

**A PENTECOST CHURCH FOR THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY**  
**PCUSA Multicultural Conference**  
**April 25, 2004**

**Scripture Lessons:            Matthew 28: 16-20**  
**Ephesians 4: 1-7; 11-16**



- I. Greetings and Thanks.
  1. Great to be with the advance party of what church will be in 21<sup>st</sup> century - thanks for your witness.
  2. Great to be in Texas and in an event co-sponsored by Grace Presbytery and the Synod of the Sun.
  3. NICE CATS (multicultural cat show).
- II. Holding Multicultural Conference between Easter and Pentecost is doing God's thing in God's time.
  1. *Chronos* and *Kairos* (quantitative vs. qualitative)
  2. Easter - triumph of life over death in Jesus (Clifton Kirkpatrick humanity).
  3. Just before Ascension - Great Commission (Matt 28: 17-20).  
<sup>18</sup>All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.
  4. Pentecost - few weeks later. Church born in most multicultural setting in human history. As read in Acts people from every nation under heaven were part of the birth of the church at Pentecost (Africa/Asia/Europe/Middle East - every part of known world). When Holy Spirit came upon them, they became one community (didn't end their differences) but set out to turn the world upside down for the gospel. Acts a marvelous story of the birth of the multicultural church.
- III. In 21<sup>st</sup> century America - we are in Jerusalem on Pentecost once again.
  - A. First time since Pentecost living in a society where people from every race, tongue and nation -our next door neighbors. Last census (25% racial-ethnic; 50% by 2050 - no racial ethnic majority).
  - B. Huge (and positive) investment by PCUSA over the years to go into all the world to share the gospel.
  - C. Now the world has come to our doorstep - God=s word to us: What in the world are we waiting for?
  - D. God is calling us to be a Pentecost Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century - and those represented here are the cutting edge of that movement.  
Time ripe for new immigrant fellowships, intentional new multicultural congregations (Church of All Nations leads the way), changing churches for changing populations (Elizabeth - Eminence), welcoming people of color in all of our churches.  
God is calling us to have the same zeal as Book of Acts to be a church of

- all nations - right here in the U.S.A.
- IV. Being in a Pentecost world and being called to be a Pentecost Church what lessons are we called to learn from the New Testament Church if we are to be faithful in that ministry. Suggest five challenges to you and to the PCUSA (preaching to the choir).
  - V. First, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit.
    - A. Just having people in Jerusalem from every race, tongue and nation wasn't enough. Church growth always comes by the power of the Holy Spirit and the witness of spirit filled Christians.
    - B. Read in Acts version of the Great Commission (witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth) that this would only happen when they had received power and the Holy Spirit had come upon them.
    - C. After Ascension, disciples together with certain women found an upper room in Jerusalem where all were constantly devoting themselves to prayer.
    - D. All great evangelistic movements begin on our knees and are inspired by the Holy Spirit.
    - E. Friends, our first and foremost task is to pray - and pray diligently- for an evangelistic renewal in the PCUSA (stop declining - start growing) that we, like the NT Church, might be set on fire with a zeal to share the gospel to the wonderful rainbow world we have right at our doorsteps.
    - F. Syngman Rhee - ROOTS AND FRUITS. It is time for Presbyterians to strengthen their roots so God can harvest the fruit!
  - VI. We must end all forms of racism - subtle and overt - in our church and in our society!
    - A. While we have come a long way, racism still deeply ingrained in our society (jobs, education, housing, anti-immigrant feelings post 9/11 - NH Indonesia example), in America's relations with the rest of the world)
    - B. Also in our churches. MLK's statement that 11 o'clock on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour of the week still true.
    - C. Major struggle of Book of Acts. Could church be truly multicultural? Jew and Gentile. Not just in theory, but with equal respect, equal leadership, and with openness to different cultures finding different ways to express the common gospel we share. With the power of the Holy Spirit, they did it, and so can we.
  - VII. We must become a church that lives out its commitment to unity in diversity!
    - A. First Corinthians - Deja Vu all over again! (Yogi Berra).
    - B. Note parallels.
    - C. Paul's prescription - Body of Christ - unity in Christ, the head, complimenting one another in diversity to build up the body.
    - D. Most beautifully stated in Ephesians 4:
      - Live life worthy of our calling,
      - seek the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace,
      - realize that some are called to be apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists - even Stated Clerks - but all to build up the church,

- speak the truth in love,
  - joined and knit together by Christ to build the body up in love.
  - E. As 21<sup>st</sup> century church must be crystal clear that what holds together and what sends us out in mission is far more important than the things that we let divide and consume us. Are being called to be a living demonstration of what God intends for all humanity (BO-3).
- VIII. We must be a church that is open to change.
- A. Are living in a radically new, post modern, multicultural world in 21<sup>st</sup> century America and our church institutions built for another era are like old wineskins trying to hold new wine.
  - B. Memphis example:  
I grew up in a large Presbyterian Church in Memphis, Tennessee. It was clearly our assumption that if you built a large Presbyterian church, they would come. No more! It was our assumption that if we sang the good ole songs and worshiped decently and in order people would surely find that satisfying. No more. It was our assumption that as a church with a passion for mission, we had to be mainly concerned about our missionaries overseas because we lived in a Christian society. The mission frontier was in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. No more! Now it is at the doorsteps of our church. It was assumed that most Presbyterian churches were middle sized, middle class, and Euro-American institutions. No more!
  - C. Same struggle in Book of Acts. Had their worship wars - Circumcision, Jewish rituals - encountering a gentile world with very different forms for praising God and being disciples. Solution in Acts 15 was not one size fits all but the option of multiple options to fit different cultures but with common core convictions that all held in common.
  - D. My own local church - contemporary and traditional worship with common services and activities.
  - E. What we need to be about is claiming together our core values, our common commitment to the lordship of Christ, and our shared witness in the world - and then with great generosity welcome a variety of ways to express what it means to be the church of Jesus Christ in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Not try to put everybody into a common mold.
  - F. Major challenge of our time - Book of Order that honors core values but radically open to diverse cultures that will make up PCUSA in 21<sup>st</sup> century. Created for middle class, middle size, Eurocentric churches - may have been reality in 1950 - not 2050.
- IX. Most of all, we must be a missionary church.
- A. God's purpose in Jesus Christ was very clear: For God so loved the world, that he sent his only son, so that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)
  - B. That same focus on the world was at the heart of the mission Christ gave to his disciples - Go into all the world and make disciples!, and it was the consuming passion of the early church
  - C. It needs to be our consuming passion as well!

- D. Loren Mead, *Once and Future Church* - move from a Christendom paradigm to a missionary paradigm. Mission frontier at the doorstep of the church.
  - E. Time for our church to set aside its preoccupation with our internal life - both in our local church and our denomination - and be focused with great passion on our outreach to the world.
  - F. Need to place front and center in every one of our churches the Great Ends of the Church.  
The great ends of the church are the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.
- X. This is indeed a *kairos* time!
- A. I believe that God has put Presbyterians in a Pentecost situation in 21<sup>st</sup> century America not by accident and not to keep doing the same things we have always done - but to be a Pentecost Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
  - B. If we are going to be faithful to this call of God, it can only happen if we cultivate the same spiritual gifts that gave life to that Pentecost Church that we read about in the New Testament:
    - the gift of prayer and openness to the fresh winds of the Holy Spirit in our lives,
    - a genuine love and openness to all people regardless of race, ethnicity or language,
    - a commitment to unity in diversity,
    - an openness to church,
    - and a passion for the mission of Christ!
- XI. Want to close with a story from the Cameroon
- A. Gannaway story - church turned inside out to turn the world upside down.
  - B. May God richly bless each of you and the PCUSA as we together seek to be faithful to God's call to be a Pentecost Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century!