**THE WORD FROM RICK – “Living Into What’s Next”**

On Saturday, February 20, approximately forty individuals from across our presbytery gathered in Redwood Falls for the purpose of ushering in the next chapter in our common life and ministry. In the course of that day, chairpersons were re-introduced to the Mission Design and offered some initial thoughts as they began their work. Candace Adams spoke to the assembled body and encouraged us all to be “light bearers” as we move forward into this new way of being presbytery. After the group had time to reflect on the Scripture and shared in prayer, Stan Menning, John McKay, Darin Seaman, Pam Prouty, and I offered an overview of what this “new thing” is all about, and the visions and hopes that emerged from the work of the Next Pres Team.

After lunch and fellowship, the real work began. The four new Commissions and one new Committee held their organizational meetings. Together, they set meeting dates and times, organized their internal structure, reviewed budgets, took necessary actions, and set priorities for the year ahead.

Everyone was aware that not a great deal would be accomplished in two hours, but each group worked diligently to maximize the time that was available and has started to wrap their hands around their responsibilities. We are on a learning curve as we go from here. We will need to create some new habits and ways to make this all work for the benefit of all our congregations and leaders. The good news was that there was good energy and a hopeful spirit. Many questions were asked, some were answered, and maybe are yet to be explored. The day closed with a sharing of prayer concerns and a time of prayer. As folks grabbed a final cookie or donut for the road, there was a buzz still present. We know that there is much that will need to be learned and unlearned, but there is a willingness to risk, to try doing things differently. We know that with much prayer, a lot of listening to our congregations and leaders, and the investment of time, this design has the potential to serve this presbytery and the Kingdom of Christ very well.

As I drove away from our long day in Redwood Falls, I was reminded of how thankful I am for all of our congregations and leaders, as well those who have helped us create this new vision – Stan Menning, Ed Morgan, Darin Seaman, Connie Seltz, Candace Adams, Karen Crawford, John McKay, David Crittenden, Diana Barber, and Pam Prouty -- and for all of you across the presbytery who have committed yourselves to taking the risk to make this happen. Many of you had the opportunity to say “no” to the Committee on Representation when they asked you to take a role in this new design – but you didn’t; you decided to sign on and help shape what this presbytery will be. You wanted to see where this adventure will take us, and I pray that the journey will not disappoint.

As we move into this new design, the Committee on Representation will be working to fill a few final slots in the various groups. These folks and those who were not able to be in Redwood Falls will be touching base with their leaders so that they can jump on board. We hope to be at full strength by the May presbytery meeting!

Finally, there was one piece of action that was taken at the Redwood Falls gathering. The Commission on Leadership voted to recommend to the Presbytery on May 10th, that I be granted Honorable Retirement beginning January 1, 2017. I believe that by that time I will have accomplished what you asked me to do, and those things that the former Council of the Presbytery directed me to do during my term here. I am committed to help our commissions and committees to be fully functional and effective, and to assist in the review and revision of the policies and procedures that will ensure the work of this presbytery going forward. The Commission on Presbytery Life has been charged with putting the final piece of the staffing in place by the beginning of next year, and I know that everything will come together.

As we enter into this new time, your prayers and your commitments of energy, talent, creativity, and resources will be the key for living into God’s future!

Grace and Peace to you all,

**Rick**