

SYNOD OF THE PACIFIC (PCUSA)
REPORT OF THE SYNOD EXECUTIVE

ROB BRINK
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There are a number of things that are happening in our Synod, and the broader church, that have occurred over the past four months, which I believe are important for you, as the synod leadership, to be aware of. You have already heard about some of these in the previous reports made this afternoon, and you will hear more as the committees report to you on Saturday.

You will be hearing a report on Saturday from the Mission Personnel Committee regarding the three presbytery executive searches that are at various stages in their processes.

You also just heard in the council's report about a planning paper that has been developed as a tool to begin a process of planning for the synod's future. It will be refined as we work with it to reflect spiritually and organizationally how God may be calling the synod to serve and function in new and exciting ways. As we delve into prayerful, reflective planning for the near and long term role of the synod, it will be critical to invite participation from all corners of the synod in an effort to consult, listen, hear diverse opinions with open minds and hearts, debate, and re-envision the role of the Synod of the Pacific in a way that glorifies God. It will be important to move deliberately and slowly through this process. You will be kept informed and involved as this planning endeavor gathers motion and takes form.

Presbyteries across our denomination are beginning to vote on the overtures and amendments passed during the 218th General Assembly held last year in San Jose. The final result of this voting process should be known by June 2009, and the outcome of these actions will both inform us as a denomination about our reformed theology, and possibly change some of our constitutional ethos. We all know the anxiety that exists around some of these proposed amendments. Therefore, it is incumbent on all of us to pray that the Holy Spirit will be present in the hearts and minds of all sisters and brothers in Christ in our presbyteries as they attempt to faithfully discern God's will for our church as it relates to these matters.

The recent decision of the California Supreme Court regarding the civil lawsuit involving the Episcopal Church and their respective congregations has provided a much needed precedent for Presbyterians to utilize as they struggle prayerfully and compassionately with justice and fairness in matters related to church properties. Our Stated Clerk and the Synod Coordinating Council will soon be talking with legal counsel representing the Roseville and Fair Oaks churches in Sacramento Presbytery about a proposed settlement. Again, you will be kept informed regarding the status of these discussions.

The Synod Executives met last month in cool and breezy Orange Beach, Alabama. We were blessed to have with us our new Stated Clerk of the denomination, Rev. Gradye Parsons. Also joining us was Rev. Jill Hudson, Director of Middle Governing Body Relations.

Gradye shared with us some of his thoughts regarding his first six months as Stated Clerk. He talked about the process of our bi-annual General Assemblies and that, contrary to the grapevine, the Office of the General Assembly has not received an avalanche of complaints. However, there are several things being looked at to help improve the bi-annual GA process. Following is a list of several items Gradye lifted up:

- The need for better orientation and training of commissioners and YADs (he indicated that several presbyteries are asking synods to broker this process so there is continuity in the training)

- The excessive lobbying of commissioners and YADs by special interest groups
- The lack of understanding Roberts Rules of Order resulting in commissioners occasionally voting one way when they really wanted to support the opposite position
- The need to look at ways to streamline the work of the GA committees – what issues need to be considered by the whole body and what issues the committees could be empowered to handle
- The expanded number of commissioners has exacerbated logistical as well as other problems
- We need to do a better job of education regarding per capita

Gradye talked about how we are a denomination that is wired around relationships – we are called to community. He sees middle governing bodies, at times, choosing leadership that does not value connectionalism. For a church that is built on connecting and talking before we make decisions, sometimes we don't do a very good job of it. We need to do a better job of collaboration. Collaboration suffers when people are fearful.

Gradye said he thinks we are on the edge of a rebirth of synods, and gave the following examples of why he feels this way:

- The increase use of staffing across presbytery bounds creates a natural opening for the synod to broker or partner
- Synods participation in property cases has been useful with presbyteries not equipped to effectively handle these matters and could be a model for other interventions
- Presbytery camps cannot be sustained by presbyteries alone
- Administrative support services at the synod level could create some cost savings for presbyteries
- The less people look to the national church for mission the more they will need coordination and expertise closer to the presbytery

Gradye said, "If there are no middle governing bodies, we will no longer be Presbyterians. Instead of connectionalism, without middle governing bodies, we will be Congregationalists."

Jill Hudson reviewed with us a new leadership training process being developed for new presbytery executives entitled "Presbytery Leadership Formation". Each new executive is assigned a companion for 90 days for technical support, however the entire training process continues over a period of three years. It is hoped that this new training program will be rolled out in 2010. The estimated cost per person is \$1,500 which covers the costs of books, course material, etc. however, travel is not included in the \$1,500. Jill is in conversation with the Board of Pensions to see if there is a possibility of obtaining some grant money from the Board to help presbyteries and executives with the cost. She will send complete information to synods regarding this training program as soon as it becomes available and asked that synods consider helping fund some of the cost for the training of executives in our regions.

Another item that was discussed was GA Mission Partnership Funds. These funds are scheduled to end in 2013. However, due to a significant decrease in unrestricted giving to General Assembly, GA Mission Partnership Funds will see a significant decrease in 2010. Governing bodies utilizing these funds will need to take this into consideration in budgeting for 2010.

There were many other items that we discussed during this meeting but there simply is not enough time to cover them all in this report. Thank you for your attention!

Grace and Peace!
Rob