

September 18, 2006

To: The Presbytery of Dakota  
From: Philip C. Brown  
Synod Executive

RE: The Presbytery's Consultations about its future as a governing body

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Fall greetings to you as elders and ministers of the Presbytery of Dakota. I hope and pray that your summer has been restful and spiritually nourishing for you and your congregations. I know that the Fall Meeting of the Presbytery is at hand and, again, that you will make the opportunity while together to continue the conversation regarding your plan for viable options for the future of Dakota as a presbytery.

A question came to me from your July 6<sup>th</sup> council meeting, *"If Rev. Brown is available for a meeting of Northern Plains and South Dakota Presbyteries, why could he not be available for a consultation meeting of Dakota Presbytery?"* First of all, we have indicated that it is not appropriate for us to participate until you, the member ministers and congregations, make a decision whether or not you can and will serve as a middle governing body of the PC (USA). What will your ministry and mission as a presbytery be? How will you organize to accomplish your plan? How will you lead and pay for it?

Please respond to these questions first among yourselves, because we cannot answer them on your behalf. Also, we continue to request that other non-members of Dakota who attend your meetings do not participate in your conversations about the future until you have formulated your own plans to sustain the functions and operations of the presbytery. These issues can be dealt with only by the ministers and congregations of the Presbytery and not by a "trouble shooter" or an outside partner.

Why would I participate with other presbyteries as they plan alternate designs for their future? Over the years, the other presbyteries of the synod have functioned interdependently, with their own structures and staff. They fund their own ministry and mission through per capita and general mission giving. None have received the level of CPMS dollars that Dakota has received. The CPMS dollars they do receive are directed to presbytery-based ministry or internal mission and not to pastors' salaries.

When I or other representatives of the synod participate in the current multi-presbytery conversations at their invitation (there are now three around the synod) about new forms of sharing ministry and mission, new forms of sharing staff, resources and governance across boundaries, we sit at the table with governing body partners who have been functioning and funding on their own. Now, in times of change and shifting resources they have initiated exploratory conversations with their neighbors about "faithfulness" as a governing body for a new day.

The purpose of this letter is to reiterate the deep concern of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies. In the three earlier communications to you this year (3/20/06, 4/25/06, and

6/14/06) I have asked, **“How can the Presbytery of Dakota fulfill its responsibilities as a governing body of the PC (USA), and how can you sustain the Presbytery?”** I pose these questions because it is evident that the Presbytery of Dakota has not been able to fulfill the requirements of a governing body.

In a previous communication, I have indicated the synod will no longer be able to provide administrative support for Dakota. Since then, we have learned that our long-time staff support person, Pat Milloy, will be retiring at the end of 2006. For many years Pat has supported the administrative needs of the Presbytery of Dakota, along with other responsibilities with the synod. Her extensive knowledge of the presbytery and her superior record keeping has provided service normally carried out by a presbytery office. Because of declining resources, the synod will not seek a new person to fill this position. Instead, we will be learning how to do our work with only two support staff for all the work of the synod. (Just a few years ago we employed six.)

Here is one small example of what that means. Recently we received a call from someone who was working on a family genealogy and requested the baptismal, wedding and ordination dates of a deceased minister member the Presbytery of Dakota. First of all, congregations are expected to maintain their own records of baptisms and weddings. Neither the synod, nor the Department of History in Philadelphia, has any records of your congregations on file. That means that any Session Records that exist are in the hands of those churches. It is a presbytery responsibility on an annual basis to review the records of your sessions to assure they are being maintained and also accessible to inquiries such as the one noted.

Secondly, maintaining and sharing upon request, the records of the presbytery (such as ordinations) are responsibilities of a presbytery. According to the person making the request to us, the presbytery was unwilling to provide copies of information from the records. The synod will no longer provide this kind of service beginning in 2007.

In summary, while the synod will be eager to engage in conversation with you about your options as a presbytery with ecclesiastical responsibilities, those options must be realistic. I note again some of the matters listed in my first memo (March 20, 2006):

- Administrative Commissions that effectively respond to complaints;
- Resolution of matters related to the Pine Ridge Retreat Center;
- Monitoring standard accounting procedures, filing of tax forms, payment of insurance, Board of Pension dues;
- Funding alternatives to compensate for the declining Comprehensive Presbytery Mission Support (CPMS);
- Failure of the presbytery to remit annual per capita payments to support the administrative ministries of the presbytery, synod and General Assembly;
- The non-compliance to report the annual statistics of the congregations;

The limited resources of the Presbytery of Dakota, human and financial, may be unable to support the responsibilities of a middle-governing body. This is not a criticism, but a

reality. One viable alternative to a “governing body” may instead be to become “The Presbytery of Dakota Mission” or a name you choose that keeps you together in worship and fellowship, celebrating your long history, but without the responsibilities of a governing body, may be a more faithful response at this time.

In order to assist you in these most difficult decisions, the Synod of Lakes and Prairies will provide an outline of the dissolution process for presbyteries. That does not mean the synod is headed immediately in that direction. It does provide a course of action based on polity and legal requirements important for you, the synod and the General Assembly.