

'There's a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place'

PRESBYTERY MEETING

NOVEMBER 15, 2008

POSTLUDE

Mike Cole delivers State of the Presbytery address

General Presbyter Mike Cole followed the path of examination undertaken at a recent retreat to summarize the State of the Presbytery. He used the retreat's 5 lenses to describe the presbytery's physical, financial, spiritual, vocational, and relational health.

In the past year, New Covenant lost one congregation through dissolution and endured the splintering of another through schism. Hurricane Ike damaged 6 church

buildings beyond the capability of the congregations to restore them by themselves. Our 106 congregations lost a total of about 700 members in the past year. The presbytery still leads our denomination in the number of new church developments.

Financially, more than half of our indebtedness to the General Assembly has been repaid, two audits with no exceptions have been received, and a balanced budget

was achieved without increasing indebtedness. Grants were awarded to more than 20 congregations to help in Ike recovery and transformation.

Worship across our presbytery continues to be diverse and biblically based. Presbytery meetings have had a rich texture of worship that has allowed us to celebrate the faith that binds us together. The Presbytery Prayer Team has called us conscientiously to pray for one another. And New Covenant congregations continue to host seminars, workshops, and conferences that promote spiritual growth

Gifted leaders have given much time to tasks which range from "minuscule to magnificent." We behave like respected colleagues even when we disagree because we believe that all are doing their best to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Mike described new winds blowing in the presbytery. One of those winds was Hurricane Ike. Another, the wind of a faltering economy. And the wind of dissent is blowing through our presbytery arising from concerns raised by sessions about the direction of the PC(USA). There is no way to avoid the deep hurt experienced by everyone in all quarters in such matters. But we know that the Holy Spirit will lead us to a resolution that honors and glorifies God.

"The church of Jesus Christ stands in a unique position," said Mike, "to exhibit faithfulness in a fearful time. Although we don't know what lies ahead, we do know who oversees our journey. New Covenant is more than up to the challenges ahead because we know the blessings that are behind us. And we know that whatever we are encountering is not a surprise to God," declared Mike.



Mike Cole



Time of prayer leads into day's business

Houston wore its bright blue sky for November's meeting of the Presbytery of New Covenant at First PC, Pasadena. Commissioners exchanged broad smiles as they hurried across the parking lots on this first jacket-day of the season.

Jazz in the Morning, a Christian instrumental ensemble formed at the request of the pastor of First PC Houston in 1993, summoned everyone to the day's business. The Rev. Larry Spencer (St. Thomas PC, Houston) invited all to join the Presbytery Prayer Team in a time of prayer and reflection in affirmation, thanksgiving, and celebration of the Great Ends of the Church.

A high point of the prayer time was the

projection of the names of New Covenant ministers, elders, deacons, and trustees who died in 2008. The presentation was a solemn and beautiful tribute to those who are now part of the Church Triumphant. Trios of names were displayed slowly on the screens, permitting time for personal remembrance and meditation as commissioners gave thanks for the ways each enriched our lives and faithfully labored to build God's kingdom.

The morning of offering of \$1825.00 will be given to the Pastors Special Needs Fund, which is administered by the General Presbyter to benefit pastors in our presbytery when emergency financial needs arise.

Though the earth's waters roar and foam...



Dave Johnson describes Ike Recovery

Nowhere was the theme of the meeting, “the vitality of the presbytery,” more obvious than in the report of the response to Hurricane Ike. Election news and the economic crisis may have pushed Ike off the front pages of the national news, but Presbyterians and many others remain constant in responding to the challenging needs in southeast Texas.

Dave Johnson, chair of the Ike Recovery Team (IRT), reviewed actions taken by the presbytery from the time of warning to the ongoing recovery work. Cleanup and immediate provisions were the initial urgent needs, faithfully undertaken by our congregations.

Coordination of recovery efforts by the IRT continues. It has connected congregations that have resources with congregations in need, and supported spiritual recovery efforts for pastors, caregivers, and congregations.

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) set up offices at Clear Lake PC (the church had power and internet access!) to do its work of providing the infrastructure necessary for long-term recovery work.

Two PDA Villages will soon be set up to provide a safe, secure place for workers who come to help. Work teams will pay \$20 a day for food, utilities, and management. One Presbyterian Disaster Village will be located in Texas City for Galveston and areas north of the island. Another will be set up in Port Neches for the area of the Golden Triangle. Villages are expected to be up soon after the first of the year, with an initial commitment of 3 years.

Members of the IRT were thanked for their outstanding and demanding work. A Hurricane Ike Special Issue newspaper has been published with details for effecting continuing help to our communities devastated by the hurricane. It is posted at www.pbyofnewcovenant.org.

Windwood lawsuit

General Council moderator, Rev. Wayne Eberly, reported that presbytery's counsel has responded to the lawsuit served by Windwood PC, Houston, and that a response team is meeting with the Windwood session on a pastoral basis.

The response team is staffed by General Presbyter Rev. Mike Cole, Elder Mort McPhail (Northwoods PC), Rev. Debbie Cenko (First, Wharton), Rev. Kevin Keaton (First, Sugar Land), and Elder Ann Hardy (St. John's, Houston).

2009 Presbytery Meetings

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| Feb. 7 | Grace PC, Houston |
| May 9 | Woodlands PC,
The Woodlands |
| Aug. 1-2 | A Weekend of Celebration &
Service (mission projects in
each church's community)
Hosted by Pines PC |
| Nov. 14 | St. Paul PC, Houston |

New stole displayed

Moderator, Jody Harrington announced the honorable retirement of the moderator's



The new Moderator's Stole

stole that displayed the logo of the Year of the Child (which has become the Decade of the Child). Two emblems, the presbytery's logo and “Moderator Presbytery of New Covenant,” were embroidered on the new green stole by a member of Southminster PC, Missouri City.

At the Feb. 7, 2009 Stated Meeting of the Presbytery of New Covenant, presbytery will vote on the proposed amendments to the *Book of Order*. The amendments are available at www.pcusa.org and will be mailed to churches in December.

Examination sustained

Candidate Paul Hoang, who has been under care of Sheppards and Lapsley Presbytery, completed his ordination exam in preparation for the ministry of Word and



Paul Hoang

Sacrament by preaching a sermon before the presbytery. After questions from the floor, a motion to sustain the examination in full was approved.

Paul, son of a Presbyterian minister, has received a pastoral call from Korean Young Nak, Houston. He received a BS degree in psychology from U. of Alabama in 2003 and a MDiv from Columbia Theological Seminary in Georgia in 2007.

Using Ruth 3:1-18 as his text, Paul spoke about faithfulness and loyalty in following God, even if an outsider feeling somehow different from others.

Paul served an internship at the Church of All Nations where the Rev. Jin Kim, who was the keynote speakers at New Covenant's August meeting, is senior pastor. Paul spoke of his experience working in this multicultural ministry and how it prepares him to recognize and appreciate the cultural and social diversity surrounding us.

Good News Shout Out

A new feature in presbytery meetings was introduced by Mike Cole, who encouraged commissioners to “shout out” the good news of what is happening in their churches and to share particular needs. A steady stream of speakers appeared at microphones – a testament in itself to the many wondrous things God is doing through New Covenant congregations.

Testimonies to hurricane work teams, new partnerships of cooperation, increased sensitivity to needs of communities, and celebrations of increased faith – all spoke to the Good News that sustains and encourages in difficult times.

New Minister-Members introduced to New Covenant Presbytery

Extending the right hand of fellowship to new colleagues, commissioners welcomed six pastors to New Covenant.



Hmingi Browne

Lal Hmingliani "Hmingi" Browne was received by the presbytery, transferring from Mid-Kentucky Presbytery. She received her MDiv from Bishop's College in India, in 1986, a ThM from Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Seoul, Korea, in 1989, and a DMin in 1992 from San Francisco Theological Seminary. Hmingi is serving as Interim Associate Pastor of Adult Education and Pastoral Care at Clear Lake PC. She is originally from Myanmar.

Will Browne, transferring from Mid-Kentucky Presbytery, is the husband of Hmingi. He is serving as the Executive

Director of the Medical Benevolence Foundation. His MDiv is from Vanderbilt Divinity School in Nashville, TN in 1975 and his DMin from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1991. Prior to coming to Houston, Will served on the World Mission staff of General Assembly.



Will Browne

Emilee Whitehurst was received by the presbytery as Member-at-Large, transferring from Mission Presbytery. She received a BA degree in Human Biology from Stanford University in 1994 and her MDiv from Harvard Divinity School in 2001. She is currently Executive Director of Rothko Chapel and hopes to serve as Parish Associate with Heights PC, Houston.



Emilee Whitehurst

Michael Umbenhaur, transferring from Sacramento Presbytery, is serving as pastor of First PC, Orange. He earned a BA degree in psychology from University of California, Davis, in 1987 and his MDiv from San Francisco Theological Seminary in 1992. Michael preached his first sermon in New Covenant at First PC, Orange, the Sunday after Hurricane Ike stormed through southeast Texas. "Called to Texas to be trained as a real pastor," quipped Mike.



Mike Umbenhaur

Daniel Nguyen was received by the presbytery as an NCD minister. He is transferring from Presbytery of Stockton.

He received a BS degree in Chemical Engineering from Ohio State University in 1978 and his MDiv from San Francisco Theological Seminary in 1998. He was 17, living in Vietnam, when he first met the Rev. Asa Hunt (Parish Associate with First PC, Houston) who taught him about the history and polity of the PC(USA).



Daniel Nguyen

Sharon Gazaway was received as Member-at-Large. She is transferring from Mid-South Presbytery. She received a BA degree from Southern Illinois University in 1971 and her MDiv from Memphis Theological Seminary in 2004. She has been called to serve as Temporary Supply at First PC, Jasper .



Sharon Gazaway

Continuing support of Heritage Presbyterian

After reviewing the recent history of the split in the congregation of Heritage PC in Houston, Elder Rupert Turner reported on the remaining minority's progress to self-sufficiency. A session, board of deacons, and a designated pastor nominating committee have been elected. Rev. James Currie will serve as moderator pro tem of the new session. Jane Pettit, a seminarian under care of this presbytery, will serve as temporary supply student pastor. Growth continues, both in scope and in numbers, in membership, the preschool, Sunday school, and mission activities.

The immediate need is for the presbytery to cover the pastor's salary until the church can assume that responsibility on its own. Each church in the presbytery is asked to prayerfully consider including this need in their budgets. This support is essential; the current congregation of just over 100 members is making a mortgage payment of \$5,650 each month.

The Administration Commission (AC) continues to provide support and guidance as needed. A financial task force is developing a plan for financial support to the church for the next 3 years.

Two international partnerships approved

Renewal of the Covenant for International Partnership 2009-2011 between New Covenant and CEDEPCA was approved. CEDEPCA works throughout Central America, taking theological education to church leaders and providing outreach to women by encouraging their role in the church and society. New Covenant has partnered with CEDEPCA since 1991.

Also approved was a new Covenant Agreement for International Partnership (2009-2011) between the Presbytery of Juan Calvino in Lima, Peru, and the Presbytery of New Covenant. Since 1998 First PC, Kingwood, has sent teams to work with churches in Juan Calvino Presbytery. This new partnership between the 2 presbyteries will further the mission of each partner through prayer and dialogue.

Installation of 2009 Moderator

Moderator Jody Harrington passed on the symbols of the office of Moderator - stole, cross, and gavel - to the Rev. Wayne Eberly, pastor of Pines PC, Houston. General Presbyter Mike Cole thanked God for the continuing leadership within this presbytery. He charged Wayne to be a passionate moderator - passionate for this presbytery and objective and fair as moderator. "Do everything in the name of Jesus," said Mike.



Rev. Wayne Eberly
2009 Moderator

Synod Seminary Scholarship Effort

The Rev. Dean Pogue reminded commissioners of the need, even in these difficult economic times, to support the Synod of the Sun Seminary Scholarship Fund. These scholarships are awarded annually to encourage a strong and continuing dedication toward theological study. Many seminarians have thousands of dollars of debt when they graduate.



Rev. Dean Pogue

Banners unrolled to recognize commitment

The presbytery staff was recognized for achieving the designation, "Community of Respect" by the Anti-Defamation League of Houston.

Banners were presented to the staff after the completion of a commitment to participate in a number of educational activities that bring increased understanding and cultural awareness of our diversity.



CODA

Elders and minister commissioners to the presbytery meeting received the following announcements by presbytery agents on behalf of presbytery and conducted the following additional business at the November 15, 2008 meeting:

- The Rev. Shun-Chi Wang was granted Honorably Retired status, effective December 1, 2008. Most recently he has served on the staff of the national office in Louisville, KY.
- The Rev. James Knez was granted Honorably Retired status, effective January 1, 2009. He has been an active member of our presbytery while engaged professionally as an attorney.
- The Rev. Robert F. Vagt was granted Honorably Retired status, effective October 31, 2008. Bob served as president of Davidson College from 1997-2007 and in January 2008 accepted the presidency of The Heinz Endowments in Pittsburgh, PA.
- Elected Diane Prevary for a 3-year term as Recording Clerk of the Presbytery (Nov. 2008-Nov. 2011).
- Elected Janice Schessler for a 3-year term as Stated Clerk of the Presbytery (Nov. 2008-Nov. 2011).
- Elected Lee Larkin for a 3-year term as Treasurer of the Presbytery (Nov. 2008-Nov. 2011).
- General Council has approved a General Council Retreat to include all committee chairs for Jan. 6-7 at Camp Cho-Yeh with Jill Hudson as facilitator.
- Committee on Preparation for Ministry granted Jane Pettit (Grace PC, Houston) permission to serve as temporary student supply pastor at Heritage PC until Jan. 15, 2009.
- Elected 83 individuals to serve on presbytery committees.
- Committee on Ministry has approved a Policy for Professional Development and Covenant of Confidentiality.
- Commissioners heard reports given by Ana Schick from Interface Samaritan and by Josh Plumley from Presbyterian Children's Homes.
- Approved a resolution declaring Feb. 21, 2009 to be a day of thanksgiving to God for the life and witness of John W. and Helen Lancaster. A Gala Dinner and Silent Auction to honor them will be held to benefit a new endowment for campus ministry.

Slides for the looping PowerPoint presentations at presbytery meetings should be sent to Susan Wittjen or Janice Schessler.

The Postlude is published after each stated meeting of the Presbytery of New Covenant.

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