

**Report of the General Presbyter  
September 8, 2009**

I want to begin by expressing my thanks to all of you for the many prayers, calls, and cards received during my recovery from surgery over the past seven weeks. You cannot know how much your concerns have helped me.

During my convalescence I spent a great amount of time visiting each of the congregations in our presbytery. I visited your church using MissionInsite – the demographic resource which Transylvania has contracted with through the Synod. MissionInsite allows us to look at the communities where we live and serve, and receive direction as we plan our ministries. I created a report for each of our congregations so the sessions of our churches can better understand the context of their ministry. Last Tuesday at the Committee on Ministry meeting I gave each COM member several packets containing the reports on the churches they serve as liaisons. In the coming weeks you can expect a call from your COM liaison with the offer to share this information with the session of your church. It is my prayer that this information will be helpful.

One of the surprising insights I had in preparing all these reports is the constant fact about the families in our care. I discovered that, on average across the presbytery, nearly one quarter of our families are single-parent families. What does this say about the mission and ministry of our churches and our Presbytery. How can we serve the physical, emotional and the spiritual needs of parents who are trying to raise a family without help? Another demographic insight is found in the fact that, in most places, the fastest growing segment of our population is seniors, age 55 and above. While this is not a great surprise, it does raise questions about the programming and outreach ministries of every church. I am certain that you will find similar insights as your sessions use this tool in your long-range planning.

While I am just back to work and still limiting my time somewhat, I am very happy to be back and I am looking forward to an exciting fall and winter as we transition into our new standing rules and look at the long-range mission and ministry of the presbytery.

Richard T. Smith