

## 2016 Annual Report for Synod

### John-Peter Smit

I am privileged to again bring my report to the Synod of Central Northeastern Ontario & Bermuda. This summer marked the tenth anniversary of my ministry in this position and it has been an honour to both serve the synod in this manner and to have been able to work so closely with the RCC over many different members.

In many ways this report will not be too terribly different from all the reports preceding it. The synod and indeed the Presbyterian Church continue to struggle with all of the issues around aging and decline that beset every denomination in our country. As such, much of my work continues to be helping Ministers, Session & Congregations adapt to new realities. This includes helping them with options, coaching and training through change and, regularly playing an active role in helping with the actual decisions. On the bright side, these processes have allowed some congregations to learn and be creative about their situations. Thus for instance, it was an honour to be invited to preach at the dedication of **The Spur**, the new ministry in a restaurant in Woodville. Likewise, in the Presbytery of West Toronto, we are just in the process of Calling a Minister to help a congregation of 20 restart with a vision but without a building. These are exciting bright spots in what is often seen as a bleak church landscape. Sadly many congregations continue to function in the hope that one day things will just get better.

As I have worked with congregations and presbyteries, I have also been examining my own methods and ministry. I am grateful for this work and truly believe it is an important ministry within the synod and even the denomination. At the same time, I am not convinced that me continuing to do the same things in the same way will bear the kind of fruit that I and the church would hope for. As such, I have been trying to educate myself and others around some possible experiments that we might do to try to change things a little. Specifically, I am working with the presbyteries of Pickering and Kingston, using a book by Alan Roxburgh entitled *Structured for Mission*. Roxburgh argues (I think compellingly) that most strategic planning is not merely ineffective but actually makes things worse. He offers a different way to consider planning and ministry; a way that is, unfortunately, far from clear and far from certain. I am trying, with a group of colleagues, to work through Roxburgh's book in the hope that it might bring a different perspective to the work of these presbyteries.

This year I was able to enjoy a continuing education course of study. This was the Level One Transitional Ministry Course (Interim Ministry) at Montreat North Carolina. It was refreshing to be able to take the course and, I benefitted greatly from the course itself. I will be taking the second level in due course.

As I reflect on this year past, I am mindful that, while the church is in a time of crisis, that God is still God and this is still God's church. It is not always easy to remember this but, we must not only cling to this certainty but, live out of it, even as our ancestors did in the desert and in Babylon and in Rome and Ephesus and everywhere the obstacles were formidable and the resources few. I am grateful for this assurance and thankful for the support and wisdom of Tori in her role as well as the committee for their care and support. Thank you again for the privilege of this ministry and I look forward to all that the Lord and the church has in mind.

Respectfully Submitted

John-Peter Smit

Regional Minister for Congregational health

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