

GENERAL PRESBYTER REPORT

Rev. Bobbi White

April 28, 2009

Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:18-20.

I am hoping that we as a Presbytery can focus our attention on fulfilling Christ’s command and supporting each other as we grow in faith and action. As a first step to support churches in this work, the Presbytery sponsored The Acts Initiative on March 6-7. Act Initiative takes its name from Acts 16:5, that says, “So the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily.” It is Holy Spirit work. Note that it says the churches were first strengthened in the faith.

At the Acts Initiative event, I was excited to see over 250 pastors and church leaders from over 45 churches discussing ways we can reach out to other people, grow in our faith as disciples, and be sent out in the world to demonstrate Christ’s love. It was a great two days. Some people said this was one of the best opportunities that Presbytery had provided.

Because some churches were not able to come, and some pastors wanted to bring additional people, we have scheduled a second Acts Initiative day. Stan Ott has agreed to condense two days into one, on Friday, May 8. If you did not get a chance to come or want to bring additional people, please sign up by April 20. It will be a great day of learning. Bring a team from your churches, so you all can use what you learn together.

Because of the excitement generated, the learning gained and the desire to help people grow in discipleship, a lot of churches are signing up to be involved in a three-year process. This includes creating a team to help the congregation to reach out to others, grow in discipleship and send people to show Christ’s love and grace. The teams from all the churches participating will meet every six months for worship and prayer, encouragement, training, and planning. Also, an important part of the process is the opportunity for ministers to be in regular support groups.

In other presbyteries that have participated in the Acts Initiative, churches both large and small and of varying theological positions, have reported their members have grown in faith and discipleship. It is my expectation and prayer that the churches in this Presbytery will experience the same.

Stan Ott, who leads Acts Initiative, asked us, “What are we praying that God will do?” Are our prayers big enough? I am praying that God will renew and continue to renew the churches in this presbytery. I am praying for our faith development, discipleship making, and for the difference our ministry will make in our communities and the world. But it my prayer that we will reach out to others and grow in worship attendance and membership. There are so many hurting people who need to know Jesus Christ, him crucified and risen, and have a church community to grow in their experience and understanding of God’s love.

We need to do better at reaching out to people not involved in a church. Our presbytery has lost over 347 people in worship and 385 in membership last year. Many of our churches are in growing areas. Only twenty seven churches grew in worship attendance and only 31 grew in membership. To grow in worship attendance and membership, we need to learn to invite others to our churches and have the gift of hospitality when people come. When we are growing in our faith, we have, as individuals and a church, the spiritual energy needed to reach out. We have the best news in the whole universe to tell people of Christ's love and grace. We are to be about baptizing, teaching, telling, and showing the love of Christ.

As I go from church to church, I see the many ways that the churches are showing the love of Christ. That is a joy in my job. I am reminded of New Hope (Asheville), that took to heart Jesus' example to wash people's feet, and now as a church monthly goes and washes and cares for the feet of the homeless, including providing new socks. It has been an outreach program that has included non-members of their church.

I see many of our churches being the mainstay in the food pantries and Christian Ministries. I hear Barbara Nagy talk about the reduction in infant mortality not only at her hospital, but in Malawi due to her work, and that is because of the support of our churches. In this Presbytery I see a couple of churches with a full-time pastor and an opportunity to grow that would not happen without your gifts. The ministry and mission of many of our churches from the smallest to the largest, is something to celebrate!

As we continue our journey to serve the Lord, my prayer is that we may "be strengthened in the faith and also grow in those people being nourished in that faith in our churches." Let us pray that God will do great things in this Presbytery and in the lives of our churches.