

Spring, 2008

Tent Talk



How foolish!
A talking
tent!

Newsletter for the Association of Presbyterian Tentmakers

June, 2008

Fall Conference at Ghost Ranch Care for the Shepherd and Hope for the Flock

The Association of Presbyterian Tentmakers (APT), NASSAM (Episcopal), and CHRISM (Europe) will sponsor a conference at Ghost Ranch campus Santa Fe, New Mexico Friday (5PM) October 24 – Sunday (noon) October 26. All tentmakers, those interested in becoming tentmakers, and those seeking a tentmaker for their church are invited to come.

Our time together will include:

- ❖ Powerful worship and preaching segments by homiletician Rev. Dr. Bill Hedrick. Bill, an Austin Seminary staff/retired parish minister, will be preaching around the two part theme of self-care for the tentmaker and (as we practice that principle) the dynamic role tentmakers can and do play in the present and future church.
- ❖ Keynote presentations that will challenge and inspire us in our unique way of shepherding.

- ❖ Panel discussions with invited “turn around” and “success story” tentmakers and their churches from around the country who bear out the vision of our unique call.
- ❖ Regional Church/Presbytery/Synod representatives in support of the tentmaking model.
- ❖ An APT fundraising jazz gospel concert open to the public held in a downtown Santa Fe church during our gathering!
- ❖ Telling our stories – time to re-energize, re-connect, share our vision, network with first timers and birds of a feather.
- ❖ Who wants to come?! Prospective tentmakers, seminarians, search committees and COM’s exploring options, CLP’s, New Immigrant Fellowships, bi-vocational Camp and Conference center personnel, judicatory representatives.
You!

Interested?

More information is available:
www.pcusatentmakers.com

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You are a Tentmaker if:

- ◇ You set the alarm clock for Monday morning.
- ◇ All church meetings are evenings or weekends.
- ◇ You are always late to Presbytery
- ◇ No one can die during the day shift
- ◇ When you meet someone in the store, you don’t know if you should pray or do lunch.
- ◇ You could sleep anywhere, even in a tent!

Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Acts 18:2b-4

A Tentmaking Discovery in South America

APT Moderator Jeff Scott

A pelo cochino! Not knowing a word, (or at least very few) of Spanish prior to my trip to Venezuela, this was the one phrase that Daniel, one of the youth, made sure I learned. I repeated it often when he asked *como esta usted?* (how's it going)? Translated, something akin to "awesome", "better than I have a right to be", better than just *bueno* or *primo*.

That sums up my 8 day experience of working in mission with 4 others from the Rocky Mountain Conference, UCC. We were toiling along with approximately 15 others from the Evangelical Pentecostal Union of Venezuela in Maricao, that country's second largest city. UEPV along with Global Partners, is a joint venture of the Disciples of Christ and the UCC which has enjoyed a rich and growing partnership since the mid 1990's. The partnership has grown to where 3 trips annually now take place with alternating emphases; construction, youth, and medical missions. I was part of a former contingent.

During a coffee break I put on my APT hat and asked my hosts laboring on the wall "do any of your preachers happen to be bi-vocational?"

Smiles and laughs erupted from my host as if I'd asked if salsa is hot?

I soon came to find out that all of our hosts served as preachers but derive most or all of their income from their Venezuelan "tents." I was blown away not only to hear the variety of professions represented but by the multiplicity, some being "tri-vocational" and more.

Let me introduce you to my Venezuelan tentmaking friends.

- Diego – a preacher and retired teacher and bank accountant who recently received a pension related to Chavez reforms.
- Omar - preacher, mechanic, **hunter**, welder, electrician, and poet
- Angel – pastor with background in construction, taxi driver and owner a small home "mini-market"
- Misael – preacher, musician (recordings on percussion, vocals, and quartet - 4 string guitar) and cook.

- Maday – Sunday school teacher, homemaker, and journalist
- Maleck – preacher and practitioner of homeopathic medicine, hunter.

I was full of questions for them during our lunch and java breaks but they boiled down to "why tentmaking for you"? Three answers emerged.

1. In the UEPV tradition, preachers manifest their gifts and are called from within (from the grass roots among and in solidarity with) the congregation and community that is their context. Therefore, a professional or seminary-trained fulltime clergy is the exception more than the rule.
2. As the UEPV is made up of and has always been aligned with poor, paid church leadership is not possible. A tent or day job is a necessity; but also, apparently, a preference. When I asked if a paid salary were available would most prefer to work in the church exclusively, only one or two responded in the affirmative.
3. As far as they were concerned bi-vocational service in the Pauline tradition and throughout scripture is their avowed model.

In this thriving denomination, it appears to me that tentmaking, to use an agricultural metaphor, is firmly rooted, organic, and flourishing. On the one hand I had come from 2,000 miles and in many respects a world away on this trip. Yet, on the other, I felt so welcome and so much at home with tentmaking brothers and sisters of the UEPV.

I still can only speak a bit of their native language. But with the help of our interpreter there certainly was a whole lot of tent talk going on!

A pelo cochino!



Lake Maricao baptism

Taking thought for Tomorrow

In the mail last month church treasurers received an attractive brochure entitled, "Guide to enrolling in your retirement plan", subtitled, "MAKE THE MOST OF **your future**". Accompanying it was a four page "Step-by-Step Enrollment Guide to the Retirement Savings Plan" which very succinctly laid out how church treasurers can enroll their pastors and church workers in the Board of Pensions/Fidelity Investments retirement plans.

The Board of Pensions should be commended for such good communications tools with church treasurers and church workers across our national and global church. Unfortunately this good communications doesn't address the issue that many Tentmakers/Part Time Pastors are not eligible to be part of the retirement plan. Why? Because they are not employed to work enough hours to be eligible. On page two of the "Guide to enrolling in your retirement plan" it very quietly states "You may begin to make tax deferred contributions to the Plan if you are working 20 hours or more."

Because the Board of Pension follows in the financial footsteps of Wal-Mart, Radio Shack and other American corporations they have accepted the standard of twenty hours of employment in order for employees to receive pension and other benefits. Given the need for small congregations to call Tentmakers/Part Time Pastors, a most needed recruitment tools is denied. Volunteer fire departments in New York provide such plans to their volunteer staff and use it as a recruitment tool. None of these volunteers put in twenty hours of paid employment. Likewise members of boards of our nation's corporations are eligible for pensions and other benefits, none of whom work a scheduled twenty hour a week. The same can be said for special districts such as parks and recreation, sanitation, and ambulance corps.

At the last General Assembly, meeting in Birmingham, Alabama, the Long Island Presbytery overtured the 217th General Assembly (2006) to direct the Board of Pensions to study the pension and medical insurance needs of churches served by Tentmaker/Part-time pastors,

and to consider new guidelines to allow flexibility for participation of churches served by Tentmaker/Part-time pastors. This overture was approved as Item 15-04 and directed the Board of Pensions "*to study the pension and medical insurance needs of particular churches served by part-time pastors such as tentmakers, and to consider new guidelines to allow flexibility for participation of churches served by these pastors.*"

The study is now complete and will be presented to the 218th General Assembly. Unfortunately, rather than breaking new ground in support of those ministering as Tentmakers, the report basically supports the status quo. No actuarial figures were given in the report to show why such changes would be imprudent or not cost effective. No formal study or polling was made of Tentmakers regarding their needs and their visions regarding their ministry, nor of the churches that presently employ such church workers.

Consequently the Board of Pensions is once again being asked to reconsider their determination regarding the need for a more flexible benefits plan for Tentmakers/Part-time pastors and Commissioned Lay Pastors. In so doing the Board of Pensions is being asked to meet officially with both the Association of Presbyterian Tentmakers and a selected cross-section of Part-time pastors in the denomination. Also requested is that the Board of Pensions develop a benefits brochure that would, in a positive way, encourage seminarians and other pastors to consider the advantages of being a Tentmaker/Part-time pastor in the Presbyterian Church USA. Without the strengthening of support for Tentmaker/Part-time pastors many small churches will be unable to obtain pastoral leadership in years to come.

Submitted by the Rev. Ralph B. Wright, Jr.
Pastor, Yaphank Presbyterian Church, Yaphank, NY
President, E&R Tax and Business Services, Patchogue,
NY



Who are these three smiling faces?
Moderator Jeff Scott, Lorena and Ross Blount.
Join them at Ghost Ranch and you will smile too.

A word from the new editor!

Thanks to Steve Hammond for his years of service as the Tent Talk editor. I am new on the job, so you need to tell me what you want. Comments, suggestions, rotten vegetables* can all be sent to me at kathy.johnstone@gmail.com. or by the post at P.O. Box 194, Mineral, Washington 98355.

Are you on the mailing list, but you have no idea why, write me and I will remove you name. Would you like to move to an e-mail copy instead of paper, again, I will be accommodating. And thank you for your attention.

Kathy Johnstone
Editor in chief

*must be submitted by e-mail only.

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