

## SOUTH WEST PRESBYTERY

*“I am a man of constant sorrow, I’ve seen trouble all my days...”*

These words, from the song of the same title, come from the hit movie, “O Brother, Where Art Thou”, and might easily be applied to the life of South West Presbytery in this, its first year of existence under the new structure of Toronto Conference. The cynical reader would easily agree, and state matter-of-factly, that is just the state of the church in this time. The apathetic person won’t even read this report, but would most likely respond with a shrug of the shoulders, and a “So what?” But you, dear readers, are neither cynical nor apathetic, and are also hoping for some realistic and hopeful word regarding the state of affairs in South West. I hope that I can deliver.

The more involved people in this Presbytery have seen their share of “constant sorrow” that do not need to be detailed here. We mourn the significant loss in our midst, as St. Luke’s United Church in Etobicoke will close its doors at the end of June. We also celebrate with them the thousands of lives touched and changed by the ministry of that congregation over the years through its worship, care of people in sickness and death, in joys lifted up in weddings and baptisms, in the Gospel proclaimed and service rendered in community and world. We also know in our bones that this is the backbone of ministry in our whole Presbytery and we witness it every day in many vital ways in many places.

Our two community ministries at Jane-Finch and Davenport-Perth continue to give the Gospel a face and a meaning within multi-faith, diverse and under-served neighbourhoods. There, relationships are built, and over time partnerships are formed with others whose desire is for justice, and for the development of long-term community health and capacity in all its facets, built from the ground up.

Within the work of our Presbytery, we mark the enthusiastic and timely leadership of our Social Justice and World Affairs Committee, as they build a network within the congregations and into the wider community. Their clear and helpful leadership as the Holy Land Awareness Group regarding developments in the Middle East and their response to the threats to our democracy at home with the cuts to KAIROS and Canadian Arab Federation (CAF) have been greatly appreciated and noticed far and wide.

We continue to organize a Presbytery wide Vacation Bible Camp for this upcoming summer, and will be taking it to through to a much larger area. Not everything is lost in the process of change. Our Youth network is growing. Our Presbytery is also benefitting from the careful and excellent leadership of the Intercultural and Diverse communities in Ministry Committee as it strives to assist us all in becoming and intercultural and culturally aware church in a very diverse context in the west half of Toronto, Brampton, Halton Hills and surrounding areas.

The challenge for our Presbytery is to build our community into one where participation is lively, dedicated, joyful and widely owned among the presbyters. Our Worship and Theme Group has provided excellent leadership at our Presbytery meetings toward this

end, but difficulties continue. Many took the opportunity of restructuring to back away from previous commitments. Not as many stepped up to take their places. Some have been hesitant in a new structure. The burden has not fallen evenly, and some of our most committed volunteers are clearly suffering under the load. We will have to find a way to solve this nexus of human problems in the near future.

In summary, there is much to be both excited and troubled about. We might allow the difficulties to cause us to despair. This is how it always has been, and we often forget to lift our eyes from what's troubling us and either not see the great and new things God is doing among us, or not see where God is directing us even through our troubles. As it is written:

*But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.*

As we move into the future, we hope and pray that the life of Jesus will always be present in us, that all those who encounter us, work with us, and join with us, will receive life renewed, reconciliation found, and peace discovered.

Respectfully submitted,  
Glenn Smith, Chair  
South West Presbytery