

## General Presbyter's Report April 26, 2011

At our April Presbytery meeting, we will again be voting on issues that divide us. Some of our votes may be more about trust than some of the other details. Some people feel that nFOG will be the worst thing we could ever do, others feel it will give flexibility for the future. It is my hope that if it passes, we will give it a chance and if it doesn't pass, we will give that a chance. Our life together often depends more on trust for each other than for the rules for our life together. As our trust has decreased over the years, our rules increased. The same feelings are connected with the Belhar Confession. So, whatever the outcome, we need to work together on building trust, not only in the denomination, but in this Presbytery.

God has much for us to do. Some people that are not connected to Christ may find one of our churches or another to be a better place for them to commit and grow in Christ. It is my hope that our Presbytery will have diverse churches, focused on Christ, but across the theological spectrum, working together to give more opportunities to witness for Christ to a world that needs the Gospel. It is also good for us to continue to listen more fully to the Holy Spirit.

There are many people that think Amendment 10A will pass this year. If it passes, some people and churches will be glad, others will be extremely upset. If it doesn't pass, the same will be true. Either way, we need to be clear to all that we still have to judge candidates for ordination according to their obedience to Christ, according to the scripture, and in light of the confession and their ordination vows. Ordination is never a right. It has always been, and always will be, up to each church to determine the ordination of members in their church, and each presbytery to do the same. In trust, we need to be clear, no congregation can be forced to ordain someone if they do not feel that the candidate is called to ministry by God, or if they feel the candidate's life does not demonstrate a strong commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to reinforce congregations' rights to make these decisions. Because we interpret scripture differently, different churches and people will disagree in what they consider an appropriate call with their understanding of scripture. I trust the Holy Spirit to lead us, whatever the vote, and guide us to follow Christ.

Some people may ask why at this Presbytery meeting we will have worship and Bible study, announcements, etc. instead of just devoting our time to voting. Our "business" is to meet together in a way that God may guide us and strengthen our churches to witness for Jesus Christ. We need to never lose our focus on what God calls us to do. As we deal with difficult and divisive issues, it is important to realize God is at work in our midst, but also that there is much to do. Having Bible study together is a reminder of our being grounded in scripture as we follow Christ.

To hear some of the challenges and good things that God is doing in our midst, I want to share the life of a presbyter on two Sundays. Two Sundays ago, at their 8:30 worship, I attended the Black Mountain Presbyterian Church for their Youth Sunday, done entirely by the youth. Seven high school seniors shared their faith journey in connection with the scripture from John about walking in the light and not the darkness. They mentioned mentors, Sunday School teachers, and members of the church that had an influence in their lives. They talked about their growing relationship with Jesus Christ and the impact that Massanetta Springs, mission trips, Montreat, Triennium, and youth events have had on their lives. Some of the people mentioned had no idea how important what they had said or done had been to the youth. One youth told of how while he was playing sports, a member of the congregation always asked him how it was going. That is something that members of any size church can do. It reinforced that the youth felt he was part of a larger family. I was also struck with the impact that Presbytery sponsored events, camps and conference centers had on the lives of the youth. We are blessed to have Beth Gunn leading our youth ministry.

I then attended the 11:00 a.m. worship at the West Asheville Church. I was impressed by the quality of music of their choir and the sermon I heard. After worship, we had a light lunch and the church struggled with their future in these tough economic times. I was impressed with some of the comments made as they looked for a way to continue to worship and minister together as a vital community. The church was supported by some ministers and elders from the Asheville area churches who were there to walk with them. I was thankful for their dedication to help provide support.

Later that afternoon, I attended a covenant service at this Presbytery's Hispanic/Latino new church development in Hickory, Iglesia Presbiteriana Emanuel. I was surprised to learn that Emanuel has people from 12 different countries. The banner on their bulletin said, "Many nationalities, united in Christ." They are truly a multi-cultural church, where customs and even some of the language is different. That is challenging, but they have figured a way to pull together. In worship, the congregation sang the song, "America will belong to Christ." They gave out flags to people from the different countries and celebrated their countries of origin as they sang a song which mentioned the names of all the countries in North, South and Central America. They were from Chile, Columbia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Honduras, El Salvador, Mexico, Costa Rica, Puerto Rico, the USA, and more.

That Sunday afternoon, the Presbyterian churches in Catawba County in the Hickory area and Trinity from Hendersonville, had come together to sign a covenant of support and mutual ministry with Emanuel. After a wonderful service of music by the Northminster choir and Emanuel, a bilingual sermon by Gary Van Brocklin (Emanuel's pastor and also a professor at Montreat College), communion, and covenant signing, we went downstairs for covered dishes from many countries. We celebrated God's work in our midst.

The next Sunday, I worshiped with Kenilworth Church in Asheville. It was the day a communicant made her profession of faith to become a full member of the church. She was welcomed, as a small church could, by everyone coming forward to greet the newest member. They also had a choir and wonderful music, including a solo. I heard another good sermon and we had wonderful fellowship afterward. The many ways they were reaching out to their community was shared.

Later that afternoon, I was at the Burnsville Church as they celebrated the beginning of their interim pastorate with Bill Lindeman. The service was focused on God's blessing of their new beginnings and God's call to the members to "Go as God called each of them." The church and its new journey were blessed as they were given tokens of ministry by the General Presbyter, local pastors, committees and ministries of their church, their clerk, and their ministries in the community. The table was full of prayer shawls, hammers, Bibles, Session records, food for the hungry, towels to wash people's feet, a pitcher with water for baptism, a plate and chalice for communion, things presented by the youth representing children and youth ministries, and more. I heard yet another good sermon. We also had a wonderful covered dish dinner to fellowship together. It was a great service of worship and a way to celebrate God's call and the ministries of the church.

Last Saturday, I was part of the Non-Installed Pastors Committee that met with 10 pastors to learn about their churches and see how the Presbytery could be of better support. The Presbytery had been supportive for some churches, and in others they felt let down and that we needed to do a better job. Again, I was struck with the many different ways churches are trying to reach out to their communities and how God is at work in our midst. However, I was also reminded of all the work God calls us to do. There are many in our counties that do not know Christ or have a Christian community/family in which to be nurtured and grow in faith.

My prayer is that, as we struggle with issues, we will renew our commitment to work together for Christ's Kingdom, celebrate God's work in our midst and also redouble our efforts for God's work.

Peace,

*Bobbi*