

GENERAL PRESBYTER REPORT

Rev. Bobbi White

January 31, 2009

“The churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.” Acts 16:5

The presbytery leadership feels God is calling us to step out in faith and challenge the churches to grow, to be transformed for the kingdom of God, and God’s people. I believe God is calling our Presbytery to be actively involved in growing deeper in our faith and in reaching out to our neighbors, particularly those that are unchurched.

During this time of economic woes, budget cuts, uncertainty, and wars across the globe, it would be a temptation to close ranks and keep things in our churches just as they are now. Yet this is the time that people really need a relationship with Christ and to be part of a Christian community. This should be a time for our churches to grow in faith and vitality.

In response to these conditions, we are inviting churches to participate in a two-day education event March 6 & 7, 2009, at Morganton, First. The event is for pastor(s) and three to six (or more) leaders from their church. The two-day event can be a stand alone event or it could be the beginning of a three-year process of listening and responding to God’s call for church transformation. The process, being used successfully in at least twelve other presbyteries, is called the Acts 16:5 Initiative. It is led by the Reverend Stan Ott of the Vital Church Institute.

The Acts Initiative has worked in large and small churches alike and in churches with varied theological views. It is helpful to churches who feel stuck and are wanting to reach out in new ways. It is beneficial to churches which are growing in faith, vitality and numbers and want to continue that growth. It is Biblically based is a process that encourages the making of disciples. One pastor, who was known for growing churches in membership, said to his Executive Presbyter, “I have been good at growing members, but now I am learning to grow disciples.”

Through the Acts 16:5 Initiative, the Presbytery invites churches to engage in a deliberate process of congregational growth and transformation. The emphasis is “communal” (serving the congregation itself) and “missional” (reaching the surrounding community and the world.) There are two very important components of the three year process. One is a team, with pastors and congregational leaders. The second are small support groups made up of five to seven pastors which meet about 8 times a year. The process is tailored so each individual church comes to its own understanding to how God is leading them and works out plans to follow that understanding.

Let us go forward, seeking God’s will for our church and stepping out in faith to see what God will do through us. One of Stan Ott’s questions to us is “What are you asking God to do?” Are we expecting that God will do great things through our churches, large and small? At this time, the world and our communities need vital, faithful, growing and welcoming churches. We have the most important message in the whole universe to share God’s love with each other, our neighbors, and the world, by what we say and do. I am excited about this program because it provides an opportunity for the pastors, Sessions and key leaders to make a difference in their churches and in the lives of God’s people.

The Presbytery is going to help cover the cost of this event and the materials, including a valuable notebook/workbook for each participant. We are estimating that the two lunches and refreshments will cost about \$25 per person. When you register, we are asking those who can to pay \$25, but if not, please

contribute as much as you are able. However, it is our desire for everyone who can to attend.

The cost of continuing in the three year program is \$115 per month per church, or about \$1400 per year. There will be limited scholarships for smaller churches and churches needing help at this time. Again, the Presbytery thinks this opportunity has great potential to strengthen our churches and make a positive difference in the life of the members called to be disciples. We will do all in our power to enable you to participate if you commit to trying new things and to grow in faith and vitality.

Please consider this invitation for you and your church to participate. I want to strongly encourage you to consider signing up for the three-year process. It could be a time of transformation, growing in depth and energy for your faith in Christ, and reaching out to others in exciting, new and rewarding ways. It can be a time of spiritual energy for both you and your church.

If you do not feel that a three-year process is for you, I invite you to come and experience one of the best two-day educational opportunities around. This two-day event or the three-year process could change the way you look at the opportunities in your church, and maybe ways to grow spiritually as Session and as leaders. It might allow God to work through us in very powerful ways to further Christ's kingdom.