

General Presbyter's Report July 26, 2011

I found many people at the "Big Tent" hopeful for the future ministry of the PCUSA. The "Big Tent" was a gathering in Indianapolis of several different conferences under one roof, with about 2,000 Presbyterians in attendance. There were wonderful worship services, great workshops, good fellowship, and powerful sermons. One sermon challenged us to "keep awake and watch." We are to watch for what God is doing in our midst. The preacher said, "Do not be afraid, but trust that God is leading you into a future."

So how do we keep awake and look for what God is doing in our midst? How do we make decisions based on trusting God to be at work in our midst - in our lives, our churches, our denomination and the world?

The people on the Presbytery mission trip to visit partner churches recently returned from Guatemala. One member said that he was inspired with the daily faith of the people in his partner church. In reflecting upon that, it was interesting to note that the people in the Guatemalan partner church have almost no control over their lives. The poverty, the lack of health facilities, jobs, and the economic conditions are all things of which the people have almost no power over.

We have often fooled ourselves into thinking that we have a lot of control over our lives and the things that happen to us. In today's world, we are realizing how little control we have. People lose jobs, are injured in car wrecks, become sick, see children in negative situations without being able to help, and things change without our input or agreement. Perhaps, understanding that our lives are also in God's hands will help us more completely trust in God. Trusting that God is at work for good is sometimes hard as we see so much change in our daily lives and in the world. With the new Form of Government and changes in the 10A, there are major changes in our denomination. Nevertheless, I feel that God is at work among us and trust God will continue to lead us through these changes. We are to watch and trust.

The Presbytery will try to walk with churches and people during this time of change. We are available to talk with Sessions, if questions arise. Some people have been upset and think they need to do things immediately to avoid problems, but there is time. The Presbytery is working to provide churches with the information needed and options available for local churches and Sessions. Some of the options will provide more flexibility for our small churches to make decisions. We will be getting information for your Session soon after the Presbytery meeting.

In the meantime, as I travel around, there are a number of places where I see God at work. Last Sunday, I attended the Old Fort Presbyterian Church, where the summer staff for Camp Grier attend. When I walked into the sanctuary, members told me how glad they were that summer had arrived and the Camp Grier counselors were coming back to their church. For many of the counselors, this is a summer tradition.

After church, I joined the summer staff for lunch and was very impressed with the gifts and experience of the staff. The college student on my right has been at Camp Grier eleven previous years. The person on my left is a counselor at Camp Grier for her first summer. Another counselor/staff is on his way to seminary. After listening to their descriptions of favorite things to do, I wanted to be a kid again. Three days later, I heard a pastor describe his faith journey which began in church camp. Thanks be to God at work at Camp Grier.

A church recently shared that a number of their youth had made commitments for Christ or renewed earlier commitments. Another youth told me of his excitement to go to Massanetta for Middle School Week, as his older brother attended the Senior High Conference at Montreat before both were going on a mission trip to an intercity ministry in Pennsylvania. Thanks be to God at work among our youth and those who are in ministry with them.

Asheville Youth Ministry (AYM) is serving youth groups from many states, providing them a mission trip experience in Asheville. AYM provides programming for the varied groups that are housed in the West Asheville Presbyterian Church. Young lives are being changed as they see Jesus in the face of those they serve and feel the Holy Spirit working among them. Thanks be to God who speaks to the youth serving the least of these, and their leaders.

West Asheville Presbyterian Church has just called a new pastor, Kent Smith, and begun a new journey of seeking God's will for them in their community. They have also reached out to house a pastoral counselor in their church as they try to better serve the people in that area. Thank God for new beginnings.

Community Gardens have sprung up all over the Presbytery. Grace Covenant has great stories to share about the hundreds of pounds of vegetables raised last year (in front of the church for all on Merrimon Avenue to see!) The garden was tended by a mix of church members and neighbors, with the yield being shared by both the tenders and food banks. This year, Kenilworth and Westminster have exciting stories to tell as they join Grace Covenant in gardening. Thanks to God at work in the knees and backs and hearts of gardeners reaching out to those in need.

Two churches, Canton and Marshall, in partnership with General Assembly, have called recent seminary graduates to lead them. This program, "Such a Time as This," will help provide financial support, as well as provide extra training to these two newly ordained pastors. Two other pastors will join them for special training. The General Assembly will provide training for mentors that we hope can be a learning experience that can be used through out this Presbytery. Thanks be to God for partnership programs with General Assembly to help small churches.

Thanks be to God who is actively working in each of our lives, the lives of our congregations, our Presbytery, our denomination, and our world. Let us watch, trust, and give thanks.

Peace,

Bobbi