



Spring, 2005

The Covenant Connection

A Newsletter of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians

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Kathleen Norris to speak at the 2005 Covenant Network Conference

Author and poet **Kathleen Norris** will keynote the 2005 Covenant Conference, *Disciples in Community*, in November. Norris's books include *Dakota*, *The Cloister Walk*, and *Amazing Grace*. Other plenary speakers will be **Amy Plantinga Pauw**, Professor of Doctrinal Theology, Louisville Seminary; **Larry Rasmussen**, Niebuhr Professor of Social Ethics (emeritus), Union(NY); and **Eugene Rogers**, Associate Professor of Religious Studies, University of Virginia. Preachers will include **Margaret Aymer**, Assistant Professor of New Testament, Interdenominational Theological Center; **Tom Long**, Professor of Preaching, Candler School of Theology; **Doug Nave**, Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York; and **Nora Tibbs Tisdale**, Consulting Theologian at the Fifth Avenue Church.

The Covenant Network Conference, *Disciples in Community* will take place at the Idlewild Presbyterian Church in Memphis, Tennessee, November 3-5, 2005. Detailed conference information and registration will be available this summer.

New Resources for Dialogue and Education are coming on-line

The *Christian Science Monitor* website is posting a series of articles and essays examining the political and cultural divide with an aim toward getting people to talk with each other rather than past each other. Visit www.csmonitor.com/commentary/conversations.html for more information.

A new curriculum on the ethics of human sexuality, *Becoming One In Christ*, has been written by the Rev. Doc. **Kevin E. Frederick** and is available on the Covenant Network Resources page for downloading by congregations and other interested groups. www.covenantnetwork.org/resourcestop.html.

Put these Dates on Your Calendar!

The PC(USA)'s *National Pastors Retreat* will be held May 27-31 at the Snowbird Resort in Utah. Speakers include **Walter Brueggemann**, **Barbara Brown Taylor**, **James Forbes**, and **Tony Campolo**. See www.pcusa.org/pastorsabbath for information.

A Church For Our Time takes tradition seriously but actively engages its current context. The popular week-long seminar which debuted last year at Ghost Ranch will repeat this year on June 26 to July 3 at Ghost Ranch and on August 8 to 12 at the Montreat Conference Center. Leaders at Ghost Ranch include **Deborah Block**, **Tim Hart-Andersen**, **Sheila Gustafson**, **Ted Wardlaw**, and **Alika Galloway**. Leaders at Montreat include **Herb Nelson**, **Ted Wardlaw**, **Joe Harvard**, and **Kim Richter**.

The Covenant Network Northwest Conference, *A New Way for a New Day*, is scheduled for October 15th, 2005 at the Newport Presbyterian Church in Bellevue, Washington. Former Moderator **Susan Andrews** will keynote; **James Noel** is the featured preacher.

The Cathedral College of Preachers in Washington D.C. will feature a seminar led by **J. Barrie Shepherd** on May 16th to the 20th, *The Pulpit as a Playground for the Spirit: Whatever happened to Delight?* For more information, visit www.cathedralcollege.org.

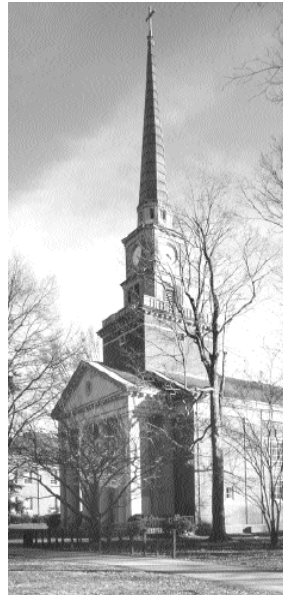
We seek the gift of unity among all who confess the name of Jesus Christ as Lord. Unity is Christ's prayer for those who would follow him, "so that the world might believe." We hope to maintain communion fellowship with all whose lives are guided by the Christian creeds and by the confessions of Reformed faith. We pledge to strengthen our ties to those who are at risk of being excluded by recent legislative actions of our church. We also want to live in unity with those whose views are

Info on Southeast Conference on Pg 2!

Southeast Covenant Network Conference: *Challenges Confronting the Church*

The first Southeast Regional Conference, April 1-2 in Davidson, NC, offers Presbyterians in our corner of the country a safe place to ask questions, confess confusion and learn from one another. One of the goals of local Covenant Networks is “fostering honest and open theological conversations in a non-adversarial context.”

This conference is hosted by Charlotte Presbytery's Covenant Network group led by the Rev. **Doug Oldenburg**. Having retired from the presidency of Columbia Theological Seminary and served as Moderator of the 210th PC(USA) General Assembly, Doug now lives in Davidson. What better place is there than Davidson College Presbyterian Church to discuss responsibly issues before the denomination? Hospitality (a characteristic generally credited to Southerners) is a biblical edict and a cornerstone of the Covenant Network.



Davidson College
Presbyterian Church

During registration at DCPC from 1-3 p.m. on April 1st (no fooling), there will be opportunities to see *Turning Points*, the Covenant Network documentary which premiered at the last General Assembly. The Rev. **Joanna Adams**, who is featured in one of the video stories, will preach at the Opening Worship at 3 p.m.; and her successor as Co-Moderator of Covenant Network, the Rev. **Kim Richter**, will preach at the Closing Worship on April 2nd.

The Rev. **Jack Rogers** will give the keynote address, “The Big Five Theological Issues in the Homosexuality Debate.” Dr Rogers described himself as a “bridge-builder” when he was elected Moderator of the 213th PC(USA) General Assembly, promising “to listen to all voices and to discover a unity that is more fundamental than our difference.” **Gary Demarest**, Co-chair of the church’s Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity and Purity, will report on that group’s work.

Another highlight of the Conference will be seeing the acclaimed play *Benedictions*, which the Davidson Community Players will present after dinner on Friday evening. Written by Judy Simpson Cook, a Presbyterian elder in Charlotte, *Benedictions* tells the story of a Presbyterian female pastor whose good life is interrupted by the appearance of a young homosexual man, then shaken by personal tragedy, culminating in a poignant soul-searching and rediscovery of the reality of God’s love.

For more information or to register, visit the Covenant Network web page at www.covenantnetwork.org/SEConf05/seconfdtls.html

Rebecca Schenck - Charlotte Presbytery Covenant Network



The Rev. Joanna
Adams



The Rev. Jack
Rogers



The Rev. Gary
Demarest



The Rev. Kim
Richter

Share the Vision

*“Toward a church as generous and
just as God’s grace.”*



The Rev. Tricia Dykers
Koenig

Do you share the vision?

If the vision is to be realized, it’s up to each of us – it’s up to you. Change happens not somewhere “out there” where other people are working, but where you live and breathe and do your ministry, in your congregation and presbytery and community. That’s why the Covenant Network is focusing on local organizing.

Top two tips for effective local organizing:

1) *Be Intentional.*

Think about what most needs to happen in your context. One size does not fit all. Your greatest demand may be for mutual support, education, reaching out across boundaries, being connected with resources... but priorities must be discerned where you are, not decreed from afar.

2) *Be Consistent.*

In order to be intentional – proactive and prepared – you need a group thinking together on a regular basis. This may mean meeting weekly, monthly or quarterly, or simply the week before each presbytery meeting.



The Rev. Lou East

If you already have a group organized locally, please be in touch with National Organizer **Tricia Dykers Koenig**, triciadk@covenantnetwork.org, or Southeast Regional Coordinator **Lou East**, loueast@covenantnetwork.org, to let us know what you’re up to – we’d love to share your stories with others. And if you don’t, we’re eager to help you get started.

“If it is to be, it is up to me.” We look forward to hearing from you!

Tricia Dykers Koenig

Covenant Network Chapters and Churches are Making a Difference

Presbytery of the James

The Covenant Network Chapter in the Presbytery of the James is now in its second year. A core group meets monthly during the lunch hour for study and planning. Among the books discussed by the group is *Godviews*, by Jack Haberer.

The PoJ Chapter sponsored a open meeting with the Rev. **Steve Montgomery** which drew 150 Presbyterians from around the region, many of whom were grateful to break through the isolation surrounding the issues of gay and lesbian participation in the Presbyterian Church. "I

didn't know there were so many people who thought like this," one participant said when the event was over.

The PoJ Chapter has sent out letters to the leadership of congregations in the presbytery offering to come and present information and facilitate discussion on the issues of inclusion. Congregations and youth groups have responded positively.

In addition to conversation around the ordination issues, the PoJ chapter is working to witness to the larger secular community, as the Virginia State Legislature recently considered barring adoptions by gay and lesbian families.

Continuing the Ministry

Covenant Network recently received an exceptional gift of \$15,000 from **First Church of Decatur, IL**. The gift helps to pay off production costs for the *Turning Points* video and will also add to the David B. McDowell scholarship fund that assists seminarians and small-church pastors attend the Covenant Conference.

Other churches may want to study First Decatur's policy for using undesignated bequests. The first \$3,000 goes to the Memorial Fund; the balance is evenly divided among their capital fund, an endowment program, and selected mission projects. Covenant Network is very grateful to be one of the missions selected this spring!

Immanuel Church in Milwaukee has included the Covenant Network in its Alternative Christmas Meals offering every year since 2002 and

First Presbyterian Church, Marshfield, IL

FPC recently held an adult forum to share reflections on the Covenant Network Conference from three members who attended. After reviewing the purpose and the history of the Covenant Network for newcomers, the Calhoun family's segment in *Turning Points* was shown. Afterward, participants talked about the Calhouns's story - and how a version of that story also has played itself out in that congregation.

On that morning, a third-time visitor came to the forum. At the end of the forum, he stood up

and addressing the group, came out. Before this moment, he was only out to his family - but not at work.

"He trusted us to share this about himself," Pastor **Scott Marrese-Wheeler** said. "People have known him for years - but not this. Everyone applauded and then there were hugs and tears. God does move through our living stories. That video made a difference - as did the Calhouns' story."

Presbytery of Carlisle

The Presbytery of Carlisle Chapter is just beginning to form.

Judd and Peggy McConnell invited a group of 12 people to their home where they viewed *Turning Points* together. "We couldn't stop talking," McConnell reports. "Even after we served the dessert, even as the night wore on, people kept talking about the video and about what we could do next."

"There is something about gathering in a home, in serving food," McConnell said. "I envision a series of meetings in homes, viewing the video, talking about it. We're going to do more of this."

Presbytery of Western North Carolina

The Covenant Network Chapter in the Presbytery of Western North Carolina started meeting two years ago in support of restoring full authority for ordination to the local examining authorities. Since then, the members of the Chapter realized that gay and lesbian members of their congregations as well as family members needed a safe place to meet and support one other.

The PWNC Chapter sponsored and then spun out Welcome Home, where families with gay and lesbian members can break their isolation and claim their families' rightful place in their congregations.

Recently, members of the Welcome Home group showed *Turning Points* at Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church. At that event, a mother of a gay child found the courage to break a silence of years and speak to her friends about her love for her child and his life.

The PWNC Chapter meets monthly and serves as a clearing house of ideas for better ministry in the presbytery.. They attribute their success to date on setting and remaining focused on annual action goals.

Presbytery of San Gabriel

The Covenant Network Chapter in the Presbytery of San Gabriel has been meeting for five years and is one of the oldest Covenant Network chapters. The PSG Chapter holds three general membership meeting each year and the steering committee meets monthly. One of the general membership meetings is a catered dinner with a national speaker. The other two meetings are more informal, with a potluck and local presentations.

The PSG chapter places its membership meetings within the context of worship. The Order of Worship from their last meeting is on the Covenant Network web site at www.Covenantnetwork.org/newsermpap.html "We have always held our meetings as services of worship," **Sonny Swenston** said. "It works well for us and is a demonstration of our belief in the Reformed traditions and a demonstration of how we can 'do' church as well as be the church."

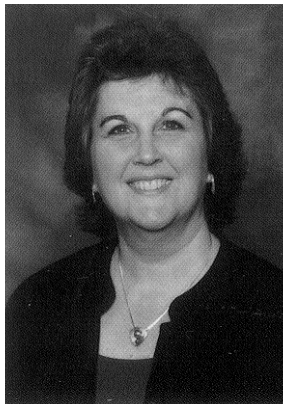


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Save the Dates!
Covenant Network Conference - 2005
November 3-5 - Memphis, Tennessee
Disciples in Community

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



April 2005

A Message from our Co-Moderators

Dear Friends,

Our denomination is taking an intentional period to slow down activity and deepen reflection. This year is the first since 1789 that we are not coming together in General Assembly. While this changes the rhythm and dynamic of our communal life, it does not lessen our need for fellowship and thinking together. A number of opportunities to do so are highlighted in this newsletter.

Whether by traveling or, equally usefully, by gathering in congregations and presbyteries, we'd like to think that many Presbyterians are using some of this time to reflect together about the church we long for, and even more, about the church God longs for us to become. As the denomination's Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity & Purity of the Church moves ahead toward a report next fall, we all are responsible to practice ways of listening to each other, studying and doing mission together. As Paul wrote to his former parishioners in Corinth, "You must get along with each other. You must learn to be considerate of one another, cultivating a life in common" (I Cor 1:10, in Eugene Peterson's translation.)

More than anything else, we need to be intentional and disciplined about praying for the Church. We hope the mission and ministry of the Presbyterian Church are in personal prayers and Prayers of the People, all across the denomination. And we remember with gratitude the guidelines adopted by an earlier G.A., which conclude with the promise to "include our disagreements in our prayers, not praying for the triumph of our viewpoints, but seeking God's grace to listen attentively, to speak clearly, and to remain open to the vision God holds for us all."

Grace and peace,

Kimberly C. Richter

Jon Walton

