



Penny's Pen

Penny's Presbytery Ponderings

Report on the Presbytery Meeting • August 26

There is a certain fondness associated with the church building in Lafayette, Indiana, as this was where, in November 2009, Frank was sustained in his examination to be accepted into the RPCNA ministry and to be installed as pastor of North Atlanta RP Church (as Northminster was then known). On Friday August 26th Frank and I, along with Bob Shapiro, found ourselves in that church building once more because of a called meeting of Great Lakes—Gulf Presbytery. The meeting was timed to be on the same day as the evening ordination of a young man, Keith Evans, who had gone through all the required training and was now being installed as assistant pastor of the Lafayette church, which has David Long as its pastor.

Once again, this building was the scene of reports, discussions and decisions that warmed the hearts of those present because of the consistent theme of how the Lord is growing his church. We heard how the Holy Spirit is advancing the work of one very new congregation, and is breathing new life into one very old one.

As part of the opening devotional, a young seminarian, Steven McCarthy, was required to preach the sermon so that his ability could be assessed and voted on by the assembled men. Unfortunately, after he had read the Scripture and was just a few minutes into his sermon, the sound system let out a cacophonous, ear-splitting noise. It took a while to stop, at which point Steven started over. Shortly afterwards the

same thing happened again. It was determined that, because the system is run by computer, and because no one in the building knew the password to access said computer, the speakers could not be turned off and the problem could not be fixed. So we exited the auditorium and set up chairs in the chapel along the hall. Steven started the sermon again and did a fine job, especially given the distractions he'd had to deal with. He was sustained unanimously on his preaching ability after the sound system had been killed and we had returned to the auditorium.

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The next item on the docket dealt with the recommendations of the Pageland (South Carolina) Commission, chaired by Pastor Frank. Pageland is the town about 40 miles southeast of Charlotte in which Chris and Joe Mangum have been working hard to gather a group to plant an RPCNA church. You may remember these brothers, who joined us for our organisation services in April 2010. We have been praying for and encouraging them since that time. In order to come into the denomination and be under its auspices, Chris and Joe and their families joined the Durham church, pastored by Ian Wise, whom you will remember as a regular visitor/preacher while he was on the Atlanta Commission before we were organised into a particular congregation. The group has been depending on commission members and seminary students to preach for them, and also on Chris Mangum, who was given permission to preach

once a month. For several months there had been a serious effort by the group to call Ian as pastor to the budding work, but these efforts were hampered by the men of Presbytery because they did not think that Pageland was sufficiently significant a location in which to put resources. However, last Friday, it was agreed by Presbytery that they would request the remaining funds of the former Pensacola Church for Pageland, that the Pageland Commission would be allowed to apply for exploratory funds from the Home Missions Board, and that the Presbytery would grant limited funds from their own budget. As obtaining all these funds is not certain, and without them there would not be sufficient to pay a pastor full time, Ian is willing to augment this income by working outside the pastoral ministry. Ian, his wife Deanna and four children are very thrilled and excited at the approval of Ian's call to Pageland, and the prayer for them now is that they can sell their house in Durham and find an appropriate one in Pageland. They hope to move on October 1st. With a pastor on the field, there will be a greater opportunity for outreach to the community and for accelerated growth to the point that, Lord willing, they will become more and more self-sufficient and before long become an organised church.

About a year ago, the men of Presbytery were close to disorganising the congregation at Hetherton, Michigan, because it was so small, had an elderly congregation, was down to one ruling elder and had no money. This was a church that had been in existence for about a century, and a teaching elder who serves on the Session, Milton Harrington, in his 80's, came and begged and pleaded over a couple of Presbytery meetings that the men not disorganise it. A young man, Dan Drost, agreed to be stated supply at the church, preaching for them and going door-to-door, but Pastor Harrington had to send out begging letters to the Presbytery churches to be able to pay Dan for his work. In July a committee

of Presbytery visited Hetherton RP Church and was able to report that, due to the grace of God, and Dan's faithful work, a new spark of life has come to that congregation. They have new adherents who "have a remarkable enthusiasm concerning the future of the church." Dan is willing to continue ministering there even though it involves working outside the pastoral ministry. Presbytery voted to seek financial help from the Vital Churches Committee of Synod as well as committing funds from Great Lakes-Gulf, which gives time to see if God's blessing will continue. There was great rejoicing expressed by several of the men, who were excited to see the change from discouragement at the decline, to encouragement at this growth and new life. Pastor Rich Johnston had tears in his eyes as he said that this was the most exciting thing he had seen happen in his twenty years in the Presbytery.

You may also remember meeting Tom Gray, his wife and ten children who came to our organisation service last year. Tom was serving at Selma RP Church, but has now accepted a call to a PCA church near Vancouver, Canada. This leaves three of our Southern churches without a pastor: Orlando, Durham, and Selma. Please keep these churches in your prayers.

As always with church court meetings, it is nice to meet up with co-labourers and colleagues and to catch up on the latest news. We were hosted by the LeFebvre family, whom we have come to know well. It is their baby daughter, Laura, for whom we had been praying when she was having to undergo surgery for a heart defect. Even now, at seventeen months old, she is awaiting further surgery, this time for a cranial cyst. For the first time, we were able to meet this little girl and give praise to God that she is doing so well.

There are times at church court meetings when good men disagree with each other, which can lead to controversies which are somewhat of an ordeal. This time, however, all of the items on the docket were handled with almost unanimity of mind, and we were able to enjoy the Lord's blessings and rejoice in seeing the ways in which he is growing his church.

◆ Penny Smith

Addendum: Recently Orlando RP Church called H.P. McCracken as pastor.

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