

Chaplain to the Retired Clergy and Surviving Spouses
2008 Conference Summary
Oct 14 – 16, 2008
Camp Allen Texas

Well, all I can say is that we had another great conference. We had 37 people registered to attend and 34 showed up. (We had a little ‘flu bug’ that kept some from attending.) Some people were concerned about damage that Camp Allen may have suffered from the hurricane but very little was seen. In fact, George Dehan, the camp director, pointed out that the camp played an important part during the hurricane by housing the State Police (they were the closest location to Galveston that could house that many people) and a couple of nursing homes evacuated their residents to Camp Allen to be cared for by their caregivers during the storm. Camp Allen played an important role during the hurricane.

Church Pension Fund Report - Dennis Sullivan, the head of the CPG, spoke to our group who were anxiously awaiting to hear what he said following the earlier financial crisis on Wall Street. His opening words were “the fund is in very sound financial condition.” He went on to point out that the fund is not ‘immune to financial conditions’ and situations such as we have just experienced ‘were a test of our fund managers.’

Dennis went on to report that at the end of the last fiscal year (March 31, 2008) the fund had 8.9 billion in assets and 5.1 billion in liabilities. This 5.1 covers pensions and the medical supplement. As of Sept 30, 2008 (the end of the first half of the fiscal year) the fund was down “...a little but not much.” He said it was down to around 8.2 or 8.3 billion. He pointed out that 35% of the fund is in ‘fixed income’ instruments. “We can take anything the market can throw at us!” The fund carries one year of benefits available in liquid reserve. Dennis pointed out that the fund trustees have been criticized for holding the reserves that they do. People have said that they should either cut assessment rates or improve the benefits. (We have all heard those suggestions

before!!) But Dennis said that he was very comfortable holding to the current policy.

It is Dennis' opinion that we will have this market for a couple of years. He said that he will continue to support the 'cost of living' increases that the fund has always provided. Dennis pointed out that the key to a good pension fund is a "good pension at retirement plus cost of living increases." The Church Pension Fund is a "fully funded pension" and even if the market goes down, our pensions remain. He contrasted that with some other funds that are dependent upon market fluctuations.

Dennis pointed out that the trustees have dealt with the question of whether or not to invest monies on behalf of other Episcopal institutions and they have said "No." Talking about other agencies within the CPG, Dennis pointed out that the Church Insurance took a big hit losing billions following Katrina and Rita. But by the end of this year they will have made up those losses. He pointed out that the two purposes of these companies is to: serve the church and give financial stability. The Church Publishing Co is still losing money but now has new management and Dennis hopes that will turn around.

There is some consideration that beginning January 1/20/09 there will be an increase in life insurance for retired clergy and surviving spouses from \$30,000 to \$50,000. There will not be any extra cost for this to the retired clergy or spouses – if it is increased.

There will be a proposal at the next General Convention to consider a "Unified Medical Plan" for active clergy and lay employees. This is a mandatory program for all active clergy and dioceses. Dennis's question is "Can we put together a useful plan that will benefit the entire church?" There will also be some major changes in the trustees at that convention.

Regarding clergy leaving the Episcopal Church, Dennis pointed out that if they have been vested in the Fund for 5 years they will get their pension. Their pension is frozen when they leave and

they will lose some of the benefits that they would have been eligible for if they had stayed.

Dennis closed by saying that if anyone in the church has questions about the fund, call the CPG. They will certainly try to answer their questions.

“The Changing Healthcare Climate” – Libby Miller (in charge of Clinical Management and Member Wellness with the Medical Trust gave a power point presentation explaining “What’s Going On Out There” in the field of healthcare. She gave a lot of statistics and pointed out that the USA healthcare system is ranked 37th by WHO. She pointed out the challenges to the healthcare system: only 55% of eligible individuals get flu shots. (We are now in the flu season so don’t be one of those statistics!) Only 66% of eligible people get a colonoscopy. Many more statistics that are too numerous to add here. She did point out some of the advancements that are currently under development. She concluded by pointing out that we are the ones in control and what we eat or don’t eat, whether we exercise or don’t exercise is affects our health. She gave us two web sites that provide good medical information: www.webmd.com , www.fit.com, and www.realage.com.

“The Medical Trust” – Ros Warren was present from The Medical Trust to give us an update on “Post Retirement Healthcare.” She also had a powerpoint presentation that talked about ‘pre 65 healthcare and post 65 healthcare. The ‘pre 65’ was to provide us with guidance in talking to people that are considering retirement. Of course the ‘post 65’ was information that we need for ourselves as well as those to whom we minister. She talked about Medicare and what is new in 2009. She also went over the 2009 Medicare supplement rates. While she gave us the figures, that information will be distributed to everyone concerned shortly so I will not try to summarize it here. She did point out that the Medical Trust is increasing the subsidy for the Medical Trust supplement by \$15 in 2009. Something that Ros pointed out that I was not aware of is the medcohealth.com web site allows you to

log in individually and see your drug history and as well as much more.

The vision program will change in 2009 and there will be a 'hearing assistance benefit' as well. For those traveling out of the country or even 100 miles from your home, Medex is available through our plan.

If you have any questions you can go to www.cpg.org and find some answers.

“Grieving the Changes in our Church” – This was the topic that I asked our speaker, Harold Ivan Smith, Chaplain and Counselor at St. Luke’s Hospital in Kansas City, to address. (friendgrief@mindspring.com) My feeling was that there are some in our retired ranks that may be grieving that the ‘church isn’t what it used to be’ when I was active in my ministry.

Harold Ivan spoke to that (as well as the general topic of grief) in three presentations: Masking the Grief: Singing the Lord’s Song, Minding the Grief: Singing the Lord’s Song and Mining the Grief: Singing the Lord’s Song. One of the people present pointed out that they had heard many presentations on the topic of grief but had never had it presented in a more humorous and meaningful fashion than Harold Ivan’s presentation. At the end of our convention some suggested that we invite Harold Ivan to be our speaker again. Some of the people present from CPG pointed out that they might invite him to be the speaker at our next national convention for Chaplains.

Harold Ivan left us with the following questions to consider:

- What did you get from the Episcopal Church that you want to keep?
- What did the Episcopal Church have that you regret not getting?
- What did you get from the Episcopal Church that you want to discard?

- What did you need that the Episcopal Church could not provide?

Harold Ivan had a handout for each of his presentations and I will try to include them with this newsletter for the Chaplains who were unable to attend the conference.

Entertainment! – Not only was Harold Ivan Smith our primary speaker, he was also our entertainment! Harold Ivan has a very strong interest in the spirituality of our presidents and their spouses. He has done research on this topic at many of the presidential libraries. He has a specific interest in Eleanor Roosevelt – and that was our entertainment. Unfortunately, the ‘time slot’ for the entertainment was ‘squeezed’ and Harold Ivan had to rush through his program. But it was very interesting and gave us information that many of us were unaware of.

Worship Experience – In the past, Camp Allen has always had a Camp Chaplain that provided daily worship services. This year no Chaplain was in residence (although the camp asked one of our own, Ben Shawhan, to serve in that capacity while we were there) so I had asked individual chaplains to lead the various worship experiences during the time we were there. This had been suggested in the past and I think that many appreciated seeing some of ‘at work’ and it gave more of us an opportunity to ‘participate’ in the conference. We may do that more in the future.

Future Plans – The end of the conference evaluations were all VERY positive. While there was some time scheduled as ‘free time’ it seemed to be eaten up by program. Both my wife and I agree that we will have to work harder next year to see that we do have more free time. The fact that it rained most of the time we were at Camp Allen eliminated many people’s desire to get outside and walk around.

Next years conference will again be held at Camp Allen, October 20 -22, 2009. I pushed for that because Camp Allen is such an easy place to have the conference. Also, with the large number of

chaplains from the state of Texas, I suspect that the overall cost of the conference would be cheaper (given travel expense) than holding it elsewhere. Another benefit is the excellent food with choices! If we met in a hotel, we would have to select a menu and not everyone would like what was chosen. Camp Allen always has choices and everyone agrees they cook good food!! While Camp Allen is a good distance from the Houston airport, they do provide transportation and that may not always be possible with another location. So please put October 20 – 22, 2009 on your calendar right now.

A suggestion for a great read: [The Shack: Where Tragedy Confronts Eternity](#) by William P. Young. You'll get a whole different perspective on the Holy Trinity!

Looking forward to seeing everyone again next year!

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