

October 27, 2006

To: The Reverend Simon Looking Elk  
The Presbytery of Dakota

From: Philip C. Brown  
Synod Executive

Jay Wilkinson  
Stated Clerk and Treasurer

RE: The November Special Meeting of the Presbytery

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With another meeting of the presbytery in the near future, we thought it could be helpful to convey some clarification to the synod's actions to date, as well as to communications we have received from you as Stated Clerk.

**First**, the synod has acted to reduce the CPMS dollars allocated for the Presbytery of Dakota beginning January 2007 in the amount of \$25,000. We anticipate a comparable decrease in the years that follow, and possibly a greater decrease should the synod suddenly experience a more rapid rate of income decline than the current reality.

This action is not based on whether or not you are an effective and faithful governing body of the church. Declining resources affect the synod budget in its entirety – more than 17% (\$455,000) since 2000 and the Personnel portion of that by 24% (\$274,000). Income decreases within the other fifteen presbyteries of the synod are affecting greatly their ability to maintain ministry, mission and staff. As we communicated in earlier memos, each presbytery is in the process of realigning its priorities and engaging in conversations with neighboring presbyteries about new ways to partner in Christ's ministry..

**Second**, we have indicated that the synod will consider an action at their January meeting to initiate the process of reviewing the Presbytery of Dakota and its capacity to serve as a governing body of the church. Such a process does not begin with the assumption of dissolution, but review. In a report to the synod and in communications to you regarding a "process of dissolution" have been to clarify the importance of determining what is involved in making such a decision – what the process will look like to determine health or dissolution. As you have learned from your own research, no such process exists. At the same time we have communicated to you that we will keep you informed as we shape that process. The process itself, when implemented, will include Dakota. We do not understand your communicating to others that we are pursuing a process of dissolution, that it is a surprise to you, and, that the Presbytery of Dakota would not be included. That is not an accurate interpretation of what is taking place.

We do hope that your special meeting in November will provide direction to enable you to fulfill the responsibilities of a presbytery. Again, the review process will be about reviewing how the Presbytery of Dakota is fulfilling its role and responsibilities, is able to fund its budget, and is able to hold its leadership accountable. The review process will be concerned with more than how the presbytery is organized. Please understand that we

will not delay the startup of this process. It will not inhibit your acting as a responsible governing body.

We anticipate at this point that the process will continue for some time in order to gather information to help the synod act on any recommendations. You are aware that these questions and concerns are not new questions. They have come to the presbytery and synod tables on several occasions over many years. As you mention in a recent note to a session of Dakota, “once again, we will be looking at dissolution.” The difference this time is the serious impact of our changing context on the church. The way we have been serving as middle governing bodies of the PCUSA no longer works; both the human and financial resources it takes to function are in serious decline. The issues before Dakota that you note in your e-mail of October 24, “*the need to determine how to work with the geography, economy and limited number of people who are willing to commit themselves to strengthening the presbytery*” are the issues facing all our presbyteries and the synod.

Further in that same email, you raise the issue of “racism.” You state, “*It is hard to say but racism still exists. The task ahead will not be easy.*” We hope and pray that as disciples of Jesus Christ called to be faithful members of his Church we will refrain from the use of labels that can make our relationship and tasks even more difficult.

We are encouraged that the Presbytery of Dakota wants to engage the difficult question of its future as a governing body of the church. We urge you to focus your energies towards becoming a faithful presbytery rather than to develop a rationale for why the synod should delay a process of review.