

A Call to “Truth-Telling”

General Presbyter Dan Schomer to the November 14, 2006, meeting of Eastminster Presbytery

In Exodus 20:16 the ninth commandment declares, **“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”**

In Ephesians 4:15 the standard of **“speaking the truth in love”** is set forth as normative for the Church.

I call to the attention of the presbytery these two foundational biblical texts for life within the Body of Christ. Over the past two months as I have sought to serve Christ and Eastminster Presbytery in relationship to the pastors and sessions of the Hudson Presbyterian Church and Stow Presbyterian Church, I have found these encounters both frustrating and painful. I do not say this by way of accusation, but as an expression of heartfelt sorrow that we find ourselves in the midst of this time of conflict and schism.

As I have tried to understand why these experiences have been so frustrating and painful for me, I came to realize that we are dealing with a crisis concerning truth telling. I have heard such statements as these:

- Concerning the “PUP” report: “Everything has changed.”
- “The Presbyterian Church doesn’t believe in the authority of Scripture.”
- “The Presbyterian Church condones goddess worship.”
- As the West Area Subcommittee and I met with the Stow Session on November 9, a young woman who is a member of the session told us that she was the last session member to hold out on seeking to separate from the PCUSA. She shared with us that, when she was told that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) does not believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ, she made up her mind to join the effort to separate.

Such “sound bites” get the attention of the members in the pews and effectively lay the foundations for schism. Who wouldn’t react to such a church, if in fact, these statements were true? The problem is that such statements are a violation of Exodus 20:19 and Ephesians 4:15.

Such statements are not mere opinions; they are untruths.

They do not represent who we are as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) or what we believe. It is one thing to disagree with a particular statement made by an individual or a General Assembly about the authority of Scripture; but it is quite another to claim that the PCUSA rejects the authority of the Bible. The first statement invites dialogue and discernment, while the second statement passes judgment on an entire church using sweeping generalizations.

So, I stand before you today, as one who at times has been guilty of making sweeping generalizations, to say that I believe in the authority of Exodus 20:16 and Ephesians 4:15. I believe it is time for truth telling. I believe it is time to expect of one another that we will speak the truth in love. I believe it is time to begin holding ourselves accountable about making sweeping generalizations and wholesale condemnations on the floor of this presbytery and around the table at session meetings. Let’s all pledge ourselves to speak the truth and speak the truth in love.