

“National Presbyterian Men Making Changes” 2007 National Presbyterian Men’s Conference Louisville Kentucky

Young men and not-so-young men. Black men and white men. Asian men and Hispanic men. Clergymen and laymen. All men loving Jesus and loving their church. Men from 14 Synods in the PC(USA) met at the Galt House Hotel in Louisville in April during the Kentucky Derby Festival to plan future priorities for National Presbyterian Men’s Ministry, and especially to better understand how to bring more young men into the organization and the church. Men attending the Conference donated bags of school supplies, which were given to the Louisville Presbyterian Community Center for needy school children.

Dr. Joe Small PC(USA) Director of Theology, Worship and Education (TWE) brought greetings from the General Assembly Council, PC(USA) to the Executive Board. Dr. Small pointed out that the Office of Christian Formation (OCF) is actively addressing the challenge of engaging men in the life of the congregation. TWE will appoint a liaison to link OCF and National Council of Presbyterian Men Inc. (National Presbyterian Men’s Ministry). The Executive Board approved a Covenant with General Assembly Council.

Following approval of the GAC Covenant, a new Presbyterian Men Mission Statement was approved focusing on mission, leadership, and discipleship: *“To equip and train all men to pursue the will of Jesus through: mission outreach; leadership; and discipleship”*.

Wray Johanning, National President, National Association of Presbyterian Scouters (Scouters) proposed a new Covenant between Scouters and National Presbyterian Men’s Ministry. Both Scouters and National Presbyterian Men’s Ministry are covenant organizations of the General Assembly Council PC(USA). “Most churches think of Scouting as a youth program, but its not. It’s an outreach program. Scouting brings people into the church” stated Mr. Johanning. “Presbyterian Men bring people into church. And for that (reason) we are both doing the same thing. We are getting the kids and you are getting the adults” Mr. Johanning said. The Executive Board approved the proposed Covenant subject to making the following additions. Presbyterian Men will; 1) encourage churches to have Boy Scout Troops; 2) encourage men to become Boy Scout Leaders; 3) encourage Scouts to be reverent.

A Pre-Conference special dinner cruise was offered Thursday evening on the Belle of Louisville sternwheeler riverboat. Some 40 Presbyterian Men and their wives attended. Seven Presbyterian college students and Rev. Rick Upchurch from University of Louisville Interfaith Center also attended. National Presbyterian Men’s Ministry gave the college students “dinner cruise ticket scholarships”.

The National Council met Friday afternoon following a tour of the Presbyterian Center on Witherspoon St. Major items of business passed by the Council included: acceptance of the

report of the Special Task Force recommending a National Events every two years instead of every year, and changing the abbreviated name of National Council of Presbyterian Men Inc. from “Presbyterian Men” to “National Presbyterian Men’s Ministry”. Other major items approved by the Council include: increasing the annual dues for church men’s group membership from \$50 to \$75 per year, and approving individual memberships in addition to church men’s group memberships. The dues for individual memberships were set at \$40 per year. The increase in dues was a result of the Presbyterian Church (USA) discontinuing financial support for National Presbyterian Men’s Ministry. The Presbyterian Church (USA) will continue to provide office space, computer, desk, 2 chairs, and telephone service at the Presbytery Center in Louisville, and lock-box banking service in Pittsburgh for National Presbyterian Men’s Ministry. Two good and faithful volunteers staff the National Presbyterian Men’s Ministry office: Rev. Bob Abrams and Mr. John Motsinger.

The Conference opened Friday evening with Dr. Susan Ryan, Coordinator Presbyterian Disaster Assistance PC(USA). Dr. Ryan told the conference that “There are lots of changes for the good in the PC(USA), Dr. Ryan challenged Presbyterian Men to assist the PDA Volunteer Villages in Florida. You organize two work teams for the Gulf area; raise money for (PDF) Katrina Disaster Relief; have a national conference at a PDF site in the Gulf region”. That’s another change for the good.

Elder David Murrow, author of ‘Why Men Hate Going to Church’ and Director of Church For Men in Chugiak, AK explained that most men in the PC(USA) are either passive, absent, or leaving the church to the extent that 2/3 of active adults in the church are women. Most youth groups are now predominantly girls. American churches draw 11 million more women than men. We lost the men a generation ago. If you want to attract men back to the church, do not do a men’s program, do a project. Non-denominational churches are attractive to men because of projects, not programs. Try male only worship services, shorter sermons (the average parable preached by Jesus took only 38 seconds), and male only choirs.

The Friday evening program closed with Elder Bob Wilson, Vice Moderator of the General Assembly PC(USA) and Past President of National Presbyterian Men’s Ministry installing the new officers of the National Council of Presbyterian Men organization.

Opening the Conference Saturday morning, Dr. Roland Martinson, author of “Coming of Age”, and Professor of Youth and Family Ministry at Luther Seminary (ELCA) in St. Paul, MN told the conference that “young men are at risk in most areas of life. Especially in learning disabilities, suicides and incarceration. How do we get to young men in the first

1/3 of their lives when they are developing mentally and physically. In North America, those in the last 1/3 of their lives have little to do with those in the first 1/3 of their lives. Not so in the rest of the world. Look at the Masai in Kenya. Read Barack Obama's "Dreams of Our Fathers". If you invite men to come to church to pick their navels they won't come. The old-fashioned kick-(but) male dominated Christianity does not work. Just (hang out) with your young guys and "actively-listen" which is something they probably did not teach you to do in seminary".

Rev. Wayne Steele, Pastor of Peace PC in Louisville was next leading the conference in robust singing of "Stand Up Stand Up For Jesus", and "Onward Christian Soldiers". Rev. Steele says "we have to get back to the things that carried us here. We are the seed of Jesus. Things have come to get in our way. Presbyterians were meant to win the race. We need to think, we need to pray what would Jesus do in the midst of what's going on in our denomination. Think about Jesus and think about each other. The devil is telling young men not to go to church. Read Nehemiah 2. The city, our denomination is in ruins. We gave it to the preachers of those mega-churches".

The Conference Youth Panel followed Rev. Steele. The Panel is comprised of Rev. Rick Upchurch, PC(USA) Campus Minister University of Louisville, Seth Hagler, Collegiate Ministries PC(USA), and Kerri Hargrave, DCE Buell PC Louisville, and Dr. Kyung-il Ghymn, Prof. of Marketing University of Reno and President National Presbyterian Men's Ministry. The panel discussed ways and means of bringing (young adults) into leadership in the church when 90% of Presbyterian youth leave the church after college. Rick Upchurch explained that "we drop the ball when they go off to college". Seth Hagler asked "we need your help to start this (National Presbyterian Men's Ministry) organization for college men. We have Presbyterian organizations for college women, but not for college men. Kerri Hargrave advised "engage the youth in leadership within the congregation".

Workshops by Dr. Youngil Cho (Conducting Effective Bible Study), Elder Charles Easley (Mentoring and Tutoring), and Dr. Teresa Chavez Saucedo (Combating Racism) were held Saturday afternoon.

Dr Dean Thompson, President of Louisville Presbyterian Seminary was Saturday nights keynote speaker. Dr. Thompson said "let no one despise your youth. Media violence and bullying leave long lasting and harmful effects on youth. Some parents have moved violence into their children's bedrooms for unsupervised viewing of violence of a TV set or computer. Our youth are over programmed and under parented. Some parents avoid talking with their children. We need to bring out our rocking chairs and talk with our young people. Teaching Sunday school is a good place to start. I teach Sunday school.

Next, Dr. David Chai presented a video of the "18th Annual Trip to Korea for Christian College Student". This extraordinary event is sponsored annually by National Presbyterian Men's Ministry and Presbyterian Church

(USA), and the Korean Presbyterian Men (Layman's Association) and Presbyterian Church of Korea to provide an opportunity for Presbyterian young adults to visit Korea and learn about and to experience the rich heritage of partnership in mission.

In closing the Saturday evening program, representatives of The Layman's Association of the Presbyterian Church of Korea offered their greetings to Presbyterian Men of the PC(USA) and thanked National Presbyterian Men's Ministry for their generous gift to their church-rebuilding project in Pyongyang, North Korea. Representing the Layman's Association were: President Yeo-Sik Yun, General Secretary Kyung-Woong Kim, and Recording Secretary Jun-Sam Lee.

A "Silent Communion" service offered at 7 AM Sunday morning. Rev. Arlin Talley of Community PC in Three Rivers, CA and Minister Adviser to National Presbyterian Men's Ministry officiated. Silent Communion is a tradition at National and many Synod Presbyterian Men's conferences.

The conference wrapped up Sunday morning at breakfast. The Presbyterian Men were prayerfully dismissed by Pres. Kyung-il Ghymn to attend worship services at local Presbyterian Churches in Louisville, and return safely to their home churches "Renewed, Refreshed and Recreated". Praise be to God.