

December 8th, 2008



www.carofirstpres.org

203 N. Almer St.
Caro, Michigan 48723

Pastor Phone: 989-672-8579
Fax: 989-673-6630

Rev. Melissa Lynn DeRosia
ana_logos@yahoo.com

To the Members of the General Assembly Council,

On November 18th, 2008 an email was sent to the members of the General Assembly Council from Executive Director of the General Assembly Council, Linda Valentine. The content of the email stated that the Rev. Rhashell Hunter, Director of Racial Ethnic, Women's Ministries and Presbyterian Women, announced a "redesign" of the office. The details of this were included in an email attachment, also made public as a press release from the Presbyterian News Service.

This "redesign" included the immediate elimination of positions held by Ms. Noelle Gulden, the Rev. Bridget Green, and the Rev. Molly Casteel. I share their names with you because the women are more than just positions, they are people. These are women who trust their denomination, its commitment to being the body of Christ, and its historic support of doing ministry with those women and racial ethnic persons who are in the margins of our denomination and world. I have worked with each of these women in my ministry as a pastor, and value the experience, wisdom, and strength they brought to their positions.

As a new member of the GAC, I am hearing from across the denomination that the recent decision by Rhashell Hunter to implement a "redesign" of the focus on racial ethnic and women's leadership says loudly to young women in ministry that the concerns for women and racial ethnic persons at the national level aren't being done in consultation with their constituents. It was stated in the article that instead of two people, one person in the GAC Executive Director's office will now coordinate the work of the church's two advocacy committees: Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC) and the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (ACWC). In what way was there "extensive dialogue" between staff persons and the constituents of ACREC and ACWC with prior to this decision? Examining the negative reactions found in the on-line communities of the National Network of Presbyterian College Women (NNPCW) and Racial Ethnic Young Women Together (REYWT), their constituents weren't part of these conversations either.

Furthermore, the execution of this "redesign" does not include a rationale for why the ACWC and ACREC committee and programming needs are being divided or how this will strengthen the ministry to "persons in the pews." In my experience working with the advocacy committees, their role is to stand with women and racial ethnic persons who are in the margins of our denomination and society. That is the way they reach persons in the pews. They were formed by the General Assembly to provide a prophetic witness to and for the church on existing and emerging issues facing women and racial ethnic persons, because all too often these populations don't make it to the pews and when they do continue to be marginalized. The division of the committee and programmatic work seems to raise confusion and muddle the prophetic witness of the Presbyterian Church.

The manner in which these decisions were made and carried out indicates to many in the church that decisions are being made in a “top down,” hierarchal approach that better reflects corporate America than it does the church. I have received phone calls and emails asking if GAC authorized this restructuring or if it was discussed at our meeting in October. With disillusionment in my response, I continue to answer, “No;” I only know that we had received communication from Linda Valentine at the meeting, and in email, that “there were no widespread staff reductions in the current plans nor was there anticipation for any in the 2009- 2010 budget.”

I share these deep concerns with you, as elected members of the General Assembly Council, because I believe we need to be cognizant that decisions are being made that are radically changing how the mission and ministry of the Presbyterian Church are being staffed and implemented at the national level. Despite continued promises for no further staff reductions, the staff roles and ministry are being changed. I invite you to be a part of these conversations and ask the hard questions about what other offices will be “redesigned” out of their leadership, before they are even given the opportunity to discern the ways they could meet the needs of a changing church? What is the role that faithful General Assembly Council members play as substantial changes are made?

I am requesting time on the agenda of our March meeting to discuss these issues. Until then I encourage you to be in conversation with Linda Valentine and Rhashell Hunter, asking the challenging questions and investigating further the implications of these decisions. The hurt, pain and lost trust that is being communicated across the church concerns me greatly for their continued engagement in a church that lives out their values. Finally, please be in prayer for Noelle, Bridget, Molly, their families, and the young women in our denomination who also valued their leadership, determination and courage to advocate for the concerns of women and persons of color.

Yours in Christ,

The Rev. Melissa Lynn DeRosia
First Presbyterian Church of Caro, Pastor
General Assembly Council, Elected Member

CC- The Rev. Rhashell Hunter
Racial Ethnic and Women’s Ministries
and Presbyterian Women, Director
The Rev. Tom Taylor
Deputy Executive Director for Mission
Ms. Linda Valentine
General Assembly Council, Executive Director