

True to God's Word – the Future of the PCC
PSALT conference experience: A personal essay
By Rev. Andy Cornell

God works in many creative ways. One is repetition: the same word, phrase, verse, or concept appearing in different contexts at roughly the same time. In these God moments, He gets my attention. It happens in my life as a pastor and it happened here, at the gathering of Presbyterians Standing for Apostolic Love and Truth (PSALT) at Vaughan Community Church on May 12-13, 2017.

Midway through the first morning, I heard something familiar from one of the presenters. "The enemy hates the bride and will attack any weakness. Prepare for it," said Carmen Fowler Laberge, editor of the Presbyterian Layman (PCUSA). "Prepare" was the key word in the message for my congregation May 14. "I am going to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). We, in turn, need to prepare for our arrival. It dawned on me a week later that the PSALT gathering was – for me at least – a reminder that preparation is key in the spiritual battle we wage. Yes, the gathering was a great opportunity to put faces to names, to reconnect with others and to bond with those of similar experiences and theology as spiritual family. And the overriding message was this: pray and prepare, for we are under attack and the enemy does not adhere to rules of engagement.

I have several pages of notes at the conference. Here are some key takeaways.

Quotable quotes: "Don't allow the idea that God has two minds on anything." (Carmen). Option 'C' in the Church Doctrine Committee recommendation No. 5 comes to mind. Other gems from Carmen: "He cannot be voted off the throne" "Leave (the denomination) together as unified witnesses . . . leave your mother who has become a whore."

Crystals of wisdom: Prof. Ephraim Radner of Wycliffe College provided insight into our culture's egocentrism. With health and life expectancy on the rise, mortality is less of an issue in the Western World. We rely less on God and are becoming our own gods. "Who does my body belong to?" the professor asked. To the dominant secular culture, the answer is not family, not my partner, not my culture and certainly not to God. Thus the new polemic: my body was designed for my pleasure, not for God's kingdom.

Points to ponder: "The church has done a poor job of celebrating singleness." (Pastor Bruxy Cavey, The Meeting House). "There are no letters in the New Testament apart from the problems of the church." (Rev. Dr. Kevin Livingston quoting Karl Barth.)

Powerful prayer and partnership: The unceasing presence of a Dunamis Fellowship prayer intercessor at the entrance to our main gathering place was reassuring. Beside her was a table with pastoral support from Renewal Fellowship Within the PCC.

A warning about division: Although the participants were, in general terms, united in their hermeneutic and theology, we face the prospect of division. The three discussion groups told the tale: "Pull out" of the PCC, "pull away" into a separate synod, or "stay and pray." While these are excellent starting places for discussion, they were reminders of the need to remain united in our theology no matter how we approach the battle for Christ's kingdom. His bride can multitask and appear in many different places. We can be divided, yet be united.

The grand nugget: Prof. Gene Haas, of Redeemer University, outlined briefly his nine principles of reformed hermeneutics. My mind wandered back to my seminary biblical hermeneutic theory, which centred around a German philosopher with strong ties to Nazism. Back home, I dredged up my notes. The syllabus described it as an interdisciplinary course on hermeneutic theory, with theology as only one aspect. Quotes from my lecture notes: “The Bible is not the word of God, but we can find God’s word in it. Bible is not infallible. We are to understand the text as human beings, mindful that it was not intended to be read by anyone other than the original listeners or readers.” (Are our seminaries the root of our apostasy?) In the panel discussion which followed Haas, I noted this insight from Rev. Karla Wubbenhorst: “There’s too much human authority used in interpretation.” Or, as Rick (Purpose Driven Life) Warren often wrote: “It’s not about me.”

Back to that key word: prepare. I had already skimmed over the reports to General Assembly prior to the PSALT gathering. I’m reading them again in light of the rich insight served at our gathering. I feel better prepared for the deeper debate expected this fall. I’m feeling much less dread. Our gathering was a warm embrace by like-minded sheep eager to seek the shepherd’s voice, regardless of our temporal state. The church is alive and well.

Let us enter the coming storm prepared, as a praying people, unceasingly searching for the mind of Christ and the Father’s will under the protection and illumination of the Holy Spirit. It’s not about me.