



Synod of Lakes and Prairies

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

October Meeting - Synod of Lakes and Prairies - Mount Olivet Retreat Center - Farmington, Minnesota - October 1-3, 2006

Unity, reformed perspective highlight ed session

A call to unity from a reformed perspective highlighted discussion about Sunday's opening educational presentation and that presentation preceded a variety of topics at the October meeting of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies.

Paul Capetz, associate professor at United Theological Seminary, provided the meeting's opening educational presentation that covered a brief history of the reformed tradition and the inclusiveness of the Presbyterian denomination.

Capetz noted that reformation is a tradition of continuing reform to reclaim the foundations of faith over time rather than change that occurred at a specific moment in time.

Reflecting on the Trinity Report received by this year's General Assembly, Capetz pointed out that the Bible contains references to both the father and mother aspects of God. Quoting the Old Testament, when Moses asked God to provide a name, God responded, "I am who I am" (Exodus 3:13).

During Tuesday's discussion of Capetz's presentation, Gregg Neel, executive presbyter of the Milwaukee Presbytery, describing the current position of the Presbyterian denomination, said, "We're not a safe place because God is working." Addressing a continuing reformation, Diana Barber, associate synod executive for leadership development, later added, "Where we are [as Presbyterians] is not always where we've been."

It was also pointed out at the meeting that the General Assembly "received and commended for study" the Trinity Report and did not adopt the report as policy of the Presbyterian denomination.

While unity during transformation highlighted the meeting, the discussions at the meeting covered a variety of aspects from the General Assembly's Peace, Unity and Purity and Trinity reports, to the summer's successful Synod School, to ecclesiastical relationships among presbyteries, to the future of Dakota Presbytery, and to a report on the changes and structure of the General Assembly.

Meeting Highlights

Synod Executive notes 'different, dynamic day:' In his report, Synod Executive Phil Brown wrote, "In a new and vastly different and dynamic day ... the Synod of Lakes and Prairies can no longer claim to be experts able to provide the solutions to its constituent presbyteries, institutional relationships or to the other synods and the General Assembly." The synod's challenge is "to discern the Synod's role in forming relationships and networks for ministry and mission with its presbyteries, institutional relationships, other synods and the General Assembly for the 21st Century. Ultimately, our purpose is to serve and make a difference in the name of Jesus Christ."

Synod authorizes study of relationships among presbyteries: In response to a proposal to create a special committee of the synod to complete a "comprehensive analysis of presbytery boundaries and staffing," the synod voted to authorize the moderator "to appoint a task force of three to five people to review the motion and the issues surrounding it and to bring back recommendations to the January 2007 meeting of the synod."

Without the motion, John Sherman, chair of the synod's Program Coordination Committee, said the synod would be "losing an opportunity and a window." Manley Olson, General Assembly Council representative of the synod, noted that the council
(See Highlights, Page 2)

Highlights (continued)

will be forming a group to address presbytery geographic and staffing realignments that are "being raised in various parts of the country."

Synod School sets record in 2006: Nearly 600 people -- actually 590 and a record number -- participated in Synod School at Buena Vista University in Storm Lake, Iowa, last summer. The total included six Methodists, seven Roman Catholics and 22 others who were members of either a UCC, Jewish, Reformed Church, ELCA or other congregation from 184 separate towns in 19 states and two Canadian provinces. Synod School 2007 will take place July 22-27 at Buena Vista University and a flier about the school will be mailed in November to alumni, congregations and presbytery offices.

Dakota Presbytery seeks additional time to provide answers regarding its ability to govern: The Dakota Presbytery, a non-geographic, Native American presbytery of the synod, told the Ecclesiastical Relations Committee that it would respond in January regarding its ability to carry out the governing responsibilities of a presbytery. In a letter to the presbytery dated Sept. 15, 2006, Synod Executive Phil Brown asked the Dakota Presbytery, "How can the Presbytery of Dakota fulfill its responsibilities as a governing body of the Presbyterian Church (USA), and how can you sustain the Presbytery?" The Rev. Maeng-Ho Ahn, a commissioner from the presbytery, who identified himself as the coordinator of mission development within the presbytery, said Dakota Presbytery would respond to the questions at the January meeting. "The answer is very simple," he said, it is "to continue as a presbytery." The Ecclesiastical Relations Committee reported, "Meanwhile the synod will continue to explore the process of dissolution and will keep the presbytery informed." A decrease in monetary mission support to the presbytery will begin in 2007.

General Assembly Council begins implementing changes: Manley Olson, General Assembly Council member from the Synod of Lakes and Prairies, said the GAC has begun to implement changes to the number of voting members, committee structure and staff reductions ratified by the 2006 General Assembly. The report stated, "The GAC now has 50 voting members, down from 71 and will eventually have 39 voting members. No new members were elected this year as the lower number is phased in." The report also noted:

- Ten associate director positions will be eliminated as of Dec. 31. Six new director positions were created and it is expected that some of the current staff will fill some of those positions. These changes follow significant layoffs in May.
- In February the GAC adopted a new committee structure that replaced the existing divisions with four goal-area committees.

The staff and structure changes were based on a continuing decline in unrestricted mission giving.

Synod approves timeline for 2008-09 Post-Secondary Education Grants: The deadline for 2008-09 Post-Secondary Education Grants is April 1, 2007. The Ecclesiastical Relations Committee is attempting to clarify the grant application process, simplify the process for the the screening committee and modify the format to produce a more uniform set of data about each project. More than \$200,000 from the synod's mission budget and Westminster Fund assist annually to fund creative ministries through the six-state region. The criteria for application were changed to allow both public and private institutions to apply. For more information about the grants, inquiries can be directed to Elona Street-Stewart, staff for racial-ethnic ministries and community empowerment, (streetstewart@comcast.net.).

Attendance

28 commissioners, 3 youth advisory delegates, stated clerk/treasurer, 11 corresponding members, and 3 support staff members of the synod

Highlights (continued)

Synod approves 2007 budget: The Synod of Lakes and Prairies adopted a budget for 2007 that is down nearly \$100,000 from 2006. The budget also includes about \$150,000 from the prior years' surplus. The budget includes \$1.15 million for ministries in partnership, and more than \$250,000 for ecumenical and institutional ministry, and communication.

Examples of ministries in partnership, and ecumenical and institutional ministries include general financial support to the mission and staff of presbyteries throughout the synod, staff partnerships with presbyteries, grants to support the development and redevelopment of churches, and financial support to campus ministries.

A narrative budget in MSWord and PowerPoint is available from the synod office. Detailed financial information about the synod can be obtained by contacting Jay Wilkinson, stated clerk and treasurer of the synod, at jwilkinson@lakesandprairies.org.

Sweep begins call as communications associate: The Synod of Lakes and Prairies approved the call to and welcomed Duane Sweep as the associate for communications. He began work in late August. Duane is continuing to explore multiple communication strategies that support the ministry and mission of the synod and its presbyteries. Duane comes to the synod with a substantial background in communications work in journalism, public relations and media research. He can be contacted by e-mail at dsweep@lakesandprairies.org.

Commissioners, other attendees provide positive evaluation

While comments overall were positive and included good suggestions, at least one would make good Reader's Digest reading —

"The egg salad sandwich tasted fine, but it was so sloppy that the filling dribbled all over. The problem was exacerbated when I had to apply the brakes in a panic stop. ... I wound up with egg on the steering wheel, my pants, the car seat; everywhere but on my face."

A full printout of comments is available by sending an e-mail to Mary Taaffe (mtaaffe@lakesandprairies.org).

Upcoming meetings

January 14 - 16, 2007

May 6 - 8, 2007

September 30 - October 2, 2007

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