

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

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During the eighteenth century, author, politician, scientist, and inventor Benjamin Franklin was credited with the following quotation: *"Certainty? In this world nothing is certain but death and taxes."* If he were alive today, I believe old Ben may concede to adding one more category to his list of things that are certain, and that is "change." In this 21st century world of global economies and global communications, change is almost certain to be encountered by the majority of human beings. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has been, and continues to be, confronted by change. As our Book of Order states, *"...the church, in obedience to Jesus Christ, is open to the reform of its standards of doctrine as well as of governance."* We affirm, *"The church reformed, always reforming, according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit."* Webster's dictionary defines change as follows: *"to make different in some particular such as position, course, or direction;"* or *"to become different; to pass from one phase to another."*

Now there is one significant problem with change—a lot of people don't like it. They don't want to become involved in change because it requires them to do something they don't want to do—think differently about something they are perfectly content to leave as is. *"If it ain't broke, don't fix it."* What do you mean we are going to try a new style of worship next Sunday? There is nothing wrong with the one we have now. These new hymns just don't do it for me the way the old ones do. Sound familiar? Well, the reality is we can either resist change, or embrace it. We can feel miserable with what is happening, or we can see it as an opportunity and get excited and participate in the process, chaotic as it sometimes may be.

Change is taking place in our synod, our presbyteries, and the broader church. In your committee meetings tomorrow and during plenary on Saturday, you will hear reports from committees and task forces about some specific changes. The following are just few: the GA/Synod Mission Partnership Funds Consultation last month *"confirmed that the present system of the division of the Mission Partnership Funding System...continue until such time as some new system addressing critical needs of middle governing body personnel and mission issues in a framework of shared theological values be put in place by the Synods and General Assembly Council through 2010"*; also last month, the Synod Executives met with the GA Expanded Staff Leadership Forum and discussed the challenges facing presbyteries and synods due to declining Undesignated Mission Support, and how the role and structure of middle governing bodies is "becoming something different"; there will be a report coming from the Mission Partnership Committee Long Range Task Force about a new model for our Synod Mission Partnership process and allocation of Synod Block Grants; Grace Presbytery in the Synod of the Sun is bringing an overture to the General Assembly in 2008 that, if approved, would do away with GA per capita. *"The overture proposes the removal of the General Assembly PER CAPITA ASSESSMENT that currently funds the budget of the Office of the General Assembly, a portion of the overall General Assembly budget. The rationale: all of what the General Assembly does IS mission and none of it needs to be funded by a "fair share tax."* If all per capita is eventually discontinued, it will have a significant impact on the Synod of the Pacific because per capita dollars are the only dollars given by congregations and presbyteries that are retained and used by Synod. Grace Presbytery's rationale implies that governing bodies would move to a "unified budget" and congregations would contribute an equivalent amount of former per capita dollars to the unified budget. In the case of the

Synod of the Pacific, our annual per capita amount is approximately \$588,000. Lastly, in an effort to be good stewards of our Synod resources and to work with our presbyteries to cut costs, I have asked the Synod Coordinating Council, with input from the Executive Forum and the Central Office Staff, to revisit holding two Synod Assembly meetings per year instead of three. If there is agreement to make a change, the Coordinating Council will prepare and present a recommendation to Synod at a subsequent meeting.

So there is significant change poking at us from every direction. Scripture and our Book of Order give us some insight into change. Listen closely for the “change” words. In Paul’s letter to the Romans, chapter 12, verse 2, Paul writes, *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God— what is good, acceptable, and perfect”* (NRS). Our Book of Order states, *“We are subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, and the Word of God. Yet the church, in obedience to Jesus Christ, is open to the reform of its standards of doctrine as well as of governance. In its confessions, the Presbyterian Church, (U.S.A.) gives witness to the faith of the Church catholic, and identifies with the affirmations of the Protestant Reformation.”* Friends, it is my strong hope and prayer that our entire Synod will embrace change, not with fear but with confidence, and welcome the opportunities it lays at our feet.