

April 25, 2006

To: Members of the Presbytery of Dakota
Ministers of Word and Sacrament and
Commissioned Lay Pastors, Elder Commissioners
And Clerks of Sessions

From: Phil Brown
Executive, the Synod of Lakes and Prairies

Re: Follow up to the Consultation and Preparation for the May Presbytery meeting

Thank you for what appears to be a productive Consultation at Camp Rimrock earlier this month, and to the Reverend Simon Looking Elk, Stated Clerk, for his detailed and informative summary. Your conversations benefited from helpful facilitation through small groups, as well as participation and energy from new voices sent by some of your congregations. I had the opportunity to speak with Sallie Cauresma, who added further positive comments and your plans to spend time during your spring presbytery meeting to pursue these critical conversations.

I would like to clarify with you, what I believe the synod is asking you to resolve as a Presbytery. And that is, **what is your future as a governing body of the Presbyterian Church (USA)?** While your conversation about the ministry and needs of your congregations is helpful, the focus for the Synod of Lakes and Prairies is not the health of congregations. Our concern is the health of our presbyteries and how the Presbytery of Dakota will be able to fulfill the responsibilities of **The Presbytery** outlined in Chapter XI of the Form of Government?

It is no longer feasible for the synod or General Assembly to provide the level of staff support to help you fulfill your functions as a presbytery. One Session did communicate directly with me to suggest that staff be provided to help the congregations of Dakota develop endowment funding in order to become self-sufficient many years from now. Such suggestions are not viable or realistic. Comments from within your Consultation that suggest congregations need to plan and prepare for decreasing CPMS dollars (beginning 2007) are realistic and can help your conversations focus on and produce helpful, faithful outcomes.

You may know that the synod has reduced its own staff by four persons in the past year. Several other presbyteries in the synod currently in staff transitions, are exploring alternate forms of leadership, no longer able to afford the staff they have had for the past thirty years. At the General Assembly level, Sallie Cauresma will not be at your spring meeting because she will learn May 1st, along with other GA staff, whether or not she will be affected by the continuous staff downsizing at that level of the church.

Another way to produce helpful results from conversations arising at the Consultation is to explore the possibility that your congregations develop relationships and affiliate with the neighboring geographic presbyteries. Such relationships would not preclude your coming together for the annual Mission Meeting with the UCC churches or celebrating your distinctive culture and history in worship and fellowship. A relationship with the geographic presbyteries

removes your need to fill the ecclesiastical, leadership and financial responsibilities required of a presbytery.

Raising the amount of per capita as a means to address the financial challenge to operate the Presbytery does not deal with the reality that congregations seem unwilling to raise or submit per capita to the Presbytery. Even if the per capita were to be paid, the question remains, who will provide the leadership in order that the Presbytery of Dakota be able to fulfill its required functions as a presbytery, including serving its member ministers and congregations.

We are grateful to know of your commitment as congregations to continue to be Presbyterian as we travel this challenging journey into a new and different day for the church. This letter is written to you prior to the meeting of the synod, April 30 – May 2, 2006. At that meeting the REPORT of the DAKOTA PRESBYTERY CONSULTATION, along with the letters I have sent to you, will be reviewed by the Ecclesiastical Relations Committee. In addition we will recommend to that committee a proposal to begin reducing CPMS dollars to the Presbytery of Dakota in the amount of \$25,000 per year. At this time, we do not know how many years we will need to continue to decrease funding. No action will be taken on the proposal by the synod until its October meeting when the 2007 budget will be approved.

I am very aware that I am not conveying good news to the Presbytery of Dakota. At the same time I hope that I am able to give additional clarity to the issues at hand in order to facilitate productive conversations among yourselves and between Dakota and the synod.

In the meantime, I pray that your conversations will continue, focused on the future of the Presbytery of Dakota and in the name of the living and loving Christ.