

# PRESBYTERY MEETING

NOV. 13, 2007

# POSTLUDE

## ‘A Future with Hope’: State of the Presbytery

By Dick Baker, Postlude Reporter



*With upbeat optimism, General Presbyter Mike Cole presented his annual report on the state of the presbytery at the November meeting of the presbytery held at Korean Central Presbyterian Church in Houston.*



Rev. Mike Cole

One year ago, we found ourselves facing an unprecedented financial crisis: we were \$1 million in debt to General Assembly, \$750,000 in debt to other organizations, and had a \$750,000

commitment for copier leases. Our leadership was in anguish and despair.

As countless hours were spent by numerous people seeking answers and solutions to this financial mess, we learned that we needed to rely on God to make a way when there seemed to be no way.

Mike reminded us of the prophet Jeremiah's lament, "Is there no balm in Gilead?" which captured the heartache felt by the Israelites who had been cast into exile in Babylon. Our African-American spiritual ancestors turned Jeremiah's question into a powerful affirmation in "There Is a Balm In Gilead," which had been beautifully sung during the morning offertory. We have turned from our own

heartache and experienced the revival of the Holy Spirit as God led us not only into a financial house cleaning, but also to increased participation of our churches and members in balancing a transparent budget.

We developed a five-year repayment plan for all our indebtedness, fully funded our restricted accounts, covered the expenses of the outlandish copier leases and, on top of all that, now have an operating budget balanced on the increased giving of our churches and members.

"We cannot be deterred from the vision and mission that God has set before us," said Mike. "God has gifted this presbytery with an incredible array of resources for mission and ministry."

With these resources:

- We lead the denomination in new church developments: 18, all the costs of which are covered by our operating budget.
- We are viewed by many as a leader in our denomination in transformational and missional ministry.
- We have a phenomenal staff who repeatedly show their commitment to Jesus Christ and their devotion to the mission of the presbytery.
- Our presbytery meetings have been streamlined and are intentionally informative, visionary, and challenging.
- Our presbytery is involved in more mission than ever, not through a centralized mission budget, but through the missional efforts of our congregations.
- We are preparing to launch an initiative for spiritual renewal and retraining of our pastors and key leaders (KEYS).
- We have funded \$120,000 in grants to advance the vision of our presbytery.
- Our presbytery worships in at least 12

languages every Sunday.

God's plan is for the gospel to prosper in this presbytery. As long as we keep our eyes on that goal, the temporary distractions will be just that — temporary.

During a recent mission trip to Peru, Mike experienced a train ride during which the train periodically stopped, reversed direction, then stopped and proceeded forward. The train was making these maneuvers in order to switch tracks as it proceeded up a hillside. Life's journey with Jesus Christ is not one long progression up the mountain, said Mike, but rather a series of maneuvers sometimes moving forward and sometimes backward. The critical thing is to affirm who the engineer of our train is — Jesus Christ.

The lesson of this last year in our presbytery is that, in order to get up the mountain, sometimes we have to reverse direction in order to get on the right track. "God has a grand plan for our presbytery," said Mike, "plans to prosper us, not to harm us, plans to give us a hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11) Thus saith the Lord, our Engineer: "All aboard!"



The Offertory, "There Is a Balm In Gilead," foreshadowed the morning message.

## Host church welcomes commissioners with warmth & enthusiasm



Rev. Jae Ho Yee

Several hundred elders and pastors gathered at Korean Central PC (Highway 6 and I-10 area) on a beautiful fall day that was fully matched by the beauty, color, and openness of the Sanctuary, the fresh flowers throughout the facility, and the exuberant hospitality extended to the commissioners by members of the church.

In his welcome to the presbytery, the Rev. Jae Ho Yee explained the church's name: The church moved here in 1979 from Central PC on Richmond where the congregation had been meeting.

After a morning of worship and business, commissioners were treated to a full Korean meal, lovingly prepared in the kitchen of Korean Central by members of the church. The Cents-Ability offering received at the lunch tables amounted to \$114.93. This offering will go to feed the hungry through food programs supported by Korean Central PC: Share of Love for the Poor and the Armindi School for Children.



## New Minister-Members welcomed to New Covenant Presbytery

The Rev. Morris "Skip" Ehrlich was received as a new minister-member of New Covenant from Mississippi Presbytery. He is serving the congregation at First PC in Texas City. Skip received his DMin from McCormick Seminary, his MDiv from Columbia Seminary, and a BS degree from The Citadel.

COM validated the ministry and approved the call of Linda Sharon under care of South Louisiana Presbytery to serve as staff chaplain at Methodist Hospital. Her husband, the Rev. Tom Sharon (First PC, Freeport) participated in an antiphonal reading of scripture as Linda began her sermon for ordination.

Following questions from the floor, her examination as a whole was sustained and Linda was welcomed into the Presbytery.



Rev. Skip Ehrlich



Rev. Linda Sharon

## Ecclesiastical Affairs

By Elder Scott Meddaugh, Postlude Reporter

Elder Susan Wittjen reported on behalf of Ecclesiastical Affairs, noting that a task force is in place to review the proposed changes to the *Book of Order's* "Form of Government" (nicknamed "FOG") that will be presented to the General Assembly in 2008. This task force, chaired by Elder Julie MacLemore, will specifically assist the presbytery's commissioners to the General Assembly and seek other ways to support the Presbytery in better understanding the implications of the proposed changes to the *Book of Order*.

Susan also noted that the presbytery meetings in 2008 will focus on the presbytery's vision "to grow congregations that passionately engage their community to make disciples." Meeting themes and speakers will address particular aspects of the vision throughout 2008.

A request was made that as each Session elects commissioners to the presbytery meetings that they consider continuity in 2008, perhaps to the extent of ensuring that the same elder attend all of the 2008 meetings. Each meeting is scheduled on a Saturday.

### Presbytery Meeting Dates in 2008

Sat., Feb. 9	Central PC, Houston
Sat., May 10	First PC, Houston
Sat., Aug. 23	Grand Lakes, Katy
Sat., Nov. 15	First PC, Pasadena

A Special Afternoon Meeting of the presbytery has been called for **Sunday, June 29, 2008**, at Pines PC, Houston, for the purpose of hearing a report from our commissioners to General Assembly (meeting June 21-28, 2008, in San Jose, CA)

The 2007-2009 *Book of Order* is available to order. The whole of Chapter 14 has changed, by action of the presbyteries during the past year. No longer is there staff available at the Presbytery Center who can take orders and track payment for multiple orders. Each church is now responsible for its own ordering and payment. See [www.pcusa.org](http://www.pcusa.org) (resources) for information about ordering.

# A difficult time for the Body

By Scott Meddaugh, Postlude Reporter

Elder Rupert Turner provided a summary of the state of affairs at Heritage Presbyterian Church, Houston. The Session of Heritage PC has informed the Presbytery of their intent to call for a vote at a congregational meeting scheduled for December 9, 2007, to seek dismissal with their property from the PC(USA) and realign with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (New Wineskins Presbytery).

General Council has appointed a Review Team that is meeting with the Heritage congregation in a series of discussion meetings. Members of the

presbytery interested in gaining perspective on this situation have been invited to attend these meetings. The Review Team will make a presentation with a question and answer period at Heritage PC on Tues., Nov. 27, at 7:00 p.m.

**A meeting of the Presbytery of New Covenant is called for Tuesday, Dec. 11, at 2:00 p.m. at St. Philip PC, Houston, to hear a report from the Review Team.**

The Rev. Laurie Murphy asked for an immediate time of prayer for the members of Heritage PC as well as the presbytery; Rupert led the body in prayer.

## New Candidates enrolled in ordination process



Moderator Deborah Cooper asks questions of new candidates, Juan Herrera (l) and Mark Renn (r), as the Rev. Kevin Boyd looks on.

The Rev. Kevin Boyd, Chair of the Committee on Preparation, presented two new candidates to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. Each spoke briefly about their Christian pilgrimage. **Mark Renn** (St. Andrew's PC, Houston) told of his maturing Christian growth, first in a Christian home and active life in his church, to leadership roles in Bible study and service during college years and after. He is currently attending Austin Seminary.

**Juan Herrera** (St. Andrew's, Houston) grew up as a Presbyterian in Mexico and attended the Pan American School before attending Austin Seminary. "Through my

transformational journey, God has enabled me to use my gifts even with my limitations," stated Juan, "to meet people where they are."

After questions concerning their readiness for candidacy, the Rev. Kevin Boyd charged the candidates to remember Paul's words to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 3:5-6) *Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything is coming from us; our competence is from God who made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant.*

The presbytery approved enrolling Mark and Juan as Candidates. Members of their CPM committees surrounded them as a sign of their love and support.

## Articles of Incorporation restated to bring into conformity with Texas law

By Elder Scott Meddaugh, Postlude Reporter

Elder Jody Harrington reported on behalf of General Council concerning problems in the existing Articles of Incorporation. Jody noted that without approval of the changes, the presbytery could not provide loan guarantees to member churches. At the request of General Council, elder and attorney Mike Harrington reviewed them and prepared the proposed changes to the Articles of Incorporation for the presbytery.

After a brief review of the proposed changes, the Rev. Clark Chamberlain challenged the wording of some of the changes, from a theological as well as a legal perspective. Resolution of the matter was facilitated by Mike Harrington's appearance in the afternoon. After agreement to specific modifications to the proposed wording of Articles IV and VII (adding an indemnification clause), the Restated Articles of Incorporation were approved by the presbytery. The restated articles will be posted on the presbytery's website.

## Finance report

By Elder Scott Meddaugh, Postlude Reporter

Elder Rupert Turner introduced the Administrative Division reports very briefly. His brevity, however, was no match for Elder Sid Holderness who summed up the state of the presbytery's operating budget as "on target." Further financial good news was provided by Sid, though with a few more words, when he stated that the "money is there" to keep the Debt Repayment on schedule.

Additional information about the status of the Debt Repayment plan is on the presbytery's website. A report on the repayment schedule will be made available on a regular basis.

# Installations mark change in presbytery leadership



Rev. Deborah Cooper

Outgoing moderator, Deborah Cooper thanked the Presbytery for allowing her to serve as Moderator this year. "The decision to serve has been a blessing to me— to be part of joyful celebrations, installations, ordinations. I have personally benefited from this service. I have seen God's will at work in our larger Church, as well as in local congregations. I have been privileged to see the living out of

our vision and to experience a spirit of unity and anticipation in our presbytery."

Deborah smiled broadly as she presented the 2008 Moderator and the 2009 Moderator for installation.

"There is strong presence in the leadership to come!" Elder Jody Harrington (Memorial Drive, PC, Houston) was installed as Moderator for 2008 and the Rev. Wayne Eberly (Pines PC, Houston) was installed as Moderator-Elect. Deborah presented them gifts, symbolic of their roles of leader, listener, peacemaker, servant, and unifier.

On behalf of the presbytery a gift to Deborah was given in thanksgiving for her hopeful and faithful Spirit and in gratitude for her service to the presbytery.



Elder Jody Harrington



Rev. Wayne Eberly

*The Postlude* is published after each stated meeting of the Presbytery of New Covenant by the presbytery's Communications Committee.

Editor: Helen Wolf

Reporters: Elders Scott Meddaugh - Southminster PC, Missouri City and Elder Dick Baker - Grace PC, Houston

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# CODA

Elders and minister commissioners to the presbytery meeting received the following announcements by presbytery agents on behalf of presbytery and conducted the following additional business at the Nov. 13, 2007 meeting:

- Approved the merger of 2 committees of the Ministries Division to form the "Congregational Resourcing Team" and amend the Bylaws of the Presbytery of New Covenant accordingly.
- Elected Revs. Fred Thrower and Lynn Hargrove and Elders John Billingsley, Cal Johnson, and Roger Mowell to the Presbytery Nominating Committee.
- Approved the request of Seabrook Presbyterian Church (meeting as Faith Covenant) to dissolve effective January 27, 2008. An Administrative Commission has been appointed to oversee the activities related to this dissolution.
- Four individuals have been enrolled as Inquirers: Shane Webb of First PC, Pasadena; Lindsay Hatch of Clear Lake PC, Houston; AnneMarie Wallace of Houston PC, Houston; and Andy Tsuei of Formosan PC, Houston.
- New Church Development is conducting a Probe in the Greatwood-Sugar Land-Telfair-Richmond area, as directed by General Council.
- First PC in Liberty invites the presbytery to their final worship on Dec. 30 at 4:00 p.m. to celebrate their years of ministry.
- Churches were reminded that nominations for Youth Advisory Delegates to GA next summer are due by Dec. 1, 2007.
- A task force is studying proposals made by Central PC and Heights PC to the presbytery that the presbytery relocate its administrative offices to their campuses. General Council did not solicit these proposals and has made no determination that presbytery offices should relocate. Additional proposals, if received in the next few weeks, will be included in the task force's work.