

Presbytery of Eastern Virginia  
(January 26, 2008)

Report of the Makemie Roots & Wings Project Oversight Task Force  
Reverend Harold McKeithen, Chairman

Friends, we, the Presbytery of Eastern Virginia, have been engaged for twenty years in supporting a “big idea”. We have visioned, planned, discussed, and prayed that we might be able to enhance our youth camp facility at Makemie Woods and add comfortable facilities for adult ministry.

For the past ten years, we have asked lay and clergy leaders in the Presbytery to use their gifts and experience to lead us through a complex process of refining our vision for Makemie Woods into a compelling plan for funding and implementation. They have been faithful to our charge and they have brought us to this critical point. Today, we will share in greater detail what has been accomplished and where we are in achieving our common goal. We will also offer a recommendation intended to steer this project in the months ahead.

In support of this endeavor, we have shared our own stories about how church camp and conference experience helped to shape our relationship with God and led many of us into ministry, as pastors, Christian educators and Christian music professionals. Time after time, we have approved the steps leading to realizing our vision for Makemie Woods as both a camp and conference facility for the use of our Presbytery churches and their members.

Nearly a decade ago, the vision began to take shape and we approved the plan to fully develop the costs and organize for a Presbytery-wide capital campaign to begin implementation, even if it required building in phases over time and multiple capital campaigns.

The process of this project has passed through a series of important steps over the past ten years.

A visioning group described the elements of a long range plan for Makemie Woods, which included a major conference center, an indoor multi-purpose activity building, a welcome center, a new maintenance building and infrastructural improvements to the site for efficient operation and security. The Presbytery accepted the vision.

A capital funds campaign team was organized to plan and execute the largest funding project in the history of the Presbytery. Feasibility studies were carried out to determine the level of support that might exist for a Makemie Woods project.

Even though the project was ambitious in light of the findings of the feasibility studies, Presbytery supported the recommendation to pursue the full vision for Makemie Woods, even if it had to be developed in phases over time. Once the campaign design was completed and presented, the Presbytery added a \$ 300,000 commitment to the new church development at Stone House Presbyterian Church. The case for support was prepared with fund development counsel, marketing materials were developed, church member data was centralized at the Presbytery office, and local church designees were trained to ensure that the project could be presented to each congregation in the most effective manner. Major donors were identified and preparation was made for personal solicitation prior to the public launch of the campaign, but this important phase of the campaign could not be carried out because several key churches launched their own local capital campaigns at the same time.

Despite this set-back, the campaign was taken to the churches in education and cultivation events, followed by a mass mailing to 9,000 Presbyterian member homes. A second mailing was sent in late 2006. Results of the campaign to date have produced nearly \$1.2 million in pledges and gifts (with approximately \$ 77,000 in multi-year pledges still to be fulfilled) from 373 pledges from throughout the Presbytery. The solicitation phase of the campaign was interrupted by the Hurricane Katrina disaster relief effort which shifted charitable giving for a period of six months or more.

With the completion of active fundraising, the Presbytery appointed a project oversight task force to monitor pledge fulfillment, carry out the commitment to Stone House Presbyterian, restore Presbytery accounts that had been used to cover earlier planning and campaign costs, and develop a plan of implementation of elements of the project as funding permitted.

Your project oversight task force has been wrestling with the reality that once all pledges have been fulfilled, we will have remaining approximately half a million dollars in cash. Original construction costs were developed five years ago and since have more doubled. The indoor activity building was estimated to cost about \$ 500,000 is now projected at more than \$ 2 million. The conference center construction was estimated earlier at nearly \$ 6 million, has now doubled in cost. In short, without the infusion of additional funding, we are unable to build anything at this time.

We know that many of you have been anxious to hear more about the progress of the project, but our oversight task force has been busy researching and exploring every option possible to try to get us out of this box, some very radical. Recently, we began a series of several focus group sessions with clergy to explore the feasibility of securing additional funding with donors and to consider whether the indoor activity building for the camp program (thought last year to be the next element of the project to be built) or a lodge type sleeping/meeting building (with 32 beds, meeting space and kitchen) for adult ministry would be more desirable to secure local church involvement and long term support for the vision of Makemie Woods.

The PEVA Makemie Roots & Wings Project Oversight Task Force has considered this new idea to build next a “lodge” type facility (sleeping up to thirty-two people) as the first phase of the proposed adult conference center. Consultation with the architect has produced a viable approach and the encouraging support of many clergy, the task force is persuaded that providing a comfortable functional facility for adults (retreats, conferences, workshops, etc.) is the preferred next step in the project and more detailed plans and funding should be pursued.

This Presbytery set out 20 years ago to provide a place of wonder and for achieving closeness with God for children and adults and to have every church in our Presbytery claim it as their own. We have been faithful in that pursuit despite disappointments along the way.

In addition to this report, you should have received today a more detailed history of the project, which will explain in greater detail the various options that have been explored. That document, along with my report, will be sent to pastors and clerks at each of our churches in the next few days to be shared with your sessions and congregations.

Until we can generate greater local church ownership and support for the Makemie Roots & Wings project, our twenty year pursuit of the goal to create a special place for ministry for our children and adults will have been in vain. Makemie Woods is now the largest mission program of the Presbytery of Eastern Virginia and requires an annual subsidy of approximately \$ 200,000 to sustain the camp program. As these costs continue to increase, the original concept to create a “cash positive” conference center to off-set or cap the subsidy made sense. Without this new revenue, the rising cost of camp ministry will become a greater challenge for the Presbytery.

With your prayers, ideas and personal commitment, we can be faithful to the vision for Makemie Woods. God willing, it will be a reality someday.

(PAUSE)

I direct your attention now to the written recommendation found on the last page of the summary history of the Makemie Woods Roots & Wings project you should have picked up when you arrived for this meeting. I will now read the recommendation of the Makemie Roots & Wings Project Oversight Task Force.

“The PEVA Makemie Roots & Wings Project Oversight Task Force recommends to Presbytery that it be authorized to pursue detailed plans, costs and local government approvals to build the first phase of the proposed adult conference center (a lodge type facility) with accommodations to sleep up to thirty-two

people, with meeting space and kitchen facilities, as the next element of the project to be implemented; and that the Oversight Task Force be authorized to extend the Roots & Wings capital funding campaign to secure the additional funding needed for the project.