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General Presbyter Report
July 30, 2013

“ All who believed were together and held everything in common . . . they spent much time together in the temple, broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of the people. And the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” Acts 2:44; 46-47

The Mission Study Task Force has been listening to people from this Presbytery. The need for building stronger relationships and partnerships within presbytery was a constant theme. “We can be stronger together than separately.” Churches can do more together. There are ways that pastors can be supportive of each other. Working together, we can do far greater mission and ministry. Part of our mission is to build strong relationships and partnerships, including encouraging churches working together.

What if we got our churches together that were in close proximity to one another and asked these questions:

- What are the needs of your community (and the world)?
- Realizing that God has placed you in communities, what is your church doing to minister to your community, including the unchurched?
- Within the congregation, what are you doing to grow disciples in Christ?
- How have you partnered, and how might you partner, with other Presbyterian Churches, churches in other denominations, and/or the Presbytery in ministering to the community and the world?
- How might God be calling you into ministry and mission together?

Churches that have met to discuss these kinds of questions have often been surprised to find out that their church and others are doing the same thing. Maybe one church, struggling with how to minister in a particular place, could join another church already involved in that ministry. A minister in one church who is a great Bible teacher might teach a Bible Study in another church. Use your imagination.

There are ways that together we can do more exciting things. The Administrative Board and Committee on Ministry will be working on this concept. We will particularly be looking at new and innovative ways, and also strengthening ways we currently work together.

What are some of the ways we are now working together, involved in partnerships and striving to build relationships? Where might there be others?

Mayland Fellowship: Currently, churches gather together to do specific things. The oldest of these is the Mayland Fellowship, which was started by lay persons in Mitchell, Avery and Yancey counties. Every year, these 18 churches give five to ten scholarships of \$500 each to students going to college. They also have a week of evening services in Spruce Pine for Holy Week, beginning with dinner and worship on Palm/Passion Sunday and ending with a Maundy Thursday Service done in several locations.

Gastonia Area Presbyterians (GAP): GAP was founded to encourage churches to work together. A major project of GAP has been Habitat for Humanity. They also support each other in providing shelter to the homeless. Third Street Presbyterian Church, with the support of other churches in GAP, worked together for a thousand pairs of shoes to be distributed to people in need. GAP has also sponsored educational events

and fund raisers, including a talent show for the pastors as a way to raise money for one of our Children's Homes.

More recently, the churches in the Hickory/Catawba County area, which have supported the Hispanic New Church Development (now part of New Vision Church) formed "Presbyterians Together." These churches are planning to look for ways to do mission together. They also worked together building Habitat for Humanity homes.

Building Habitat Houses: Besides GAP and Presbyterians Together, the Asheville/Buncombe churches and Avery county churches have built or are building houses for Habitat. In the Black Mountain Presbyterian Church's hallway are pictures of all the Habitat Houses that the Asheville/Buncombe churches have built.

Guatemalan Partnership: When many in this Presbytery think of partnerships and relationship building, they think of our Guatemalan Partnership. In addition to a Presbytery partnership with two presbyteries in Guatemala, we have over thirty church-to-church partnerships. Building relationships and working together is the focus of the Guatemalan Partnership. For example, when we travel to Guatemala or have Guatemalans come here, it is to visit, worship together, learn from each other, and spend a night or two in someone's home. It is not necessarily a "build something" partnership, we are establishing relationships. Prayer is one of the important ways the partnership grows. When Fran McSwain from Shelby was struggling with cancer, a battle she eventually lost, our partners in Guatemala were praying for her. When something happens to a pastor or a family member in Guatemala, word goes to all our partner churches for prayer. This year alone, several churches have been able to visit their partners, including Trinity, Waldensian, and Black Mountain. As a part of the Presbytery delegation that went in June, folks from Crossnore, Banner Elk and Dallas First were also able to visit their partner churches.

For several years now, most of our churches have supported scholarship programs for children in their partner churches. That is making a huge difference as children, who would not be able to attend school, can now go. To try to see that those scholarships bear the most fruit possible, the partnership decided to have several people examine the education system. So, in August, four educators from PWNC and four from our partner presbyteries are going to spend a week together studying education in Guatemala and our presbyteries. The hope is that what they learn will help the students in our presbyteries.

Youth: Another way we are stronger together is in the opportunities provided to our youth. Some churches like Fletcher and Crossnore combine their youth groups. PWNC has 50 youth going to Triennium, representing 15 churches from all over the presbytery, both from our larger and smaller membership churches. Beth Gunn and Bill Buchanan will be in leadership roles at the Triennium. This fall, September 29th, we have a free Senior High Rally in Montreat, and then a Middle School Retreat at Camp Grier November 8-10. Our Youth Council will help with both of these events. Whether you bring a group of ten or one person, this can be an enriching faith growing experience for our youth. These events also give them a broader view of being Christian and Presbyterian, as they develop friends from other churches.

Hunger: The "Nickel a Meal" money has been an important way to respond to hunger. Through this collection, a church's local ministries, a few important regional ministries, and needed international projects are supported. Hungry children and adults in Haiti, Guatemala, Malawi and other countries have benefitted. Help was given to New Vision, who provided 95 students with meals every weekend. (See the Hunger Committee Report) Churches in the Asheville/Swannanoa area partner with Manna Food Bank to distribute weekend food in their area. In addition, Swannanoa Church is a site for one of the free Buncombe County

summer lunch programs.

Sharing of ideas and passions about responding to hunger are other ways that we partner with one another. For example, the wonderful Community Gardens at Northminster and Grace Covenant have been an inspiration. Other churches are also involved in community gardens. Westminster gives out bread and fresh produce two Saturdays a month and works with the MANNA Food Bank in food distribution. Third Street helped to encourage the Health Department located next to their church to have a Farmers Market for their neighborhood. They are promoting this as a part of a “Healthy Neighborhood” focus. Fairview and other churches have food pantries. The list could go on and on.

In Gastonia, Third Street, with the support of other churches in GAP, provides weekend food to children from a local elementary school who might otherwise go hungry. Many other churches do this type of community mission project as well.

Partnership with PCUSA Programs (For Such A Time As This, Engage Material, and The Presbyterian Foundation's Small Church Program):

Congratulations go to Canton, Marshall and Westminster. These three churches took the risk of having a full-time minister for two years and working with the PCUSA “For Such A Time As This” program, in partnership with the Presbytery and the Presbytery’s Small Church Committee. This program included education in Louisville and an intentional mentoring group process. These churches did this without the guarantee that the funding would be there to continue, but have been able to move into the third year. They are reaching out to new people and new ministries. These churches are also supported by Presbytery and the Small Church Committee. Three other churches are in the middle of this journey: Dulatown, Quaker Meadows and Sweetwater. We hope other churches will also consider this wonderful program.

We applaud those churches who are trying to reach out to people who do not have a relationship with Jesus Christ or a community where they can grow in their faith. A few of those churches are using the “Engage” material that Ray Jones introduced at the October Presbytery meeting. New Hope (Asheville), Sweetwater and Quaker Meadows are some of the churches using that process as a way to vision. Some others of you are also trying “Engage.”

The Presbyterian Foundation, in partnership with PWNC, is helping our small membership churches look at future challenges and possibilities. The third meetings will be held in four areas of the presbytery on August 20 and 22. At the initiative of the churches, we will be looking at visions for the future and challenges with building. Churches have opportunities to learn from each other and the presenters. We give thanks for these partnerships.

Jesus sent his disciples out two by two. We are not meant to work alone. I hope we will continue to look for ways that we can work together to strengthen God’s churches, ministries and mission.

Peace,
Bobbi