

GENERAL PRESBYTER'S REMARKS DECEMBER 7, 2004

This will be the last Presbytery meeting for the year. More importantly, it will be the last meeting at which we will hear of or from several committees: Ecumenical & Social Concerns, Evangelism & Congregational Development, Nurture & Education, Presbytery's Life, Racial Ethnic Ministries. This has led to some reflection and even a few questions as these committees had their last official meeting at the October 23rd Committee Day. I hope you will take the opportunity to personally thank those who have served faithfully on these committees.

However, beyond giving thanks for their service, what will happen to the concerns and traditional responsibilities of these committees? Are pieces going to slip through the cracks? Have we thought through all of the details?

I have to say that I appreciate these questions - it shows people are interested in the work of the Presbytery. The redesign of the committee structure is part of a larger vision for Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery. As part of my five-year review, there were a large number of people who offered comments. Many of them focused on one issue: the Presbytery is not working well or enthusiastically the way it is currently structured. Some of the comments referred to staff, many to committees, and many more to the need to address more directly the needs of congregations.

As mentioned previously, and as will be discussed at the December Presbytery meeting, this has led to **three areas of revision**, each focusing more clearly on the vitality of our congregations:

- a **new staffing design** which includes an Associate General Presbyter for Congregational Development (the search committee is hard at work)
- a **new Presbytery structure** which includes three new committees focused on the needs and interests congregations, plus a significantly revised Mission Committee
- a **Coordinating Council** which will meet quarterly and evaluate how well the Presbytery is addressing the needs of particular congregations

The **process by which we arrived at these proposed revisions included:**

- the recommendations by the Personnel Committee in May based on my review
- the recommendations of the Council later in May to do two things:
 - report the preliminary design to the Presbytery in June
 - hold a retreat of all affected committees to develop a new committee plan
- a preliminary report by Personnel Committee to the Presbytery in June, outlining the three areas of revision and inviting response
- a retreat on July 24 involving six program committees, resulting in a complete revision of the Presbytery committee structure
- a report of the planned committee changes to the affected committees at the Committee Day on July 31, for their comment
- further review by the Council at its August 16 meeting
- presentation to the Presbytery on September 17-18 for comment or questions
- presentation for approval by Presbytery at its December 7 meeting

Further, if approved, the January 2005 Committee Day will include 30-45 minutes for training and explanation of the new design so that each committee can understand not only what its role and responsibilities are, but also how their committee fits into the overall design of the whole Presbytery. Whatever written materials developed for that training time will be made available through the Presbytery office for anyone who asks for a copy.

Does this mean all of the contingencies have been anticipated or all of the details worked out. Absolutely not! It is impossible to anticipate all of the details and questions in advance. There will be many specifics we will have to address only after they become apparent. This is always the case with any new design. If you doubt that, just think back to the last time you had to go back to the hardware store before you could finish a home repair project.

Two things are important, however. **The first is the need to continue to make anything we do as transparent as possible.** Many of the questions raised about the new design were raised by the same committees which had representatives at the July 24 committee retreat which developed the design. Just because an ever-increasing group of people has reviewed the design, that does not mean everyone has yet seen the whole picture or the process which was employed to get there. Communication and patience are the keys, just as they are in the local congregation. **We must realize that we have a basic responsibility to make sure everyone has the information they need to make an informed decision.** That is the reason the Presbytery never votes on changes in the Manual of Operations without two readings of the proposed changes. That is the reason why questions will still be in order at the December 7 meeting.

Secondly, we must always avail ourselves of the opportunity to ask questions. In every Presbytery packet now there is a request for your evaluation of that meeting. On that form is your opportunity to put in writing your questions, your concerns, and your suggestions for making our Presbytery better. Your comments are recorded and reviewed by the Council every time they meet. Further, they are reported back to the Presbytery so that you can see that your concerns have been heard. That doesn't mean that every suggestion will be accepted, but it does mean that the Council is taking seriously the question of how our meetings can better honor those who are there and better respond to the needs of our congregations. I hope you will continue to ask questions and will especially take a few minutes at every Presbytery meeting to tell us how you think we are doing. **We truly want to hear from you and we truly want to make our Presbytery meetings something each of our congregations looks forward to attending.** We hope you will let us know how we are doing in moving beyond the old model of "mind-numbing and soul-sucking" meetings to a model in which there are opportunities for growth, fellowship, spiritual nurture, and networking for everyone.