

Report of the General Presbyter  
Transylvania Presbytery  
March 10, 2009

The first of February marked the beginning of my second year as General Presbyter and my twelfth year in Transylvania. It has been a very full and exciting year for me as I have gotten to know more and more of you. At last count I have attended events in, or met with the pastors, of two thirds of our 92 congregations. I am becoming very familiar with the geography of our 56 counties. I have to say that I have been well received in every part of our presbytery. When I visit a congregation I like to tell them about my view of the General Presbyter's position. I see myself first of all, as a pastor to the pastors, and pastoral families of the presbytery. I point out that a minister does not have a minister, nor does their family. They have a spouse or a parent who happens to be a pastor, but they do not have anyone to meet their own need for pastoral care. A big part of my call is to provide that kind of ministry. I tell congregations that I am "your per-capita dollars at work." "The money you send to presbytery pays my salary, so your pastor receives the same kind of care you expect to get from him or her." With that in mind, I ask that every member of the presbytery let me know when your pastor needs a pastor.

January and February of this year has given me another opportunity to travel and to meet with the members of Transylvania Presbytery. Our "Transy Talks" have taken me to seven locations around the presbytery. (They have also provided me with some of my most challenging winter driving conditions. It seems like a scheduled Transy Talk was an open invitation for bad weather!) The Transy Talks were designed to help the presbytery talk about today's vote on the amendments coming from General Assembly – particularly O8B . Because there are such heart-felt differences in our feelings toward this amendment, the council felt it would be good to have an opportunity to talk through the issues in advance of today's meeting. The format we used in each of the 7 events included a time for worship, two presentations (one pro and one con), and ample time for small-group conversation. In all our meetings I have been impressed by the mutual respect shown by both presenters and participants. The presenters, even while they took opposite positions regarding the amendment, still demonstrated a genuine respect for their opposite. Each understood that the other reached their conclusion based on their own understanding of scripture and their own life experience, so there was no questioning of the other's faith, or their love for Jesus Christ. It is my prayer that the conversations, debate and vote today will demonstrate this same kind of Christian love and respect.



*Rollin Tarter moderating Transy Talk at Corbin*

It is clear to me that Presbyterians, almost by definition, will never agree on every issue. There is great diversity within our denomination, and certainly, within our presbytery, and I praise God for that diversity! We are stronger because of it!

Today's meeting also offers a first reading of proposed changes to our standing rules. I know very few people who get excited about by-laws and organizational structures, but I want to encourage each of you to read and consider the proposed changes between now and our June 6 meeting in Somerset. A special Structure Task Force of the Coordinating Council worked through 2008 to consider how we can better organize the presbytery to meet the needs of the future. Among other things, the new structure streamlines the Council, reorganizes many of our committees, reconfigures the dates of presbytery meetings, and eliminates districts. The intent is to help the presbytery work more effectively and focus more on our mission.

As I get further into my second year, I want to continue my presence throughout the presbytery. There are still congregations I have not been able to visit. There are a limited number of Sunday mornings in a year, and I need to reserve some Sundays to worship with my own family and tend to my own spiritual needs, so I ask that you invite me to other church occasions: PW meetings, church picnics, special celebrations, Sunday evening events. I want to strengthen our connections between congregations and the presbytery. Please let me know how I can do that with your own church.

Richard Smith