



Winter 2010

The Covenant Connection

A Newsletter of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians (Vol 13 #4)

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Covenant Network joins PFR in a Call to Prayer

Encouraged by Moderator Cindy Bolbach, the Boards of Directors of the Covenant Network and Presbyterians for Renewal have invited all Presbyterians to join in a Call to Prayer for our church, as well as to commit together to conduct the upcoming discussions around Amendment 10-A “in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called.” The complete text for this joint Call to Prayer can be found on the Moderator's Blog: <http://pcusa-oga.typepad.com/mod/2010/10/a-call-to-prayer.html>

Preparing to vote in the presbyteries, preparing for a post-B church.

Voting on Amendment 10-A has begun in the Presbyteries and the margins are consistently moving in our direction. In this edition: Information, updates, and encouragements to make your voice be heard and your vote count!

We welcome seven new congregations to the Covenant Community!

We celebrate seven congregations that have joined the Covenant Network since September, by affirming the Call to Covenant Community. We warmly welcome Ginter Park Presbyterian, Richmond, VA; Shepherdstown [WV] Presbyterian; First Presbyterian, Morgantown, WV; First Presbyterian, New Canaan, CT; Freedom Plains United Presbyterian, LaGrangeville, NY; University Presbyterian, San Antonio, TX; and Setauket [NY] Presbyterian. Their leadership is important and we appreciate their ministry.

Executive Director will retire in Summer of 2011

In a November 3rd press release, the Covenant Network Board of Directors announced that Pamela Byers will retire in summer 2011 from the position of Executive Director; a position she has held since the founding of the Covenant Network in 1997. Regarding Pam's significant contribution to the church as CovNet Executive Director, Deborah Block comments, “Pam Byers has labored for our vision of an inclusive, engaged, and united church with unfaltering 'energy, intelligence, imagination, and love,' successfully leading the way to the current Amendment 10-A now before the presbyteries.” For the complete text of the press release, go to: www.covnetpres.org/2010/12/executive-director-will-retire/



Haven't heard from us lately?

Over 200 people gathered in Houston to celebrate the *Family of God* at Covenant Network's 13th National Conference. A family panel moderated by Rev. Erin Swenson, a Marriage and Family Therapist, as well as video stories of families within our church, set the context for powerful plenaries, spirited worship services, engaging workshops and renewing fellowship. Texts and videos of the plenary addresses and sermons can be found on the Covenant Network website. CD's and MP3 downloads are available through the e-store, or by contacting Jason Fredrick at jasonf@covenantnetwork.org. Excerpts of some conference presentations can be found in this newsletter.

We are always working to keep our contact information current. If we've lost touch with you, whether because of a move or change of email address, please contact Jason, at jasonf@covenantnetwork.org to update your contact information. Thanks!

The church we seek to strengthen is built upon the hospitality of Jesus, who said, “Whoever comes to me I will not cast out.” The good news of the gospel is that all—those who are near and those who were far off—are invited; all are members of the household and citizens of the realm of God. No one has a claim on this invitation and none of us becomes worthy, even by sincere effort, to live according to God's will. Grateful for our own inclusion, we carry out the mission of the church to extend God's hospitality to a broken and fearful and lonely world.

From the *Call to Covenant Community*. Please read it in its entirety at covnetpres.org/resources/call-to-covenant-community/.

Proposed Amendment 10-A would replace the current language of G-6.0106b with the following:

“Standards for ordained service reflect the church's desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (G-1.0000). The governing body responsible for ordination and/or installation (G-14.0240; G-14.0450) shall examine each candidate's calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of office. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate's ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003). Governing bodies shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.”

AMENDMENT 10-A
The Constitutional Case

Amendment 10-A offers the beginning of the end of our denominational polarization over ordination standards through a rigorous constitutional adherence to the principles of the Adopting Act of 1729. Whenever the church has faced conflicts over ordination in the past, it has found peace by returning to the Adopting Act compromise.

“Standards for ordained service reflect the church's desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (G-1.0000).”

Standards are not designed to be arbitrary or punitive - they are undertaken voluntarily and joyfully in submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The standards do not simply relate to one area of life, such as sexuality, but “in all aspects of life.” The model for these standards is Jesus Christ, who alone is Head of the Church.

“The governing body responsible for ordination and/or installation (G.14.0240; G-14.0450) shall examine each candidate's calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of office.”

This sentence reflects the “New Side/New School” traditions of ordination standards inherited from the English Puritan stream of American Presbyterianism. It focuses on call (both the candidate's sense of call and the church's affirmation of that call), gifts, preparation, and “suitability for the responsibilities of office.” The criteria for determination of “suitability” will undoubtedly reflect the local judgment of particular governing bodies. However, the question of “suitability” is related to “the responsibilities of office.” Matters such as gender or race would be excluded from consideration as these have been specifically addressed in confessional documents of the church. A candidate's sexual behavior (but not orientation) could be a factor considered in determining a particular candidate's “suitability.” Since the examining body would be required to examine “each candidate's” suitability, it would not be permissible for a governing body to bar a class of people. But the candidate's behavior would need to be examined in the larger context of the person's gifts, calling, and preparation. Matters related to the conscience of a candidate would be considered as they are now, since these relate to G-6.0108, not G-6.0106.

“The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate's ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003).”

This sentence incorporates the historic “Old Side/Old School” concerns regarding ordination standards inherited from the Scots-Irish stream of American Presbyterianism. The examination is not merely a subjective evaluation of the candidate's call, or merely the candidate's verbal assent to standards. The examining body must be satisfied of the candidate's “ability and commitment” to fulfill the requirements expressed in all the constitutional questions for office. The questions cover a wide range of concerns: theological orthodoxy; authority of Scripture and the confessions; acceptance of our polity; commitment to collegiality; furtherance of the peace, unity, and purity of the church; and demonstration of the love and justice of Christ.

By taking a both/and approach to the two main historic streams of American Presbyterianism, Amendment 10-A reflects the position articulated in the Adopting Act of 1729 and reaffirmed whenever the church has encountered division on ordination standards (1758, 1870, 1927). For this reason, persons whose theology of ordination is exclusively in one tradition or the other may find the amendment not fully satisfactory. A view to history and our past attempts to resolve the polarity in our tradition shows the wisdom of the middle-way approach taken by the Adopting Act and its subsequent affirmations.

“Governing bodies shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.”

This sentence makes explicit the reliance on Scripture and the confessions mentioned in G-1.0000c, while also indicating that standards shall be applied individually in the consideration of candidates. This is a précis of the Adopting Act - objective criteria established by Scripture and the confessions, applied pastorally and in the full context of a candidate's calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for office. It strikes the time-tested balance between universal standards and individual call and character that has been the touchstone of American Presbyterianism.

Every Voice and Every Vote

The early voting on Amendment 10-A, while heavily front-loaded with traditionally-conservative presbyteries, shows an encouraging trend. As of this writing at the end of November, no presbytery has yet changed its result in

Mark Achtemeier

from his *Outlook* 'Webinar' on 10-A

“This Amendment is worth supporting no matter which side of the ordination debate we are on. This doesn't have to be a liberal/conservative issue. It doesn't have to be a debate about our sexuality policy. Amendment 10-A simply makes good sense, and it will be beneficial for the whole church.

“Let me highlight three reasons why this is the case:

- 1) 10-A will bring peace to our presbyteries by halting the endless succession of battles over proposed amendments to the Constitution.
- 2) The Amendment will remove divisive ambiguity from the Book of Order, sparing our church huge amounts of costly litigation in the church courts.
- 3) Amendment A will help us become the kind of faithful church where divisive issues can be handled more graciously and productively than we have seen in the recent past.”

To read Dr. Achtemeier's complete discussion of 10-A from his webinar with Mike Loudon, go to:
www.covnetpres.org/2010/11/why-i-support-amendment-10-a/

comparison to Amendment 08-B; but the 'yes' vote on 10-A from those presbyteries is 45%, as opposed to 39% on 08-B (not including one strongly-supportive presbytery that approved 10-A overwhelmingly, without an official count but with only 4 nays).

The very first to vote, the Presbytery of the James, improved from a 67-vote deficit on 08-B to an actual tie on 10-A. Could there be a more dramatic illustration of the importance of every single vote?

Whether your presbytery has already voted or will be waiting till spring, and whether or not you have a vote in your presbytery, there are ways for every Presbyterian to make a difference in the work toward a church as generous and just as God's grace:

Pray without ceasing for the health and witness of the PCUSA

Talk to others about why 10-A is important to you and to the future of the PCUSA.

- ◆ Pray without ceasing for the health and witness of the PCUSA, for your congregation and presbytery, for those most affected by the current paragraph, and for those who see the world and the issues from a different perspective.
- ◆ Talk to others - both in your congregation and presbytery, and across the denomination - about why 10-A is important to you and to the future of the PCUSA.
- ◆ Remind presbyters of the importance of attending the meeting, and help them get there.
- ◆ Work with presbytery leadership on good process, to ensure that the body has the best possible opportunity to listen and discern the will of Christ.
- ◆ Think about how you will advocate for 10-A during the presbytery's consideration, including 10-A's faithfulness to Scripture, the principles of theology and polity that it upholds, and your stories of how the current G-6.0106b affects both people and the church.
- ◆ Build relationships with those who disagree, living out our common commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and his commandment that we love one another

Tricia Dykers Koenig
Covenant Network National Organizer

For more resources and to volunteer, please contact me at triciadk@covenantnetwork.org or 216-658-1770.

10-A: What is New; What is Not

“Here we go again!”

Having voted on a proposed amendment to G-6.0106b just two years ago, some may be thinking that there's nothing more to consider in Amendment 10-A.

The Covenant Network supported the passage of Amendment 08-B, the proposal to change the wording of G-6.0106b from the 218th General Assembly (2008). Amendment 10-A, however, was drafted with attention to **correcting** both **the well-known deficiencies of G-6.0106b** and the perceived weaknesses that were criticized in Amendment 08-B.

And in any case, as long as G-6.0106b oppresses the conscience of fully half of the church, we will have to consider the question every two years. 10-A offers us standards which all Presbyterians can affirm.

10-A relies heavily on the historic Presbyterian polity of the **Adopting Act of 1729**, carefully balancing universal and local, objective and subjective, the need for common standards to be applied to individual candidates.

In comparison to the current G-6.0106b, Amendment 10-A:

- ◆ Lifts up the Lordship of Jesus Christ as the foundation of all standards for ordination.
- ◆ Returns Scripture and the confessions to their proper authority in relationship to the Lordship of Christ.
- ◆ Corrects the theological error of singling out one aspect of ethical living for particular scrutiny.
- ◆ Renews attention to the constitutional questions for ordination and installation.
- ◆ Removes the hypocrisy of pretending to prohibit the ordination and installation of all who “refus[e] to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin,” which if honored would exclude 100% of candidates.
- ◆ Ceases to impose one interpretation of Scripture on everyone in violation of the “Historic Principles of Church Order” that “there are truths and forms with respect to which men of good characters and principles may differ. And in all these we think it the duty both of private Christians and societies to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other.” (G-1.0305)

In comparison to Amendment 08-B, Amendment 10-A:

- ◆ Clarifies that the constitutional questions are not the only area of inquiry in examinations of candidates for ordained office, specifically listing “calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of office” along with Scripture and the confessions, in an insistence on rigorous examinations.
- ◆ Substitutes the more definite “determination of the candidate's ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements” for “establishes the candidate's sincere efforts to adhere to these standards,” a phrase that some thought to be too subjective and watered-down.

What does not change:

There are, nevertheless, ways in which Amendment 10-A **does not differ** from the current Constitution or the previously proposed amendment. In particular, it is basic to Presbyterian polity that “no person can be placed in any permanent office in a congregation or governing body of the church except by election of that body.” (G-6.0107) As is currently true, it will continue to be the case under the wording of 10-A that **no presbytery, Session, or congregation can be forced to accept an ordained officer whom that body determines to be unfit for service.**

For more information and resources about Amendment 10-A, click on the “*Amendment 10-A Resources*” sidebar on the Covenant Network homepage:
www.covnetpres.org



A Note to the Covenant Network

Monday, November 8, 2010

Dear Friends,



Last night during our Sunday night on-campus worship service, Coe students who had attended the CovNet Conference testified as to where they had experienced God during the conference and what they had learned. They talked about how they felt welcomed, challenged, and inspired. They came back more confident about their faith, their community, and their identity. They now know what the Church ought to be and they are committed to working toward that goal.

I don't know whether you realize how significant this conference has been, and continues to be, in the lives of Coe students. More than one student in years past has found the courage to come out after attending the CovNet conference, and many students have heard their call to ministry after attending the conference. Other students have learned how to more effectively stand up for LGBT folks with a gained biblical knowledge and how to publicly proclaim both the gospel and their support for an inclusive church. Furthermore, this conference serves every year to strengthen the bonds among the students as we travel, worship, learn, and play together. It has become one of the most important venues for my ministry every year to grow and strengthen. So thank you, CovNet, for making it possible for Coe students to attend - especially for waiving the registration fee (without which we could not afford to attend).

Again, thank you SO much and please send this email on to all members of the board and the conference planning team.

Sincerely,
Kristin Hutson
Coe College Chaplain

All the powerful addresses and sermons from the conference are available on CD or MP3 through our e-store or by calling the office.

415.351.2196

As part of her ministry, Kristin Hutson has brought students from Coe College to Covenant Network's national conferences for the past eight years. The presence and participation of these amazing young people have been a true blessing to us all.

THE FAMILY OF GOD

A Sermon preached at the 2010 Covenant Conference
by Rev. Dr. Clifton Kirkpatrick
November 5, 2010
excerpted and edited

Galatians 3:23-29

Friends in the Covenant Network, it is great to be here! While I have appreciated being with you often in my role as Stated Clerk, it is nice to be here not because of my role, but because I believe in the cause - because this is my family!

I am particularly attracted by the theme of this year's Covenant Conference, "We Are Family." Family is very important to me. The New Testament builds on this theme as it makes clear that we are adopted into the family of God and are thus sisters and brothers in Christ. We are the "family of God."

For me the church ecumenical is an especially significant part of my family. Through this part of the family I have seen the power of the gospel cutting across all barriers to be a global family of God. In so many places where there is great suffering and injustice - like the Sudan, Haiti, or Bangladesh - I have truly seen Jesus Christ in the "least of our sisters and brothers" and the incredible hope, faith, and faithfulness that they have in what have appeared to me to be hopeless situations.

This past summer was a time of special significance for my broader ecumenical family as we took an important step to make that global family - at least the Reformed part of it - more whole. This summer the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) was launched in Grand Rapids, Michigan. There we bonded together as two parts of the family long divided between "evangelicals" and "ecumenicals" (represented in two global organizations, the Reformed Ecumenical Council and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches) to be a communion together. It was truly a global version of our yearning for that kind of reconciliation in the PCUSA.

We gathered in Grand Rapids because that is where this movement toward reconciliation started. In February, 2006 we were invited to Calvin College to see if those of us who had been divided for half a century in the Reformed movement could find new ways to cooperate with one another... Like so many dialogues in the

PCUSA, I feared that we would all affirm the core faith we have in common, but that our efforts would soon break down when it got specific.

However, my fears soon proved to be baseless. It blew my mind! The delegates from the global south came with a very different perspective. As one signaled early, "God doesn't call us to cooperate but to be one." They pointed out that the division between "ecumenicals" and "evangelicals" was a Western invention, growing out of the enlightenment and the modern era, of which we need to let go. In their context, it was crystal clear that God calls us to be both. The problem is not that we have too much evangelism or too much social action. We don't have enough of either! We need both!

We were reminded that diversity is not a problem but a gift - and that we are called to model to the world what it means to be the family of God - and not the dysfunctional family of God.

The devil was indeed in the details, but four years later ... we were in Grand Rapids pledging to one another not to be an alliance, but a communion, a family of God together across all the barriers that divide our world.

For the tradition which is the one most likely of all in the world to split, this coming together in one communion was an incredible witness to all of our call to be the family of God together. It was an affirmation of our diversity, and a pledge to belong to one another. It was a witness that the painful divisions in the Anglican Communion (and of many between North and South) are not destiny. I am exceedingly glad the Reformed family is making a witness for a better way and hope our churches will as well.

This is exactly the dream the Apostle Paul had for the Galatians - not to be divided by the law but united by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. For Paul the law is not unimportant. He reminded the Galatians that we had been guarded under the law until faith came and that the law served as our disciplinarian. However, through faith we have become children of God and welcomed into an unusual but life giving family, guided by grace and relationships and not just rules.

*We are to be
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We are not a small, homogeneous family.... We are a multicultural, multilingual, multi-generational family made up of people we would have never chosen ourselves but whom God has chosen, and we are called to be family together. Paul makes it clear that this family is one where all the human barriers that have divided us from one another and that have been used to oppress one another are to come down in the family to which Christ invites us. We are to be a model of the reconciled world that God intends for all humanity....

In New Testament times there were the three primary barriers that were plaguing the world, barriers of race, economic status, and gender. For Paul it was crystal clear that racial justice, economic justice, and gender justice are the hallmarks of God's intention for the world. And these realities still divide our world - and our church - today. In fact, they are all getting worse in our day.

In a world facing these divisions and injustices, Galatians 3:28 is incredible good news with its promise that *“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”*

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has called Galatians 3:28 *“God's egalitarian manifesto,”* and it has served as the foundation of the church's ministry for justice from New Testament times to today. It is a powerful social vision. While this is indeed God's vision for the world, it is first and foremost God's vision for the church. It is the foundation of our polity for a life together in Christ.

It was not necessarily the lived reality of the New Testament church, where the divisions of the world at that time were the divisions and injustices in the church. But Galatians 3:28 was a powerful vision to challenge them to authentic Christian living - and us. ... Many years ago, Ronald Bainton reminded us seminary students that the gift of the Bible is not its practices but its principles and its vision of God's way in the world, which were often far ahead of the living reality of the people of God. Passages like Micah 6, the Beatitudes, the Jubilee passages, and I Corinthians 13 are visions far from being a living reality, but challenges God has made to us to transcend our context and live out the values of the reign of God.

The message of Galatians 3:28 is that for Christians our differences lose their power to oppress and divide; rather our differences become that wonderful diversity that

complements one another as we are united in the cause of Christ. ...Our witness is to live as if these barriers have been removed and to strive to make them disappear from our world....

...There is a wonderful phrase that captures this vision from our Book of Order. It states that *“The Church of Jesus Christ is the provisional demonstration of what God intends for all humanity.”* (This stuff will preach!) This same vision is expressed another way in Covenant Network's vision for “a church as generous and just as God's grace.”...

God is calling us to build our communities and our lives as open communities where all are welcomed and our only intolerance should be toward efforts to exclude those who are different. This spirit has been one of the great gifts of the Covenant Network over the years. We have always sought to broaden the circle but never to exclude others from it. We have carried out our prophetic ministry with kindness and with a view to restoring the wholeness of the family of God.

This spirit is needed now more than ever! ... The struggle to be a truly inclusive, grace filled, justice seeking family of God must always be our goal.

I want to close with proverb from Africa that expresses the heart of this call. ... *“If you need to go fast, go alone. But if you need to go far, go together.”*

... Friends, we live in just such complicated times filled with incredible challenges and diversity, and God has given us each other to be strength for the journey. God is indeed calling us to go far in the cause of Christ together - as one people, celebrating our great diversity of gifts, but sharing in a common journey along the way of Christ for the world.

May God bless us all as we seek to go far together in the cause of Christ! Amen.

The full text of this sermon is available on our website.

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Toward a Church as Generous and Just as God's Grace

A Letter from our Co-Moderators: *Winter 2010*

A pastor friend recently asked, "Why is this issue (ordination of GLBT individuals) so important to you?" When we responded, "Because it is a matter of life and death," our colleague was puzzled. But it's clear, isn't it? The church's ongoing position is felt as personal rejection - and there's a strong connection between that rejection of personhood and elevated rates of suicide among GLBT teens in the United States.

Little did we know how sadly prophetic that conversation would turn out to be.

When the church adopted a blanket policy of denial of ordination to GLBT Christians, the institution became guilty of condemning human beings for who they are, not "just" for their actions, as some would like to claim. With that condemnation, the church undergirds and nurtures a culture of hostility toward GLBT people, a culture in which bullying grows and flourishes. And this, despite overwhelming scientific evidence by all reputable medical and psychological communities that one's sexuality is not changeable.

Centuries down the road from now, will the church be apologizing for condemnation of our contemporary Galileo?

The Covenant Network is doing its best to see that our path to repentance is much shorter. We are doing all we can to follow the General Assembly's lead and adopt Amendment 10-A THIS YEAR. Finally, we have been given the gift of language that all of us can claim with conviction. It is a start - a very good start. And yet we will still have "miles to go before we sleep." The work of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians will continue as we support those who have been rejected, and as we continue to be in healing conversations with those with whom we disagree.

THIS IS THE YEAR. Please be a part of making this change a reality. Do your part. Give. Be active in your presbytery. Have that conversation you've been meaning to have. Lives depend on it - depend on us being as generous and just as God's grace.

Grace and Peace,

Mary Lynn Tobin
Pastor, Davis Community Church
Davis, CA



David A. Van Dyke
Pastor, House of Hope Presbyterian Church
St. Paul, MN