

**Interim Executive Presbyter's Report**  
**Rev. Dave Wasserman**  
**January 16, 2010**  
**Faith Presbyterian Church, Sun City**

Well, I hope you have had wonderful Advent-Christmas-New Years celebrations; that you lit your candles, said your goodbye to 2009 and, if you're like me, greeted 2010 when it came to pass in New York City, two hours ahead of schedule and then got a good night's sleep. I've begun this New Year with a fascinating read of a book by Phyllis Tickle entitled The Great Emergence. It's about the church past, present, and future.

To put things in perspective, the author quotes Anglican Bishop Mark Dyer who has famously said that the only way to understand what is happening to us 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians is to remember, "that about every five hundred years the Church feels compelled to hold a giant rummage sale. That is, about every five hundred years the empowered structures of institutionalized Christianity, whatever they may be at the time... must be shattered in order that renewal and new growth may occur. Phyllis Tickle goes on to identify three results that come from each cleaning out the closets (and I want to read this one paragraph to you):

*First, a new more vital form of Christianity does indeed emerge. Second, the organized expression of Christianity which ...had been dominant...is constituted into a more pure and less ossified expression of its former self... [and]... the Church actually ends up with two new creatures where once there had been only one. That is, in the birthing of a brand-new expression of its faith and practice, the Church also gains a grand refurbishment of the older one. The third result...[is that]... every time the incrustations of an overly established Christianity have been broken open, the faith has spread – and been spread – dramatically ... Thus, for example, the birth of Protestantism ...[500 years ago]... not only established a new, powerful way of being Christian, but it also forced Roman Catholicism to make changes in its own structures and praxis. As a result of both of those changes, Christianity was spread over far more of the earth's territories than had been true in the past. (page 17)*

As confusing as all this may feel, I believe we are in a very vital time in the life of the Church, and a great moment to be in a leadership transition for this Presbytery. So it was that in December, I said to the Council I thought we would go through four steps as part of our "emergence" into a next form of Grand Canyon Presbytery. The **first** is contained in an initial time of getting started with a transitional leader and making sure that the basics are being covered. It's simply a little reassurance that life will keep on keeping on during these next couple of years. The **second** step is a time of reflection and exploration – more than a typical mission study, my counsel is that we use this time to experiment a bit – to try things differently and see what we learn and what will become clear to us. The **third** step is a time of discernment and declaration, compiling our reflections and identifying those directions and changes and gifts and skills we believe will serve the presbytery next years together. And the **final** step is the search and call to a new leader. All this isn't going to be neat and clean, that is, completing one step before engaging the next, but together they form a framework that I believe will keep us focused on the eventual task ahead: calling new leadership for our Presbytery.

Last month, the Council agreed to begin this new year by engaging the second step: a time of reflection and exploration. Over the next several months, I hope we will spend some time **reflecting** on both our traditions, articulated most succinctly in the opening chapters of our Constitution, and some new thinking about God's work in the world, currently framed by the missional church initiative. And early next month, the Council will begin this season of reflection at its retreat.

For today, our focus is on the "exploration" side. Those of you who attended the November Presbytery meeting spent time in small group conversation reflecting on what we might emphasize next. In just a few minutes, we're going to review those responses and brainstorm a bit – imagining WAYS we might make some turnings together. What are some simple but effective changes we could try that might help us see new paths for our life and work together?

And before we go there, I've been asked to remind you of two things.

First, the Book of Order places onto presbyteries five kinds of responsibilities. We have:

- fiduciary responsibilities that connect us to the rest of the church – the decisions we make on behalf of the whole church, like ordaining a new minister; the reports we receive and provide, like the annual statistical reports; the records we keep and review.
- Institutional maintenance responsibilities that organize our life (such as our committee structure), or insure our continuation from year to year (such as our nominating process and our stewardship commitments)
- Three strategic responsibilities – to our congregations (starting new churches, encouraging renewal and revitalization), to our leaders (from candidacy to retirement), and to the regional mission entrusted to us (which in our case is most visibly identified in our Native American congregations).

If we're going to try some new ways of being Grand Canyon Presbytery over this next year, then any or all of these become possible areas for that exploration.

Second, organizations like a presbytery are embodied in a variety of ways. One way is what happens when we meet as a whole body, like today. But other ways include what happens when we meet as a council or in committees. Still other ways include how we connect directly with congregations and leaders, what we expect from the staff and what we expect from our volunteers. What **we** do models to the rest of the church "life in the body of Jesus Christ", so all of these become important settings to think about. We can change – when, where, how often we meet and what we do when we gather. We can decide where, and who, and how we want to manage our responsibilities or develop a leadership team that keeps generating the vision and values for our life together.

This is the time of exploration before us. So, today, I invite you to remember that effective transition times ask us to be open to new ideas and to trying some different things recognizing that it may feel a little chaotic at times. God's doing new things and we're seeking to become clear about what God wants for us and from us now.

By the way, I think it was last year that we celebrated the 500<sup>th</sup> birthday of John Calvin. Welcome to the chaos, friends. Roll up your sleeves, put on your thinking caps; 2010 could be a very special year for this part of God's people!