

Synod Administration Team
First Reformed Church, Orange City, IA
April 14, 2009, 10:00 – 3:00

Present:

Admin Team Members: Lori Walber, Denny Brand, Iris Shaffer, Ivan Wiersma, Travis Else, Carl Van Voorst, and Perry De Groot.

GSC Representatives: Evan Vermeer and Mary Bechler.

Synod of the Heartland Staff: John Sikkink, Alicia Beaver, Cathy Davis, Jim Koopman, Dale Assink, Pam Kimpson, Bob Cleveringa, Kristin Franken, Don De Kok and Dan De Vries.

Absent:

Admin Team Members: Charlotte Foreman and Bob Rook.

GSC Representatives: Glen Blumer, Liz Moss, John Busman, and Rhonda Johnson.

John Sikkink opened the meeting with devotions and prayer. Personal introductions of the group were made.

John reviewed the mission and vision of the Synod.

Lori Walber, President of the Synod of the Heartland, gave the President's report.

Our Sunday paper carried an article by E. J. Dionne Jr. from the Washington Post entitled "Christianity Finds New Life in Struggle." Its sub-heading was "Feel-good theology can't compete with a faith rediscovering its mission." He went on to ask, "Are we witnessing the decline of Christianity in America, or is this rather a moment of reform and renewal, a time when the deterioration that has been under way is arrested?" My answer would be yes.

Christianity has become just one of the choices people have when exploring their spirituality. No longer is the assumption valid that the new family in town will automatically go to the church across the street. They may be part of the 15% that claim no religious affiliation. The loss of purpose within some churches is taking its toll. Our world is not looking for another social club to join. We must constantly ask the question, "Why are we here?" and recognize that the church does not exist to make us comfortable.

But I'm struck most by the second part of his question. Is this a moment of reform and renewal? Yes! Churches throughout our Synod have recommitted themselves to renewal. There are exciting things happening around the Synod. Churches like American Reformed in Worthington, MN, are opening their doors to groups of Hispanics. Others across the prairie have shown that in times of crises, God cares and speaks through the Church. Numerous groups are reaching out effectively to post-moderns. Still others recognize the value of community and are engaged in their corners of the world.

This is a time of renewed commitment to the often neglected portions of our society – the poor, the elderly, the young, the physically and emotionally challenged – all are being served in new and exciting ways that ultimately point to Christ. There is a shift from “pack ‘em into the big suburban church” to also identifying and serving the great needs of the city and our rural areas.

But that becomes hard work. The challenges are many. Leadership development, passion, and energy all are sorely needed. When we look at our worldly resources, we are overwhelmed. But we have been gifted with the mighty resources of God. To God be the glory! We have all the resources we need. We just have to use them.

John reviewed the Eight Year History of the classes in the Synod, the Multiplication Team Report, and discussed what should be used as a tool for measurement.

Each representative shared stories, concerns, and celebrations from their classis. Synod Regional Ministers also reported at this time along with their respective classes. (handouts available)

The discussion on being Reformed and Missional continues. Bob Rook is on the National Team and will send out a report. (handout available)

Discipleship – Pam Kimpson reported on the education work in the Synod of the Heartland. She continues to network, scholarship, and encourage the educators in the Synod. (handout available)

Leaders for the Harvest – Dan De Vries reported on the churches in the program. His contract with the Synod will be ending in June. The LFH Task Force is working on how to continue this program. (handout available)

Youth – Bob Cleveringa introduced his new support staff person, Kristin Franken. Bob reported on the various youth events held last summer and the ones planned for this summer. Leaders on the Horizon is a youth leadership curriculum and has 140 students enrolled this year. (handout available)

Mary Bechler and Evan Vermeer reported on the General Synod Council meeting. Budget was a big concern at their last meeting. They have had to cut budgets and will be freezing the 2010 assessments. They gave us updates on the Church Herald, BOBS, and the Belhar Confession.

The minutes of the 2009 Finance Team meeting were reviewed. The compilation has now been completed with Williams and Co. and has been approved by the Finance Team. The finances were found to be in good order. John reviewed the proposed financial budgets for 2010. There will be no increase in assessments for 2010. Salaries of ordained staff will also be frozen. Secretarial staff budget was lowered with half of the expense of the youth secretarial staff being taken out of the youth reserve fund beginning in 2010. Meeting expense was lowered to promote using technology instead of face to face meeting when possible. The staff travel budget was also lowered.

Bob Cleveringa asked that the youth secretarial position budget be reviewed after doing it this way for a couple of years.

MMSC to approve the Proposed 2010 Budget and the 2010 Partners In Possibilities Budget. (handout available)

John Sikkink reported that he going on “Sankofa” trip with denominational staff beginning next week. Updates will be published daily on the Synod webpage.

Dale Assink and Dan De Vries gave an update on the Multi-racial Task Force Meeting they attended with Earl James. There is a Five-Fold Multi-Dimensional Test, using five different points , that churches can use. The church is not mirroring what kids are experiencing growing up. Earl James is willing to come out and lead discussions on this topic if classes/churches are interested. (handout available)

A Task Force on Disabilities has been formed in the RCA. We are being asked to look at our churches to see how friendly we are to people with disabilities. (handout available)

The Synod continues to re-work its goals. (handout available)

The nomination report was presented. (handout available)

MMSC to approve Bob Rook as the new President of the Synod of the Heartland.

Iris Shaffer was on the nomination ballot for Vice President. The floor was open for other nominations. No other nominations were taken.

MMSC to approve Iris Shaffer as the Vice President of the Synod of the Heartland.

John Sikkink presented a Five Year Financial Plan Model based on current and projected income and looking at current and future staffing needs.

Staff was excused and the group went into Executive Session.

Executive Session – Staff was affirmed for the great job they are doing helping the Synod live out its mission. A task force comprised of Lori Walber, Mary Bechler, and Bob Rook was established to bring more detail to the five year plan before the Admin Team gives any further direction to the Synod.

Lori Walber closed the meeting with prayer.

