

Administrative Review Task Force on Dakota Presbytery Progress Report

This Task Force was created at the January 2007 meeting of the Synod (Action 11-96, Page 2444-6, Minutes, Fifty-ninth Meeting of the Synod, January 2007), with the task to determine if the Presbytery of Dakota “is or, in a reasonable amount of time, can become viable ...” and to make recommendations based on these conclusions. In the enabling action, the task force was instructed to make a final report and to bring recommendations to the January 2008 Synod meeting, “if possible.”

Moderator Kathleen Dooley appointed the following people to the Task Force: The Reverend Robert Bouton, Cedar Rapids, IA (EI-current Commissioner), CLP Kevin Kaufmann, Devils Lake, ND, (NP), The Reverend Val Putnam, Sioux Falls, SD (SD), Elder JoAnn Simser, St. Paul, MN (TCA-current Commissioner), and Elder Betty Walker, Burnsville, MN (TCA). Each of these members has significant experience with the Presbytery of Dakota, Native American people, and/or the Synod of Lakes and Prairies. Staffing the Task Force are Synod Executive Phil Brown and Stated Clerk/Treasurer Jay Wilkinson.

Since the last Synod meeting, the Task Force has met on October 25-26 at the Synod office.

Some of the things that caused the Synod to create this task force include:

1. A long history of dependency of Dakota Presbytery, first on the Board of National Missions, and since 1973 on the Synod of Lakes and Prairies.
2. The immense geography of the Presbytery is a serious impediment to the orderly conduct of business under the best of situations.
3. The small number of churches, pastors, and members and the lack of sufficient funds make the work of a presbytery extremely difficult.
4. The Presbytery has never been self supporting financially. While some other presbyteries within the bounds of this Synod have had periods of being net aid-receiving presbyteries, the differences lie in both the consistency of dependency by Dakota Presbytery and the degree of financial support.
5. The Presbytery has periods of time when adequate records have not been kept and have not carried out a number of the duties of a presbytery enumerated in the Book of Order at G-11.0103. To name a few, they have been unable to resolve problems within several churches (G-11.0103e), to provide pastoral care for the churches and members, visiting sessions ... (G-11.0103g), to review session records (G-11.0103x), to take special oversight of churches without pastors (G-11.0103k), to establish and maintain ecumenical relationships (G-11.0103u).

A summary of the work of the task force is as follows:

1. The group discussed much of the history of the relationship between the Synod (and one of its predecessors, the Synod of South Dakota) and the Presbytery, and the history of earlier reviews.

2. They had a long discussion with Elona Street-Stewart, who was deployed Synod staff to Dakota for a number of years.
3. The Task Force went through a large number of documents relating to Dakota Presbytery (including Minutes, financial reports, DPMS records, and property records) that have accumulated over the years. Each member agreed to study a particular of the documents and discussed these.
4. A delegation from the task force attended the spring meeting of the Presbytery of Dakota on May 5.
5. A meeting was held with Bonnie Sue Lewis, Assistant Professor of Mission and Native American Christianity at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary. Her book, "Creating Christian Indians, Native Clergy in the Presbyterian Church," was distributed to each member of the task force and provided much additional history, and confirmed other historical items.
6. The task force met with several members of Dakota Presbytery, including the current moderator.
7. The task force had a 75 minute meeting with mark Tammen, Director of the Department of Constitutional Services, Office of the General Assembly, concerning the future of Dakota Presbytery.
8. The group has prayed over, and discussed a number of alternatives for recommendations to the Synod.

We have learned:

1. Dakota Presbytery has a long and rich history of ministry with Native American people.
2. It's not easy to define the term "viability" of a presbytery.
3. There have been at least two attempts to dissolve the presbytery and integrate the Dakota churches into geographic presbyteries: in the mid to late 1960s (which ended with a reversal of a General Assembly Action in 1971), and again at the time reunion and creation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in the late 1980s (which ended with the conclusion of a Synod Administrative Commission in the early 1990s).
4. It is important for the people of Dakota to be able to control their own destiny. The term "self determination" is a common theme we have heard.
5. There are many wonderful worship activities and mission activities conducted by many of the churches of Dakota Presbytery.
6. The Presbytery meetings have a very spiritual nature.
7. There are significant cultural issues involved in why Dakota Presbytery does not act like other presbyteries. It is unreasonable to expect that Dakota Presbytery, or indeed, many other cultures, will do things in the same manner as those of us who come from a mostly western and northern European heritage.

Alternatives:

1. **Do nothing.** Accept Dakota as it now stands and operates, recognizing that we and our predecessors have participated in the history of this presbytery and are (at least) partially responsible for the current situation.
2. **Dissolve** Dakota Presbytery and merge the constituent churches into the geographic presbyteries.

3. **Convert** the churches into fellowships (indigenous fellowships?) and convert Dakota Presbytery into a collection of fellowships or a “fellowship Presbytery” or “cultural Presbytery.” This would likely require changes to the Book of Order. Similarities to the Choctaw model in Oklahoma, immigrant fellowships, and the Mission Camp that Dakota currently participates with the UCC.
4. **Partner** in conversations with Dakota Presbytery about the future of Dakota and its churches to come up with some new form of organization. “How will Dakota move forward given declining \$ and membership?”

Conclusions:

1. Any plan to integrate the churches of Dakota Presbytery into geographic presbyteries is doomed to failure. The people of Dakota do not want it to happen. The geographic presbyteries involved are not prepared to deal with the problems inherent in the cultural differences.
2. Ignoring the requirements of the Book of Order is not an option.
3. The work of this task force is not concluded. The task force must continue its work with the participation of, and cooperation of the Presbytery of Dakota in light of the necessity of declining mission support (CPMS) dollars from the Synod.

Recommendations: The task force recommends the following action to the Synod.

Action Sought: Administrative Review Task Force: That Synod approve the following resolution to continue the work of an Administrative Review Task Force:

Whereas, a Task Force was created by the Synod (Page 2444, Minutes of the Fifty-ninth meeting of the Synod, January 14-16, 2007) for the purpose of reviewing the work of the Presbytery of Dakota and returning recommendations, and

Whereas, the Task Force created has determined that the work of the group is not yet concluded, and they are not ready to make final recommendations, and

Whereas, it is the recommendation of the Task Force that the participation and cooperation of members of the Presbytery of Dakota is necessary for a just conclusions, now therefore,

Be it Resolved, that the Synod of Lakes and Prairies does hereby extend the life of the Administrative Task Force on the Review of the Work of the Presbytery of Dakota for one additional year, with instruction to the Task Force to have a final report and recommendations presented not later than the January 2009 meeting of the Synod, if possible. Progress reports will be presented at every stated meeting of the Synod until the Task Force is dissolved by the Synod.

Further, that the Synod of Lakes and Prairies does hereby state that there is no intention, as this time, of dissolving the Presbytery of Dakota or to a wholesale assignment of the churches of the Presbytery to geographic presbyteries. The Task Force is directed to request participation from the officers, and perhaps others, of the Presbytery of Dakota with a goal of finding a mutually satisfactory way to meet the needs of the Book of Order and for the people of Dakota to be faithful to their heritage and culture.

Expenses of this task force during 2008 are to be limited to a maximum of \$10,000 and are to be charged to account 5480g, Presbytery Staffing Partnerships.