

REPORT OF THE GENERAL PRESBYTER
March 9, 2010

The advent of 2010 brought a new structure to Transylvania Presbytery as the standing rules adopted last June took effect. On January 10 and 11 the new General Council held a retreat at Shaker Village and began the examination of our presbytery and how we can better function. We asked the question: “If Transylvania Presbytery disappeared today, would we be missed?” The sobering reality is that, for many people the answer is “No.” The next question, then, is: “What should we do about it?” “What can we do to make sure that the presbytery is important in the day to day lives of our congregations?” Using J. Russel Crabtree’s book *The Fly in the Ointment: Why Denominations Aren’t Helping Their Congregations ...And How They Can*” the Council began to look at how every committee of the presbytery might provide direct service to the sessions of each of our churches. How can we truly help every church in our region be the very best, strongest church it can be? This has been my charge to each committee this year.

Today’s thematic Presbytery meeting is one example. The new Stewardship Committee of the Presbytery is presenting a program designed to help each congregation strengthen their own program of year round stewardship. Our hope is that you will take away some practical ideas from today’s meeting that will help your church in this year and for years to come. The June meeting will look at all the changes in technology and how these developments can help your congregation in its mission, and in September we will be offering a program on Hospitality and Church Growth. We hope that each gathering of the presbytery will offer opportunities for your churches to be better equipped for ministry. In addition to the “business” of the presbytery (the voting on reports) we will be addressing the **real** business of the presbytery, *i.e.* the mutual support of our common ministries.

The council also took seriously the new charge they have to provide guidance for the future of the presbytery’s operations. In that regard they took a look at the location of the Transylvania office and appointed a Task Group to investigate the possibility of closing the current office and moving to a virtual or mobile model. The report of the General Council will outline the work that Task Group has done thus far and invites comment by every presbyter as we move toward a decision, possibly at the June meeting.

The first months of 2010 have been busy as our new committees have attempted to organize amid the challenges of snow storms and rescheduled or cancelled meetings. Through it all I have a growing optimism about the life and work of Transylvania and I look forward with hope and curiosity as we discern where the Spirit is leading us in the future.

Richard Smith