



Where are We Now and Where are We Going?

Where are we now and where are we going? Let's look first at changes for the better that are becoming apparent at our national denominational offices. I will cover initial impressions of the challenges and opportunities ahead of us in the Presbytery of San Diego in future months in Clark's Corner.

The office in Louisville is divided into two groups: the **General Assembly Council** (GAC), which oversees all of our mission work, and the **Office of the General Assembly** (OGA), which is the stated clerk's / ecclesiastical side of the church. Since a year ago, when the General Assembly elected me to serve on the Review Committee for the General Assembly Council, I have had the privilege of meeting and talking with more people in Louisville, and getting a better idea of what is going on there.

The new Executive Director for the GAC is **Linda Valentine**. She has only been on the job for a little more than a year now. Under her are three deputy directors. One is **Joey Bailey**, the Chief Financial Officer for the PC(USA). One is **Karen Schmidt**, who comes out of a strong, evangelical congregation, First Presbyterian of Glen Ellyn, IL, where Jerry Andrews is the pastor. She oversees communications and fundraising. The other is **Tom Taylor**. Tom was the senior pastor at Glenkirk Presbyterian Church in Glendora, CA, and prior to that was the senior pastor at Apple Valley. Tom is a strong evangelical and the new director for Mission.

Serving under Tom are five division directors: **Joe Small**, director of Theology and Worship and Christian Education, whose Reformed writings have kept the denomination's official positions historically orthodox. **Sara Lisherness** oversees Peacemaking and Relief work, and **Rhashell Hunter** oversees Racial Ethnic and Women's ministries. Both of these women have delightful spirits and a real love for the church. **Eric Hoey**, the former pastor of a multi-cultural church in Altadena, CA, is a strong evangelical and the new director for Evangelism and Church Growth. **Hunter Farrell**, a Fuller Seminary graduate, has recently returned from mission work in Peru to oversee our Global Mission area.

Since Linda Valentine and Tom Taylor have moved into leadership, there has been a dramatic change among the people who work in Louisville. People have told us that they enjoy coming to work again. There are now open conversations of people sharing their personal faith in Jesus Christ, which wasn't happening before.

People say, “It feels like we work for a church again.” There are now more evangelicals working in our national offices than at any point in my lifetime.

The director of our Washington Office just resigned last month. This provides us with a good opportunity to look at engaging politics and government in a new, fresh, more effective way. Just like our presbytery has changed in recent years, so has the General Assembly Council.

I believe we lose credibility when we say everything in our denomination is bad, because its not. Everything is not bad. Some things are bad, but some things are changing, and some things are very good. Yes, there are still many areas in need of reform, but we need to be honest about what is working and what is not working. I don't believe in being Polyanna, but neither do I believe in being Chicken Little.

The other part of our national offices is the **Office of the General Assembly**. This is the stated clerk's office. Just last month, our stated clerk, **Cliff Kirkpatrick** announced that he will not seek to be elected to a fourth term next year. He will conclude twelve years of service in this position next June at the General Assembly meeting. This is good. This leaves the door open for new reform to take place in the Office of the General Assembly. If we can find a clerk like Linda Valentine, who will bring in fresh staff with fresh ideas, this could be a very positive change for us.

There is also good news on the judicial front. The disaster and crisis that many feared when the PUP report was passed by the last General Assembly never materialized. Recent PJC decisions have continued to uphold the constitution. Recently, the Synod of the Pacific PJC found the **Rev. Janie Spahr** guilty of performing two same sex marriages, contrary to our constitution. This reversed the previous decision by her presbytery's PJC, which said she did nothing wrong. The synod said she did something wrong. She will obviously appeal this to the GA PJC, but the system has worked, and our constitution has once again been upheld.

This is not the time to be leaving the denomination. I believe that 90% of evangelicals will choose to stay in the PC(USA). God is transforming our church, and it will be interesting to see where he takes us.

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