

General Presbyter's Report

October 21 & 22, 2011

When we gather to worship, learn, and fellowship at this two-day Presbytery meeting, I hope it will be a time of renewal and encouragement in the faith. We are coming together with brothers and sisters who are committed to following Jesus Christ and to serving him in our churches. Using the image from scripture, "We are branches abiding in the Vine - in Christ's love - and we are to be bearers of much fruit."

All of us are challenged these days to find new ways to reach those who do not know Christ and/or do not have a church community that is encouraging them to grow in their faith. We are also challenged to grow in our own personal faith and to help those in our churches do the same. Then we are "sent" by Christ to share God's love with a broken and hurting world. This is a big job. My prayer is that our focus will be on following and serving as a body of Christ.

The Presbytery Council, at the request of the Evangelism Division, has declared that in 2012, our focus will be *Evangelism*. Because of my concern for people who do not know the love of Christ, I am excited about next year's focus; reaching out to people for Christ, inviting them into a relationship with Christ, and helping them grow in faith. You will see this in Presbytery meetings and other events throughout the year. I want us to be encouraged to reach out to those who do not have a church home or a relationship with Jesus Christ. My hope is that next summer, many of our churches will read and preach through the book of Acts, and that the Spirit will put us on fire for the gospel! At the two-day October Presbytery meeting in 2012 (October 26 & 27), Ray Jones, Coordinator for Evangelism at General Assembly, will be our speaker. This emphasis will help us learn how to better express our faith, and how God's love is important to us in our lives. *God's love is truly good news!*

I am often asked what a Presbytery does. At this meeting, you will receive a booklet that will try to summarize some of the things we do together. It is really a "thank-you" booklet for the work that you are doing. While thinking about the difference Presbytery has made in some situations, I read a letter that Dr. Barbara Nagy had written to describe for Morganton First the differences she observed from our work in Nkhoma Hospital. This is in addition to our Presbytery's help in starting a preschool that now extends to 3rd grade! Please continue to keep Barbara and Malawi in your prayers. I have attached her letter because I think it is essential for you to realize what an important part you in this Presbytery have contributed to the hospital. It is an example of what we can do working together. (GP Attachment 1)

When I look around the Presbytery, I see so many places where God is at work. Revivals are abounding. Laura Long shared how the Lord worked through a revival at Clinchfield in Marion, where Hazel Dula preached. Bill Lowe is preaching at Duncan's Creek's revival and Love's Chapel just finished a revival. There are a number of groups around the Presbytery where pastors are getting together for Bible study and prayer. Some of these are lectionary groups and others were started with Acts Initiative, but include other pastors. These can be a great way for prayer, fellowship and support. If you would like to be in a group, contact the Presbytery office.

Margie Boyd's first Sunday at Cullowhee was September 25. She is excited about working with the Campus Ministry and the church. Margie would like to know names of students attending Western Carolina University from your church so she can include them in the campus ministry activities.

Whit Malone will be coming to First Hickory in October as their new Head of Staff. He and his family are looking forward to getting back down south!

The Bryson City Church began a new ministry in partnership with other churches in Bryson City for the purpose of doing home repair projects in Swain County. The church hosted a group from Sharon Presbyterian Church in Charlotte on September 15-18 to work in partnership with them. They look forward to hosting other groups next summer.

The Let's Celebrate Event in Morganton was attended by 235 people. Many people said they felt the workshops were some of the best they had ever attended. They included workshops on small church, evangelism and music in the church. There was also a track for youth and special activities for children planned by Ann Aichinger.

While I am excited about the ministry and mission we are doing together, I know there are also people within our denomination and this Presbytery that are focused on whether they should stay in the PCUSA, or go to another Reformed body or Presbytery. There are also people trying to come up with ways to do both. I believe that our denomination and Presbytery need the voices of each and every church. I believe Christ has called us together. While there is a group looking at leaving, there is also a group committed to the PCUSA which is looking at reformation within the denomination. It is my hope that while some struggle with options, we will still be in conversation together and will do things that build-up the body of Christ.

I believe that all of us are beginning to understand that the mission field that used to be overseas is now in our back yard. ***We need to do things differently!*** We need to become a more welcoming people and also a people that reaches out beyond our church family and take risks for the gospel. I have seen the evidence of your fruit, and we can't stop now! God is at work in our midst. Thanks be to God!

Peace,

Bobbi

Attachment

ATTACHMENT GP 1

For the Stewardship Campaign, First Presbyterian Church Morganton

19 September, 2011

I am walking down the Pediatrics ward in my mind this evening, thinking about how the day has gone, and, as usual, asking how we could have managed the numerous crises and challenges better. There are several newborns that were so asphyxiated at delivery that they were unable to breastfeed, always a bad sign. This usually occurs when deliveries at home or remote health centers have not gone well. They have started to feed now, and it looks like all are going to make it. We have had our usual outbreak of meningitis at this time of the year, but better medicines have enabled numerous children to live without significant brain injury: a three year old breaks into a big smile as she finally understands her azungu doctor telling her she gets to go home instead of getting another injection. We have an eight year old boy in a corner bed with newly diagnosed diabetic ketoacidosis, a disease with a much higher mortality in Malawi than HIV, but he is doing better after using up about five bottles of precious glucose test strips. We considered sending him to our referral hospital in Lilongwe due to the amounts of insulin and lab reagents we had to use to treat him, but the referral hospital ran out of insulin and other meds several months ago. We have lots of kids with severe pneumonia slowly improving with oxygen and antibiotics, a difficult combination to maintain since the electricity is off almost every day, the hospital runs on a back up diesel requiring generator, and the whole country is out of diesel again, a regular occurrence. We are just sending home a bright little 11 year old that had a rhabdomyosarcoma, a cancer of the muscle, removed at one of our sister mission hospitals. Incredibly she has no sign of the cancer a year after surgery, but the medicines she received to fight it seriously weakened her heart, and she needed treatment for that. A team of visiting surgeons is busy in the outpatient department seeing patients for specialty surgery that may not be available in Malawi, at least not at subsidized mission hospital prices, or in a place that people from our area could ever hope to get to. They and a group of visiting specialists in HIV care are also teaching our staff and improving our ability to care for all sorts of problems. I spent an hour in a conference about keeping relief food available for outpatients and ended up hearing that plans to extend our mobile outreach clinics to about 5,000 more pregnant women and children per month are coming to fruition, a project we have been working on for several years.

I have been asked how your giving has impacted the people in our hospital's area of care. When I first came to Malawi we had no oxygen in the hospital. Gifts from people from Western NC have changed that so that a child dying from pneumonia at Nkhoma Hospital is now rare. After the oxygen was made available we had further deaths every time the electricity went off because oxygen concentrators require electricity, but visiting mission teams helped us with a generator and an emergency activation switch, again saving numerous lives. We had frequent pediatric deaths because the hospital ran out of blood on a daily basis. One of our mission teams concentrated on improving the lab, which can now provide emergency blood for transfusion in sometimes as little as 15 minutes, which has saved many critically ill malaria patients. On three occasions, emergency infusions of cash have kept Nkhoma Hospital open, when funds owed by Malawi government failed to be paid and the hospital had utilized every available means to purchase medicines. You have nurtured and financially supported one of the few pediatricians in the entire country, enabling over 9,000 pediatric inpatients in the last year to have access to specialty care, helping health care facilities all over the central part of the country learn how to take care of newborns, and teaching, teaching, teaching all cadres of medical practitioners how to care for sick kids. Space does not permit to tell about houses built for much needed staff, remodeling of health centers to make them livable and functioning, the establishment of a high quality school in the Nkhoma community and much else. What I will say is that many have asked about Africa, 'Why can't they finally improve?' A big part of the answer is that people face so many obstacles on a daily basis they have lost hope that things can ever change. Your walking together with the people of Malawi in prayer, presence and financial support has begun to change the way people think about their community and themselves. Ordinary people are beginning to see that working together they can improve their communities; they see a future and a hope for themselves and their families. These types of changes are not cheap, they are not quick, and they are not easy. Thanks for hanging in there with us as we pray and hope for God's Kingdom to come in Malawi and also at First Presbyterian Church in Morganton.

Barbara