

**Executive Presbyter's Report to the Presbytery of Grand Canyon  
November 11, 2006, Cook School for Christian Leadership, Tempe, Arizona  
Ken Moe**

Today's report deals with changing times and shifting money. The presbytery has before it a provisional budget, which includes optimistic expectations for General Mission giving from the churches, and yet a bottom-line showing a hundred thousand-dollar deficit. Actually, the amount anticipated is about the same as this year. The reason it's optimistic is not because of any anticipated shortfall from churches but because of reduced mission support from General Assembly. I applaud the optimistic spirit of the Budget Committee and pray that their projections will be exceeded.

Nevertheless, as a presbytery we need to look beyond the 2007 budget year, because financial catastrophe looms ahead beginning with 2008 and it gets worse after that. The General Assembly Council and the Synod of the Southwest have made decisions that affect the long-term ability of Grand Canyon Presbytery to carry on our historic mission in the areas of racial/ethnic ministry and new church development.

Because of our many former National Mission churches, mostly on reservations, Grand Canyon Presbytery has received Mission Partnership Funds from undesignated General Mission contributions to General Assembly for more than three decades. In recent years the amount of money distributed by GA has decreased.

Last summer the National Mission Partnership Committee met and approved recommendations to begin a phased elimination of these funds, so that by 2013 they would be entirely gone. Still on the table, however, is an option to end Mission Partnership Funds as soon as 2009. Final action on this proposal is scheduled for April 2007.

We've known for some time that partnership funds were declining. The looming disaster is that this is not the only piece of budgetary bad news. At a specially called meeting last month, the Synod of the Southwest voted to approve a plan to restructure the synod, returning to a program synod model after having abandoned the program structure in the 1990s. Let me state up front that this is not a plan generated by the synod Executive/Stated Clerk but by a task force that she was not a member of.

Among other things, the approved plan calls for the synod to hire "long-term contract staff...for Racial/Ethnic Ministry with Hispanic and Indian constituencies." The report goes on to say, "This proposal will require of us a philosophical shift away from being a governing body whose chief function is to serve as a conduit for pass-through funding, to one that intentionally and thoughtfully funds regional ministry." Let me unpack that sentence. Implementation of the restructure plan will require the synod to stop passing all Mission Partnership Funds to the presbyteries and instead divert that funding for the synod to use as it sees fit in regional ministry with its own expanding agenda and staff.

Thus the reduced Mission Partnership Funds that remain will be further diminished as they are retained by the synod to do its program at the expense of the presbyteries.

Adding insult to injury, some time ago, the synod notified the presbyteries that it would stop funding the Arizona Ecumenical Council and leave that mission entirely up to the presbyteries, effective 2008. We have also been advised that the synod will stop providing the annual \$30,124 in mission support for Racial/Ethnic ministry staff. Earlier this year the synod reported that it would increase per capita by \$1.00 in 2008. So, at the same time the synod is eliminating financial responsibility for ecumenical mission (clearly regional ministry that crosses presbytery boundaries) and removing support for presbytery racial/ethnic ministry staff, it is raising the per capita the presbyteries must pay to the synod to support more synod administration and staff.

For Grand Canyon Presbytery this means the loss of GA and synod mission dollars that we have been using to support Native American and Hispanic churches, new church development, and the Associate Executive Presbyter for Native American Ministry staff position.

2008 is shaping up to be the year that Grand Canyon Presbytery may begin the painful process of closing down mission churches, not for lack of worshipers but for lack of money. When I raised this issue on the floor of the synod meeting, an officer of the synod explained that the synod plan provides the solution to the needs of aid-receiving congregations, which is to end financial support for them and replace that with what they really need - advice from synod staff.

I must confess that I made myself something of a pest at the synod meeting. In the interest of full disclosure, here is what I said in response to this matter of diverting mission dollars away from support of congregations: "You don't pay Native American CLPs' and ministers' salaries with advice from synod contract staff. You don't keep pension dues intact with patronizing words about self-sufficiency. This is not a plan to help mission churches. It is a plan to close them."

Various people raised concerns about the synod restructure plan, and repeatedly, those who did so were characterized by plan supporters as reacting out of fear. Anyone who objected to the financial implications of the plan was motivated by fear of scarcity, we were told. Those who have worked with me on tough issues know that I have a number of flaws, but fear isn't one of them. Maybe it ought to be, but I don't function out of fear, and in this particular case, my motivation is keeping faith with congregations, not fear of scarcity. And it seems clear to me that with regard to mission support, the Synod of the Southwest, and to a lesser extent, the General Assembly Council have in a sense broken faith with the Presbytery of Grand Canyon and our historic mission churches.

Actually, there is much in the synod restructure plan that I like, but let me mention another problem area before returning to financial matters. The synod approved a change in apportionment of commissioners so that each of the four presbyteries would have the same number of voting commissioners. Thus, Sierra Blanca Presbytery with 6% of the members in the synod and Grand Canyon Presbytery with 47% of the members would have equal voting representation. The synod Stated Clerk ruled afterward that this action was not done properly and would have to be revisited at the March 2007 synod

meeting. It also requires concurrence of a majority of the presbyteries. Stay tuned for further developments in the synod plan for unequal representation.

A decade ago, Grand Canyon Presbytery decided to work toward financial self-sufficiency. We have made progress in that regard, but the long term reality is that most of our Native American and Hispanic congregations will need at least another full generation of financial support to keep their doors open.

Now near the end of 2006, we have come to the bitter circumstance that sooner than we hoped we must make our own way financially. We must support our extensive mission enterprise virtually alone or close aid-receiving churches and cease new church development. I don't know where you are on this, but I'm not ready to close old churches and stop building new ones.

So then, what can we do? It seems to me there are two things we can try. The first is to build up our endowment. At present the presbytery endowment has a corpus of about \$90,000, counting money from the sale of an easement that has been designated for the endowment but not yet received. We are in escrow for the sale of the Covenant Church property. That should net us about half a million dollars when we close next month. My advice to the presbytery is to invest every dollar we can from the sale of property into the endowment. Also, we should ask every church in the presbytery to contribute to the endowment annually. The sooner we can build up a significant endowment, the sooner we will have interest income to invest in our continuing mission.

The endowment is primarily (although not exclusively) set up for racial/ethnic ministry and new church development and redevelopment. With the 2008 budget crisis looming on the horizon, we need an aggressive strategy to build endowment as part of a plan for missional self-sufficiency. There are surely other good ways of building endowment, and on behalf of the Endowment Committee, we seek and welcome your ideas and actions toward this end.

The second thing we need to consider is the formula for distribution of General Mission gifts from congregations. At present, 65% of General Mission money received by the presbytery stays right here to support presbytery mission. Ten percent goes to synod and 25% to General Assembly. I have spoken with the Budget Committee about revisiting this formula for the 2008 budget year. Historically, Grand Canyon Presbytery has been among the top 20 presbyteries in one category or another of mission giving to General Assembly. And, of course, we are the largest contributor of per capita and General Mission giving to the synod, in any given year contributing nearly half of the total from the four presbyteries.

As long as the mission dollars circulated freely throughout the system, church to presbytery to synod to GA and back to synod, and presbytery for aid to churches, we managed fairly well. However, as less money circulates back to us from GA in support of former National Mission churches, and more of that is diverted to synod for its program, it becomes prudent for us to consider retaining a larger percentage of mission dollars here at home for the same purpose.

I suppose the synod's plan for equalized voting representation (each presbytery with a quarter of the commissioners) could be applied to mission and per capita as well,

with each presbytery contributing one fourth of the total. I don't really mean that. There is no way that Sierra Blanca Presbytery, with only 6% of the members in the synod could ever provide 25% of the synod per capita or mission contributions. It would be unfair to ask them to do so. It's far more important that the congregations in Sierra Blanca be cared for, just as it's vitally important to care for the aid-receiving congregations in this presbytery.

Grand Canyon Presbytery has the largest concentration of Native American churches anywhere in the denomination. Most of these churches have been here longer than all but a few Anglo congregations. They are the core of our presbytery identity and the salt of our soul. We are a greatly diverse presbytery, represented by many races, cultures, and languages –Native American, African American, Hispanic, Asian, African immigrants, European- all coming together under the banner of the Presbyterian Church (USA). But in this part of the world, members of the various Indian tribes are not only the first Americans; they are also largely the first Presbyterians. Yet they, and to a lesser extent our Hispanic congregations, continue to be the most economically vulnerable among us.

We have a difficult financial road ahead, and it looks like we're being called to walk it alone, but not because we want to. Not by choice. Working in genuine partnership is much preferred. The synod restructure plan, however, uses the language of partnership and regional ministry in a way that moves away from sharing resources and toward centralized decision-making about mission at the synod level. The situation thus created portends closing some of our aid-receiving churches. And the synod's decision to increase its staff puts tremendous pressure on us to reduce the presbytery staff.

I'm not afraid to talk about closing churches and eliminating presbytery staff, but I am reluctant to do that without first asking our churches to share more of their mission resources with the presbytery for the benefit of the aid-receiving congregations among us. And so I ask the churches and individuals in this presbytery to accept the challenge and respond generously. Will you do that? Thank you.