

May 1, 2010

Dear Colleagues,

You are invited to join an on-line, secure and private, on-going conversation on "... being the church together."

The PCUSA in 2010 is in uncharted waters. One of the questions that keeps emerging in many of our "meta" conversations is: **how we (meaning all the entities and governing bodies of the PCUSA) are "church together"**.

Last month's extended on-line conversation related to the e-mail post, "A Wing and a Prayer", suggested a need for us to have an easily accessible forum for such conversations, as well as a need for us who do this work at the middle level to keep talking, networking, and sharing our thoughts from this middle place on what it means to be "church together".

Betty Meadows has asked me to give some time and leadership to continue the conversation that was begun in one of our interest/affinity groups [Being the Church Together] at the 2009 AEPS annual meeting. **We will have our conversation on the AEPS.org home page. This will be our first attempt to have an on-going conversation on our web-site that doesn't depend on "respond to all" e-mail.**

Attached and on the AEPS web site is a white paper written for the November 2009 GAMC-MGB Advisory Board on the topic *"What is it Presbyteries do best that the Church needs most?."* (That was the question the 11 participants [5 elected from AEPS] around the table were asked to answer from the perspective of the governing body they represent.) Also attached and on the [AEPS website](#) is a paper Paul Hooker wrote for the May 2009 Advisory Board Meeting. Together, these two papers will provide a spring-board to launch us into our discussion.

Some background - over the past 2 years, AEPS has moved into new territory related to:

- our purpose, membership, and work as an association;
- exploring new ways of networking and communicating among ourselves;
- discovering new ways to support and encourage one another in this work;
- continuing to discuss what are the appropriate ways for us (AEPS) to address the major challenges and changes that the PCUSA is facing.

In summary, an essential piece of the future of the PCUSA is in the recovery of the purpose and function of a Presbytery as each particular presbytery relates in a covenanted, collaborative, supportive networked and value-added partnership with its congregations, clergy members, educators, and elders. In short, there cannot be a Presbyterian Church without a Presbytery.

Nothing top-down, by itself, will restore our passion, energy, purpose and spirit as a denomination, and nothing that creates lone-ranger pastors or isolates congregations will lead us into a deeper and fuller expression of the New Testament and Reformed belief that congregations, pastors and mission are stronger when we live in a covenantal, accountable, and meaningful relationship with each other through a Presbytery.

In the white paper, based on the minutes of the first Presbytery meetings (1700's) we hear the testimony of the early Presbyterian pioneers who believed that:

- congregations could be stronger (congregational care),

- pastors more effective and faithful (leadership development),
- and mission more strategic (missional engagement) in a Presbyterian rather than congregational form of government.

DISCUSSION STARTER

If the above is true, what are some ways (best practices) in which we can continue and expand on those three core purposes of a Presbytery?

Looking forward to our conversation and seeing you all at GA.

Graham Hart

Past-President of AEPS [2009]