



Reformation Day 2011

To the congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):

*The church affirms Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda secundum verbum Dei, that is, "The church reformed, always to be reformed according to the Word of God" in the power of the Spirit. (Book of Order, F-2.02)*

Presbyterian roots go back – way back – nearly 500 years to the beginning of the Protestant Reformation when, on October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to a church door in Wittenberg, Germany. Luther, John Calvin, and other leaders of that movement would be astounded today to see the fruits of their faith-filled, courageous witness: The gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed in word and deed in and through worshiping communities around the world that seek to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, and confront injustice in its many forms.

We celebrate our reformed heritage and continually draw nourishment from these deep roots, especially during this present time of dramatic change within and beyond the church. Change generates both excitement and anxiety, possibility and perplexity. Where is God leading us? What is out there on the horizon?

Looking extensively to the past, however, or gazing anxiously to the future can lead to missing what is happening in our midst now. God spoke through the prophet Isaiah: "I am about to do a new thing; *now* it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (Isa. 43:19).

Today, in our time, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is in the midst of another reformation. God is creating a new church in and through us. Signs of it and responses to it are plentiful:

--New worshiping communities are springing up, many of them looking different from traditional congregations.

--We have a new Form of Government that provides more flexibility for congregations to do mission more effectively in their particular contexts.

--Special committees and groups across the entire church are envisioning new possibilities for the church in the 21st century, possibilities that reflect a growing multicultural reality and the need to adjust our structure from a corporate, top-down approach to one that enhances even further the work of congregations and presbyteries.

It is both an exciting and unsettling time in the life of the PC(USA). We suspect that Calvin felt similar pangs of anticipation and anxiety when he was in the midst of another season of dramatic change in the life of the church. Yet Calvin's strong faith in a steadfast and sovereign God is evident in his hymn, "I Greet Thee, Who My Sure Redeemer Art." One of the stanzas reads:

Thou art the life, by which alone we live,  
And all our substance and our strength receive;  
Sustain us by Thy faith and by Thy power,  
And give us strength in every trying hour.

As we celebrate and give thanks for the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, we also celebrate and give thanks for the mission and ministry of the PC(USA) in this time of another great reformation. Like Calvin and his colleagues, may we respond in unity with eagerness, faithfulness, wisdom, and joy:

Our hope is in no other, save in thee  
Our faith is built upon thy promise free  
Lord, give us peace and make us calm and sure  
That in thy strength we evermore endure.

To God be the glory!



Elder Cindy Bolbach  
Moderator, 219th General Assembly (2010)



The Reverend Landon Whitsitt  
Vice Moderator, 219th General Assembly (2010)



The Reverend Gradye Parsons  
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly



Elder Linda Valentine  
Executive Director, General Assembly Mission Council