

## ***A LETTER FROM THE GENERAL PRESBYTER***

March 2008

Dear Friends:

On Palm/ Passion Sunday, I heard a wonderful sermon by Martha Jane Petersen asking the question, "*How Far Would We Follow Jesus?*" That afternoon, I participated in a funeral hearing about the wonderful witness to Christ's love on the part of Chick Dimmock, truly one of Christ's joyful saints. As I anticipate a Holy Week of worship at Mayland Fellowship and the life, death and resurrection of our Lord, I am reminded of an Easter story I heard. It was about a group of Christians whose witness "went far to follow Christ."

A pastor was preaching a sermon at the first service one Easter, using an illustration from Russia. The pastor said that during the Stalin era, Stalin sent out people to brainwash the countryside. At one gathering in a large auditorium full of people, a young man spent three hours describing the rightness of Lenin/Marxist thinking. The young man said that the church was dead and that there was no longer any need for God. He was passionate and he thought he'd been convincing. He entertained questions. For what was to be the last question, the Orthodox priest stood up in the back of the auditorium and said, "I only want to say one thing, 'Christ is risen!'"

The members of the audience stood up and shouted boldly, "Christ is risen, Christ is risen indeed."

The pastor said that after the first service, an elderly woman with a broken accent came up to him. She said, "I am from Russia. I know more of the story. At the second service tell them that everyone who stood up knew they would be sent to prison." (From "Take Your Best Shot," by Gordon MacDonald)

I hope as we go through the next months, we will be able to live as Easter people, proclaiming that Christ has indeed risen and we have been changed forever. I pray this will help us reach out to those who do not know that good news or do not attend church, inviting them to church and into a growing relationship with Christ and into a Christian nurturing community. May you be blessed this Easter season.

### **News at the Presbytery:**

This month, we have three words (thanksgiving, retirement and partial retirement) for three people (Ike Kennerly, Ginnie Stevens, and Ellen Dozier).

We are thankful for Christ's healing touch in Ike Kennerly's recovery from a ruptured appendix, infection from the appendix, and pneumonia. Ike is at home and recovering slowly. As a result, he retired early, the end of February, from the Interim Associate Presbyter position. We give thanks for his ministry among us, particularly at a crucial time in the life of this presbytery. He brought with him his knowledge and wisdom, his experience as a pastor and as an Executive Presbyter, and his deep faith. We are thankful for the way he ministered in our midst and I am thankful for his advice and help. We are also thankful, as is the Etowah Church, that he only partially retired and will continue as the Stated Supply at Etowah. This is good news. In the meantime, until we find someone to continue Ike's ministry, Robert, Charles and I will be backups.

We also give thanks for Ginnie Stevens and her ministry. Ginnie is also retiring at the end of March from the Associate for Mission position. We are grateful for her many gifts in ministry, her ability to help us use our gifts and the difference she has made in the ways we as individuals, churches and Presbytery reach out

to others. Through her work, she has helped us make a positive impact on the world, our Presbytery, our communities and the churches. Ginnie worked in the "old Asheville Presbytery" and then in the Presbytery of Western North Carolina. She was responsible for starting the Guatemalan partnership. She was responsible for the two Guatemalan presbyteries and our Presbytery providing 80% support for missionary Dr. Barbara Nagy in Malawi. Through that work, we have supported the Nkhoma Hospital, work with Aids orphans, and much, much more. We give thanks to God for her ministry and also for the faith and love she demonstrates as Christ's faithful disciple. We also give thanks that she is only partially retiring and will continue to serve as the coordinator of the Guatemalan Partnership for this presbytery. We are planning a celebration and retirement dinner for Ginnie on April 15 at the First Presbyterian Church, Morganton. We invite all those who would enjoy celebrating Ginnie's ministry to attend. The dinner is a six o'clock and the cost is \$15 per person.(See the flyer for more information.)

We give thanks for Ellen Dozier's ministry and witness. Ellen is retiring from her ministry with the women in Guatemala. She has just returned to this Presbytery. In April, she will be speaking throughout the United States about her ministry and also helping raise money for the person who will be continuing her work. She will return here and looks forward to sharing with the churches in this Presbytery after May. We give thanks for Ellen's ministry in Guatemala. Her first ministry there was to work with our partnership and the two presbyteries. Over the last 8 years, she has been making a difference by teaching, empowering and working with the Guatemalan women. We also give thanks that she plans to continue to work part-time in this Presbytery in some pastoral capacity, and that she will share her witness with us.

We have been blessed with three people whose witness to God's grace, joy and love is powerful. We are blessed in many ways with other people who also witness to Christ's powerful love. For this, we celebrate and give thanks to God.