

**Triennial Visit  
With the Session of  
Second Presbyterian Church of Staunton  
George W. Evans and Don Myers – September 28, 2011**

Following our meal and discussion with Dan Williams, we gathered at Second Church for our time with the session. Before the meeting, Don and I snooped around a little bit, looking through some historical artifacts and commenting to one another on the beauty of the church structure. Second is a most impressive looking building and obviously well taken care of.

I explained why we were there and the purpose of the triennial visit. Session was most welcoming and Don and I felt very comfortable among them. We went right to business.

Session pretty was pretty much in harmony with the comments Dan made to us during our time with him. They indicated that Staunton was once a “country in town” sort of community, but that concept was no longer viable. It was more than 50 years ago that many farming families were the core of the church. They also mentioned the large numbers of churches within a short distance of one another, and in particular how close they were to First Presbyterian (There is some history about that). One elder said “We are saturated with churches.” Parking was another issue with the session. They apparently lost many parking spaces from a lot which went from city control to the ownership of the Methodist Church nearby. One or two members of the church actually live near the church - most members live in other areas of the community.

The Session is very proud of the architecture and appearance of the church plant. They spoke of the beauty of their sanctuary. They also felt that one of their strengths was that they were “a solid Christian group.” They identified themselves as being “special” even though they are declining in numbers. It was evident from their sharing with us that they are a friendly, caring, and compassionate people who are mission minded and involved. They said they find the funds they need whenever they identify a need which they believe they are called to address. The challenges they now face include the declining membership and, along with that, the declining income. The upkeep of the building is expensive. The financial challenges they are facing are great, but they do their best to keep up with them. The recurring theme was the lack of young people.

The session knows the church has a mission statement. They said it was posted on their web-site. The “use” of the statement was in question. Long range plans are almost nonexistent since they are attempting to remain viable for the short term.

The session is very happy with the support they receive from the congregation. “100%!” They were especially proud of how the congregation steps up to the plate in supporting hunger offerings. “Every time our mission committee puts out a request for hunger offerings, even with the decline in funds and numbers of members, our congregation’s giving to hunger needs and other outreach goes up.” “It makes us feel good.”

Session is aware of the people who are in relationship with the presbytery. The clerk (Nancy Swisher) is on the Sessional Records Committee; Pam Snyder is PW president (sic) and has been extremely active on the Synod and National levels of PW. The majority of members now on session have attended presbytery meetings (although some indicated it was with fear and trepidation - apparently Dan’s driving skills were in question as well as the mechanics of his car!)

“Send us money” was a response when asked how COM could help Second Church. I sensed it was in jest, but it does indicate the worry they have over the financial future of the church. Session also asked, “What can COM do to help us with our decline in membership?” Of greater interest with a few of the elders was the listing of available ministers, CLP’s etc., who are available to preach. They get the list from the presbytery office but said it is not very reliable. They often called several people on the list only to discover they are not available or are no longer preaching. They have several community folk who can fill in if necessary, but they would prefer “Presbyterians.” They are also aware of some other churches in the presbytery that are growing and wondered if presbytery couldn’t “tap” into them as resources to help others churches with their growth issues. The suggestion was made that a workshop of some sort be developed for churches struggling in situations similar to theirs.

I concluded our time with prayer.