

A message from:

Linda Valentine

General Assembly Mission Council

Good News from Minneapolis



Greetings to members of the General Assembly Mission Council, Middle Governing Body executives and friends,

One of the most frequently asked questions in the church is, “Why can’t we have good news? Why does only bad news get attention?” As I continue to reflect on the good and faithful work that was begun at the [219th General Assembly](#) (2010), I might boldly paraphrase Nathanael’s famous question from John 1:46 by asking, “Can anything good come out of Minneapolis,” to which the answer would surely be a resounding *yes!*

One powerful example of the Good News coming out of Minneapolis has just been shared with me by the Rev. Christine Chakoian, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Lake Forest, Illinois, a commissioner who served as a member of the General Assembly Committee on Mission Coordination.

Chris has just sent word of a magnificent gift of \$70,000 from Lynn and Foster Friess, through their cousin Susan Peet, a member of First Presbyterian Church in Lake Forest, towards scholarships for the Young Adult Volunteer program.

As Chris tells the story, it all started in the room where the GA committee was meeting. Although members of the committee had heard many requests for initiatives requiring financial resources, they remained convinced that because the church was being called to “do business” in a new way, as worthy as many of the projects were, such expenditures were not supporting the new direction of network resourcing.

Chris recalled only two exceptions: the expansion of staffing for collegiate ministries, and a \$100,000 scholarship program for Young Adult Volunteers who could not raise all of their funds on their own. “I personally was so moved that this was the right thing to do that, on the spot, I pledged that somehow I would raise \$50,000 from my congregation,” Chris shared.

When she returned home from GA, Chris preached about the work of God through the General Assembly, specifically highlighting the GA action to institute the Young Adult Volunteer Scholarship program through the initial investment of \$100,000. Following her sermon, Chris received two immediate reactions: one from a church member who was upset about ordination issues, and another, Susan Peet, who said that she’d been racking her brain about a recommendation for a worthy charitable contribution, which she needed at a family member’s request. Susan decided that the Young Adult Volunteer program mentioned in Chris’s sermon would do quite nicely.

As it turned out, the family members who were seeking the recommendation were Susan’s cousin Lynn Friess and her husband Foster, who founded Brandywine Mutual Funds. They are extraordinarily generous people and deep Christians. This summer, they invited 100 families to come celebrate their 70th birthday with them in Wyoming. In lieu of birthday presents, they asked each household to recommend a charity to be a gift recipient in their honor. This isn’t unusual for them, Susan had explained. The Friesses are deeply faithful Christians who feel blessed beyond measure. At the birthday celebration, the Friesses gave away at least \$7 million dollars to their friends’ and relatives’ charities, including their \$70,000 gift to the Young Adult Volunteer program. The room of 200 people was in tears, Susan said.

I am awed by the power of the Holy Spirit, which has moved and worked in so many lives to make this

incredible gift possible. We are so very grateful for the generosity of the Friesses, and for Susan, Chris, and all of the others who inspired this gift.

Because our daughter was a young adult volunteer in San Antonio, Texas, in a year of discernment in the midst of college, I can testify firsthand to what a transformative experience this is. Many YAVs go on to become pastors and leaders in the church – so in addition to being transformational for young people, the YAV program prepares leaders for the church and for society. This gift will enable more young people to serve, and will inspire others to provide support as well. In fact, the GA Committee on Mission Coordination heard the challenge from among their own members to raise another \$50,000 for the YAV scholarship fund by raising \$1,000 each from their respective congregations. Just imagine the impact if we all responded to such a call!

After having experienced an engaged General Assembly focusing much of its creative energy and dialogue around youth and young adults - and seeing this remarkable result – it is my privilege to again introduce to you my newest colleague, Roger Dermody, deputy executive director for mission, who shares with me in celebrating the hope-filled passion of our young adults.

Faithfully yours,

Linda Valentine

Dear Friends in Christ,

Among the many topics discussed recently by the staff who serve the mission and ministry of our larger church through the General Assembly Mission Council, the need to reach, engage, and retain our young adults has been primary. At our recent General Assembly in Minneapolis, Commissioners sent two directives to the GAMC. One commits scholarship money for our Young Adult Volunteer program, hoping to make these tremendously formative opportunities open to more and more young adults. The other deals with our ongoing commitment to college and university students, calling for a full-time national office and a new comprehensive strategy to more effectively reach and keep these vibrant young adults vitally connected and engaged in the life of our Church. To each of these initiatives, I say a hearty, "Amen!" To the gift which Linda has announced, I give praise and thanks to God!



Roger Dermody

I spent the first 15 years of my full-time ministry life working with college students and young adults. I had the privilege of co-chairing our GA Task Force 98-63 that produced a denomination-wide strategy aimed at this vibrant population entitled, *Renewing the Commitment*. As I write this article, I am flying back from a reunion of several hundred young men and women whom I had the privilege of serving ten to twenty years ago. These young adults are a true inspiration to me, and offer tremendous hope for the future of our church. My own life has been formed by them. The Bel Air Presbyterian Church – a thriving, 3,000-member congregation in Los Angeles, Calif., where I served for nine years as executive pastor – was significantly revitalized by their passion, zeal, dedication and faithfulness.

Now with families of their own, these young men and women remain highly engaged in leadership and the life of the Church - due in large part to their strong connection to the local church during their collegiate years.

My sense is that a denomination-wide strategy will have to draw upon multiple resources. There is no one-size-fits-all for college ministry, nor many other ministries for that matter. We need the on-campus relationships forged by our campus chaplains. We need to re-engage and forge new partnerships with vibrant, existing para-church ministries, building mutual trust and support. We need to take more seriously the missional opportunity to literally reach the nations, as the Lord is bringing young men and women from all over the globe to our universities. My strong hope is that our local churches will get more engaged. There are wonderful models all over the country of churches that are significantly involved in campus ministry. Sadly, there are far too many churches literally right down the street from our nations' campuses, who remain unengaged and detached. We need to extend a new spirit of hospitality toward our young adults, and to those on campus who work with them. Few things will revitalize a congregation better than a bunch of energetic, passionate young adults in our worshipping life together. I truly celebrate the hope-filled passion of our collegians. In the coming year, I look forward to gathering some of our brightest minds in order to develop a strategy that benefits the whole Church, and maintains our commitment to this vital group of Presbyterians.

Blessings,

Roger A. Dermody

