

January 8, 2008

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

FROM: Phil Brown
Synod Executive

SUBJECT: The Meeting of the Synod Assembly
January 20 – 22, 2008

*We told her she couldn't go; she was too young to stay up that late.
She told us that Baby Jesus would be there and he was younger than she.
We told him he couldn't go; he was too old to brave the cold night air.
He told us he'd rather greet heaven from the Christmas Eve service than be found
slumped by the TV.
So we bundled them up against the extreme cold, against their own defenselessness,
against our better judgment and they went out with joy.
My prayer is that those of us who think that we're in charge of the world and the church
will remember that the stable was filled with such as these:
Those who could not be kept from rejoicing!
(Kneeling in Bethlehem, Ann Weems)*

What a familiar yet refreshing scene Ann Weems portrays for us in this writing...one more of the many I have shared with you through these cover memos. Each one, for me, feels so rich with thought, challenge and faithfulness. Each one confronts our assumptions and routines about faith and life that diminish or block the Good News of Jesus Christ in our lives and the lives of others. Strangely, or consistently, the Word is demonstrated to us from among the "least of these."

So...what about this New Year for you? Is there anything you learned or experienced during the Advent/Christmas Season you have committed to carry into the New Year? Something you did differently this time around that made the Season more meaningful and fresh? Maybe a less crowded calendar...or placing some Sabbath time on your calendar...maybe reaching out to someone in need and allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to you through them...maybe connecting with someone with whom you have been at odds for some time with the purpose to reconcile? So many possibilities exist for that manger scene to take root within us. And, I am eager to hear from you and share with you some of these stories while together at the synod meeting.

I do pray that none of us be kept from...or keep from rejoicing at the wonder of this New Year!! THANKS BE TO GOD!

Regarding this mailing...

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. While there are several documents for your perusal, the most significant for your study is the Progress Report from the Administrative Review Task Force on Dakota Presbytery.

In addition, we sometimes send an additional mailing of material to those of you serving particular committees. **Program Coordination Committee** papers were sent prior to Christmas. There are none in advance for **Personnel**. **Ecclesiastical Relations (ERC)** papers are included in this current 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.

Please consider matters that will 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 2008. 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 Taaffe know during the synod meeting.

- **Orientation for new commissioners and youth advisory delegates** – (see the Proposed Agenda (a green sheet included in the last mailing.) It can be a very helpful start up for newcomers to 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 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 third 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.

- **The proposal to extend the Presbytery of Dakota Administrative Review Task Force** – For those who are new to the Synod, the Presbytery of Dakota is a non-geographic presbytery with approximately 21 churches from western Minnesota through North and South Dakota and eastern Montana. The members of these churches are primarily Native Americans and total approximately 900. At the fall meeting of the synod, the Ecclesiastical Relations Committee (ERC) discussed whether or not this presbytery, given the enormous geography, very limited membership, and rampant poverty, is able to function as a viable governing body of the Presbyterian Church (USA). On several occasions over the years the presbytery and the synod have worked hard to find solutions to the multitude of problems in conducting the essential work of a presbytery. The presbytery is working once again on a plan to re-vitalize itself and its churches.

At its January 2007 meeting the synod acted to form an Administrative Review Task Force to study the history, to work with the Presbytery of Dakota to determine whether the presbytery is or can become viable as a middle-governing body of the church. The task force was expected to serve for a minimum of one year to fulfill its responsibilities and make appropriate recommendations to the January 2008 meeting of the synod.

You can review the significant correspondence between the synod and the Presbytery of Dakota that provides further background regarding the question we are considering at <http://www.lakesandprairies.org/PresbyteriesDakota.html>.