

SYNOD EXECUTIVE REPORT
The Reverend Phil Brown
FALL MEETING OF THE SYNOD OF LAKES AND PRAIRIES
SEPTEMBER 30 – OCTOBER 2, 2007

Grace and peace to each of you in the name of the loving God of Jesus Christ as we come together for the fall meeting of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies. The officers and staff express our gratitude to you for giving your time and gifts for ministry to the synod and we invite you, we encourage you to help us discover during our time together – **in these plenary sessions, around the meal table, during our committee meetings and even our snack times** – what it means to be the one Body of Jesus Christ for a new day in the life of the church.

A few weeks back I was to join my synod executive colleagues for a few days of business and pleasure out west. Mary dropped me at the airport late afternoon and upon checking in I learned that all flights all airlines were off schedule and everyone in a crowded airport was being rebooked. When I learned the options for me, none very promising, I requested a refund and phoned Mary, asking for a ride back to the office. Not two minutes later I was heading for an exit, when my phone rang and the familiar voice of the Stated Clerk/Treasurer happily inquire ... “so you can’t get there from here. How would you like to go to Sioux Falls tomorrow and meet with the Dakota Administrative Review T.F.?”

As confused as I was at the moment, I could not come up with the slightest excuse why that was a bad idea because I had other plans. In fact, by the time the task force was through with its meeting and talking with some representatives of the Pby of Dakota, from my perspective, it was providential that the airlines were in such a mess a few nights earlier.

One of the fun pieces of our journey to Sioux Falls related to the car Jay had rented for our travel, including JoAnn Simser and Betty Walker. The car included a GPS...a global positioning system, or if you’re not familiar with that, it’s a like a little TV screen that maps out your trip. You plug in the address of your destination. Via satellite it already knows where you are and the arrow on the screen simply follows along the highway as you travel. A voice instructs you in advance to anticipate a turn ahead and it will talk to you when you make a wrong turn ... generally in an understanding sort of way.

What we really enjoyed, however, was the point in our trip at which we made the last turn towards our destination and the voice declares ... **you have arrived! YOU HAVE ARRIVED!**

A week or two later I had a similar system in the rental car to travel to a couple presbyteries and I eagerly anticipated to words “**you have arrived.**” I don’t know about you, but any sense that “**I have arrived**” is foreign to my life and calling. In fact I believe it is critical for us as individuals and as a synod to be undoing any attitude or practice that reflects “**we have arrived.**”

If you disagree with me on this point or not clear about my point, I hope we can engage in some conversation these next few days. I will be surprised, however, if you go through your committee meetings and come to the conclusion, “**you have arrived.**”

I shared with you in my cover memo sent in early August some important thoughts for me gleaned from readings I was doing at the time. Another passage of scripture I came across as I re-read the book of Philippians provides a wonderful rehearsal of God’s journey in Christ and the one to which we are called. Note that there are no words of Paul that suggest “arrival”, only the journey. I’ve always liked this passage, in part because of the way it reads ... the central passages are a confession of faith.

Listen to the beginning verses of chapter 2...

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy,

Make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.

Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interest of others.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,

But emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,

He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on the cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

And every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; For it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for God’s own pleasure. AMEN (Philippians 2:1-13)

WHAT’S GOING ON IN THE LIFE OF THE SYNOD OF LAKES AND PRAIRIES?

While I do not anticipate the introduction of significant new items in front of this meeting, I do believe you will be engaging in and hearing about the many places we are currently dealing with matters that are transforming the lives of presbyteries, the synod

and the General Assembly – none of these, by the way, will reflect that “we have arrived.”

1. A progress report from the Task Force on Administrative Review for the Presbytery of Dakota
2. A progress report on the newly appointed Task Force to explore the synod’s relationship with Campus Ministry
3. A report from Manley Olson related to the General Assembly Council’s work and the recent gathering of the Council with Middle Governing Body staff in Louisville. We had presbyters there as well, Harry Olthoff of EI; Dave Feltman of NCI; Phil Barrett of DM and Chaz Ruark of MRV. A part of our time was spent identifying and pursuing issues we believed to be very important for the whole church in these times basically reaffirming that we are living in a new day for governing bodies as we seek to rebalance our focus between governance and mission. There were 17 different, yet significant topics for small group consideration ... none of them pointed to “we have arrived.” And I’ll let Manley unpack all that ... and some you may want to pursue.
4. Prior to the time with the General Assembly Council and staff colleagues, I met with the executives of a few other synods, who like ours, have enjoyed a healthy history and now are seeking creative ways to discover new life for a new day. The next time we meet, I have asked that they think with me about how a synod might function without being a governing body of the church. That is, how do we serve our presbyteries faithfully, helping to provide resources, helping to form vital ministry and mission networks, serving as a regional disciplinary unit of the church...serving as a central administrative, financial, communications and personnel support unit for our presbyteries (and possibly what are now presbyteries of other synods)? We have lots to think about ... and to assume leadership.
5. Since May, conversations have begun or continued among different groupings of our presbyteries as they consider their future – ministry and mission partnerships, staffing and office configurations, differing expectations of the synod’s role. There’s not much static in the life of our presbyteries
6. Continuing conversations and recommendations with our institutional relationships and the way they function; e.g., the homes associations, Presbyterian Clearwater Forest Camp. For next year we will add our college relationships and consider what a faithful relationship with them might look like...if anything.
7. No doubt, I have overlooked some matter of importance to us, only to reinforce the reality that I have not arrived! What else??