

Light of the Northern Plains

Presbytery of the Northern Plains

November 2008

PRAYER CONCERNS

Cori Kaufmann, Parish Nurse for LAKE REGION PRES. PARISH (Devils Lake, Minnewaukan, Webster and Bdecan) and the wife of CLP Kevin Kaufmann, was supposed to have surgery last month, however she did not have to because further tests showed what was thought to be a second aneurysm was not an aneurysm at all, but rather a different kind of, yet normal blood vessel - which was of no concern and did not need any repair. Both Kevin and Cori believe strongly that it is through your prayers and support and the grace of God that Cori has had such a positive outcome.

Because of disagreements with possible policies, some churches choose not to pay their per capita or to ask that only the presbytery portion be used. Presbyterians value healthy debate about our beliefs and actions, but not paying per capita jeopardizes the work in our presbytery. At the present time, our presbytery pays the full amount of per capita whether we receive it from the churches or not. With declining membership, we are already facing a need to study our staffing needs and will surely need to reduce our staff size in the near future. If we were to lose the dollars General Assembly returns to us because we did not pay our per capita in full, our situation would be quite desperate.

In addition to per capita, church give mission dollars to support the work of the church at every level. Each year presbytery recommends a percentage distribution of those dollars. This year (like recent years) we recommend 60% be retained in the presbytery and 20% each be forwarded to synod and General Assembly. Churches receive a form at year-end to report their mission pledge for the coming year and the distribution they choose – either the recommended amounts or another formula approved by their session.

Like per capita, we receive more in return for our mission dollars than we give. In the Northern Plains, it truly is the case that when we give, we receive blessings in full measure.

2009 PER CAPITA AND UNIFIED MISSION



By: Gretchen Daneke Graf, Budget and Finance Chair

At the October 2008 Presbytery meeting, some actions of presbytery will impact financial planning for churches for the coming year.

Presbytery has approved a total per capita of \$ 41.95 per member: General Assembly receives \$6.15, Synod \$4.80 and the Presbytery of the Northern Plains \$31.00. Most of this remains with the presbytery and will pay our expenses for the staff which help us, for the council which guides presbytery life, and for administrative committees which take care of business and respond to special needs in churches. Per capita is paid on active church members only and the total for each congregation is calculated using the membership numbers provided in the annual reports the previous January. In 2009, each church will pay for the number of active members on their rolls on December 31, 2007.

Some of our per capita dollars are forwarded to the Synod of Lakes and Prairies and the General Assembly. These dollars provide for programming and resources which churches can access at any time. In reality, our presbytery receives more back from General Assembly and Synod than we pay them in per capita. A total of \$60,000 supports our staff expense and our mission programs, such as youth retreats and our Chogoria partnership.

2009 Per Capita

General Assembly	\$ 6.15
Synod of Lakes & Prairies	\$ 4.80
Northern Plains Presbytery	<u>\$31.00</u>
Total 2009 Per Capita	\$41.95

The apportionment is based on church membership as of December 31, 2007 as reported in the 2007 General Assembly Minutes (Part 11, Statistics).



Recommended Unified Mission

General Assembly	20 %
Synod of Lakes & Prairies	20 %
Northern Plains Presbytery	60 %

ACTIONS OF THE 218TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY related to G-6.0106b and G-6.0108.*

By: Elder Michael Lochow, Stated Clerk

Recent actions by the 218th General Assembly regarding G-6.0106b and G-6.0108 in the *Book of Order* are raising questions in sessions and presbyteries about the effect of those actions on the work of ordaining bodies.

The 218th General Assembly voted to send a proposed amendment to the presbyteries for consideration which would delete the current text of G-6.0106b and insert new text in its place. As part of this vote the Assembly adopted a new Authoritative Interpretation (AI), which is now in effect:

Interpretive statements concerning ordained service of homosexual church members by the 190th General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and the 119th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and all subsequent affirmations thereof, have no further force or effect.

What is an “Authoritative Interpretation”, where did this idea come from, and what is the effect of this most recent action you might ask.

An authoritative interpretation is an interpretation of a section the *Book of Order*. It may come from (be approved at) a meeting of the General Assembly (GA) or may emanate from the General Assembly’s Permanent Judicial Commission (GAPJC) as part of one of their decisions.

Authoritative Interpretations are constitutionally binding on all Presbyterians and Presbyterian governing bodies and their subgroups. The most recent interpretation of a provision of the *Book of Order* is binding.

Our current practice of using authoritative interpretations first came into use by the GAPJC in 1985 when it recognized the “definitive guidance” provided by previous GAs as authoritative interpretations. The GA subsequently agreed with this understanding, finding that definitive guidance adopted by the previous GAs carried “the weight of ‘authoritative interpretations.’”

This practice was codified in 1987 by adopting the current language in G-13.0103r of the *Book of Order*. Authoritative Interpretations are in effect until changed or revoked by a subsequent GA or modified by the GAPJC.

What this new AI means is that this identical wording from those 1978 and 1979 predecessor bodies is no longer in effect: “For the church to ordain a self-affirming, practicing homosexual person to ministry would be to act in contradiction to its charter and calling in Scripture, setting in motion both within the church and society serious considerations to the will of Christ.”

The “subsequent affirmations” language in the new AI also negated other language from the 1993 GA *Minutes*, p. 76 and several PJC cases opinions issued prior to 1996 (see Advisory Opinion: Note 22). There are eight PJC cases decided since 1996 which are unaffected by this new AI (see also AO: Note 22).

The 218th GA also adopted a new AI of G-6.0108 Freedom of Conscience – Individual and Corporate:
...the requirements of G-6.0108 ... apply equally to all ordination standards of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Section G-6.0108 requires examining bodies to give prayerful and careful consideration, on an individual, case-by-case basis, to any departure from an ordination standard in matters of belief or practice that a candidate may declare during examination. However, the examining body is not required to accept a departure from standards and cannot excuse a candidate’s inability to perform the constitutional functions unique to his or her office (such as administration of the sacraments).



Commissioners and advisory delegates followed discussion during Wednesday afternoon business meeting. Photo by Joseph Williams

For more information on actions of the 218th General Assembly please go to: <https://www.pcusa.org/ga218/> or contact the Presbytery office at 701-772-0783 or by email pnpooffice@gmail.com

This has a modifying effect on the 2008 GAPJC of *Bush v. Presbytery of Pittsburgh*, in that the scrupling of either belief or practice is now allowed. The effect is to remind ordaining bodies that they bear the responsibility of determining whether any particular standard (including) those described in G-6.0106b will be a bar to that particular candidate’s ordination/installation.

The 218th GA left in place the prohibition in *Bush*, which told ordaining bodies: “Restatements of the *Book of Order*, in whatever form they are adopted, are themselves an obstruction to the same standard of constitutional governance no less than attempts to depart from mandatory provisions.” The “restatements” referred by the decision in *Bush* were “...attempts by governing bodies that ordain and install officers to adopt resolutions, statements or policies that paraphrase or restate provisions of the *Book of Order* ...”

If you have any questions regarding any of these matters before the church, feel free to contact Michael Lochow, Stated Clerk at 701-271-4775

* Sources for this summary were Constitutional Musings: Note 15 and Advisory Opinion: Note 22 from the Constitutional Services Office of the General Assembly.

WHO IS IN CHARGE WHEN PRESBYTERY’S WITHOUT AN EXECUTIVE PRESBYTER?



Moderator, the Rev. David Thompson of United Presbyterian Church of Jamestown, with the Rev. Dr. Charles Traylor at the Oct 08 Presbterv Meeting.

At the October Presbytery meeting, Presbytery accepted the resignation of its Executive Presbyter (EP), The Rev. Dr. Charles Traylor, and wished him well in his transfer to the Presbytery of East Tennessee. Also during that same meeting, approved starting a search for an interim executive while the Presbytery continues to examine its future mission.

While the search for an interim is underway, it may take several months before the God presents the search committee with the correct person. During this time of not having an Executive Presbyter the workflow will shift from that position onto other staff members and committees and their chairperson’s. More items will be coming before Council, Committee on Ministry and other bodies of the Presbytery to ensure the work of the Presbytery is being done.

The office staff encourages anyone with questions, concerns or joys to call or email them. The office number is 701-772-0783 or 800-243-3532 (toll free) where you may reach Laurie Elhard, Communication Coordinator and she will help you direct your questions to the proper person in the Presbytery. Following are the staff’s email addresses:

Elder Michael Lochow, Stated Clerk

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Elder Bill Weisfenning, Treasurer

pnp treasurer@gmail.com

Laurie Elhard, Communications Coordinator

pnpoffice@gmail.com

RESOURCES

Between Two Worlds: Daily Readings for Advent (Book)

Advent - the season in which we prepare for the coming of the Savior - provokes a certain ambivalence among modern believers. We know that Christ has come in the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth, and we live anticipating his return, knowing that our true home is one which he has gone ahead to prepare for us. In the meantime, we are left living between those two worlds. Moorehead uses the witness of the scriptures, her wealth of experience in long years of ministry, and the wisdom of her own life of prayer to guide us in praying the ambiguity of living faithfully between 'here and now' and 'there and then.'

Scriptures for the Church Seasons: Come to the Cradle (Book)

Provides a five-session study for Advent-Christmas based on the Revised Common Lectionary.

Manger and Mystery An Advent Adventure (Book)

Manger and Mystery urges us to pause, take a breath, and reflect on what the birth of the Christ Child means to contemporary life. This study provides five chapters, one for each week of Advent and one that focuses on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Futuring Your Church: Finding Your Vision and Making it Work (Book)

A practical guide for church leaders to explore their congregation’s heritage, its current context, and its theological bearings. From those insights, members can discern God’s vision for their church and apply it.

How to Prevent Lay Leader Burnout (Book)

Here are useful ideas for caring for the caregivers who give their time to the church. Some suggestions offered by the authors are: how to conduct an exit interview, avoiding the tendency to over program, and positive ways to support leaders’ spiritual growth.

To borrow a resource, contact the

Resource Center for Churches at

info@resourcesforthejourney.org or telephone (888) 293-9901 (toll free). The staff will gladly reserve one of these or another resource for you. The center has books, DVDs, reference works, choir anthems, and even a labyrinth available for loan.

RASCAL: New Ministry Team Formed

By: Paul Kuhn, RASCAL Leader

From the name to the hoped-for learning, the Presbytery of Northern Plains' newest ministry team seeks to help our people appreciate and profit from the riches of the Reformed Tradition.

The name "RASCAL" stands for Reformed According to the Scriptures: Companions Active in Learning. The word "rascal" connotes a certain degree of good spirited orneriness which is appropriate to the Reformed expression of the Faith. As Richard Baxter wrote, "There is no mirth like the mirth of the saints." So RASCAL will seek to be good spirited in its quite serious examination of what Reformed theology and practice can offer the church today.

What can RASCAL offer the church today? We hope to learn more of what it means to be faithful in the service of God in a particularly Presbyterian way, highlighting both form and substance. For example, we hope to help the Presbytery of the Northern Plains regain what has been lost in understanding why traditional Presbyterian worship looks like it does, and how it can be lively while orderly. We hope to help to revitalize our understandings of the spiritual aspects of the office of elder and the proper role of the Session. We hope to help the church see how the theological stance of our Tradition continues to help to make sense of the world in which we live and the people with whom we live.

RASCAL will provide fellowship, learning, and teaching opportunities for those who would be companions on a journey of exploration of the great documents of the Reformed Tradition including such documents as the Second Helvetic Confession, The Westminster Standards, the Scots Confession and many others.

We are planning to have an inaugural lecture sometime in the early spring of 2009. There is a proposal made to read and have an email commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith. Our first face-to-face will be on January 23rd (before the Presbytery meeting on the 24th) to lay some plans for the future. We see RASCAL as contributing to the "living into" the new PNP vision statement, especially as we seek to be a "vital, informed Presbyterian community."

Anyone, clergy or laity, interested in learning more about what being Reformed has to offer today, or about the RASCAL ministry team, please contact Paul Kuhn at (701) 477-0899 or Box 333, Rolla, ND 58367 or pdnkuhn@utma.com.

WINTER PRESBYTERY MEETING

The January Presbytery meeting has been changed to be a one day meeting. The meeting will be held on Saturday, January 24, 2009 at Mendenhall Presbyterian Church of East Grand Forks.

Meeting material will be posted on the Presbytery website at www.northernplainspresbytery.com by noon on January 7, 2008. For congregations which don't have internet access, packets can be mailed out to them. We are asking for those congregations to contact the office if they are unable to find someone within the congregation to print off the meeting material.

Presbytery's Calendar

Nov 1	COM Liaison Training at United Presbyterian Church from 10:00 am – 2:00 pm
Nov 27-28	Office Closed – Holiday
Dec 24-25	Office Closed – Holiday
Jan 15	Council Mt at Chiefton, Carrington, ND
Jan 24	Winter Presbytery Meeting at Mendenhall Presbyterian Church of East Grand Forks
March 12	Council Mt – location TBA
April 18	Spring PW Gathering
April 24-25	Spring Presbytery Meeting at United Presbyterian Church of Jamestown

CC = Conference Call

VCS = Video Conferencing Sites

At the October 2008 Presbytery meeting, new vision statement was approved:

“A vibrant, informed, Presbyterian community which nourishes ministry and joins in Christ’s mission.”

More information about how the Presbytery will grow into this statement to come.

How would you like to receive the Light of the Northern Plains electronically? You can by signing up for the paperless edition. It costs nothing. To sign up, simply email pnpoffice@gmail.com and request to be put on the electronic newsletter list.

Light of the Northern Plains is published under the Council of the Presbytery of the Northern Plains.

Laurie Elhard, Communications Coordinator

Other contributors: Michael Lochow, Gretchen Daneke Graf, and Paul Kuhn.

A copy deadline for the Light is the twenty-fifth of the month. Items may be sent to:

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