

Rev. Gale Watkins
Annual Report of Council Chairperson
January 21, 2006

Presbytery Council has the task of coordinating the work of all the entities and staff of the Presbytery. Council acts on behalf of the Presbytery in between Presbytery meetings (while Presbytery meets five times per year, Council meets ten times). Council has a "big picture" role in the Presbytery. Council's task is to see that the Presbytery live out its mission statement, which is essentially that will assist congregations and ministers in their work.

Council faces some real challenges. We have twenty-eight voting members, plus several staff who participate in our meetings. This is a very large group for making decisions. Further, many Council members are specialists whose attention is on one part of Presbytery's work. They tend to be overextended, making it hard for them to focus on the "big picture" of the Presbytery's mission.

During the past year, we have taken some small steps to improve Council's effectiveness. One of these is asking committees with action items to send them out by email several days prior to Council meetings. This allows voting members to think them over and sleep on them before making a decision.

I would like to highlight three positive actions of the past year, along with two concerns.

1. Our Evangelism and Church Development committee prepared a strategy for new church development, entitled "God is out to get you." We have struggled for years in the absence of such a strategy. The committee is currently setting up a team for implementation of the plan. This is encouraging news for our future.
2. Council has formed a task force for "multicultural activities." This group of seven members, chaired by Grace Mossman, will look at the entire Presbytery and help us deal in a direct and healthy way with the many cultures that are already in our midst.
3. We have a proposal that will, we hope, improve the way we plan and evaluate. Our Planning and Evaluation committee, called for in our bylaws, is large and unwieldy. In recent years, it has not functioned well. We are proposing three small, "nimble" committees - Presbytery Planning, Budget and Finance, and Presbytery Evaluation.

My two concerns are people and money.

People - we have thirteen Presbytery committees. Perhaps we have too many committees. In any case, some of our committees are not close to being fully staffed. Information has been provided by the nominating committee about the need for people, and the process they follow. Perhaps it is a generational issue. Younger generations are less inclined to work on permanent committees, and more willing to serve on short-term task forces. Whatever we think about that, I lift this up as a concern for our Presbytery.

Money - our Council brought to the November meeting of Presbytery a provisional budget that had a deficit of \$80,000. That is a significant amount of money! During the last few months of 2005, we had to dip into reserves in order to meet our obligations. Given the limited amount of money that we have, we could be looking at a major financial crisis in the middle of this year. There are differing opinions on what we ought to do about it. Some believe that if we do a better job of telling the story of what the Presbytery is doing, the churches will provide the money needed to balance the budget. I hope this is correct! But others believe that our income will not increase significantly, and that we ought to consider what we can and cannot do. In other words, decide what to cut. Here is where our proposal for changes in planning, budget and finance, and evaluation can be very helpful. We need a mechanism by which we can spell out what our priorities really are. Then our budget can be closely aligned with what we want to do.

This concludes my part of our annual report. We will now hear from Executive Presbyter Ken Moe.