

**Assembly Council Highlights**  
**Sunday, March 30 – Tuesday, April 01, 2008**  
**Crieff Hills Community**

The Assembly Council met at Crieff Hills Community from Sunday, March 30 until Tuesday, April 01, 2008. The following are some of the highlights from that gathering.

**The Moderator's Report – The Rev. Dr. Hans Kouwenberg**

Dr. Hans Kouwenberg, Moderator of the 2007 General Assembly, reported to the Assembly Council that he has visited every province apart from Alberta and Newfoundland, spending the majority of his time in “the golden horseshoe” of Ontario. A week long April trip to Korea is planned as is a visit to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Dr. Kouwenberg will also address the Presbyterian College convocation. He has enjoyed preaching and every opportunity to speak about matters of the church that are close to his heart. He expressed heartfelt gratitude to his home congregation of Calvin, Abbotsford, for prayerful support.

“The Aboriginal and Church Leaders’ Tour was one of the most moving events of my life,” said Dr. Kouwenberg. He spoke with sorrow about how a culture that had been in North America for thousands of years was crushed by the so-called discoverers. He said, “We are part of the dissolution of a culture. We were involved in taking children from their homes, sometimes hundreds of miles from where they lived, over 100 years of residential schools..” He noted that Mr. Elijah Harper spoke of the need for Aboriginal people to forgive in order to find healing for themselves. Dr. Kouwenberg predicts the government’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission will engage increasing numbers of people across Canada in the story of residential schools.. He expressed hope that the commission would take place soon and that an apology would be offered by the federal government to the Aboriginal people. He paid tribute to Ms. Lori Ransom, Animator for Healing and Reconciliation, for her help and support during the tour.

**The Aboriginal and Church Leaders’ Tour**

A tour of Aboriginal and Church leaders took place in March of this year. Representatives from the Presbyterian, United, Anglican and Roman Catholic churches met with national and provincial Aboriginal leaders at spiritually and historically significant events in Ottawa, Vancouver, Saskatoon and Winnipeg. The tour was meant to draw attention to the Federal Government’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The commission will be appointed by the Federal Government, probably following their apology, and will travel across Canada. In his speech at the Winnipeg event, The Rev. Dr. Hans Kouwenberg noted that reconciliation is like a journey from the past into the future; from what was patently unjust to a future that is just. He said, “It is the heartfelt prayer of The Presbyterian Church in Canada that our Aboriginal neighbours will want to walk with us as children of the same God and begin the sacred work of healing and reconciliation together.”

The Rev. Stephen Kendall, Principal Clerk, told the council that Dr. Kouwenberg was asked to speak on behalf of all the participating churches about their commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission during the Vancouver leg of the tour. The other church leaders literally and figuratively stood behind Dr. Kouwenberg during this address resulting in a spontaneous show of unity and sincerity. Mr. Bobby Joseph, one of the Aboriginal leaders, then invited Aboriginal elders present to stand and face the church leaders to acknowledge Dr. Kouwenberg’s statement. It was described as a moment of grace and unity of purpose.

Ms. Lori Ransom, the Healing and Reconciliation Animator for The Presbyterian Church in Canada, also reflected on the tour. Early on she wondered if the Aboriginal community would respond to the tour or if it would consider this just something the church was doing for itself. She was pleased with the

Aboriginal response and noted that there was significant local media coverage as well. An elderly residential school survivor reminded one gathering of how much more there is yet to do. Emphasizing the truth of that statement, another survivor left one of the gatherings in anger, questioning the sincerity of the event. On another occasion, British Columbia Chief, Shawn Atleo, said, "I will tell my grandmother, our prayers are being answered." "This is more than I expected out of the tour," said Ms. Ramsom.

"More than 1500 people attended the tour," said Ms. Ramsom. "The leaders were personally affected." The churches were challenged by the Aboriginal leaders to carry the movement forward. Ms. Ramsom informed the council that the church leaders had been introduced to the House of Commons so that parliament was aware of this initiative. She drew attention to the rememberingthechildren.ca website where more information about the tour can be found.

### **Residential Schools – Missing Children**

A missing children's ecumenical working group is developing an appropriate response to demonstrations in churches that are held to raise awareness of the children who reportedly went missing from residential schools.. Archival searches for evidence of missing children have already commenced and The Rev. Ian Morrison has traveled to Kenora and Birtle to see what he can discover regarding this matter. Already he has found a potentially relevant burial register and the names of people who may have knowledge of burial sites. Meanwhile, Residential School hearings carry on and Mr. Morrison continues to represent our church at them.

Ms. Ramsom observed that we should not only remember the children who attended the residential schools., but their children and grandchildren as well; all of whom have been adversely affected by the abuses endured.

### **Policy Regarding Allegations of Racial Harassment**

A policy to deal with allegations of racial harassment within The Presbyterian Church in Canada has been drafted by an ad hoc committee of the Assembly Council. It has undergone study by the denomination and been approved by the Assembly Council. The policy will be presented to the General Assembly in June. Educational resources on the subject of racism will eventually be produced to accompany the policy.

### **Diversity Policy**

A policy designed to encourage further ethnic diversity on standing committees of the General Assembly and in the hiring practices of the national offices will be recommended to the Assembly in June. If adopted, part of the process will be to ask standings committees and the national offices to assess their current ethnic diversity annually over a three-year period as a way of measuring diversity need and progress.

### **The Vine Helpline: Connecting people, places and programs**

Ms. Dorothy Henderson, Team Leader for the "The Vine Helpline: Connecting people, places and programs", made a presentation to the Assembly Council about this new way for congregations to receive information and help on a wide variety of subjects, including ministry with children and youth, worship, educational ministry, congregational development, change and transition, eldership training, evangelism and outreach, and leadership development. Since the vine took root in January some 105 queries have been answered.

The Vine, a part of the Life and Mission Agency, has a staff of five but also depends on trained volunteers. Those interested in offering their time and talent to this ministry should contact the volunteer coordinator, Mr. David Phillips, at 416-642-1987 or 1-866-642-2830.

The Vine draws upon the expertise of individuals across our church. A list of those who have recognized skill in the ministries handled by the Vine is being developed so that if a congregation in British Columbia, for instance, requests help with outreach, the Vine will be able to connect that congregation with an expert from their area who has agreed to offer knowledge and training.

The Vine Helpline can be reached by calling 1-866-642-2830.

### **Long Range Planning**

Five values identified by the Long Range Planning Committee as being important for our denomination include:

- Visibility and relevance that results in change in the world
- Christ-centred living that nurtures and empowers individuals to embrace God's world
- Committee leadership that is prepared to take risks
- Congregational vitality that enables courageous choices
- Effective structure that supports meaningful ministry and mission

The committee is now planning to invite 10 to 12 presbyteries to send 4 to 5 representatives to participate in an event that would use Appreciative Inquiry methodology to help identify a vision for the denomination. It is hoped this gathering will serve as a way of hearing what Presbyterians discern as necessary for the future.

### **The Rev. Dr. Tony Plomp**

The Assembly Council agreed to recommend to the Assembly that The Rev. Dr. Tony Plomp be appointed for another 5 year term as Deputy Clerk of the General Assembly. This is a part-time position that Dr. Plomp has held since 1987.

### **Regional Staff Affirmed**

The Women's Missionary Society and the Life and Mission Agency, who share the funding of regional staff with synod and synodicals, hired a consultant to provide an objective opinion on the effectiveness of regional staffing. The consultation concluded that the model is working well and is highly valued by the church. In 2009, the Women's Missionary Society support for regional staffing will be reduced from \$390,000 to \$200,000. The national offices Management Team and the Assembly Council Finance Committee have been asked to give serious consideration to finding ways to make up the \$190,000 shortfall.

### **Associate Secretary for Communication and Resource Production**

The search for an Associate Secretary for Communication and Resource Production continues.

### **Committee of Former Moderators**

The 2007 General Assembly received an overture that requested the establishment of a committee of former Moderators of the General Assembly that would reflect theologically on the spirit and work of the Assembly and to report directly to the General Assembly each year. For various reasons, such as the fact that there is no provision for an unelected group to have direct reporting access to the Assembly, the Clerks will recommend that the prayer of the overture be not granted. The Assembly Council concurred with this position.

### **Biennial Assemblies**

The 2007 General Assembly approved a recommendation that presbyteries be asked to ponder the implications of moving to biennial General Assemblies. Responses weighing the obstacles and opportunities were received from 19 presbyteries and one session. The Assembly Council wants to build on these responses by providing a summary of them along with council comments to the General

Assembly. There is also a plan to invite further comments from interested parties while exploring the experience of other denominations, studying financial implications and drawing up possible General Assembly scenarios. A further report will be presented to the 2009 General Assembly.

### **Greener Churches**

An overture destined for the 2008 General Assembly seeks advice on how to conduct energy audits and take energy conservation measures within our church buildings. The Assembly Council notes that these resources already exist and points to the "Energy Workbook for Religious Buildings" as produced by KAIROS as one example. (Visit [www.kairoscanada.org](http://www.kairoscanada.org) and click on the "Ecology" button.) Short-term loans to assist with renovation costs may be obtained through The Presbyterian Church in Canada Lending Fund. This will be reported to the General Assembly.

### **Pension Fund**

The Presbyterian Church in Canada Pension Fund has suffered somewhat due to the general slump in the market. The Trustee Board, however, is keeping a close eye on developments and will meet soon with fund managers. The board is not concerned at this point since the Pension Fund is a conservative and long-term investment.

### **Travel Allowance**

The Assembly Council has increased the recommended per kilometer travel allowance for committees and staff of The Presbyterian Church in Canada from \$0.35 to \$0.40 per kilometer, effective July 1, 2008. By comparison, it was noted that municipal and government rates are now ranging from \$0.42 to \$0.52 per kilometer. One of the implications of this recommendation is that churches would be expected to pay the new amount for Sunday pulpit supply travel. The Assembly council commends this rate to other courts of the church and congregations.

### **Nation Office Computer Infrastructure**

The outdated computers and computer infrastructure at the national offices will be updated this fall. The cost of the upgrade will be borne by bequest income, as approved in 2007.

### **Website Updates**

The new Presbyterian website is not meeting the needs and expectations of the church. Staff is listening to suggestions and diligently working on improvements.

### **Next Meeting**

The Assembly Council will meet next from November 23-25, 2008, and from March 22-24, 2009.