



## PRESBYTERY OF THE PACIFIC

1968 -2003

In 1872, the Synod of the Pacific (a merger of Old and New School Presbyterians) voted to organize the Presbytery of Los Angeles. On March 20, 1873 the first meeting of this Presbytery convened in the Calvary Presbyterian Church, Wilmington. In 1967 the Presbytery of Los Angeles, a member of the Synod of California and one of the largest Presbyteries in the nation, voted to divide into five new Presbyteries. These Presbyteries with the addition of the Presbytery of Riverside and Santa Barbara formed the Synod of Southern California (later Hawaii would be added to the name.)

The Presbytery of Los Angeles, Southwest was organized on January 4, 1968 at the Inglewood Presbyterian Church. The intent was to provide continuity of name with the Presbytery of Los Angeles. The name proved to be awkward and excluded Hawaii. In 1970 the name was changed to the Presbytery of the Pacific, a more accurate description of the Presbytery, with the Midway Islands as the western boundary. The Presbytery was constituted with 50 congregations, 153 ministers of Word and Sacrament, and over 40,000 members. At the beginning of the life of the Presbytery diversity was apparent. Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Mexican, Cuban, Welsh, African-American, and Anglo congregations, those ethnically and racially mixed and those who were not so diverse; congregations small, midsize, large and very large - liberal, conservative, moderate, evangelical, ecumenical; congregations with names like Beverly Hills, Hollywood, Malibu, Honolulu and those with names like St. Pauls, St. Peters, St. Marks, St. Andrews, Bethesda, Korean, Westminster, Faith, and the most prevalent, first Presbyterian. These added to other names expressed the extent of the diversity.

The Presbytery during the first eight years was committed to doing mission program through the Synod. The only staff was an administrative secretary, part time at the beginning and a volunteer Stated Clerk. The Chairs of the two principle ecclesiastical committee (Ministerial Relations and Candidates) were ministers serving congregations who could provide them with secretaries to do the "paper" required of these committees.

The Book of Order was adding new definitions for the position of Executive Presbyter. The other Presbyteries of the Synod had called full or part-time Executives, and most of the other Presbyteries reduced their involvement with mission through the Synod. The Presbytery knew it needed to organize in different ways. In 1974 the Presbytery elected a self-study committee to do a comprehensive mission study and to make

recommendations. The Committee of Twelve employed a full-time staff person to aid them in their study. That person was The Reverend Howard Rice, on leave from San Francisco Theological Seminary. The approved study contained multiple recommendations when presented to the Presbytery in the fall of 1975. A principal feature was the organization of the Presbytery into five mission units. Each unit was comprised of congregations representing the diversity of the Presbytery. The Units, with geographical proximity as a value, were of necessity non-geographical to accomplish the diversity requirement. These Units were empowered to share a life together, supporting one another with comfort, care, and common mission. They would elect persons to membership on the three Presbytery Cabinets (Program, Personnel, and Administration).

An additional approved recommendation from the Self-study was the employment of an organizing Executive to form and empower the mission units as defined by the study. That person was the Reverend Charles Doak, on leave of absence as the Presbyterian Chaplain at UCLA (The Reverend George Abdo was ordained to be the interim chaplain during this time.) The Presbytery called the Reverend David Meekhof to be the first Executive Presbyter. He was installed in the spring of 1978. At that time a part-time compensated Stated Clerk was working with the Presbytery.

During the early years of the Presbytery, mission was formed out of the Presbytery diversity. One example of this was the First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood and the West Hollywood Presbyterian Church. These two congregations in the same section of the city were very different in size and understanding of mission. Nevertheless both were faithful to the Gospel. West Hollywood had become a sanctuary for young people who had migrated to the Sunset Strip during the sixties and seventies. Out of this congregation came two mission projects - the Lazarus Project and the Mary Magdalene ministry. At the same time Hollywood First church, which had had a leading role in what would become the Jesus People with programs and parades on Hollywood Boulevard, was creating a media mission with film, television and radio as their focus.

Many other congregations had their own mission which contributed to the continued Presbytery mission life. Two congregations literally contributed their life to mission. West Adams Presbyterian closed and sold in 1967 just prior to the beginning of the Presbytery provided the funds for the Black Advisory Committee, which, although part of the Synod, did the great majority of its work in the Presbytery of the Pacific. Pacific Presbyterian Church in Playa del Rey was sold because of the airport expansion and the funds used to create the Urban Church Redevelopment Fund.

The Mission Units did not continue. The lack of geographical proximity, the added meeting demands on ministers and elders, the time required for the hard work of living with diversity were more persuasive than the reasons which had formed the Units. The only one in continued existence is the Hawaiian Presbyterian Council.

With David Meekhof's energetic and knowledgeable presence, the Presbytery continued the work done in the early seventies by organizing new congregations in the Asian and Hispanic communities - adding to the rich diversity of the Presbytery. At the end of the

1990's we had added a Philippine congregation. One important mission of the Presbytery was our Native American Ministry - a revival of the Presbytery of Los Angeles Indian Welcome Center (the first in the city of Los Angeles).

The Education Ministry of the Presbytery prospered with the leadership of Nancy Scott, Director of Christian Education and later our first Associate General Presbyter. The Resource Center and the now extinct Kaleidoscope - a one-day teaching/learning event - were two of her many contributions.

The Presbytery Hunger Mission developed with such success that it acquired General Assembly funding for a full time Hunger Action Enabler. This became so well established that during the 1992 city unrest, Joanne Bell was a person in leadership for the City of Los Angeles mobilization to provide food and shelter for those who suffered loss because of fires and destruction.

The Presbytery was not without difficult times. The Presbytery was equally divided (one or two votes) on matters concerning amending The Book of Order. The Presbytery was involved in both ecclesiastical and civil judicial processes. Two principle civil cases were linked to: 1) property ownership and 2) employment vacation pay. The Presbytery won the first and lost the second. Both resulted in changes in Presbytery policy.

The Presbytery is the governing body of origin. All congregations and pastors are members and accountable to one another through the Presbytery. Presbytery calls and installs ministers, develops, redevelops, and closes congregations. Presbyteries elect all commissioners to Synod and General Assembly. The Presbytery of the Pacific has sought to be faithful in these responsibilities.

When David Meekhof resigned as Presbytery Executive effective December 31, 1991. Nancy Scott was asked to serve as acting General Presbyter until Charles Doak again was provided a leave of absence from UCLA to become the interim General Presbyter (The Presbytery had replaced "Executive" with "General" indicating a shift from primary administrative duties to more pastoral responsibilities). Soon after, the Reverend Linda Culbertson was called and installed as the Associate General Presbyter. As Charles Doak's leave of absence was about to conclude and the Presbytery was unable to acquire a new General Presbyter and with budget constraints more obvious, Linda Culbertson became the Acting General Presbyter. Later the Associate Presbyter position was abolished and in 1998 Ms Culbertson was installed as our second General Presbyter.

The offices of the Presbytery have been located since 1972 in Covenant Presbyterian Church. The reason is that beginning in 1971 the Presbytery Stated Clerk was an elder from Covenant Church. At one time, the Presbytery had looked for office space closer to the center of the City of Los Angeles. Circumstances (a fire at Wilshire Church) prevented this from happening. In 1976 and again 1993 the Presbytery rented more space in Covenant Church.

As with all organizations, these years have witnessed constant reorganization and updated technology. Presbytery leadership is more staff dependent than in the early years, although there continues to be superior volunteer leadership. A prime example is Presbytery's excellent web site.

One of the Presbytery constants is the commitment to Jesus Christ and His love, justice, care, comfort and correction through the Church. This is the reason Presbytery continues to live since 1968, as God's chosen and diverse people.

Charles W. Doak  
November 11, 2003  
January 20, 2003