

January 6, 2009

TO: Commissioners, Youth Advisory Delegates, Corresponding
Members and Friends of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies

FROM: Phil Brown
Synod Executive

“HOLDING”

*THE Day is here and we made it to Bethlehem!
The time has come for kneeling and we've seen the Child!
There is singing in the stable and we want desperately to hold on to it...
Hold on to the Star! And the angels! And the spirit of love!
How do we hold on to the Christmas spirit?
Why can't every day be Christmas?*

*The world mutters “Be realistic,” and sometimes we church people mutter too.
On our way back from Bethlehem sometimes we forget
What we've been warned about in a dream: **to return another way.**
Once we've seen the Child, we're left holding hearts wherein angels dance
and stars sing!
Once we've been to Bethlehem, **every day is Christmas!***

(Kneeling in Bethlehem by Ann Weems)

Some of you know that I really appreciate the thoughts of Ann Weems for the Advent and Christmas Seasons ... and the way she leads us into the New Year with a blatant or subtle nuance. Here in the simple question regarding the desire to hold on to the spirit of Christmas, to capture that spirit for each day of the year, Weems adds a subtle piece of the story we have heard and read so many times; i.e., **“once we've seen the Child, return another way and every day is Christmas!”**

For astronomy is not only pleasant, but also useful to be known; it cannot be denied that this art unfolds the admirable wisdom of God.

*(John Calvin, *The Hand of God*, Reagan, p.49)*

The book, *The Hand of God*, is one Diana Barber shared with the staff following her involvement in the Western Area Staff gathering this past December. It includes some of the miraculous photography taken through the Hubble Telescope, attaching to each view a thoughtful comment like Calvin's. Probably for Calvin and his day, five-hundred years ago this year, his comment reeked of passion for such beauty. Probably for us, his reflection was a bit beige or uncolorful, at least for me.

Do you take time during this season to glance at the crisp, clear sky and adsorb all its beauty, even with the naked eye? Recently there has been a crescent moon in the southwestern sky early in the evening (my best time) with the rare sight of Venus, Jupiter and Mars closely aligned ... such an artist, this God of the heavens ... so wise this God of the earth and all that is therein.

To each of you, those new as synod commissioners and youth advisory delegates, and to those returning, our time together in 2009 will call on us to seek God's incredible wisdom and in view of the Christ child to lead on in a different way. During this winter meeting, we will take up some new items that can and will make a very real difference to the Synod of Lakes and Prairies and, quite likely, its presbyteries. I'll mention some of these issues below.

Regarding this mailing for 1st-time commissioners and Youth Advisory Delegates (Yads) ...

This mailing contains materials for your orientation to the synod and this meeting; such as, logistics and the agenda, norms and the Synod Primer. It also includes materials to prepare you for discussions and proposals that will come to the floor of the synod from one of the committees.

Orientation for new commissioners and youth advisory delegates – (see the Proposed Agenda, a beige colored sheet included in the first mailing.) We recommend it as a helpful start up for all those new to the synod assembly. Gather with others in the lower level of the Ruth Youngdahl Lodge. Bring your Synod Primer along with you ... and your sense of humor!

The **Minutes of the September 2008 Meeting** have been sent electronically to returning commissioners and YADs. They will be sent to new commissioners/YADs prior to the meeting. (In the future we plan to post minutes on the website.) While a review of the Minutes will provide some background on a host of synod business, the **most significant** for your study is the **Final Report from the Administrative Review Task Force on Dakota Presbytery** (beginning page 2755). The synod will not be considering progress on this report until the spring Meeting but it is critical for you to become well informed on this topic and the direction determined by the synod. As you review the Minutes you will note the Conclusions and actions taken by the synod assembly (pages 2760 - 2761).

In addition, we sometimes send an additional mailing of material to those of you serving particular committees. **Program Coordination Committee** and **Personnel Committee** papers were sent prior to Christmas. **Ecclesiastical Relations (ERC)** papers are included in this packet. And, **Finance** will be mailed out soon. If you are not sure which committee you serve, look at Agenda Item: 3, a white paper, included in the first mailing to you.

Regarding your appointment to a particular committee, the Steering Committee seeks to balance your stated preferences with the needs of the Standing Committees. It is not unusual, therefore, that you are appointed to a different committee than indicated by your preferences. We request that you experience your assignment for at least one full meeting. If you conclude it unsatisfactory at that point, please contact the moderator about a new assignment.

Please consider some additional resources to help you prepare for your role as a synod commissioner or Youth Advisory Delegate and the winter meeting.

- **Prior to the January meeting, check out the synod's Web site, www.lakesandprairies.org.** I encourage your exploring this site, not only for the many of you who will be new commissioners and Youth Advisory Delegates in 2009. It is a helpful refresher for everyone. It is important for you to learn what you can about the synod, its ministry and mission in order to serve as a helpful interpreter to your presbytery.

In addition, Duane Sweep, the synod's Associate for Communications has established a blog site (www.myspace.com/synodoflakesandprairies). Check out the blog and the interactions in response. Check out the music – the result of Duane's searching for Christian musicians from within each presbytery. (Please be aware that categories posted at the top of the synod's page are not a part of or under the control of the synod.)

Also, if you are not currently receiving the synod's e-newsletter, **Keeping in Touch**, please let Mary Kes know during the synod meeting.

- **The Annual report from Presbyterian Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (PAHSA)** – This report is not included in your papers. The report will come through the Ecclesiastical Relations Committee. This will be the fourth joint annual report the Homes Associations of the synod have made – one result of the changes adopted recently by the Homes and by the synod. This combined report provides the synod with a much fuller perspective of its mission to seniors through the Homes.
- **A proposal to form an Administrative Review Task Force to consider the future of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies as a governing body of the Presbyterian Church (USA).** Papers will be distributed to you early in the synod meeting.
- **Preparation for our Education Time** – please refer to the **PINK SHEET** included in this packet.