

**From the Synod Executive
Carol McDonald
October 14, 2011**



The Synod of Lincoln Trails will gather for its 4th and final meeting of 2011, next Saturday, October 29. We will spend time with Gil Rendle, author of Journey in the Wilderness. The Synod has been reading Rendle's book throughout 2011; he will lead an all-day workshop on Friday, October 28 for all interested persons. We are also excited to welcome Ruling Elder Cynthia Bolbach, Moderator of the 219th General Assembly as our preacher and guest for the day. It will be good to hear from Cindy; she has been traveling the PC (U.S.A.) since July, 2010, and will have great stories to tell. Cindy served as co-moderator of the Task Force on the new Form of Government. She has been exactly the Moderator we have needed for this time of transition – and some unrest – in the life of our denomination. If you'd like to join us to welcome Cindy, please let Judy Lucas know as soon as possible – judy@lincolntrails.org

I've long believed that change and transition were constant, but events of recent days have convinced me that even change and transition have changed and moved a different direction. On Saturday, October 7, meeting in Indianapolis, IN, the Mid-Council Commission of the PC(U.S.A.) General Assembly approved unanimously the following motion:

Recommendation: *That synods be discontinued as councils and their ecclesiastical functions be vested in 5 regional administrative commissions of the General Assembly. During a period of transition, synods in consultation with their constituent presbyteries, create and implement a transition plan to transfer assets, funds, projects and programs including those that relate to racial ethnic ministries to appropriate entities and submit for approval this transition plan to the 222nd General Assembly.*

Recommendation: *That the authority and intent of the Mid Councils Commission be vested in these regional administrative commissions in order to facilitate churches and presbyteries to build partnerships and re-align where necessary to fulfill their stated missional objectives.*

Recommendation: *That the regional administrative commissions possess such power and authority to enforce the church's commitment to inclusiveness and representation (G-3.0103), including the formation of committees on representation from among their constituent presbyteries to fulfill the mandate of G-3.0103.*

Recommendation: *That the General Assembly be authorized to create 5 regional judicial commissions to serve as courts of appeal of decisions of presbytery PJs in disciplinary and remedial cases, and as courts of original jurisdiction in remedial cases against presbyteries, or upon reference from presbytery PJs.*

In the days following the commission's action, I have heard several things: Synods are going away forever. Synods are going away as governing bodies, but can continue as mission partnerships if the constituent presbyteries so desire. I think the truth is somewhere in the middle. If the Commission's recommendation is approved by the 220th General Assembly and passed by a majority of our 173 presbyteries, we will have a lot of work to do. We will engage in deep consultation with our presbyteries and with trusted colleagues in other synods. Commissioners, Executive and General Presbyters, our Discernment Team, and other partners in ministry will be in conversation; we will utilize every listening skill we have ever employed – and probably learn some new ones!

Those of you who know me well probably know that my mind has been racing, and “planning” ever since hearing this recommendation. Actually, my first response was grief – grief so layered that I can’t yet explain it. But then I started to over-think! After several days of reflection, I am confident that:

- a. We don’t need to panic! The recommendation gives us time to sort through its implications and to explore its implementation for this part of the PC(U.S.A.).
- b. We do not need to act in haste. In fact, we are better off – and so are the whole church and the people we serve – if we really do take the necessary time to listen, to ask questions, and to formulate thoughtful plans.
- c. Ultimately, we are not in charge. With God’s help, we will make decisions together about our programs, our people, and our other resources.
- d. The Synod of Lincoln Trails has always been a leader in the PC(U.S.A.) and our clear thinking and adaptive leadership is needed now more than ever.

My deep prayer, as we move into, and through, this swirl of change and transition is that we will truly embody the words of our foundational principles: “The Church is to be a community of faith, entrusting itself to God alone, even at the risk of losing its life.” (F-1.0301) In the weeks and months to come, may we live...and preach...and become those words!