



A Weekly Communication
From the Executive Presbyter
San Gabriel Presbytery
#23 - July 14, 2008

*"Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water. Jesus said, "Come"
So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus.
But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened,
and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"
Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him,
"You of little faith, why did you doubt?"
(Matthew)*

Presbytery Remarks - "Out of the Boat into the Water"

Given that much has happened since we last gathered, I thought it would be helpful to share my presbytery remarks in this Spirit Soundings. The July meeting always has less participation, although we were surprised with about 150 people in the end.

"Faith and Grace I bring to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Like the apostles and saints before us, I continue to give thanks for each and every one of you – as you continue to faithfully embody the Gospel in places near and far."

A few of the things I give thanks for:

- Westminster celebrated 100 years; Emmanuel 87 years, Community, West Covina 60 years; Bob Stebe celebrated 25 years of ordination. In each of these celebrations, we were there through the presence and love of one of our leaders. Thank you to Rex McDaniel, John Najarian and Steve Salyards for their representing the heart of our community.
- Mideast Evangelical Church ordained a new elder and installed their new leadership as they also received new members into their life. – thank you to Jack Lorimer for his faithful leadership. Thank you also to Brad Calhoun for partnering with me at this wonderful celebration.
- COMMT Chair, Cyndie Crowell and I spend a morning with the Taiwanese leadership of our presbytery. What a humble privilege it is to meet more and more capable leadership in a growing population of our presbytery.
- We ordained a gifted Chinese pastor - the Rev. Bob Zihong Huang as Organizing Pastor to Capstone Chinese New Church Development. It was a multi-cultural tapestry as we gathered at Arcadia for this worship service.
- I had the privilege of accompanying a gifted group of men and women who you elected to go to GA. They were faithful, prayerful and thoughtful. They modeled what it means to walk

together through differing views and common faith. Thank you to Betsy Straeter, Cyndie Crowell, Josey Saez-Acevedo, James Park and Philip Salyards. What a joy to be with them. As I shared with you all, San Gabriel was well-represented at this Assembly. In addition to those I mentioned in my last Soundings, I neglected to mention others who were present: Jeff Howard, Grace Oh Howard, Dennis Tarr, and Carolyn Harris.

- We had the privilege of witnessing an “emergent” 39 year old pastor of Filipino and Chinese heritage become moderator of the Assembly.
- Throughout the week, I had many opportunities to speak to the top leadership of our denomination. I continue to hold them in prayer as they seek to lead at a challenging time in our history. I ask that you especially remember Linda Valentine (Executive Director of GAC), our own Tom Taylor and Eric Hoey, newly elected Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons and our new moderator Bruce Reyes Chow.
- Our national office has formed a task force to consider how we might create a pilot to explore doing ordination exams or their equivalent in a different manner. This pilot would seek to maintain our theological and biblical integrity while at the same time, allowing for the multi-cultural reality we are more a part of. I have been asked to serve on that Task Force.
- Upon return, I invited pastors of our congregations – in the midst of summer – to gather post GA. This was a pastoral care call. Our pastors of congregations are on the - front lines of interpretation. They need to have a safe and candid place to share concerns and hopes. About 20 pastors came out - not bad considering shortness of notice and season. We will continue this conversation in the future.
- Our council voted to recommend two presbytery-wide mission initiatives (in addition to our ongoing commitment to the Gulf Coast): **(1). LIVING WATERS FOR THE WORLD** – (started by Synod of the Living Waters – Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi and Tennessee). This ministry equips the participants to create an inexpensive water purification apparatus that can be built anywhere around the world. Imagine going together – side by side – to Mexico (countless other places) to help a poor community to have clean water.

The second initiative you will be invited to participate in beginning in the Fall is to **bring canned foods** to each of our presbytery gatherings. They will be distributed to one of the food banks in the area. This is just a reminder that as we gather, we are called to recall the growing reality of hunger in nearby communities.

I am also thankful for some of the movement we are making toward the future:

1. COMMT is seriously reflecting on our overall congregational health and life together. To that end, they are sponsoring a Healthy Congregations Conference scheduled for November. Healthy Congregations is well-known for helping congregations identify how their "church family system" functions (good and bad).
2. We will continue to reflect on how to have post-general assembly conversations. Of particular concern and interest is the recommendation regarding ordination standards that we have been asked to vote on.
3. As we move forward, we will continue to arrange for equipping moments at our presbytery meetings and we will continue to be committed to studying the Bible together. This final of our three part Bible study was again well-received.

Closing and Biblical Refection;

You and I have been on a journey of grace together. We have worked hard to build a climate of respect and appreciation for one another. We have by our choices and actions, demonstrated our willingness to live in the uncomfortable tension of our theological conversations. I invite us - the San Gabriel Presbytery - to renew that commitment as we walk forward. I invite us - San Gabriel Presbytery - to renew that commitment as we eventually vote on the recommendations from this 218th GA. I invite us - San Gabriel Presbytery - to "not react" or "act out" I invite us to remember that in whatever actions we take, we are called to consider our corporate life as a people of God. This isn't about any of our own personal preferences or agendas.

No matter how unwilling, hesitant, frustrated, sad, joyous or terrified we are, I do believe God has called us to lead our presbytery through a time such as this. God has called us in our unique (conservative, liberal, immigrant and racial ethnic sisters and brothers; specialized ministries; honorably retired; large and small) reality to lead at this time. Trust me, I understand the temptation to want to bolt, but I believe that it is no accident that we have been brought together at this historical moment. May we do so in a way that the world will recognize – as being of Christ. – by our love for another.

I end with the closing words of the Matthew text when Jesus invites Peter to get out of the boat.

Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

Jesus said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus.

**But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened,
and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"
Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him,
"You of little faith, why did you doubt?" "**

I believe there are storms raging around us and we are being asked to get out of the boat. We must resist the temptation to depend on the power of structure and form to save us. This will be about our relationships - with one another and with our God. Friends, I believe we are being asked to walk on water. As such, we are called to focus on our call - in the midst of the storm - to serve, to grow spiritually; our call to keep our eyes on the source of our power. We are being asked to dare believe in the gospel we claim.

It is clear to me that this is not about me or you. It is truly about God. God is the only one who will be able to reach out and grasp us with his outstretched arms.

I pray that we, in humble awareness of our human limitations recognize the place we find ourselves - and reach back toward the grasp of Jesus. "Lord save us."

Presbytery Highlights

New Members: We received some wonderful new members into our presbytery: ***the Rev. Britt Johnston*** will be serving ***Occidental*** and the ***Rev. Margo Houts*** will be serving ***Altadena***. We are confident that they will bring blessings to these communities of faith.

To be Ordained: We also examined for ordination the soon-to-be reverend, ***Margarita Reyes***. Margarita has been called to serve as pastor of the ***Rosemead, First*** Hispanic congregation. Her ordination and installation will be in August. Margarita will be the first Hispanic woman to be ordained

as a minister in one of our congregations. It was a wonderful moment to feel the love that she has already brought with her into our presbytery.

Post General Assembly Reflections: Our 218th GA Commissioners reflected on the many decisions made at the San Jose gathering at a pre-presbytery forum. They also made a presentation during our time of business. Feel free to invite any of them to speak to your churches.

Closing Worship: A special thank you to Heather Williams and the music worship team for leading us in a time of quiet reflection, prayer and song.

Prayers this Week: Please offer prayers for the following persons over the coming week

Minister Members - for their ministries, their leadership and their families

1. Chung-Hsin Wang
2. Robert Wendel
3. Tom Wentz
4. Heather Williams
5. Patricia Williams

Elders - for their ministries, their leadership and their families:

1. Heidi Taylor of Community, San Marino
2. Cyndy Tessitor of Glenkirk, Glendora
3. Evelyn Thomas of Pasadena, Pasadena
4. Shelly Thunell of La Verne Heights, La Verne
5. Don Trerise of Grace, Los Angeles

Candidates/Inquirers to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament

1. Candidate Jolene Currie of New Hope, Pasadena
2. Inquirer John Mi Na of Claremont, Claremont

Church Family: Please pray for the saints at Arabic Evangelical Church, Arcadia. May God bless their pastor, the Rev. Hisham Kamel, their elders and lay leadership, along with the community of saints, as they seek to be ever-faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Prayers for the Week

I again offer you the words of a hymn "In a World Too Long Divided" sung to 'Hymn to Joy' sung during one of the General Assembly worship services.

*In a world too long divided, in a culture self-enthralled,
Still the Church is tried and tested by the tasks to which Christ called.
Love of wealth and quests for power can too blindly all consume
Leaving hate and separation, granting grace and love no room.*

*How can we deny our neighbors, turn our faces from their pain
When our Savior lived compassion and revealed God's grace-filled reign?
Our salvation is communal - for the last and lost come first,
Where the hungry find true manna and Christ quenches every thirst.*

*Let us now be true disciples and continue on the Way,
Seeking justice through our actions, sharing truth in all we say.
God's true kingdom is expansive, and God's grace is meant for all
So the outcast may find welcome and the lost may sense God's call.*

*In a world too long divided, in a time when few are heard,
Still the Church must live its witness and proclaim God's grace-filled Word.
Let the bound receive their freedom and the burdened find release
'Til our voices rise in chorus and our lives unite in peace.*

May the love of God be with us, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ surround us and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit hold us close.

Your sister, colleague, friend and companion on the journey,

Ruth S-G