

“A MOMENT IN TIME”

(A Proposal For A National Church Gathering Project for the Year of the Sabbath.)

The Committee on History, having been approached by the Rev. Dr. Fred Rennie with this idea, fully supports the plan and places it before the General Assembly in the terms given by Dr. Rennie.

Background:

After a few years of retirement from the active Ministry of Word and Sacrament, I offered my services to the Session of St. John’s Church, Cornwall, Ontario, to review and place in orderly fashion their collection of *archival materials* which had accumulated over many years and had lain virtually neglected, unread and unknown.

A few months into the work I soon became aware that there was a decided lack of materials that would give today’s worshipper any insight and appreciation into how Presbyterian worship, its format and content in pulpit and pew, had been conducted over the years in the congregation. There were *few printed materials* before the 1950s, and even in that decade materials were sparse. The few Orders of Service I did find were obviously printed for special occasions. Sermons, hand-written or in print form, were non-existent. There was little information, if any, concerning the Congregation’s involvement in programs inside the Church, or outside in the Community.

St. John’s is an old established congregation with roots stretching back to 1787 when the Rev. John Bethune arrived in this part of Eastern Ontario. What was the pulpit preaching in its initial days, and beyond? What hymns were the congregation singing? What Scriptures in particular were being expounded? Was the face of the Church turned away from contemporary social and political events? Where was the Church showing the face of Christian compassion, or was it mainly concerned about its own particular existence? The archival material was not available to fully answer these questions. I dare to believe that the situation in this congregation is not much different from other congregations, larger or smaller, or of lesser or more years, across The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

I recognize that in former years knowledge of and access to *multiple printing methods* was limited, or even not available to most congregations. But in the past 50 years improvements and greater access have been made in this area. When did our congregations – which did not have the history or practice of using fixed liturgical books – begin to create and use a weekly printed Order of Worship? When did this Order of Worship enlarge to include the announcement of activities for participation within and without the Church? When did it become a valuable witness to the life, work and witness of the Congregation in the wider Church and to the world?

Lacking such resources from the *past*, my thoughts turned to the *future*, for the benefit of the generations of Presbyterians to come, and for the church historians and social scientists who could use such materials for their examination and analysis of our ecclesiastical, social and political history. There is no doubt that we have abundant resources available today. What is needed is the *will*, on the local and national level, to *acquire and preserve* samples of such materials for future generations. Hence there came to mind the following Plan to acquire and preserve “A Moment in Time”.

The Plan:

The recent General Assembly has approved a call to the Church to observe “*the Year of the Sabbath*” on the congregational level. “Sabbath” implies rest and, I would hope, a time for reflection on where we have come from as a Church on both local and national levels. Ecclesiastes, the unknown “Teacher” of the Old Testament, addressed in his book the issue of time. “For everything”, he said, “there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven” (Eccl. 3: 1-8). As you read and ponder his list of momentous “times” you note that there is “a time to pluck up what is planted”, “a time to build up”, “a time to keep”, and a “*time to gather*”. These are all activities, which I feel lend themselves to the Project I have in mind, and which the Committee on History has agreed to sponsor.

The Year of the Sabbath, to run from Advent's beginning in 2006, and to end the Sunday prior to Advent 2007, can be an *inspired occasion* for our people to "gather" together representative materials from their worship and service lives, to be preserved for generations to come. Such materials will "say" that at a particular "Moment in Time" this is what we as Christian people of the Presbyterian persuasion in Canada were about – what we were saying from the pulpit or from the pew, what we were singing and reading in worship, what we were doing "in the public square" beyond the hours of weekly worship, and how we were saying and doing it. From such "gathering" we may also be led further into serious reflection upon our roots, and to a re-examination of the fitness of our faith for the 21st century.

The principal intent of "A moment in Time" however, is *not to examine*, through submitted materials, our *present* activities in worship and work as Congregations. Although such is and would be a commendable exercise, it is one that I suggest is beyond the expertise, interest, or energy of the Committee on History.

My desire is simply to "*acquire and preserve*" for those who will come after us. I envision that all materials received will be appropriately sealed for 50 years, with permission to access before then being granted by the Principal Clerk of the General Assembly to bona fide researchers only. All materials will be kept in a proper and safe place, free from the possibility of disintegration by the elements or from accidental destruction by uninformed persons. The Archives of our Church is agreeable to be this place, and to lend its expertise to the Project during its collection, reception and storage phases. In the unlikely event that The Presbyterian Church in Canada merged, or ceased to exist during this period of time, such materials, being part of the Church's archival collection, would naturally pass into the hands and care of our successor. I believe that to open such a deposit of materials in the middle of the 21st century will be an *exciting experience* for qualified researchers. This will be primary "raw material" to read and analyse that to this time has had limited or no examination.

Working Out the Plan :

- (1) *Congregations are encouraged to choose* their own "Moment (i.e. Sunday) in Time" between the First Sunday in Advent 2006, and Christ the King Sunday 2007 (these calendar dates are December 3/06 and November 25, 2007), but a Sunday between Easter and Pentecost 2007 is *highly recommended*.
- (2) *Congregations are urged not to choose* significant Sundays in the Christian Year (i.e. Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, Christian Family or Mission Awareness Sunday etc), or in the natural or civic year (Canada Day or Labour Day weekends, Thanksgiving, etc.) for their Sunday. What is desired from them is "ordinary or typical" Sunday worship. However, Sundays on which either Sacrament is celebrated are not excluded.
- (3) *Congregations are encouraged to provide* the following Worship Materials from the Sunday which they have selected in the time frame outlined above: Worship Bulletin with inserts (if any); copy of Sermon preached; copy of prayers offered; an indication of which "hymn book" was used in worship that Sunday to identify the source of hymns sung as noted on the Bulletin used; copy of materials used for a "Children's Time", if such took place in worship on that Sunday; texts of solos or anthems provided by individuals, small music groups, or choirs in worship; titles of musical selections played during worship by organ, piano, or other musical instruments. *Complete instructions* will accompany the publicity of the Project to all Congregations of the Church.
- (4) *In addition to the above*, some indication of the composition of the worshipping community present that Sunday will be provided as well: i.e. the number of worshippers in attendance, with the age breakdown as follows - birth to 5 years, 6 to 12 years, 13 to 18 years, 19 to 25 years, 26 to 45 years, 46 to 60 years, 61 to 75 years, over 75 years.(Children/Youth in Nursery or Church School are counted as being present in worship on that Sunday). A division of these numbers by male/female would be helpful. Information on how to make this "simple census" will be provided to all Congregations.

- (5) *Any other print materials* that might be deemed helpful in providing a “picture” of the Congregation *at worship* may be included.
- (6) *Those Congregations with electronic capability* are encouraged to provide their materials “on line” – i.e. sermons, prayers, bulletins etc. – anything that is capable of electronic transmission, to facilitate their participation in the Project. However, such submissions will be converted to print form by the Archives and retained as such. The receiving place for such electronic response will also be the Archives of the Church, located at 50 Wynford Drive, Toronto, Ontario, M3C 1J7.
- (7) *Additional enclosures can include:* no more than three (3) colour photos (labeled as to source) of - principal worship area; congregation at worship; exterior of place of worship. The Archives will ensure that these are preserved in their proper manner upon receipt.
- (8) All print/photo materials will be *sent to the Church Archives in the addressed Return Envelope provided.* These will be individually accessioned by the Archives and stored appropriately for long-term preservation and retention. The exterior of the Return Envelope must clearly provide the name and address of the participating Congregation, and the Sunday that was chosen for submission.
- (9) *Publicity of this national “gathering project” will be provided* through the PC-Pak, the Presbyterian Record, the web site of the Committee on History, other media, and the Clerks of all Presbyteries (acting as occasional reminders throughout the Year of the Sabbath to all Congregations within the bounds). Annual Synod Meetings will also be another means of encouraging the fullest participation.
- (10) The *Clerk of Session* in each Congregation will be the principal recipient of publicity regarding the Project, and of the Return Envelope for the Archives. The support of the Sessions of all Congregations in the promotion of “A Moment in Time” is earnestly solicited.

There are approximately 950 Congregations of our Church spread across Canada. Popular studies indicate that about a 15% response is usually achieved from broad surveys. That would result in a return of about 150 responses, a still helpful indicator for future research purposes. Of course, the Committee on History encourages *the fullest possible participation* of the Church in this Project.

Funding the Project :

The cost to the individual congregation for a “Moment in Time” will be the cost of postage in mailing in their Return Envelope to the Archives of the Church. The cost of administration, publicity, labeling, and envelopes will be borne from other financial sources, and is not considered excessive.

Starting the Project:

Recommendation No. 3 Adopted

That the 132nd General Assembly give its permission to the Committee on History to proceed with the project, “A Moment in Time”, with preparation, publicity, and distribution to all Congregations of the Church to be completed by December 1, 2006.

Recommendation No. 4 Adopted

That the 132nd General Assembly fully support and endorse “A Moment in Time”, and urge the active participation in it of all Congregations of The Presbyterian Church in Canada during the forthcoming Year of the Sabbath.