



The Grapevine

CONNECTING THE CONGREGATIONS OF THE PRESBYTERY OF DETROIT

April 2007

DETROIT PRESBYTERY HONORED BY MODERATORIAL VISIT and makes the most of the time with Joan Gray and Bob Wilson

Connectionalism At Its Best – Editorial Comment

“I am the Church. You are the Church. We are the Church together. All around the world, all who follow Jesus, we are the Church together.”

Some years ago Avery and Marsh put this ditty to a clever tune – and it rings and sings with the truth of God’s Word, and will and purpose. It is a witty summation of the Apostle Paul’s powerful arguments in Corinthians 12 for the essential connectedness of any and all who follow Jesus, the Christ.

Christians are the Body of Christ, and no matter what good or horrible shape we may find churches in at any given time or place, we are it. We are Christ’s Body, the most tangible evidence to the truth of his resurrection.

And at the end of March the price and the prize of being the Body of Christ, of being connected to one another, was very evident in gatherings across Detroit Presbytery. The price is love for and a deep desire to understand better those who differ from us, sometimes in the strongest possible terms. Both Joan Gray and

Bob Wilson were living examples of persons willing to pay this price. How gracious they were to all. They listened.

The prize, if we are willing to listen, is to hear about the wonder of our Presbyterian connectionalism and the incredible, obviously Holy Spirit led, things that are happening around the world in the name of Jesus through local congregations and Presbyteries, the agencies of the General Assembly, and our mission persons in nearly every corner of the world.

Read a bit here about what is happening in this too often seen as beleaguered church of ours. For all of our struggles, there is no perfect denomination out there, for there are no perfect people, and you and I have every reason to be proud of and grateful for the ties that bind us together in the PC (USA).

General Assembly Moderator and Vice Moderator Key Note Interfaith Luncheon

The Presbytery of Detroit Middle East Work Group and Littlefield Church hosted General Assembly Moderator Joan Gray and Vice-Moderator Bob Wilson for an interfaith luncheon Saturday, March 24 at Littlefield/Dearborn.

Reema Haugen and George Khoury shared some of their experiences as

Palestinian Christians whose families were forced from their homes during the Nakba (the Catastrophe) in 1948 and how they experience the Christian church. Presbyterian Women of the Presbytery of Detroit Moderator Ruth Azar, whose heritage is Lebanese and Syrian, also spoke.

Sheldon Klimst of Brit Tzedek v’Shalom, the Jewish Alliance for Justice and Peace, described the work his organization is trying to do to bring about change in the Jewish community. He said he is optimistic about a future of a just peace in the Middle East. David Finkel of Jewish Voice for Peace says he is not as hopeful. He expressed support for economic actions such as divestment from multinational corporations that support the occupation of Palestinian territories and of the need to boycott products produced in Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

Casey Currie described what it was like to live in Gaza and later in Israel as a Presbyterian. Others shared their stories and their hopes for peace.

This informal event was an opportunity for people to hear one another’s stories and to form relationships for working together for peace. As Moderator Joan Gray summarized, “The stories are rich.” She spoke briefly of the importance of planting seeds of peace.



Casey and George



David and Amy with Joan



Reema, Donna, Inez, and Sheldon

Blessings of the Wilderness

By The Rev Dr. Allen D. Timm, Executive Presbyter



In his book, Leading Change in the Congregation, Gil Rendle refers many times to the Jewish Christian tradition of being guided by the Holy Spirit. Through

Holy Conversations, leaders seek to find a new path through conversations that are spiritual. Written in collaboration with, Alice Mann, Rendle points early on in the book to the spiritual lessons we can learn from Moses. In Holy Conversations, the authors say Strategic planning is a “spiritual practice for congregations.” In Leading Change, Rendle offers “spiritual and organizational tools” for leaders.

In Holy Conversations, Mann and Rendle cite a Midrash about Moses and Aaron. In this Jewish teaching, it is shown that Moses holds the vision for leadership. But Aaron puts it all together. One is visionary; the other the nuts and bolts planner. Without both functions, say the authors, leadership is dead in the water. Aaron is the voice of management, and Moses is the voice of leadership. “Leadership needs to search for vision and ask the big questions of purpose and identity. Management needs to take care of the travel – determining the steps to take, giving people appropriate tasks, and making clear decisions. The only risk is to let Moses and Aaron get too far apart (Holy Conversations, xvii).

For Rendle and Mann, finding God’s desire for the congregation is as important as finding my desire and our desire (136). This comes through discernment in Bible study, prayer, and conversation. Sometimes we think the direction we have found is off beat, but as the authors point out, quoting M. Scott Peck, one way of discerning that you are on God’s path is knowing that what you propose is somewhat “crazy.” “Were it not crazy and unusual, Peck suggested, we would have figured the question or challenge out ourselves and we would be discerning our own logic rather than the movement of God. It is God who breaks through with unusual and unexpected demands” (25). Our task, the authors say, is to hear what God is calling us to do, and who is our neighbor (5).

But where do we receive the vision for

leadership? In the wilderness. Throughout his book, Leading Change in the Congregation, Rendle points to the benefits of being in the wilderness and later being in exile.

Many congregations are in exile. They face declining membership, and an aging membership, who want new members but do not want to change. They look for technical solutions where adaptive changes are necessary. In the exile of 587 BCE, Israel faced the same problems. They had to make due without a temple. Says Walter Brueggemann, when Babylon arrived, Jeremiah proclaimed it as God’s intervention. Jeremiah told the people that the invasion was not just another problem to be solved, but the hand of God. And during that exile, says Rendle, the community discovered Deuteronomy, a lesson in being community, and Leviticus, a lesson in being holy with God and one another (122). Israel adapted when faced with a new situation.

Rendle writes, likewise in our churches, “We too need to exercise theological discernment as leaders of congregations. Problems to be solved? Or movement of God’s spirit doing something new, which carries us in ways we had considered” (40)? Rendle cites Heifitz and Linsky’s two types of problems, adaptive, versus technical. In adaptive situations, both the problem and the solution are not clear, and the group needs to learn a new behavior (44). Congregational leaders who seek a quick fix, a technical solution, will ask, “How can we get the new members to give like the old time members?... But if congregational leaders are willing to open themselves spiritually to the possibility that God is doing something new in their congregation, they will need to consider more adaptive approaches and ask very different questions such as: What is the meaning of membership in our congregation, and what beliefs, practices, and behaviors are expected from those who want to be a part of this community? How do we talk with one another in our congregation about our material resources, given members’ multiple expectations and the diversity of lifestyles? How do we teach the disciplines of our faith to people unfamiliar with them in ways they can understand and participate? To what extent do we understand our congregational budget to be about institutional expenses,

and to what extent do we understand it as a spiritual discipline?...The critical difference will be the assumptions and attitudes that will either make them seek quick-fix answers to frustrating problems or make them open, if not always anxious, to see what change the hand of God offers” (45-46).

Rendle points to the illustration of the Israelites 40 years in the wilderness, as to finding the hand of God. “Had they (the people of Israel) made this trip in forty weeks or months, the people of Israel would have arrived unchanged” (98). First of all, being in the wilderness helps us to see what the problem is. Being in chaos helps us to fully understand the problem. Being in the wilderness drives us to depend on God for our spiritual food. In the wilderness we are transformed and made new. The role of leaders in the wilderness is to help people dream dreams of alternate possibilities that provide energy and direction. Leaders need to pay attention and hold still long enough for change to occur. The task of leaders is not to make them happy. Rather, the task is to hold people in the wilderness long enough for God to provide deep change. Leaders are called to help to define the problem a congregation faces and to lead the congregation to agree upon what needs to be changed. Then the group can brainstorm about possible solutions and resources to make the necessary change (100).

God heard the cries of the people of Israel while they were slaves in Egypt. Will we, like Moses, be obedient to God? God hears the cries of the church today. Will we be faithful and listen for the vision God has for the people God has entrusted to our care? Will we be transformed by God, and obey God’s leading?

Another spiritual task of the leader is to be whole, or in systems terms, to work towards differentiation. Leaders need to be a step ahead of their congregation, so that they can lead the congregation where they have been, and find other outlets to share their anxieties and burdens (128). Rendle spends an entire chapter relating the Body of Christ (I Cor 12) to systems thinking, reminding us that we are connected to one another

In a postscript, Rendle reminds us that God calls us to love and forgive. God calls us to be civil toward one another, and to

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THE MODERATOR'S CORNER

Pentecost: The Wearing Of Red

This year Pentecost is May 27, the day for wearing red. The name Pentecost comes from the word for fifty used by Greek-speaking Jews. It was the name of the celebration held fifty days after Passover. It was the day on which the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles in a form likened to tongues of fire and therefore is marked by the wearing of red vestments.

The color red is just a symbol for you cannot describe the joy, peace, and wonder of the Holy Spirit within your

soul. The first time I felt the deep revelation of the Holy Spirit within me I was speechless.

At the age of twelve, my life was changed forever. The Holy Spirit continues to fill the depths of my soul each and every day.

Pentecost is an anniversary of Christ's servants-members of his church-having their lives transformed spiritually by the Holy Spirit. It is this Spirit that continues to guide us into a more clear understanding of God's call into His service.

- May the Holy Spirit be our Comforter in these trying times in our community.
- May the Holy Spirit be our Advocate

to work toward world peace.

- May the Holy Spirit be our Companion in times of trouble in our personal lives.
- May the Holy Spirit be our Friend to give us courage to extend love where there is none.
- May the Holy Spirit be our Counselor to bring hope to those without faith.
- On the day of Pentecost, all believers shall be gathered together into one place.

Peace to each of you during this blessed season.

Dixie, Moderator

*REFLECTIONS ON A HALF-CENTURY AS A MEMBER OF THE PRESBYTERY OF DETROIT (1957-2007)

By The Rev. L. J. Peterson (Retired)

A long-time colleague and I were "swapping stories" not long ago about the "good-old days" in Detroit Presbytery, when he jokingly said that perhaps we should "jot some of them down" to pass on to our "posterity" in the Presbytery.

It was a very hot June afternoon in 1957 (in the un-air conditioned Chapel of Alma College) when I was received as a member of Detroit Presbytery, by transfer from Western Michigan Presbytery in order to become Pastor of Grandale Church in Northwest Detroit. In those days the Synod of Michigan held a nearly week-long annual meeting in June and usually it was held at Alma College. . . in order to save money for the seven Presbyteries in Michigan they would almost all hold their June meetings "On the floor of Synod."

This was my first involvement with a Presbytery with a "Paid Staff." In all the smaller Presbyteries it was expected that the programs and projects of the Presbytery would be operated by the Pastors as a normal part of their responsibility as Presbyters. That was not a bad idea because it kept the Presbytery from assuming the burden of a high "payroll." However as an "Urban Presbytery" Detroit needed more than part-time volunteer staff, so "at the helm" at "Presbyterian Headquarters" on the 11th floor of the Kales Building on Grand Circus Park in downtown Detroit were three full-time very dedicated and competent Clergymen. They were Ken Neigh, Harold Fredsell, and Bob Yolton.

These are names which I hope that at

least a few Presbytery members will recall because they played a vital role in the life of the Presbytery and The Synod of Michigan. During those thirty-five years of "active duty" as a member of Presbytery I did have some "real work" to occupy my time. I had the joy of serving as the Pastor of two wonderful Congregations (Grandale and Northbrook) as well as my later responsibilities at Presbyterian Village.

When I became involved with Presbyterian Village in the 70's it consisted of a few buildings on part of the land owned in Redford Township, and it was serving a few dozen (mostly Presbyterian) "Senior Citizens" (As we called them then.) When I retired as CEO of Presbyterian Villages of Michigan at end of 1992 we had grown to five locations around the Detroit Metro area, serving several hundred residents. But that was only the beginning! Now in about twenty or more locations across the State of Michigan a few thousand people are being provided with comfortable retirement housing and safe and secure care. I commend my successor, Roger Myers, for making this happen.

When I "arrived" in Detroit in 1957 the Presbytery had 83,000 Communicant members in its Churches, and encompassed a smaller geographical area than it does today. A year later that number by was augmented by a few thousand more members from the addition of the UPNA Churches in the area. New Church development was being actively pursued, with new congregations added to the roll of Presbytery on a regular basis.

Presbyterianism was "alive and well" in Detroit!

Unfortunately, fifty years later I understand that there are less than 38,000 members in the Presbytery, with many Churches "falling by the wayside." Some have blamed the "bitter dissensions" within the Church as their excuse for leaving, but often many of them are the very ones who refused to be accepting of the viewpoints of others. We have weathered the storm of an "Exodus" before, with the founding of the EPC right here in Detroit. We may have to weather it again as they are trying to lure the discontented into leaving us and coming into their "web." Surely we can and must find ways to "agree to disagree" and be bound together by the essential areas of our Faith and our common loyalty to Jesus Christ.

It is not too late for us to reverse the course and save Detroit Presbytery, (and indeed our entire denomination) from destruction. We can stop the "retreat" and march forward to victory. But we need to start NOW - and to preach better, work harder, study and pray more diligently, and return to that time when it could be said by us, "They will know we are Christians by our Love." The crucial question that remains to be answered is "Are we willing to really try??"

*The original article has been extensively edited for space considerations. Rev. Peterson is recovering from Colon cancer and expressed grateful thanks for notes of support he has received.

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forgive others when they have wronged us. It is the responsibility of the leader to provide a safe environment for people to know God's love in community. Of course, that does not mean conflict is never allowed. When we disagree, we learn from

one another and shape a common vision. But nevertheless, we must treat each other in a civil manner. A covenant of behavior helps all agree on norms and goals for their group.

The Spirit filled leader is not afraid to follow the Spirit into the wilderness and to

find that one does not live by bread alone, but by the spiritual food of God. And we will be changed by the hand of God and reach our hand out in mission. And if we will listen to the advice of Moses' father in law Jethro (Ex. 18), we will share the Spirit with others.

Day of Prayer with Moderator Joan Gray was held March 26, 2007. Four presbyteries were represented including Detroit, Lake Huron, Muskingum and Maumee Valley. Joan Gray, a trained spiritual director, offered a warm presence along with prayer, group sharing, scripture reading and significant rituals, which bonded the community together at this daylong retreat, which was hosted by St. John's Presbyterian Church.

Right: Pastor Johnie Bennett welcomed Joan and all the participants:



Ruth Azar Honored During Women's History Month

Detroit Business News and Directory in its March issue honored Ruth Azar, past President of the Presbyterian Women of Detroit Presbytery. Among the many facets of community service that mark Ruth's life, the Business article noted in particular Ruth's current passion for building a dynamic mission center at the former Morang Street Mission site. Thanks to Ruth's vision and vital energy and organizational ability there is new hope for the renewed presence of Presbyterian Mission outreach in the City of Detroit.

From PRESBYTERY COMMUNICATIONS

Do you want to know about happenings in and around the Presbytery of Detroit?
Do you want to find out the Who, What, When, and Where of an event?
Do you want to advertise an event?

Try the following:

1. Of course – *The Grapevine*
2. Maybe better – the weekly email notice of changes to the web site and upcoming events– Are you on the list? If not and you would like to be - send an email message to sandy@detroitpresbytery.org requesting to be added to the email notice list.
3. Or access the Presbytery of Detroit web site <http://www.PbyDetroit.org> for up to date information about event in and around the Presbytery.

Presbytery Meeting Dates and Locations for the remainder of 2007:

Jun 26—Detroit, Jefferson Avenue.
Aug 28—Northville, First
Oct 23—Redford, St. James
Nov 27—Detroit, Hope

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Interim Editor the Rev. Dr. David Robertson, Pastor, Orchard Lake During a leave of absence for Editor Jeanne Gerritsen for pressing Church responsibilities, David Robertson has agreed to serve as Interim Editor of the Grapevine. Information can be shared with him at david@olccp.com or info@detroitpresbytery.org