

General Presbyter's Report

Bobbi White, General Presbyter

The Scripture theme for the 2012 General Assembly was “**Walking, Running, Soaring in Hope.**” It is based on the scripture “but those who **hope** in the LORD will renew their strength. They will **soar** on wings like eagles; they will **run** and not grow weary, and they will **walk** and not faint” (Isa 40:31).

In worship and praying, we “soared like eagles.” We had incredible preachers, worship leadership and music. There were many times in the Assembly when people prayed together or when time was taken for prayer and discernment. The sermons challenged us to think about the scripture from Mark 2:1-12, that told the story of the four people who let the paralytic down through the roof to be healed by Jesus. Cindy Bolbach, the outgoing moderator, had preached on that text the previous year. She said at that time, she thought of the church as the paralytic. But after being out in the church these last two years, she saw the Spirit moving in the church and saw vitality that she hadn't seen earlier. Now she encouraged us to see ourselves as the disciples who were willing to do whatever it took to bring others to Jesus.

Cindy also encouraged the commissioners be cautious and realize the tremendous change in the church in the last two years. She wrote, “I am not sure we can absorb anything that is another huge change.” The Assembly may have heard those words and “walked.” This Assembly wrestled with major issues. Business was considered seriously and debated widely. I think commissioners were faithful to how they felt God was leading them, even though some of the decisions were made by two votes or 30 votes. Instead of radical changes, I think the Assembly wanted us to look at the work God was calling us to do. Maybe we are to be about the work of bringing the paralytic to Jesus. Maybe our radical call is to be willing to step out to be faithful to Jesus.

One radical proposal was for presbyteries and churches to create 1001 new worshiping communities. We were challenged to be creative in reaching those around us. The world around us is different and we are a mission field. We were shown concrete examples of how others are reaching out and doing church differently. As the moderator was saying, “the Spirit is alive and working in this denomination.”

The Assembly is over. How are we going to respond to God's challenge to us to reach out in the name of Christ to our communities and the people in our midst? That, for us, is a more important question than how should I react to the Assembly. How is the Spirit blowing in our midst?

We have encouraged churches to preach and study the book of Acts this summer as a way of listening to what the Spirit is saying to each of us and our churches. Paul wrote that “I give thanks for each of you as I remember you with joy in my prayers.” Then Paul challenged the churches to reach out to others.

At the October 26-27, 2012 Presbytery meeting, Ray Jones, from the Evangelism Division of the General Assembly Office, will be our keynote speaker. I am excited that he will be with us and also sharing some great new resources. Our Evangelism Committee has encouraged each church to do one new thing to reach out to people this year, and we will celebrate the things people have done at the October meeting.

We can celebrate now with two churches in their reaching out. Newdale, near Spruce Pine, one of our smaller membership churches, had eleven new members join last month. Besides its growth in membership, Newdale is known for its fifth Sunday evening gathering of singing the old hymns. Those leaving this service are blessed and joyful. Waldensian Presbyterian Church also celebrated new members. They had twelve new members, eight under the age of 40, including two adult baptisms. Several years ago, Waldensian started a contemporary service and now has two worship services on Sunday. The Spirit is moving in our midst!

Others reach out in different ways. Four women in Saluda, a forty-one-member church, challenged the church to build wells in Haiti. They collected more than \$3,000 for two wells. They began with \$300, the entire amount in the PW budget. In addition, they hosted for this summer a 14-year-old Guatemalan from their sister church in Guatemala. West Asheville raised money for Habitat, with a concert from the Black Mountain praise band. New Vision reaches out with a coffee house once a month and with their Life Tree Café each week. They will soon be getting ready for their load of pumpkins, which gives them great visibility in the community and raises money for mission. Morrison had free barbeque and a concert for the neighborhood. In spite of the rain, those present had a great time.

We see the Lord working in the lives of our children and youth. Vacation Bible Schools are happening everywhere, even with churches who have no children. At a recent meeting, almost the whole room raised their hands to say that their lives had been changed by church camps. Children and youth are at Camp Grier being given a message of God's love. Youth from across the Presbytery are participating in a week long mission experience in Charlotte (CROSS).

We will be welcoming three candidates to be newly ordained pastors. They will be serving three small membership churches of Dulatown, Quaker Meadows and Sweetwater. They will receive additional training to add to "what we learn in seminary" and be supported by mentors, in partnership with the General Assembly "Such a Time as This" program, the Presbytery and the churches. The three pastors from Canton, Marshall and Westminster, who participated in the program last year, will also soon be going to Louisville for additional continuing education.

There are some exciting opportunities in the next couple of months. "Let's Celebrate," our one day education event, will be on August 18 at First Church Morganton. There are 26 different workshops from which to choose. More information about this offering can be found at www.presbyterywnc.org.

The School for the Laity begins classes in October, after the kick-off retreat at William Black Lodge in September. If you want to learn more about studying the Bible, what you believe, worship, church leadership, etc., plan to be a part of this awesome opportunity. Many people come to the School for the Laity to become better Sunday School teachers or just to learn for themselves. If you would like to study with a wonderful, fun group of people, consider enrolling in this program. Scholarships are available. At this Presbytery meeting, we will recognize eleven graduates who recently completed the two-year program.

Another challenge at General Assembly was to increase the number of mission co-workers. We are blessed with those from our presbytery and others supported by our churches. Please keep in your prayers our missionaries, including Becca Young in Indonesia and John McCall in Taiwan.

Also Frank and Nancy Dimmock and the younger members of their family are returning to Lesotho at the end of this month. We were fortunate to have Nancy with us in October and Frank in April. Please pray for their safe return, their work and the members of the family that will be staying in the states.

Barbara Nagy and family are returning to the states. Barbara has a dream of helping get better medical access for the villages of Malawi. This is needed to improve the health of people and to treat children early so they do not develop such critical and terminal illnesses. She will be returning to get a degree in Public Health at Emory University in Atlanta. Then, she is hoping to return to Nkhoma to work with the hospital and the villages in Africa. Melia will begin Rhodes College this fall. Anna and Happy will be in school in Decatur, GA.

There are more good things happening. Look around and share. The Spirit wants to do mighty things in our midst. We have to open our eyes to see where the Spirit is leading us. If "we hope in the Lord, we will soar like eagles, run and not grow weary, and walk and not faint."