

**Transylvania Presbytery
General Council Report
March 9, 2010**

As required by the Standing Rules 5.3.1.4 the General Council reports the following actions taken:

1. Approved for the docket of the March meeting a presentation on the subject of Stewardship as proposed by the Stewardship Committee. The presentation will be docketed for 11:30 a.m.

2. Created a Task Group in accord with Standing Rule 5.4 for the purpose of investigating a move from physical office space to a “virtual office”. The Task Group named included Jerry Sevier, Melissa Sevier, Rollin Tarter with Melissa Sevier serving as convener and chair. Robyn Justus, Sharel Templeton, and Richard Smith were added as Advisory members from the presbytery and either Terry Newland or Emily Dunbar from the Synod office. This Task Group will report to the Presbytery at the March meeting during the Council time on the docket.

3. Set the following dates for next meetings of the General Council: February 16, May 25, August 31 and November 30. These meetings of the General Council will convene at 5:00 p.m.

4 Established the following themes for meetings of the presbytery in 2010: March 9–Stewardship; June 26–Technology; September 17-18 Hospitality and Church Growth; December 14–Worship. The Stewardship Committee shall be responsible for the March 9 meeting, the Mission committee shall be responsible for the September 17-18 meeting, the Worship Task Group of the General Council shall be responsible for the December 14 meeting. In accord with Standing Rule 5.4 the General Council suggested the following Task Group to be responsible for the June 26 meeting: Scott Cervas, Alice Davis, John Preston, Robyn Justus and Sharel Templeton with Robyn Justus and Sharel Templeton serving as conveners and co-chairs of the group.

5. In accord with Standing Rule 5.4.2 appointed a Judicial Business Task Group composed of Ruth Beattie, David Weber, and Stated Clerk Jim Rucker. Ruth Beattie will convene this group.

6. In accord with Standing Rule 5.2.1.1c the General Council replied to a question raised by the Committee on Preparation for Ministry with the advice that a thorough and comprehensive examination of Candidates for the Ministry of Word and Sacrament should be conducted by the Committee in the areas of Theology, Sacraments, Polity, Bible.

7. In accord with Standing Rule 5.4 appointed a Task Group composed of George Moore, Catesby Woodford and Stated Clerk Jim Rucker to develop and bring to the council for consideration a policy paper on the dissolution of churches of the Presbytery wishing to withdraw

from the Presbyterian Church.

8. In accord with Standing Rule 5.4.3 suggested a Task Group for Planning and Evaluation composed of Rollin Tarter, Beau Weston, Rolf Craven and General Presbyter Richard Smith.

Report of the Mobile Office Task Group

The General Council at their January Leadership Retreat took very seriously the responsibility of looking at the whole operation of the Presbytery and how Transylvania needs to be more responsive to the needs of every congregation. One question that has been lingering in the minds of the Presbytery for the last eight to ten years is that of the location of the presbytery office. When the old office at Rose Street was sold to UK we entered into a “temporary” lease at 2480 Fortune Dr. That temporary solution to our location question has been on the table for all this time. The suggestion that came out of the council retreat was the possibility of going to a “virtual” or “mobile” office. (The Synod of Living Waters is making that move this year.) The Council appointed a Task Group to investigate this possibility.

The “Mobile Task Group” is charged with laying out the advantages and disadvantages of having an office and meeting space, or closing the office with the staff working from home or mobile locations. The Task Group met on January 27th and made a decision to have a series of articles in the weekly E-News laying out the pros and cons of physical vs. mobile office and offering an opportunity to address questions and concerns raised by the presbytery. Included in this report is a series of articles that were presented in the Enews over the past two months.

There will be time during the presbytery meeting for a discussion of the Mobile Office possibility. The General Council wants to hear your feedback!

From January 29th Edition of the Enews

A Mobile Presbytery?

At our January retreat, the General Council took very seriously the responsibility of looking at the whole operation of the Presbytery and how Transylvania needs to be more responsive to the needs of every congregation. What can each committee and each staff person do to provide direct service to the sessions of our churches? Especially in these difficult economic times how can the Presbytery be an active partner in ministry supporting the work of our 92 churches?

The council also has the responsibility of addressing the long-term needs and direction of our work together. One question that has been lingering in the minds of the Presbytery for the last eight to ten years, is that of the location of the presbytery office. When the old office at Rose Street was sold to UK we entered into a “temporary” lease at 2480 Fortune Dr. That temporary solution to our location question has been on the table for all this time. The suggestion that came out of the council retreat was the possibility of going to a “virtual” or “mobile” office. (The Synod of Living Waters is making that move this year.) The Council appointed a Task Group to investigate this possibility. They are charged with laying out the advantages and disadvantages of having an office and meeting space, or closing the office with the staff working from home or mobile locations. That Task Group is working now and will be reporting back to the Council at their meeting on February 16. In the coming weeks we are planning to have a series of articles in the weekly E-News laying out the pros and cons of physical vs. mobile office and offering an opportunity to address questions and concerns raised by the presbytery. So I urge each of you to stay tuned to our ongoing conversation.

I am excited by the first meeting of General Council and by the much needed shift of focus to the needs of our churches rather than the needs of the presbytery as an institution. Please keep the presbytery and the various committees in your prayers as we begin to work within our new structure. *Richard*

From February 5th Edition of the Enews

A Mobile Presbytery? (Article 2 in a series of ongoing conversations about a mobile vs. physical presbytery office)

We live in an ever-changing world of technology. In 2005, Transylvania Presbytery made the decision that presbytery packets would no longer be printed and mailed to commissioners unless requested. The results of that decision are amazing. Instead of approximately 350 packets for each meeting, we now mail out only 20. In addition to saving countless trees, the cost to the presbytery has exceeded \$25,000 over the last five years. Going completely “paperless” is one of the goals of our proposed “Mobile Office.”

In an age where nearly everyone carries an Iphone, Blackberry or other mobile device as part of their everyday working tools, the presbytery is finding it difficult to ignore the prospect of a mobile office. Could we see the same kind of cost savings impact on the presbytery as when we switched to emailing presbytery packets, only on a greater level? What would be gained? What would be lost? Apart from committee meetings, how many people come into the office with a presbytery business purpose? How many people actually visit and use the resource center? How many meetings are held each month? What would be the benefits or losses if those meetings were held in various churches around the presbytery? Could some meetings be held online, through computer or video networking? These are a few of the questions being addressed by the Mobile Office Task Group appointed by the General Council.

After last week’s E-News article, we received the following correspondence relating to the mobile office:

Correspondence 1: *“I just wanted to thank you for taking the initiative on this issue. It has been beneficial for the Presbytery to have a physical location with office space where resources are centralized, but the lease cost of the current location seems in excess of what Presbytery can afford and has been that way for some time. So I await findings of the task force working on this issue.”*

Correspondence 2: *“What will you do with the documents and historical items that you are keeping in your office? I am often distressed with what people toss out when actually this 'garbage' is quite valuable historically.”*

We welcome and encourage any ideas, questions or concerns and urge each of you to share in our ongoing conversation. Please drop me an email with your thoughts at rsmith@transyby.org

And, please keep the presbytery and the various committees in your prayers as we begin to work within our new Presbytery structure. *Richard*

From February 12th Edition of the Enews

Reflections on the Idea of a Mobile Office

On the 31st of January I ended my second year as General Presbyter of Transylvania. In the past 24 months I have become very much aware of the fact that our Presbytery is Transylvania. We cover a huge and highly diverse territory covering over 16,424 square miles. From Somerset to Ashland is 173 miles; Whitesburg to Augusta over 200 miles; and Stopover to Midway 197. “Trans,” however, is not just a matter of miles. The straight-line distance between the Peter Creek Church in Phelps and the Highland Church in Canada is only 11.5 miles, but the travel time is 48 minutes. If we look at the geography of our presbytery where is the center, or, where ought the office be located? The geographical center is somewhere around the Daniel Boone National Forest, perhaps around Campton or Stanton, but that location would make sense to no one. Last year, one of our committees met regularly at Campton, only to discover that the location was far more difficult for most people to get to than Lexington. This was especially true for one of our pastors in the south central part of our presbytery.

For many years our Presbytery maintained two offices – one in Hazard and one in Lexington. Over time, that became difficult and unduly expensive. When I first heard the proposal that we consider closing the office in Lexington and move to a more mobile concept, I was skeptical. How would that work? But the more I think about the realities of the work that I do, the more sense it makes. When I think about the rest of the staff, I can see advantages as well as challenges. In my position I think it is better, for the presbytery to come to the people (pastors or churches) who have a question or concern than to make them come to a physical office in Lexington. More and more often I find myself visiting in the churches (going to the sessions or pastors) who request the resources of the presbytery. I’m beginning to realize that this is what the presbytery *ought* to be. Transylvania Presbytery is not a Lexington-Centered Presbytery, it is 16,414 square miles of Kentucky towns, cities, crossroads and open country.

I’ve also been doing a lot of reflection on the Resource Center, and I’ve come to realize how little used and out dated it is. It is expensive to physically house a collection of mostly obsolete books and publications. Doesn’t it make more sense to strengthen our connectionalism and to help each congregation serve as a resource to our sister congregations? This week I had a pastor ask for resources for teaching children about communion. We had nothing in the office, but I contacted the children’s minister at FPC Lexington and got some great ideas to send to the pastor. What if every church in the presbytery cataloged educational, youth and other resources that they have on their shelves? Used once and shelved for the next five or ten years, the materials just gather dust. But if the presbytery resource center was not a place, but was more of a multi-location library catalog that linked all these church owned resources, then we could truly be a connectional presbytery, helping strengthen the ministry in every church.

In the coming weeks and months I encourage each of you to share in the on-going dialogue about the office and whether we stay in our current location, move to another place, or evolve to a mobile model. Let’s hear your reflections. *Richard*

From February 19th Edition of the Enews

A MOBILE OFFICE?

At Tuesday's meeting, the General Council heard an initial report from the Task Group looking at the possibility of a Mobile Office. They asked the Task Group to prepare a list of the Pros and Cons of the idea and to include the listing in our E-News. The list below is a work in process, and we invite you to help us complete the work. What ARE the advantages and disadvantages of a more mobile model for the Presbytery office?

Advantages

- Presbytery will be MORE present/connected with other geographical areas (not just Lexington)
- Staff (General Presbyter AND support staff) will be more able to directly resource congregations/session/committees
- Committee Meetings not Lexington centric
- Stronger regional connectedness
- Cost effective – less \$ spent on office/meeting space; more fiscally responsible
- Committee meetings in churches reinforces connectedness
- Quicker transition into current and future technologies
- Reforms institution to meet realities of a changing culture
- Greener footprint for the presbytery – paperless, utilities
- Improved communication when everyone is reachable via cell phones, email, facebook, etc.
- Will have dedicated work space at a church
- Support staff can actively “support” churches by visiting, working with church staff members.
- Resource Center will be expanded to include items housed throughout the presbytery.

Disadvantages

- No physical office for “drop-in” visits
- No presbytery owned meeting room
- Less daily staff interaction with each other (staff will physically meet weekly and email and speak by phone daily)
- Potentially less staff interaction with members of presbytery (support staff will attend most meetings, wherever they meet)
- Need for mailing address
- More travel costs

- Cost of communication equipment
- Loss of physical access to resource center
- Central housing of historical records
- Accountability for staff work
- More difficult transition when current staff leave

In the coming weeks we will expand this listing of advantages and disadvantages, and also discuss how the presbytery might compensate for the disadvantages.

From March 5th Edition of the Enews

A Mobile Office / A Decentralized Office

This is another of a series of articles on the work of the Task Group appointed by the General Council to look at the Presbytery office.

We have had several people ask about other presbyteries – are there others who have moved to a mobile or virtual office? We sent out an email across the denomination asking that question and have had several insightful responses. There are at least three other presbyteries that are currently operating without a single physical office. Homestead Presbytery in Eastern Nebraska has moved to what they call a “Decentralized” model. The following excerpt was sent to us by Lowell Knauss, their former Interim Presbyter:

Q. What is meant by Decentralization?

A. Decentralization means there will be no one “Office” where staff must be to be considered “at work”. In reality there will be many offices; one to act as central receiving, home offices, and church work points around the Presbytery. In a real sense every church in Presbytery is an office. Staff members will spend a large portion of their time in the field working in the churches of Presbytery. When not in the field, the staff member will maintain a home office. A central receiving office will be established for the receipt of mail etc.

We heard from Gayle Collins, the Stated Clerk of Glacier Presbytery about their experience with a “virtual” presbytery. She gave some details about working with the geographical challenges of their region and the benefits of their new model, and then concluded by saying:

“I’m sure there is more I could tell you, but Glacier has been functioning on a "logical" basis rather than by a printed "model". Much of what Glacier is doing is using common sense based on the geographical layout and positioning of the churches. Our communication team will be looking into web-based meetings and using a church from each cluster as a focal point (especially for presbytery meetings held in the winter months).”

We have also heard from several presbyteries that are considering the same kind of move and are most interested in following our explorations into the question of how to be a Presbytery in this changing world.

Listening to feedback from Presbytery members and committees it seems advisable to maintain what Homestead calls “a central receiving office” likely in one of our churches, where a workstation, copier and a limited amount of file storage and supplies can be kept. That “office” would not have regular office hours, but might be available for one-on-one consultations or very small meetings.

As with the other of these weekly Think Pieces, we invite your comments in our on-going conversation about the office.

Frequently Asked Questions on the idea of a Mobile Office

1. How did the presbytery get to the point of talking about a “virtual” or “mobile” office? **The suggestion came out of the council retreat as a viable option for the presbytery.**
2. What will happen to the files and historic documents that are in the presbytery office? **The idea is to scan all of the files that are needed in the office into an electronic database. Historical documents could then be either sent to either the Historical Society, Columbia Theological Seminary, or church files sent back to the individual churches.**
3. Where will the committees of the presbytery gather to do their work? **The idea is to use the facilities that are available in the 92 different churches of the presbytery. Committee meetings can be used to reinforce the connectedness of the presbytery with the churches.**
4. Will committees be expected to track down their own meeting sites? **No. This will be a responsibility of the staff to coordinate meeting space and time.**
5. How will do you manage and coordinate staff in a mobile office? **The idea is that staff will have weekly staff meetings at one of the churches or other locations to coordinate the work of the presbytery. Job descriptions of the current staff may need to be revised so that staff can more directly resource the congregations and sessions.**
6. What will happen to the Resource Center? **We’ve come to realize how little used and out dated the Resource Center is. It is expensive to physically house a collection of mostly obsolete books and publications. One idea is to coordinate and develop an on-line database of the resources that each of the churches would be willing to share with each other. This would enable the presbytery to offer a multi-location library catalog that linked all of these church owned resources in one spot. Then we could truly be a connectional presbytery, helping strengthen the ministry in every church.**
7. How will I get in touch with the staff and what if I need to meet the staff in person? **The technology is available that the current phone number and toll free number could be used and would roll over to the individual cell phones of the staff. So, it would be no different than calling the office as you currently do.**
8. Have you explored the possibility of using a space in one of the Lexington churches for the office instead of going mobile? **Churches have not yet been officially contacted about space. The thought of the task group is that a small dedicated space in one of the churches could be secured for staff to use when a physical space is needed. But that this space would not be “the office.”**
9. How will the presbytery receive mail? **The presbytery could get a box at a mailing shop so that packages could be delivered since packages cannot be delivered to post office boxes.**

10. The presbytery office is seen to a lot of people as the “face of the presbytery.” What is lost if there are no friendly faces, only e-mails from the virtual world? **Staff will be even more visible to the members of the presbytery. Staff will continue to be present at committee meetings and will also be available as resources to churches as needed. Instead of meeting staff at the presbytery office, the staff could come to you.**
11. Are there other presbyteries that are going mobile? **Yes. Homestead Presbytery and Ohio Valley Presbytery have gone to the mobile “field based” model. There are other presbyteries that are currently investigating this option as well. Our Synod, the Synod of Living Waters, has plans to be completely mobile by April of this year.**
12. When would this move to a “Mobile Office” take place? **There is no timetable since no decision has been made. If the presbytery wants to pursue the idea, a vote would likely be taken at the June 2010 presbytery meeting with the transaction coming sometime after that date.**
13. If we do not have an office, how will people know we exist? Is the closing of the office the first step toward non-existence? **Some would say we are many steps into irrelevance already. The presbytery can be more visible and more meaningful if we are more present in the lives of our churches. The General Council asked the question: “If Transylvania Presbytery disappeared today, who would miss us?” The hard truth is that not many average Presbyterians would care. If Presbytery is going to be relevant (real) to most Presbyterians, we need to be actively working in our churches, not bound by a single piece of real estate in one location.**