

DIGEST  
66<sup>TH</sup> Stated Meeting of The Presbytery of New Hope Presbytery  
October 15, 2005  
First Presbyterian Church, New Bern, NC

**Attendance**

Ministers	80
Corresponding Members	6
Elders	83
CLP/Lay Pastors	4
Lay Members of Council	5
Candidate/Inquirer	7
Visitors	56
Staff	<u>4</u>
Total	245

**Call to Order**

Reverend Mary Harris Todd, Moderator, called the meeting to order at 9:30 AM.

**Docket**

The Docket was approved as presented with the inclusion of the materials in the supplemental docket.

**Welcome by Hosts**

Reverend William Hawkins welcomed the Presbytery on behalf of the Session of First Presbyterian Church, New Bern.

**Introduction of First Time Commissioners**

First Time elder commissioners were introduced and welcomed. An orientation was available for all elders prior to the meeting.

**Appointment of Standing Committees**

The following were elected to serve on the committees as listed:

Resolutions: Jane Love, Moderator; Orville Wintermute and Sylvia Hendrick

Attendance: Jonathan Wallace, Moderator; Juli Gicker-Anderson; Steve Wicks and Herbert Sugg

**Candidate Sermon**

Candidate Stephanie Arnold gave her sermon to the Presbytery. This portion of her examination by COM was sustained.

**Seating of Corresponding Members**

Reverend Paul Lang, Recording Clerk, recommended the following corresponding members be seated: William DePrater (Abington Presbytery); Rufus McLean (Charlotte Presbytery); Richard Weikel (United Church of Christ); Paul Rhodes (Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy); James L. Workman (International Pentecostal Church)

**Report of the Stated Clerk**

Elder Barbara Campbell Davis

The Presbytery received the following:

1. Minutes of the Commission to Install Dennis Sebesan as Pastor of Little River Presbyterian Church on September 18, 2005
2. Minutes of the Commission to Install Janise Smith as Associate Pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church, Durham, on September 25, 2005.
3. Remarks to the NC House of Representatives in honor of Reverend Jim Lambeth. (Jim died on October 29, 2003)
4. Congratulations to Elizabeth K. Aldrich, who retired from her position as Secretary at Westminster Presbyterian Church, Raleigh, effective July 12, 2005.
5. Candidate Amanda Covington was dismissed to Salem Presbytery to be ordained and installed as Associate Pastor of Graham Presbyterian Church.
6. Candidate Barry Chance was dismissed to Pines Presbytery to be ordained and installed as Pastor of St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, Shreveport, LA.

7. Sessional Records for the following churches were approved without exception for 2004:  
Bethlehem, Mebane Efland  
Eno, Cedar Grove Fairfield, Hillsborough  
Hillsborough Roxboro
8. Report of the Hispanic Ministries of Durham/Chapel Hill.

**PRAYER CONCERNS:**

1. Sefton Strickland (Pastor, Spring Hill Lucama) who is recovering from surgery.
2. Jimmie Hawkins (Pastor, Covenant, Durham) who son, James, is seriously ill.
3. Bob Borland (HR, and wife, Marjorie, whose son, Bob Borland, Jr., is suffering from cancer.
4. Walt Mueller (HR) who is recovering from a stroke.
5. Harriet Isbell (HR) who is recovering from recent surgery.
6. Joseph Brown (Elder Cotton Memorial) whose wife is recovering from surgery.
7. Barbara Murphy (Elder New Hope, Chapel Hill) who is recovering from surgery.
8. Pete Brown (Pastor, Rocky Mount 1<sup>st</sup>) whose wife, Donna, is recovering from surgery.
9. Brett Webb-Mithcell (MAL/Interim) whose father is recovering from recent surgery.
10. Helen Butler (Elder, Treasurer Rivermont) who has cancer in both lungs.
11. Carol McCartney (Mt. Pleasant, Willow Spring) whose daughter is suffering with a brain tumor.
12. To all those that have suffered losses during the recent hurricanes.

**CONGRATULATIONS:**

1. Ministers and Elders who are being recognized for their ordination anniversaries.
2. Conway Lanford (Pastor Westminster, Raleigh) and wife, Weilie, on the birth of their twin grandsons on February 27, 2005.

**CONDOLENCES TO:**

1. Johnny Dockery (CLP Neuse Forest) whose wife, Isabella, died on September 6, 2005.
2. Clyde Wiley (MAL) whose mother, Betty J. w\Wiley, died on August 10, 2005.
3. The Family of Filbert "Bert" Moore (MAL) who died on August 15, 2005.
4. Janice Smith (Elder, Rocky Mount First) whose husband, Linwood, died on July 20, 2005.
5. John Newell (Elder, Oxford) on the death of his wife, Patsy, on July 21, 2005.
6. The family of Linwood Dupree (Elder, Mt Pleasant, Willow Springs) who died on July 26, 2005.
7. The family of Charles Anderson (Elder, West Haven) who died on August 5, 2005.
8. Steve Wicks (Pastor, Mt. Olive) whose mother, Hazel Moon Wicks) died on August 4, 2005.
9. Charles Evans (Pastor Geneva, Hebron, Oak Hill) whose father, Ernest W. Evans, died on August 2, 2005.
10. Martha Stith (Elder, Mt. Pisgah) whose grandson, LaMarcus Purnel, died in an auto accident recently.
11. Bruce Bell (Elder, Warrenton) whose wife, Ann, died September 19, 2005.
12. Julie Gicker-Anderson (Mal) and husband, Charlie, on the death of his brother on September 20, 2005.
13. Mindy Douglas Adams (Aop, University) and husband, Scott, on the death of his brother recently.
14. The family of Reverend Joseph Sayblack (Pastor Bear Grass/Roberson Chapel) who died on September 28, 2005.
15. Eric Tellefsen (Lay Pastor) whose mother died on August 3, 2005.
16. Margaret Malloy (Elder, White Rock) whose brother, Levi Gee, died Sunday October 9, 2005
17. The family of Mary Brown (Elder, Timothy Darling) who died recently.

**Report of Nominating Committee**

Reverend Bettie Kirkpatrick, Moderator

The Presbytery approved the following persons to serve as noted: **(Elected to serve in bold)**

Mid-Atlantic Synod Committee:

Permanent Jubilee Fund: **Willie Williams**

Vice-Moderator of New Hope Presbytery: **Joe Harvard**

Presbytery of New Hope Committees:

Council:

Class of 2006: Richard Brand; Brenda Brown; Juliann Gicker-Anderson; Jimmie Hawkins; Sybil Steele Henderson; Conway Lanford; David McDonald; Jerry Slaymaker; Mary Harris Todd; Connia Watson

Class of 2007: Ingram Hedgpath; Freeda Lawrence; Viola Lee; Lynn Stall; Portia Turner Williamson

Class of 2008: **Leigh Gillis; Richard Harrell; Gerald Johnson; Bonnie Pettijohn; Wicky Thorpe**

Finance & Property:

Class of 2006: Sybil Steele Henderson; John Mitchell

Class of 2007: Lawrence Gulley; Terry Hobgood

Class of 2008: **Jody Welker, Anne Etheredge**

Communications Committee:

Class of 2006: Bob Milks; Margot Hausmann;

Class of 2007: Eleanor Howell; **Fred Westbrook**

Class of 2008: **Jeffrey Gillette; Rosemary Fitts**

Organizational Development and Evaluation:

Class of 2006: Ellen Hall; Jerry Slaymaker

Class of 2007: Amy Douglas; David Garrison

Class of 2008: **Linda Leake; Meri-Li Douglas**

New Hope Foundation:

Class of 2006: Houston Black; Dorothy Brock; Ashmead Pipkin; **Ed Stock**

Class of 2007: David Bean; Samuel Douglas; Augustus Thompson; **Rocky Stone**

Class of 2008: **Bruce Bell; Mitchell Perry; Wicky Thorpe**

Permanent Judicial Committee

Class of 2008: William Hawkins; David Verner; **Natarlin Best**

Class of 2010: Claude Andrews; Haywood Holderness, **Nelson Crisp**

Class of 2012: Cader Howard; **Denise Thorpe; Georgia Stussie**

Committee on Representation:

Class of 2006: Jane Hare; Edith Lee

Class of 2007: Donna Frederick;

Class of 2008: **Peggie Kearney; Thomas Wilson**

Division for Leadership Development:

Class of 2006: Richard Brand; Debbie Osterhoudt; Lynn Stall

Class of 2007: Drew Clark; James Ferry; Ronald McMenamin

Class of 2008: **Susan Dunlap; Curtis Harper; Marilyn Hedgpeth**

Committee on Ministry:

Class of 2006: Robert Brizendine; John Hawes; Michael Nevling; Ike Robinson; Martha Stith; Allyn Testroet;

**David Keck; Connie Button**

Class of 2007: Sheila Barrick; Joseph Brown; Steven Rowe; Lynn Stall; Martha Strayhorn; David Voss; Jonathan Wallace; Tracy Walston-Bailey

Class of 2008: **Mindy Douglas Adams; John Brothers; Anne Montgomery; Lee Walton; Janel Dixon; William Neely; Billy Leggett; Amethia Anderson**

Examinations Committee:

Class of 2006: Deborah Osterhoudt; Earle Purser; Byron Wade; Brett Webb-Mitchell

Class of 2007: Dottie Dubose-Blum; Robert Dunham; David Huffman; Betty Jordan

Class of 2008: **Mary Holderness; Todd Hester; Sam McKnight**

Commissioned Lay Pastor Committee:

Class of 2006: Ed Conner; David Garrison; **David Keck**

Class of 2007: Richard Harrell; Peggy Rodgers Leggett; **Ann Stephenson**

Class of 2008: **Ronn McCracken**

Sessional Records:

Class of 2006: Nikki Goss; Alice McArthur; Janice Smith

Class of 2007: Pauline Savage-Stancil; Kathy Barnes; **Ida Adams**

Class of 2008: **Linda Barnes; Dennis Robinson; Linda Evans**

Preparation for Ministry:

Class of 2006: Peggy Griffin; Gloria Johnson; Susan Mazzara; Richard Rice; Steve Wicks; Jack Simonds

Class of 2007: Drew Clark; A. M. McGeachy; Sallie Verner; Tom Watkins; Mary Shelby; **Omotolokun Omokunde**

Class of 2008: **James Martin; Richard McKellar; Iris Olinger; Christopher Edmonston; Betty Berghaus;**

**Nancy Jones**

Division for Congregational Ministries:

Class of 2006: Juli Gicker-Anderson; William Griffin; **Ann Cobb**

Class of 2007: Brenda Brown; Teresa Amentt Jennings; Cameron Womack

Class of 2008: **Faye Mumford**

Christian Education:

Class of 2006: Sung Hee Chang; Brenda Crocker; Jane Love; Phyllis Pollard; Katie Ricks

Class of 2007: Brenda Brown; Wendy Duncan; Nancy Rozak; David White; **Shane Bass**

Class of 2008: **Debbie Kirk; Jane Wilson; Faye Price; James Lawton**

Stewardship Education:

Class of 2006: Virginia Anthony; William Griffin; Ronald Scheeler

Class of 2007: Michael Dickey; Robert Johnson,

Class of 2008:

Older Adult:

Class of 2006: Betty Little; **Betty Bailey**

Class of 2007: Doris Murrell; Dawn Omokunde

Class of 2008: **Carole McCartney; JoAnne McMenamin**

Camp Albemarle Committee:

Class of 2006: Lisa Chappell; Russell Proctor

Class of 2007: **Linda Barnes; Andrew Martinez**

Class of 2008: **Al Norwood; Nathan Dry; Charles White; Richard McDuffie; Priscilla Johnson**

Multicultural Committee:

Class of 2006: Donald Davis; Peter Park; Paul Ransford

Class of 2007: Jimmie Hawkins; J.J. Ruiz

Class of 2008:

Youth Committee:

Class of 2006: Jenny Daughety; Jennifer Gospodarek; Kathy Howard; Kim Soon Hoon; Tracy Turner

Class of 2007: Teresa Amentt Jennings; Carolyn Snipes; Ann Vinsky; **Ouida Myers**

Class of 2008:

Division for Outreach Ministries

Class of 2006: John Etheredge; Harriet Jennings; Margaret Malloy

Class of 2007: Elizabeth Day; Peter Hausmann; Richard Hildebrandt; **Herbert Dail**

Class of 2008: **Bonnie Pettijohn, Sefton Strickland; Tom Westfall**

Church Development & Evangelism:

Class of 2006: Joan Cassilly; Paul Lang; Billy Leggett

Class of 2007: Raymond Cobb; Frank Day; John Hartman; Wanda Neely

Class of 2008: **Chad Neal; Steve Aschmann**

Ministries of Missions:

Class of 2006: Charles Evans; Allen Proctor; David Smith; Judy Van Male; Willie Williams; Candace Worth

Class of 2007: Lee Anna Fisler; Claudaline Greene; Richard Hildebrandt; Robert Jacobs; Ryan Rasmussen; Sue Hinman

Class of 2008: **Sue Fricks; Kerri Hefner; Linda Parker**

Campus Ministry:

Class of 2006: Danny Bell; Lori Pistor; Kim Riffle; Eleanor Winfrew

Class of 2007: Peter Hasumann; Byron Wade; Betty Connette; Karla Miller

Class of 2008: **Jim Leistman; Paul White; Janise Smith**

Self-Development of People:

Class of 2006: John Etheredge; James Hodge; Tilda Howard; Carolyn Whitener, **John Fricks**

Class of 2007: Raymond Privott; Desire Volkwiijn

Class of 2008: **Joe Ward; Leorita Hankerson; Chris Moody**

### **Report of Task Force on Emerging Issues**

Reverend Jim McKinnon, Moderator

Reverend Joe Harvard reported on the work of the task force and encouraged all to attend the discussion groups that will be held throughout the presbytery in churches throughout November. The members of the Task Force will contact each church to invite them to the discussion group in their area. Training for group leaders will take place in two locations prior to the discussion group gatherings.

### **Report of Bills and Overtures**

Reverend Greg Gregory

The Bills and Overtures Committee presented three overtures to the presbytery. There were 169 voting commissioners registered for this meeting.

Results of each are as follows:

1. Overture to General Assembly regarding the Democratic Republic of the Congo: **142 Yes; 1 No**
2. Overture to the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic: **150 Yes ; 2 No; 1 Abstain**
3. Overture to General Assembly on striking G-6.0106B from the Book of Order – recommendation to postpone debate and vote on this overture until February 2007: **83 Yes; 79 No**

### **Worship**

Worship was led by the following: Reverend William Hawkins (First Presbyterian), Reverend Jeff Sockwell (West New Bern), Johnny Dockery (CLP Neuse Forest), Juli Gicker-Anderson (Interim, Bethlehem, Rocky Mount), Steve Mabie (Lay Pastor), Ken Gruebel (CLP), Robert Johnson (Ebenezer), Lloyd Griffith (Parish Associate, First Presbyterian), with Choirs from Ebenezer, First Presbyterian and Sanctuary Bells from First Presbyterian. Vance Harper Jones, Organist and Pat Rowlett, Director of Music of First Presbyterian.

The offering will be given to the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance for Hurricane Relief. Necrology of Ministers and Elders were read. (Please see attached copy of the sermon by William Hawkins "Disestablished: The Challenge of Congregational Life Today")

### **Report of Council**

Reverend Leigh Gillis, Moderator

The Council approved the following:

1. The Council gave permission to the session of Fairview Presbyterian Church, Selma to sell the manse.
2. The Council gave permission to the session of Roanoke Island Presbyterian Church, Manteo, to secure a loan of up to \$200,000 to purchase a house for use as their manse.
3. The Council gave permission to the session of Peace Presbyterian Church, Winterville, to sell their property for \$2,300,000.
4. The Council gave permission to the session of Covenant Presbyterian Church, Durham, to lease a portion of their property for use as a communication tower.
5. Pat Donofrio was recognized for Certification Level II by the Administrative Personal Association of PCUSA.
6. A Task Force was established for Disaster Assistance preparedness.
7. The Proposed Challenge Budget for 2006 was set at \$1,962,745.
8. Current Peacemaking funds of \$19,000 will be invested in certificates of deposit at the Self Help Credit Union.

### **Address to the Presbytery**

Barbara Campbell Davis, Stated Clerk

Barbara Campbell Davis, Executive Presbyter/Stated Clerk gave the annual state of the presbytery address. The address could not be given in February due to laryngitis.

### **Report of the Committee on Ministry**

Lynn Stall, Moderator

Reported by Tom Murphy

The Presbytery approved the following:

#### Interim Supply:

1. Lisa Nance and Providence Presbyterian Church effective October 1, 2005 through March 31, 2006 on part-time basis. Terms are: Salary \$18,484; Social Security \$1,458; Pension/Medical \$7,906; Accountable Reimbursement \$5,575. Total \$33,423.
2. Thomas Wilson and Falkland Presbyterian Church through September 30, 2005.
3. William DePrater and New Hope Presbyterian Church, Chapel Hill effective November 1, 2005 through October 31, 2006. Terms are: Salary \$38,268; Housing \$11,630; Social Security \$3,856; Pension/Medical \$15,623; Additional Life Insurance \$500; Accountable Reimbursement \$3,000. Total \$72,890. Four weeks vacation and two weeks continuing education.
4. Lisa Nance and Providence Presbyterian Church, Angier, effective October 1, 2005 through March 31, 2006 on a part-time basis. Corrected terms of call: Salary \$4,484; Housing \$14,000; Social Security \$1,458; Pension/Medical \$7,906; Accountable Reimbursement \$5,575. Total \$33,413. One week Continuing Education and one week vacation.

#### Temporary Supply:

1. Alan Koenke (Candidate) to serve as a "student in Ministry" at Oxford Presbyterian Church effective October 1, 2005 through July 31, 2006. Terms are: Monthly: Salary \$2,200; Social Security \$160; Pension/Medical \$550; Accountable Reimbursement \$250. Monthly total \$3,160. Two weeks vacation.
2. Heidi Cleveland to serve as Temporary Supply Christian Educator at North Raleigh Presbyterian Church effective August 29, 2005. Terms are: Salary \$10,200; Housing \$9,800; Social Security \$1,530. Total \$21,530.

#### Parish Associate:

1. Lloyd Griffith and First Presbyterian Church, New Bern effective September 1, 2005.

### Dissolution

1. Spottswood Graves and Hollywood Presbyterian Church, Greenville, effective August 25, 2005.
2. Brenda Halbrooks and White Memorial Presbyterian Church, Raleigh, effective August 31, 2005.
3. John Causey and First Presbyterian Church, Smithfield, effective August 31, 2005.
4. Daniel Soo M. Woo, DuRaleigh Presbyterian Church, Raleigh, effective September 30, 2005.
5. Chris Moody, St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, Henderson, effective August 28, 2005.
6. Larry Green, Associate Pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Garner, effective August 31, 2005.
7. Cecil Bryant and supply agreement with Fairview Presbyterian Church, Selma, effective August 28, 2005.
8. Jackie Lindberg and Oxford Presbyterian Church effective December 1, 2005.

### Dismissals

1. John Causey to the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina to accept a call to Shallotte Presbyterian Church effective August 31, 2005.
2. Michael Hill to Salem Presbytery to serve as Interim Pastor at Taylorsville Presbyterian Church effective March 5, 2005.
3. Brenda Halbrooks to the Presbytery of the James to serve as interim pastor of Chester Presbyterian Church effective August 31, 2005.

### Moderators:

1. Rick Brand and Oxford Presbyterian Church effective December 1, 2005.
2. Ryan Rasmussen and Pinewood Presbyterian Church effective November 1, 2005.
3. Chris Moody and St. John's Presbyterian Church, Durham effective October 1, 2005 through December 31, 2005.

### Approved the Following:

1. Richard Weikel (UCC) to Labor within the Bounds of New Hope Presbytery to serve as a supply pastor.
2. James Workman (candidate of West Jersey Presbytery) to be added to the supply list of New Hope Presbytery.
3. Cathy Church Norman to serve as Associate Pastor (Part-Time) at the Kirk of Kildaire Presbyterian effective October 10, 2005. Terms are: Salary \$30,888; Social Security \$2,363; Pension/Medical \$11,315; Accountable Reimbursement \$2,000. Total \$46,566. Four weeks vacation and two weeks continuing education.
4. Change to the terms of call for Rev. David McDonald, First Presbyterian Church, Roanoke Rapids.
5. Daniel Woo was granted a status of Specialized Minister member of New Hope Presbytery for the purpose of establishing a partnership with the Presbytery of Gwang Ju (Northern Korea) in mission and affirm that Daniel Woo have the standing of dual membership and be released to serve in the Presbytery of Gwang Ju.
6. Vacancy dues to be waived for the following churches and positions:
  - First Presbyterian Church, Garner/Associate Pastor
  - Oxford Presbyterian Church/Pastor
  - Bear Grass and Roberson Chapel/Pastor
7. Jackie Lindberg will be honorably retired effective December 1, 2005.

### Approved the following calls:

1. Stephanie Arnold to serve as Associate Pastor for the Kirk of Kildaire Presbyterian, Cary. The effective date of the call is October 30, 2005. Terms are: Salary \$30,000; Housing Allowance \$14,364; Social Security \$3,508; Accountable Reimbursement \$4,200; Pension/Medical \$14,218. Total \$67,790. Four weeks vacation and two weeks continuing education.
2. Rufus McLean to serve as Pastor of Hollywood Presbyterian Church, Greenville. The effective date of the call is October 1, 2005. Terms: Salary \$26,140; Housing allowance \$13,000; Social Security \$3045.85; Accountable Reimbursement \$3,000; Pension/Medical \$12,342.65; Medical Supplement \$675. Total \$58,203.50. Four weeks vacation and two weeks continuing education.
3. William DePrater was received as a Minister Member of the Presbytery of New Hope.

### IV. COMMISSION TO ORDAIN/INSTALL:

1. To Ordain and Install Stephanie Arnold as Associate Pastor of Kirk of Kildaire Presbyterian, Cary on November 20, 2005 at 11 AM. Members of the Commission are Ministers: Jody Welker, Ron McMenamin, Katherine Kussmaul, Marla Cates. Elders: Amy Woynicz, Patty Snow.
2. To Install Rufus McLean as Pastor of Hollywood Presbyterian Church, Greenville, on November 6, 2005 at 3:30 PM. Members of the Commission are: Ministers: Bill Neely, Jonathan Wallace and Mary Harris Todd. Elders: Charles Ross, Ephraim Smith, Lee Walton, Barbara Campbell Davis.
3. To Install Cathy Church Norman as Associate Pastor for congregational Life at The Kirk of Kildaire Presbyterian, Cary, on November 6, 2005 at 11:00 AM. Members of the Commission are: Ministers: Cherrie Henry, Peter Hausmann, Jody Welker. Elders: Hal Jordan, Barbara Campbell Davis. Guest Bart Norman will sit with the commission.

### **In Memory**

The Presbytery remembered recently deceased ministers; Reverend Filbert Moore and Reverend Joseph Sayblack with written memorials and prayer.

### **Report of Examinations Committee**

Debbie Osterhoudt, Moderator

Reported by Tom Murphy

The examinations of Stephanie Arnold, Rufus McLean and William DePrater were sustained.

### **Report of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry**

Drew Clark, Moderator

Reported by Steve Wicks, Vice-Moderator

The following were received as inquirers:

Sarah Wiles (Wake Forest)

Christopher Henry (Warrenton)

Received as Candidates with reception:

Sung Kim (DuRaleigh) Sung Kim was introduced by Jae Kim.

Carolyn Poteet (Blacknall Memorial) Carolyn Poteet was introduced by Allan Poole.

Charles Jones (Westminster, Durham) Charles Jones was introduced by William "Pete" Brown.

Examination of the applicants was completed by Mary Harris Todd who also declared them candidates. Paul Ransford charged the candidates and the blessing was offered by Mary Harris Todd.

Steve Wicks informed the Presbytery of the need for "The Cultivation of Call" with facts and information.

### **Report of Outreach Division**

Bonnie Pettijohn, Moderator

The Outreach Division Ministries booklet was distributed to each church. John Etheredge gave a report on the Self-Development of People Committee. They are all certified and ready to serve when needed. Connie Button gave an update on the Disaster Assistance hurricane relief from New Hope Presbytery and what can be done to continue the relief efforts.

### **Report of Leadership Division**

Rick Brand, Moderator

Rick reported on the recent attendance of the Pastors/Educators Retreat and announced the upcoming New Minister/Educator Orientation to take place on November 8 at the Presbytery Office.

### **Announcement**

Chuck Noonan invited the presbytery to attend the Energizing the Church Conference to be held on November 11-12, 2005 at Hudson Memorial Presbyterian Church, Raleigh.

### **Report of Standing Committees**

The reports of the standing committees were received and approved.

### **Adjourn**

The 66<sup>th</sup> Stated Meeting was adjourned with prayer by Moderator Mary Harris Todd at 3:45 PM.

**Next Meeting  
February 18, 2006**

**Trinity Avenue  
Presbyterian Church  
Durham**

*Disestablished: The Challenge of Congregational Life Today*

Though our U.S. Constitution was produced by a congress consisting mostly of Christians, the first clause of the First Amendment prohibits the establishment of an official religion. The apparent irony goes deeper when we acknowledge the contributions of Christians in the formation of our government, beginning with the revolutionary war itself. This was something particularly true of Presbyterians. Historian Lefferts Loetscher said that the fires of the American Revolution were fanned from Presbyterian pulpits sufficient for the British to describe it as “the Presbyterian Rebellion.” When King George III asked what the trouble was in the American colonies a member of Parliament replied our “colonial cousins had run off with a Presbyterian parson.” **1**

The organizing pastor of First Presbyterian Church New Bern, John Knox Witherspoon, was the grandson and namesake of the only clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence. (I’m required to say that!)

Whatever you may think of the disestablishment clause, the biblical wisdom and Reformed theological stamp that shaped our Constitution is unmistakable. Educated at Presbyterian Princeton where he was a student of John Witherspoon, was its principal author James Madison. Remembered as “The Father of the United States Constitution,” Madison helped produce what Lutheran historian Martin Marty has called “a thoroughly Calvinist document.” Marty claims that the Constitution supplies the checks and balances any Presbyterian would love, for the unspoken implication found throughout, “is the conviction that while humans have a great capability, self-interest would always turn them against the common good if left to themselves.” **2**

Madison believed that human beings, religious or not, should not be trusted on their own. It was held that this healthy suspicion would actually serve the greater good of those very persons and in turn, the lives of those people they would be entrusted to govern. Madison learned from Witherspoon what the Bible had taught concerning human nature nearly two millennia before Lord Acton was inspired to make his famous quip “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts, absolutely.”

He and his co-authors had observed how this power placed in the service of religious intolerance, had lit the flames of incessant wars throughout Europe in the preceding centuries. **3** They knew how when conflicts arise, human nature takes over as each side deputizes God as their heavenly mascot, wearing their religious halo in the transparent attempt to cover the will to power. As American Christians we have cause to be grateful for the way biblical wisdom was distilled in our Constitution, particularly that first clause of the First Amendment.

While early on the “disestablishment clause” prevented our nation from ever choosing one Christian brand or denomination over another, it could not prevent our national conscience to assume Christianity to be, however unofficially, *the* “established” religion. So, it was essentially for nearly two hundred years, our Jewish friends looked upon as a tolerated though benighted minority. Challenges to this assumption were to come from brand new religions, spawned upon American soil: the Mormons in the 19<sup>th</sup> and Jehovah’s Witnesses in the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. **4** However unanticipated, these challenges were bound to multiply and accelerate with the passage of the Naturalization and Immigration Act of 1965. **5**

With national quotas lifted, immigrants of the so-named “Fifth Wave” came to our shores in numbers as never before; not only from Europe and Mexico, but in the hundreds of thousands from Asia and the Orient. Introduced into our tax-paying citizenry have come Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, Hindus, and followers of other religions. Where have they settled? San Francisco, Chicago, Atlanta, New York, and Chapel Hill no doubt – these are some of the places you might expect. But when the December 2002 issue of *Our State Magazine* featured an article on a Buddhist Temple outside the Brunswick County town of Bolivia, North Carolina, well, it got my attention. **6**

Though Christians in the United States will continue to significantly outnumber adherents of other religions for the foreseeable future, the landscape of religious life in America will never be the same. No longer is the net effect of the disestablishment clause that which prevents one brand of Christianity lording over the others. It now



takes the form of not showing preference for the very religion of Christianity over any other. The ground under our feet has shifted, caused not so much by the popular target of atheism and secularism, as by a more expansive religious pluralism. It has changed much that we as American Christians have for too long taken for granted, beginning with our privileged status. Some ten years after the passage of the First Amendment, when in 1802, Thomas Jefferson coined the slang phrase “Separation of Church and State,” he surely misspoke. Were he alive today, he would have stayed closer to the Constitutional wording of, “separation of Religion and State.”

The First Amendment squabbles being debated in the courts today, come as a consequence of our nation’s evolving religious pluralism. These divisions, I know, go on not merely among us but inside each of us. When it comes to “intelligent design” my heart is with the Bible enthusiasts, but my head is with the Constitution and the methods of scientific inquiry. Like any of you, I am troubled by the impersonal materialistic assumptions easily presupposed when discussing evolutionary biological processes like mutation and natural selection. Yet, “intelligent design” is not particularly biblical, and only raises the larger question: “Whose intelligent design.... The deistic god of Newtonian physics? Marduk and Tiamat of the *Enuma Elish*? Uranus and Gaia of the Greek Poet, Hesiod? Or is it the design resulting from the work of the Hindu Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.... to name only a few intelligent designers?

When it comes to prayer in public schools, my heart and head are likewise split. We know prayer as a means of grace opening us to the movement of God’s Spirit, reviving God’s image within us, and equipping us to ever more grow in the likeness of Christ. There is nothing like the intimacy God makes real to you and me in prayer. But when classmates and teachers can be of another religion or none whatsoever as protected by the Constitution, any compromise praying to a generic Higher Power, only disgraces the relationship of sincere devotees of different faiths, and violates the constitutional rights of those of no faith.

My heart and head are similarly divided when it comes to posting the commandments in government buildings or displaying them in monuments on public grounds, when done to the exclusion of any other commemorative or historical markers. The role of the Ten Commandments in western jurisprudence is unquestioned, and any revisionist history that suggests otherwise needs to be challenged. But when religious groups surprise us with claims that the commandments are not religious per se, then tie their witness to several thousand monuments erected half a century ago as a publicity scheme of Paramount Studios to hawk Cecille B. Demille’s 1956 Hollywood production, I’m left to wonder what faith is being witnessed. **7**

My friends, I submit to you, these First Amendment battles are the wrong places in government and society to witness our faithfulness to Christ. The efforts of our denomination and those ecumenical alliances to which we belong on state, national, and global levels, have and continue to offer faithful attempts to witness to the gospel in the public sector, controversial and troublesome as they may be at times. But these realities are not my concerns today, nor do I imagine for any of us as pastors or elders of congregations.

It was 1960, five years before the landmark Naturalization and Immigration Act, cited by historians as the year marking the end of Western Christendom. The symbolic date was timed with the elimination of the blue laws in the United States. It was the last legally protected protestant convention to fall, born of the efforts of the moral reformers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to combat the three social sins: no drinking, no gambling, and lastly, no “Christian Sabbath” (or Lord’s Day) breaking.

Pressures for this change came not from atheists or adherents of other religions, but from the commercial and business interests of Christians just like you and me. Buoyed up by emerging wealth and increased recreational opportunities, other places to go and other things to do became more attractive than participation in the life of a local congregation. Worship on the Lord’s Day became an interruption. No longer the pretense of church commitment necessary for social respectability, many of us became nostalgic for more of that pretense.

For those of us ordained as elders or pastors 25 years or so ago, it was old news when in the late 1980's Robert Lynn reported to the Lilly Foundation on the increasing challenges and pressures on congregational life. There once was an "ecology," he called it, of such things as public (essentially "Protestant") education, the Sunday Schools, youth programs, conference centers, publications, mission societies, that formerly aided the congregation in Christian acculturation of her members. Many are gone and those few that still exist, he said, are but a shadow of what they once were. **8**

All this is to say, what every elder and pastor knows or needs to: That working at congregational life may never have been more demanding than it is today, and perhaps never more important. I don't know when simply showing up has mattered so much. We who have been nurtured in the church that we've by now also loved and served for years, have always known that the congregation is where "the action is." Now it is the only place, and perhaps this is best. As nothing can be taken for granted, we realize nothing ever should have been. Faith formation and spiritual development to form the peculiar people we are called to be, is again our proper task. **9**

No one can do it as well our congregations, yours and mine, trusting the Spirit of God to lead us along the way. It is in and through congregational life where we affirm the Supremacy of Christ's Lordship, by embodying his humble servanthood in our witness to and sometimes sharing with, those of other faiths and no faith. It is in congregational life that we explore the depth of the affirmation, "I believe in God the Father, Almighty, maker of heaven and earth," who is at one with the Divine Logos and the Spirit that both broods over and gives life to all. Our faith provides that wider and broader perspective to the instrumentality of science, both its theories and findings. It is in congregational life where we experience personal and corporate prayer opening us to the love of God and neighbor unknown and unavailable in any other way. It is in congregational life where the keeping of the commandments is found at the center of a constellation of practices and disciplines that shape Christian conscience and form us as the aliens and exiles the New Testament says we are, prodding us to "honor everyone and love the family of believers."

The intrinsic worth of congregational life, like a sleeping giant, rises up now and again, to wow a nation. While traditional disaster-response organizations have been faulted for acting slowly following the Gulf Coast hurricanes, the churches and her agencies knew immediately what to do and how to do it right the first time with congregations of every stripe: welcoming, housing, clothing and feeding thousands of victims. **10**

No technology, no pleasures no activities or opportunities that are now or will ever come available, can replace or supersede the priceless experience of a Christian congregation, worshipping, living, studying, praying and serving together. There is no greater good that can be accomplished, no better work that we as pastors and elders can be about, than our labor of love to build-up the church "Christ gave himself up for," and "against which the gates of hell shall not prevail" (Ephesians 5:25b; Matt 16:18b).

There is never a better time for you and me to be Christian than right now, otherwise the Lord would not have put us here! "You did not choose me, but I chose you," said the Lord Jesus. Friends, let us claim our chosenness by building up the community of faith, seeking to do so in the love and humility, courage and fortitude of Christ himself.

William L. Hawkins, Pastor  
First Presbyterian Church, New Bern, NC.  
66<sup>th</sup> Meeting of New Hope Ppty  
October 15, 2005

## ENDNOTES

1. Lefferts Loetscher, A Brief History of the Presbyterians, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978, pp. 73-76.

2. Dean K. Thompson, "Celebrating Our Presbyterian Heritage: John Witherspoon, James Madison and the U.S. Constitution," *Presbyterian Outlook*, July 4, 1991, *THE PRESBYTERIAN OUTLOOK*.
3. Richard B. Morris, Seven Who Shaped Our Destiny: The Founding Fathers as Revolutionaries, (New York: Harper & Row, 1973). Madison said that this separation (religion and state) formed, "the great barrier against usurpations on the rights of conscience. So long as it is respected and no longer, these will be safe. Every provision for them short of this principle, will be found to leave crevices at least through which bigotry may introduce persecution; a monster, that feeding and thriving on its own venom, gradually swells to a size and strength overwhelming all laws divine and human" (p. 206).
4. John B. Cobb, Jr., ed, Progressive Christians Speak: A Different Voice on Faith and Politics, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, pp. 14-15, 17-18 (esp., pp. 315-317).
5. Diana Eck, A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation, San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001, pp. 6-7.
6. David LaVere, "The Road to Enlightenment: In An Unexpected Corner of North Carolina, Followers of the Buddha Live Gently, Practice Charity, And Make Big Plans for the Future," *Our State Magazine*, "The Faith Issue," December 2002, pp. 68-71.
7. Frank Rich, "The God Racket, From Demille to DeLay," *New York Times*, March 27, 2005. Paramount Studios accomplished this project in collaboration with the "Fraternal Order of Eagles, a nationwide association of civic-minded clubs found by theater owners..."
8. T. Hartley Hall, IV, Back to the Future: The Pastor as Resident Theologian, AS I SEE IT TODAY, A Publication of Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, Spring, 1994.
9. Clifton Kirkpatrick, "Wake-Up Call to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), "Statistically, we are not losing people to other churches. Our problem is that we are losing our people to the secular world – to no active church affiliation. All of us – pastors, elders, and deacons – need to give special attention to nurturing our members..." How else do we account for annual the statistics of the PC(USA) reporting the 2004 category of "other losses" at 108,871?
10. PCUSA.NEWS@HALAK. PCUSA.ORG. "After Katrina, church agencies out-quickened government, secular groups."