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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY MISSION COUNCIL

OF THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
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July 25, 1974

STATEMENT OF RESIGNATION

to the
General Assembly Mission Council
of the
United Presbyterian Church, USA
by the
Reverend Leon E. Fanniel
Executive Director

Upon my return to New York from the 186th General Assembly, or what has now become known as "the Louisville experience," I convened the Administrative Staff of the General Assembly Mission Council and later during the week the Coordinating Cabinet. A major block of time was given at both of these meetings to assess the events which occurred during the Assembly and the meetings of the Mission Council. I took the occasion of these two meetings to share some of my deep and personal concerns which resulted both from our time together in Louisville and during the past one year and ten months of my service as the Executive Director of the General Assembly Mission Council. The focusing on these concerns have helped to shape the content of my comments to you this morning.

It might be more appropriate to make such comments in an Executive Session of the General Assembly Mission Council, however, I prefer to share these comments in the presence of the staff of the Mission Council, other agency staff and synod executives. This is significant for me because from my perspective it is these persons, with you, the elected members of the Mission Council, who constitute the basic team necessary for the effective implementation of the work of this Council and the General Assembly as a judicatory. Whether or not any discussion of my presentation needs to be made in Executive Session is a decision which you (GAMC) will need to make.

One year and ten months ago in this city (Chicago), I was elected as the Executive Director of the General Assembly Mission Council. One of the numerous questions that I vividly recall being asked was "why do you want this position?" My response to that question was that "to say that I want the position would be an inaccurate

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statement. Rather, I am challenged by the potential of the restructuring; committed to the dream which shaped the 'Design for Mission'; and willing to make myself available if in the wisdom of this Council it is determined that I can make a positive contribution to the implementation of the Design." I further stated "that I was awed by the magnitude of the task, feeling not at all equal to it, but willing to give my best with the support of staff to help you do the job."

In reflecting with the Mission Council staff and the Coordinating Cabinet about this period of time, I indicated that it has been a time of excitement, loneliness, joyful accomplishments, and frustrations. I have been told by some that this is "the nature of the beast." I have lived through months of undercurrents, corridor and back room comments about the lack of leadership, the lack of competence and experience, and the inappropriateness of present leadership style. It is being said that there exists a "crisis in leadership" and that unless this situation is altered, the church will continue to decline in membership, decrease its financial support to G.A. causes, and cease to have an inspired thrust in mission.

It is a natural tendency to take personally such expressed feelings about leadership. However, I recognize that if, in fact, a "crisis in leadership" exists, it is a crisis for which we all must accept responsibility. The leadership of the United Presbyterian Church has never been vested in any one person. And while many call now for a Moses to "lead us out of the wilderness," that will occur only as we take seriously our corporate responsibility for leadership.

Nevertheless, I am that symbol of leadership and I accept the responsibilities that go with the symbol. It is in recognition of the significance of this symbol, my continuing commitment to the dream yet to be realized in the restructuring, my love and concern for the Church, and my intent not to be a deterrent to the forward and creative movement of this church, I am submitting to you my resignation as Executive Director of the General Assembly Mission Council. I am asking that my resignation become effective as of August 31, 1974. I am sure you are aware that this is a difficult decision for me to make. However, I have made it only after very careful and prayerful consideration and I feel that it is the right decision.

It would be non-productive to enumerate a number of the reasons for this decision, however, I would like to highlight several:

- a. It is apparent that significant changes have occurred in the minds of many people both on this Council and elsewhere regarding the expectation of leadership and the appropriate style needed for this time in the life

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of the church. There is now a call for more aggressive, forceful, direct and charismatic leadership. My ability to meet these new expectations is not an issue for me. Rather, the issue is that I know who I am...I like who I am...and I neither want nor feel the need to expend energy "proving" my ability to make such a transition.

- b. Also significant is my feeling that the existing atmosphere and prevailing attitude regarding a "crisis in leadership" within the GAMC, across staff lines and in other segments of the church would make my efforts non-productive and the experience less than meaningful to me.

When I accepted your call as Executive Director I did so with no illusions either about the complexity of the task nor the inherent problems related to that task. I said at the time to some persons, that anyone who is not prepared to redefine their understanding of "tenure" or "longevity" in a leadership role would be in for a rude awakening because of the constantly changing nature of the church and the society which so greatly affects and influences the church. Further that these changes will require new approaches and varied leadership styles. It was my fervent prayer that God would enable me to recognize when that time occurred and give me the "guts" to make the necessary decision. I have no desire to remain in a situation where the quality of leadership is constantly in question, nor where the situation has the possibility of being destructive to me both spiritually and professionally.

I hope that you, the General Assembly Mission Council, will take the occasion of my resignation to do several creative things:

- a. Reassess your "concept of leadership;"
- b. Clearly define and articulate your understanding of leadership roles and expectations;
- c. Make the necessary structural changes and provide appropriate accountabilities to enable a new Executive Director to fulfill your expectations;
- d. Make the hard decisions regarding the refinement of present structure and process;
- e. Make the necessary policy decisions that will provide for the creative realignment of staff and functions at the G.A. level in order to provide for the appropriate leadership required; and
- f. Do what is required with integrity and in the Spirit of Christ.

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In a recent interview which was published in the June edition of A.D. I said that the General Assembly Mission Council members "simply are not structure people. They are mission people. They care about what the church is and wants to be doing, not just the mechanics of how it gets done...the Mission Council, in other words, has the responsibility for making mission happen." And you must have the will to do this. There are some exciting things bubbling just under the surface. In spite of some assessments, we have made some significant strides in the past year and ten months, and you must not step backwards at this critical point in the life of the church. You have a competent and committed staff related to this Council and in the agencies. You have agency and synod executives and their staff who have moved into what I call the "mixed zone," taking seriously the imperative in the Design which calls for interdependence, churchwideness, and comprehensiveness. There is a new spirit in the life of these groups...a spirit which you must nurture so that it reaches its full potential. It is only as we acknowledge that our particular areas of responsibility are only a part of the greater whole and direct our energies toward the good of the whole, will we emerge as a healthy, vibrant and vital church.

We have been through some difficult times, but I believe that they have been times of making our fibre stronger, our resolve more certain. And I am convinced that we will emerge a better people of God, more fully prepared to tell and do on behalf of our Lord as a result. I was asked recently whether or not the United Presbyterian Church's situation is serious. Of course. It is a serious business in which we are engaged. And we still have difficult times ahead. But I will remind you that we are called not only to be serious about this task but also joyful; not only mindful of our problems, but mindful of the promise that, through ways we might not know, all will be well in the end. I believe it and I will bear witness to that.

There is much more that I could say, but will not, except to express my gratefulness to God and my appreciation for the opportunity given me to be a partner with you in mission at this level in the life and work of our church. I have no answers about my future, and that does not really disturb me. God has charted my course these past years. And while the rationale for His decisions has not always been clear to me, nevertheless, I have said yes -- and not without questioning. But having said yes, I have tried to give my best. And I'll say yes to the next call, if it is God's will, and I'll question...and I'll give my best. I will leave this office with a continuing commitment to the church that is still firm, a faith that is even stronger, a capability of loving more deeply, and prepared to bear a creative witness to God's working in His church through you and through me.

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I would suggest that the Personnel and Nominating Committee meet this evening, augmented by the Stated Clerk, the Chairperson of the General Assembly Mission Council, and the Moderator of the 186th General Assembly to discuss with me the details of my resignation and make recommendations to you at a subsequent plenary session during this meeting.

The blessing and peace of God be with you all. Please keep me in your prayers.

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