



Spring 2011

The Covenant Connection

A Newsletter of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians (Vol 14 #1)

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Amendment 10-A receiving positive responses in Presbytery voting

With more than 100 of 173 presbyteries having voted on Amendment 10-A, which would replace an ordination standard focused on sexuality with an affirmation of Presbyterians' shared "desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life," the trend is toward approval.

Much work remains, however!

Your participation - through prayer, witness, conversation, volunteering, donating - can make this the year that G-6.0106b is amended.



logo design by Kim Krueger

SAVE THE DATE !! 2011 Covenant Conference

Hosted by First Presbyterian Church, Durham, NC
See page 7 for more details

November 3-5, 2011

Two Ordination Cases Headed for GAPJC

Two different Synod PJC's upheld two presbyteries' decisions to accept stated "departures" from common exclusionary interpretations of G-6.0106b and approve for ordination Lisa Larges, a lesbian seminary graduate, and Scott Anderson, a partnered gay man. In both cases, decided in late fall 2010, the SPJC's relied upon the 2008 GA's Authoritative Interpretation of G-6.0108. Appeals of both decisions will be heard by the GAPJC in late July. Covenant Network Director Doug Nave is defending both presbyteries.

Promising PJC Rulings in Marriage Cases

The General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission (GAPJC) ruled on February 8 that the Rev. Jean Southard "did not violate the Book of Order or her ordination vows" by presiding at the 2008 marriage of a same-gender couple - two active members of the Massachusetts congregation she then served. Same-gender marriage has been legally recognized in Massachusetts since 2004. However, the Rev. Jane Spahr will defend herself on a similar charge of performing legal same-gender marriages in California in 2008, before the Synod of the Pacific PJC on March 24.

Meanwhile, two Presbytery PJC's have acquitted the Rev. Laurie McNeill and the Rev. Erwin Barron of charges that they committed offenses by contracting legal civil marriages in Massachusetts and California.

Four New Covenant Congregations

We welcome four congregations whose sessions have recently studied and affirmed the Call to Covenant Community: Crescent Avenue Presbyterian Church in Plainfield, NJ, Broadway Presbyterian Church in New York City, Faith Presbyterian Church in Franklin, WI, and Shady Grove Presbyterian Church in Memphis, TN.

Haven't heard from us lately?

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/.

Amendment 10-A Campaign Report

We are gratified by the progress we are seeing across the church in the debates and results on Amendment 10-A, which provides language which would (finally) replace the current and controversial G-6.0106b.

As we go to press on March 9, 64 presbyteries have still to vote. While we are not taking anything for granted, we are cautiously optimistic that 10-A will pass! In the number that counts, 65 presbyteries have voted in favor of 10-A, while 44 have voted against, (one being a tie vote.) The magic number is 87 for ratification.

In 2008-09, 78 presbyteries voted in favor of replacing G-6.0106b. For this campaign to succeed, we need a net gain of 9 presbyteries. Already, we have seen a net gain of 12 compared to votes on 08-B.

What is clear is that Amendment 10-A has the support of Presbyterians throughout the PC(USA). 10-A is passing from the Gulf of Mexico to the Great Lakes; in the Southeast and the Midwest, in Southern California and New England, on the coasts and in all three presbyteries in Oklahoma. Not including the six presbyteries approving 10-A in uncounted voice, hand, or standing votes, 55% of elders and ministers have voted in favor - a strong majority and an increase from 50% in the same presbyteries in 2008-09.

But we cannot let up, or rest easy. This can be the year we succeed in getting rid of the controversial, exclusive, and hurtful language of G-6.0106b. Please join us and help us make this change possible.

To participate in helping to make this change possible, contact National Organizer Tricia Dykers Koenig at 216-658-1770, or triciadk@covenantnetwork.org.



*Covenant Network Directors Dave Colby and Jay McKell
at the 2010 Conference in Houston*

Help us bring it on home!

Early voting on Amendment 10-A is very promising.

We've never been so close to replacing the discriminatory language of G-6.0106b. But making it happen needs all our continued effort. We can't let this chance pass us by.

Some presbyteries have approved 10-A - or not - by just one or two votes. Every vote counts. And every organizing effort makes a difference.

Please make a special donation to ensure that *this can be the year* we change G-6.0106b. Please provide the resources to let us send our staff into "swing" presbyteries as needed, to provide online and telephone counseling and support, to continue to produce the theological and tactical resources that help local organizers, to employ social media in new ways to support a more gracious church.

With your generous help, *this really can be the year!* Please contribute through our website, or mail your gift today.

Advocating for Amendment 10-A in our Presbyteries

Here we are again, Mr. Moderator. I think we're all frustrated to be here again, having this same debate. But we're here because it's hard to build a church as big as God's love. It takes time. Centuries even.

It takes time because it's a scary thing to extend the levers of leadership to people who are different from us - African Americans, women, Gentiles, Northerners. It was scary for the disciples and it's scary for us.

At least it has been for me. For much of my life I would have voted to keep



Steve Runholt, Pastor
Warren Wilson
Presbyterian Church,
Presbytery of
Western North Carolina

our current ordination standards in place. For years I thought the Bible was crystal clear on this matter. *"They are filled with every kind of wickedness,"* Paul writes about apparent homosexuals in Romans 1. *"Full of envy, murder, strife, they are God-haters."*

How can you argue with that? Except that none of my gay and lesbian friends and congregants are like that. Quite the opposite, in fact.

They love God and are full of mercy and grace. Many are conspicuously gifted for leadership and ministry.

So I looked closer. And I came to understand Romans 1 is not about them. It's about sexual practices in pagan temples in ancient Rome, not about loving, faithful same-gender relationships of the kind known by our congregants who are gay.

Then I made the real discovery. This passage is not about my gay and lesbian friends, it's about me.

Having whipped his readers into a frenzy, Paul then delivers the knockout punch: *"Therefore you have no excuse, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you . . . are doing the very same things."*

When I judge anyone, I am the guilty party, not them. That's the real point of the passage, and it changed my life. It's why I'm standing here today.

And here we are all again, because it's hard to build a church as big as God's love. It was hard for the disciples and it's hard for us. But one simple way to do that is to vote "Yes" on this amendment.

As we study our nation's history, we discover a long and regrettable record of our majority groups seeking to bar our undervalued groups and minority groups from the table of equal participation and leadership. Such exclusionary-based thinking regarding Native Americans, African Americans, women, and many religious and immigrant peoples has failed, again and again. By the grace of God (and hopefully sooner than later), such exclusionary-based actions against our beloved gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender colleagues will end in failure.

Theologically speaking, the followers of Jesus Christ stand on and are nurtured by our ongoing belief that baptism is every Christian's ordination. The privilege of equal participation at the table of church leadership is profoundly rooted in our baptism. When we baptize our little ones, they are ordained into the priesthood of all believers and the communion of saints. No one should attempt to block or hinder any Christian from the blessed and historic privileges and responsibilities involved, indeed, inherent in our baptism. So, the church needs to cease its debilitating resistance of baptism's enfranchisement of the priesthood of all believers and the communion of saints, and simply get on with it.



Rev. Dr. Dean K. Thompson,
recently retired President,
Louisville Presbyterian
Theological Seminary

*Dr. Thompson's remarks
at the meeting of the Presbytery of West Virginia,
Highlawn Presbyterian Church,
Huntington, West Virginia, March 1, 2011.*

... more in support of Amendment 10-A

All of us here are either ministers of Word and Sacrament or elders, and that means that all of us have answered the ordination questions in the Book of Order. The fourth ordination question, letter d, reads as follows: *“Will you fulfill your office in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?”*

Note the order: obedience to Christ, under the authority of Scripture, guided by the confessions. The current G-6.0106b mixes up that order, putting obedience to Scripture first and then, conforming to the confessions. There is no mention of Christ whatever---none. Therefore it conflicts with the fourth ordination question and in my view is not in accordance with Reformed theology.

One of the things I like best about the new proposed wording is that it gets the order right in terms of Reformed theology and in sync with that ordination question: submitting joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and guided by Scripture and the confessions. Christ, Scripture, confessions. And it specifically ties the examination of candidates for ordination to the ordination questions

I hope this amendment passes. I think it would benefit our whole denomination enormously.



Rev. Carolyn Grohman, Interim Pastor
1st Presbyterian Church, Wyoming, NY

Floor Speech given to the Presbytery of Genesee Valley
January 22, 2011

Executive Director Will Retire



Pam, at the Houston Conference

Covenant Network's founding Executive Director Pam Byers plans to retire at the end of May. The Board of Directors will gather in San Francisco to honor Pam at a Farewell Gala Dinner, celebrating her significant contributions toward the just and generous church we seek to be together. She will also be honored and recognized at the Covenant Network GA Luncheon in Pittsburgh next year.

For fourteen years Pam has led in the building of a network which now includes some 5000 signatures on the Call to Covenant Community, including 20 former

GA Moderators, 400 sessions, and several presbyteries.

Thirteen national conferences, numerous regional conferences and the popular Covenant Network Luncheons at GA have contributed important resources to the denomination and deeply enriched the discourse on ordination standards and ecclesiology. Various publications as well as production of the award winning documentary, *Turning Points*, have become powerful resources, encouraging and enhancing study at all levels of church life.

And, under Pam's leadership, the Covenant Network has worked diligently not only to support all efforts at the national level to remove barriers to full inclusion, as well as journey alongside those who have continued to pursue the call to ordained service despite obstacles, but also to stay in conversation and fellowship with Presbyterians who differ, valuing the contribution of all Reformed viewpoints.

An interim Executive Director
will be announced very soon.

As you pause to reflect on Pam's remarkable legacy and deep commitment to this cause, please consider making a contribution to the Covenant Network in honor of her extraordinary ministry and service.

“Once the Scales Fell”

Rev. Katie Morrison

Pastor, San Lorenzo (CA) Community Church, UCC

Acts 9:1-19a

Excerpt of sermon preached at the 2010 Covenant Conference
Full text can be found online at www.covnetpres.org

I am honored to have been invited to preach this evening and have looked forward to the "family reunion" that participating in this conference is for me as someone who stepped out of the Presbyterian "pool" five years ago in order to be able to freely fulfill my call to serve the church through ordained ministry. Thank you.

In our Scripture reading we hear that Saul, the vitriolic persecutor is on the move. He is headed toward Damascus with the conviction that only MIGHT and RIGHT can induce. This Saul of Tarsus - a devout Pharisee - had joined the security forces of his day to stamp out the small sects of Christian Jews in Palestine who were becoming unbearable for their blasphemy and heresy. He had just overseen the martyrdom of Stephen and in the previous chapter, the text says that he literally entered "house after house" dragging off followers of The Way and committing them to jail...

He was a warrior for the Purity of his religion, until something very powerful stopped him in his tracks and his life was forever changed. One might say that he was mercilessly ambushed by heaven itself.

When we meet Saul, who later becomes Paul, he has just been struck by a blinding light. So overwhelming is his experience that he is unable to see. He is unable to eat or drink - so overcome is he...

Jesus stops him in his tracks and as much as that matters, ...I wonder about something that the text doesn't specifically tell us... Does he make a visit to Stephen's family? What about the people he had gathered up, the people who were still in jail? I wonder... does Paul ever circle back?

I had an unusually exceptional church upbringing. My grandmother was the church secretary at my home congregation - for over twenty-five years. I felt comfortable in that church office since as early as I can remember. I also attended the preschool that was a part of our church. My mom was one of the teachers there... Both of my parents served as elders and sang in the choir. My dad ...was a part of calling our church's first female pastor, which observing her Sunday after Sunday had a

huge impact on me and planted the seeds for being able to see myself as a pastor. Our youth group leader... was amazing. She introduced us to inclusive language, liberation and progressive theology, led us on many mission trips local and away, and helped bond us as a group in ways that reverberate even today.

When the Senior Pastor started his ministry at PPC, I was in sixth grade. ...The search committee matched up our families to help them in their transition to a new church and home. His daughter and I became fast best friends. Our families began spending Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner together... For being a downtown, urban church... this was a tight-knit experience for me.

Although I wasn't aware that I was a fourth generation Presbyterian growing up, I was aware that this church was my home and this congregation was my family - a room full of grandparents, parents, and peers with whom I could feel safe and to whom I belonged...

When I came out as a lesbian during my first semester of college, things changed drastically in the relationship between me and my pastor. This became evident during my first trip home from college... but, let me stop there for now.

The truth is... Pam Byers extended the invitation to me to be one of the conference preachers more than once... and each time, I have found excuses to say no... I wasn't quite ready to step back in to the Presbyterian circle... But this time - in saying YES, I made a commitment. I said to myself, "Self! It's now time. Before that conference rolls around, promise to make those two phone calls you know you need to make."
"ok, I promise."

We all have those experiences in life where our hearts were first broken - the loss of innocence, and trust and belief that love is enough. I trace my earliest experiences of heartbreak back to two relationships with significant individuals who were both pastors within the context of my home church. One was the Senior Pastor and the other was a seminary professor. These phone calls were about circling back to those two people and revisiting those initial heartbreaks.

Two weeks ago I called the seminary professor - Jack Rogers.* After exchanging updates on our families, and explaining that I was preparing to be at this Conference,



I asked him if he would provide me with the gift of simply listening so that I could continue some healing that I needed to do with him and that I was calling with the purpose of offering forgiveness. He graciously agreed. I continued...

It was 1993, and the summer after my junior year of college that I attended my second General Assembly. Following the assembly, all members at Pasadena Presbyterian Church who had attended were invited to share about their experience, except, I wasn't invited. That moment was my first tangible moment of discrimination from someone I knew that was based 100% on my being an openly lesbian woman. I had never before experienced that kind of outright exclusion and I experienced it first in the church.

I relayed this story to Jack in this recent phone call... Jack listened tenderly as I let out some tears. "There's one more I'd like to share, I said."

Jack, I don't know if you even remember, but you happened to be the chair of CPM when I first came before the committee with FORM 1. Sometime during the hour and a half of questioning I received from the committee, you asked me, "Who is Jesus to you." I answered, "Partner and Friend." Again you asked the question... and again I answered... again you asked... "WHO IS JESUS TO YOU?"... "Well let me answer that with a story," and I went on to share an experience that took place earlier that day. But this answer still didn't satisfy Jack or the committee...

Jack said to me over the phone something like, "I wish I had been at a place where I could have done better... and I can see how hurtful both of those experiences would have been. Katie I am sorry."

I explained that, while it is not as live for me now, for so many years I held such anger toward him and such hurt and how I didn't understand why after having his conversion, he didn't circle back... but that I was now ready to release that disappointment and I said, "I forgive you, Jack, for the hurt you caused me."

Three days ago, I called Dean Thompson.**

In 1991, when word got to Dean that I was lesbian...the excitement he had previously had about my sense of call to ministry shifted. Our relationship felt forever altered. I experienced him walk the other direction when he saw me at gatherings. When we met together to "be in dialogue" I heard about God's plan for human

relationships as laid out in Genesis... Both of our families lost the connection we had once enjoyed. Sometime soon after, Dean left our home church for another call.

This phone call was the hardest phone call I have ever made.

"Hello" the voice said... "Hi. Dean? It's Katie Morrison." "Oh, Katie, Katie Morrison, I think of you," he said without missing a beat. I explained my preparation for the conference and how I was calling to release him, having held such anger toward him over the years. "I'm the one in need of forgiveness," he said, "and here you are, calling me with a Spirit of forgiveness. How

deeply I regret that I wasn't there for you when you needed me..."



◆
This is a sermon about circling back, a sermon about asking for forgiveness. A sermon about the scales falling off... and what is the next step?

Our healing is wrapped up in one another. Apparently, that's the way God designed it.

There are so many in the denomination who have been hurt, so many are no longer in the denomination as a result, and so many no longer participating in any Christian community. I think about, comparatively, all of the privilege I had - knowing I was loved and accepted and had a place at the table. I had (and have) *extremely* supportive parents. I was *invited* to be a part of the leadership team of the National Network of Presbyterian College Women *because* I was an out lesbian. And because of their incredibly progressive commitment to representative diversity, I was invited to represent the group at GA. It was at that GA where I met amazing, early, early LGBT pioneers of this movement for inclusion.

I had unusual support in this process, and I can't help but think of all of the people who did not have my level of tenacity and the support and encouragement that I received in this process, even through the WORST of what I experienced...

This brings me to my challenge to you, Covenant Network members and friends: Have you always been in the supportive position you are in today?... Are there any Sauls here? Were any of you ever on the path that Saul walked before the conversion experience? Has anyone contributed toward the pain of an LGBT Presbyterian either through direct action or through your silence on the "issue"?

After all, the church to-date (like it did to Saul) offers

you authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke God's truth for them of who they are as LGBT persons on The Way.

For those of you who have been on a conversion journey, what has it been like? Did the shade pop up all at once, or was a slow peeling of the scales from your eyes?... And, once your sight was restored, what did you do next?

Once we do change our hearts and minds, what do we do with our conversion? Whatever your story, have you circled back and asked for forgiveness from those you may have hurt along the way as you were receiving your own transformation?...

Presbyterian Church... church of my upbringing... may the scales fall from your eyes, may you be renewed in your baptism, may you break bread together, and then may you regain your strength. And, in the breaking of bread, may you have circled back and righted wrongs and asked for forgiveness so that in your strength there is a Peace, Unity, and Purity that is not *false*, but is *true and just*.

May it be so...



Katie Morrison, Curran Reichart, and Ellis Jane

- * The Rev. Dr. Jack Rogers has given his consent to the Covenant Network, to print Katie's sermon with his name included.
- **The Rev. Dr. Dean Thompson has given his consent to the Covenant Network, to print Katie's sermon with his name included.



***Learning to live out the ministry of reconciliation entrusted to us
- in our church, our communities, and our world.***

In the length and breadth of Church history, G-6.0106b will be gone in the blink of an eye. Some people will celebrate over the “right” decision that our denomination has made, yet quietly pause over future concerns. Others will grieve the “poor” decision that our denomination has made, but persevere in hope for future possibilities.

We know that people of good faith will continue to disagree about important issues. In our longing for a way to transform painful disagreements that threaten to stifle our faith communities, can we seek together a spiritual maturity that is more proactive and less reactive? Can we learn how to let our light shine in the midst of difficult discernment? Indeed, God has ‘*entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation.*’ (2 Corinthians 5:19) Can we learn how to practice reconciliation on a daily basis?

Join us at the 2011 Covenant Conference where together we will seek a larger vision. Our children and grandchildren deserve a church where mutual respect and civility are so natural to the ebb and flow of our common life, that reconciliation will likewise unfold throughout our natural rhythms; where reconciliation is not an ideal end toward which we strive, but a condition of our daily lives together.

2011 Covenant Conference

November 3-5

First Presbyterian Church, Durham, NC

Speakers include:

James C. Davis,

Professor of Religion, Middlebury College,
author of *In Defense of Civility*, WJKP, 2010

Frances Taylor Gench,

Professor of New Testament,
Union Theological Seminary, Richmond

J. Herbert Nelson,

Director, PC(USA) Washington Office



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

A Letter from our Co-Moderators: *Spring 2011*

The two founding goals of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians were the removal of Amendment B from the Book of Order, and maintaining the unity of the church. Given what is currently unfolding in the church, maintaining our unity would appear to be the more difficult of the two goals. But as a new day dawns, conversations are breaking out all around the church and across theological divides. These conversations will be critical to our unity going forward. A church that is not fully engaged in conversation, or one that refuses to trust that God alone is Lord of the conscience and that people of good character may differ, is not living fully into what it means to be Presbyterian. And as Presbyterians, we are followers of Jesus Christ, not followers of either Paul or Apollos, while still others of us feel more at home with Cephas.

While much hard work remains, when Amendment B is gone, how we conduct ourselves will be important. Feelings and emotions on that day will reflect the broad diversity of opinions among Presbyterians. Our hope is that upon learning that the day we've anticipated has arrived, our joy will be measured by the fact that as the Covenant Network, we know how painful it is to live in the minority. May no one gloat or pretend that the full reign of God has just been ushered in. Instead, may we celebrate a new day, the turning of a page, by offering prayers for the whole church and her future. And then may we all commit ourselves to forging ahead, living into our greater unity that transcends our differences, namely our one faith, our one hope and our one Lord Jesus Christ, the head of the church and lover of us all.



Mary Lynn Tobin
Pastor, Davis Community Church
Davis, CA

Grace and Peace,



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