



Summer, 2004

# The Covenant Connection

A Newsletter of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians  
2515 Fillmore St. San Francisco Ca 94115 ♦ 415 351 2196 (v) ♦ 415 351 2198 (f) ♦ [www.covenantnetwork.org](http://www.covenantnetwork.org)

## New Covenant Network Video, *Turning Points*, Debuts at General Assembly

The Covenant Network will present the premiere of *Turning Points: Stories of Life and Change in the Church* at the 216th General Assembly. This powerful video documents how individuals, families, and congregations experience the exclusion and inclusion of gay and lesbian Presbyterians in the life of the church. The video's four segments can be viewed and discussed as individual pieces or all together. Biblical scholars and theologians including Walter Brueggemann and Beverly Gaventa provide commentary and interpretation. A study guide will be available.

The video opens with the poignant visit of Susie Smith, now a minister in the United Church of Christ, to her former Presbyterian congregation in South Carolina. Congregation members speak to the camera and to Susie about how their lives were changed by her presence and her departure. The choice between one's son and one's church is the focus of the Calhoun family's story in the second segment. The third story recounts a tragic moment of misunderstanding in the life of a young minister and a daring act of reconciliation twenty years later. The fourth segment considers how a thriving congregation in the midwest welcomes and includes gay and lesbian members.

The video will be shown in its entirety at General Assembly on Tuesday, June 29th and Wednesday June 30th, from 7:30 to 9 p.m. in the Convention Center, Room B10. The video will be available for sale at G.A. and then through the Covenant Network office or the website.

## Follow the Covenant Network at General Assembly On-Line

The Covenant Network will be posting news from the 216th General Assembly of interest to Covenant Network members on our website. While our focus will be on overtures related to ordination, we will also report on other issues before the assembly as well as events. Please visit our website at [www.covenantnetwork.org/216ga](http://www.covenantnetwork.org/216ga) before and during General Assembly.

## Imagining a Church for Our Time

There is still time to join Presbyterians from around the country at Ghost Ranch to consider and imagine "A Church for Our Time," July 26th to August 1<sup>st</sup>. For more information, visit [www.ghostranch.org](http://www.ghostranch.org) or contact Diane Haddon at 505 685 4333 x 152.

## Covenant Network Elects New Board Members, Co-Moderators

The Covenant Network board elected four new Directors and returned nine others at its April meeting. The Board welcomes Jay McKell, pastor of Grace Covenant Church in Overland Park, KS, Erica Funk, associate pastor of El Dorado Federated Church in Placerville, CA, the Rev. Ted Smith of Candler School of Theology and Elder Allie Latimer, Washington D.C. The Board is grateful for the ongoing work of Deborah Block, Betsy Britton, John Buchanan, David Colby, Tim Hart-Andersen, Doug Nave, Mark Smutny, Barbara Wheeler, and John Wilkinson. Jon Walton, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York, and Kim Richter, pastor of Grace Covenant Church in Asheville, NC, were elected to serve as Co-Moderators beginning in November of 2004.

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 different from ours. *From the Call to Covenant Community. Please read the whole document at [covenantnetwork.org/call2cc.html](http://covenantnetwork.org/call2cc.html)*

# A Prayer for General Assembly

Summoning God, teach us to assemble as pilgrims in your presence. As we gather from across the land, and across the globe, remind us of who we are and of the purpose of our journey.

May we see ourselves, not so much as warriors for a holy cause, as defenders of a revealed truth, even as legislators for a great institution, but as seekers, those who yearn - as the hart longs for water springs - for your presence, your grace, your guidance.

As your Son, our Savior taught us, may we be ever mindful of two supreme realities: your holy presence among us, healing our divisions, illuminating our path; and the presence of our neighbors with their concerns, their needs, their unique experiences, their own deep love for you.

So grant us more than merely tongues ready and eager to speak. Grant us ears ready and eager to hear, eyes ready to see, knees ready to kneel, hands ready to clasp and hold, and work with everyone we meet to establish in this church we love, your reign, O God, and not our own.

We ask this through the One who gave, and gave, and gave himself to serve you, and to save us all. AMEN

*J. Barrie Shepherd*

*For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness and darkness and tempest... But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God... to the general assembly and church of the first born which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all... (Hebrews 12:18, 22)*

## Covenant Network at General Assembly

**FRIDAY - JUNE 25**  
5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

### **Covenant Network Convocation Dinner**

The Marriott Hotel - Isabel Rogers, Moderator of the 199th G.A., Al Winn, Moderator of the 119th G.A. (PCUS), and Kim Richter, Covenant Network Co-Moderator-Elect. We will end in time to attend the Wither- spoon briefing.

**SUNDAY - JUNE 27**  
8 p.m. - 11 p.m.

### **Covenant Network Open House**

The Crowne Plaza, Georgian/Elizabethan Rooms. All friends of the Covenant Network are invited

**MONDAY - JUNE 28**  
12:30 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.

### **Covenant Network Luncheon**

Convention Center Room B21b - Princeton Professor of New Testament, Brian Blount, and Joanna Adams, Covenant Network Co-Moderator. Alice Anderson will be signing *Far From Home*.

8:30 p.m. - 11:30 p.m.

### **Reception for Young Adults**

The Crowne Plaza, Georgian/Elizabethan Rooms. We welcome pastors, seminarians, TSADs, YADs, and other Covenant Network friends under 40.

## Recommendations on Business Coming Before the 216th General Assembly

The 216th General Assembly will consider, as always, a wide range of proposals seeking in one way or another to further a church and world where, as the Assembly's motto says, "all may have life in fullness." Commissioners will also be discussing a number of reports developed through years of careful group deliberation - the *Preliminary Report of the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church*, the revised study on *Transforming Families*, and an initial report on *The Trinity: God's Love Overflowing*. These papers and the Spirit-led discussion that we are confident will occur in Richmond exemplify our Presbyterian family working together at our best.

*(continued on page 3)*



*Both photos on this page are by Danny Bolin, courtesy of PCUSA*

**TUESDAY - JUNE 29**  
7:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

### **Turning Points: Stories of Life and Change in the Church**

Convention Center Room B10 - The premiere of a new video showing Presbyterian pastors, families and congregations dealing with issues of inclusion.

7:30 p.m. & 9:00 p.m. (two showings)

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**WEDNESDAY - JUNE 30**  
2:00 p.m.-3:30 p.m.

**CNYA Organizing Meeting** Hospitality Suite in Crowne Plaza - Come talk with others about seminarians' and younger clergy's participation in the Covenant Network, locally and nationally.

*Meet Covenant Network staff, board members, and friends in the Covenant Network booth in the Exhibit Hall, Booth #925*

(Recommendations continued from page 2)

While all the business coming to this General Assembly is important, this year the Covenant Network chooses to focus our attention on one particular task. Overtures from the Presbytery of the Western Reserve (with concurrences by the Presbyteries of Albany, Long Island, Milwaukee, New York City, and Santa Fe) and from the Presbytery of Detroit **ask the General Assembly to issue a new “Authoritative Interpretation” declaring that the legal standards for ordination are those found in the Book of Order**, not in statements by G.A.’s or courts that pre-date the adoption of G-6.0106b. (These Overtures, 04-18 and 04-27, will be handled at G.A. as Item # 05-7 and 05-8.)

Passing these overtures will clarify what rules sessions and presbyteries need to interpret and apply when examining candidates for ordination.

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Currently, despite the Constitutional provision G-6.0106b, some governing bodies feel constrained by a variety of statements built on the 1978 G.A.’s finding that “unrepentant homosexual practice does not

accord with the requirements for ordination.” When adopted in 1978, this statement was specifically presented and intended as “definitive guidance,” not as law. And the church specifically did not incorporate it in what became G-6.0106b. Yet it continues to cause confusion and contention within the church.

This necessary step toward greater openness and fairness in ordination decisions is one that the 216th General Assembly can accomplish itself, without sending an amendment out to presbyteries. Such a process will permit the important work of the Theological Task Force consultations throughout the church to proceed on “the matters that unite and divide us.” We are hopeful that during the coming years, the Spirit may yet lead us to discern new ways of living together that we haven’t yet envisioned.

## Covenant Network Announces *Far From Home: Tales of Presbyterian Exiles*

Presbyterians have another opportunity to see the cost to the church of our exclusionary ordination policies with the publication of a new booklet by the Covenant Network of Presbyterians, *Far from Home: Tales of Presbyterian Exiles*.

Written by the Rev. Alice Anderson, it tells the stories of 39 pastors, seminarians, elders, and deacons who used to serve the Presbyterian Church but have left or been forced out by the church’s inhospitable stance.

John Hobbs’s story, presented here, is among the stories included in the booklet. John is now serving as the interim pastor at a UCC and UMC dual-affiliated church in Chicago, IL.

The booklet was mailed in May to presbytery resource centers, seminary libraries, commissioners, selected clergy, and all Clerks of Session, in hopes of sparking conversations across the church. Additional copies can be ordered from the Covenant Network office or through the web site. It will also be available at G.A.

John Hobbs joined the Waverly Road Presbyterian Church in Kingsport, Tennessee in the mid 1970’s. He was attracted by one of the UPCUSA policy papers studied there, *Peacemaking, the Believer’s Calling*. “It spoke to me about reconciliation and healing in our church and our world,” he says.



Hobbs entered Columbia Seminary in 1984. After seminary, he served a congregation in Tennessee, then became the pastor of Nacoochee Presbyterian Church in Sautee, Georgia. He was one of the few pastors in the area working on AIDS. Gays and lesbians found Nacoochee Church a safe place to be.

“In 1993, an elder came out to the Session as a lesbian. She told us she couldn’t live in good conscience in the PC(USA) and be open, so she needed to resign. We accepted her resignation with regret and left her seat open. We wanted to be reminded that people are excluded and left out of leadership in our denomination and churches suffer because of it,” Hobbs said.

Hobbs had been married for 20 years, with children in high school and college, when he came to understand himself as a gay man. “I came out to the congregation. They were very supportive, but the community and the presbytery were not. It was painful, but I resigned.”

Hobbs later met a partner with whom he moved to Chicago, where he took a position with the Interfaith Council of Chicago. He says, “It was good work, but I yearned to be a pastor. I missed the preaching, the teaching, and the pastoral care. Finally, after working for several years on advocacy within the PC(USA), I realized I couldn’t wait for the Presbyterian Church any longer, and started to seek full standing in the United Church of Christ.”

He says, “The UCC allows a congregation to define its community and the way of being in its community. The Presbyterian Church says, ‘Live this way or you are in violation of community.’ The Book of Order is used as a weapon, as a power fulcrum to bring people into compliance. When we live under oppressive policies, anger, guilt and shame are stirred up within us. Since I left the PC(USA), my spirituality has been enhanced. I’ve noticed a big difference in my personality. I’m no longer under Pharaoh’s laws.”

The Covenant Network is ready to provide assistance to commissioners as desired. Commissioners who want help accomplishing their objectives are invited to contact our National Organizer Tricia Dykers Koenig, [triciadk@covenantnetwork.org](mailto:triciadk@covenantnetwork.org) or 216-658-1770, or, during G.A., to leave messages at our booth (#925 in the Exhibit Hall) or hospitality suite in the Crowne Plaza.

## A Message from our Co-Moderators

June, 2004

Dear friends,

This month the church gathers again in General Assembly. It's our annual family reunion, bringing with it all the anticipation, pleasures, and challenges of most reunions! We look forward to seeing many of you in Richmond.

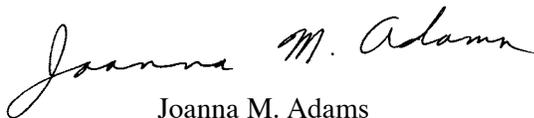
This year the church has a chance to make our polity significantly clearer and our lives together less contentious. We hope the General Assembly will choose to issue a new "Authoritative Interpretation," making it clear that the standards guiding ordination decisions are those in the Book of Order, not the various, confusing statements made by one or another body over the years. Such a move would provide clarity and greater fairness in an area where we acknowledge that the church continues to disagree. And it's a change that the General Assembly can accomplish without a potentially rancorous presbytery battle.

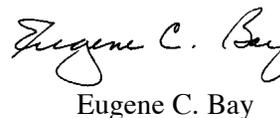
If you will be in Richmond, we hope you will join us for the exciting debut of a new video, *Turning Points: Stories of Life and Change in the Church*. It will introduce you to fellow Presbyterians struggling with issues of welcome and full inclusion for all our family members. We hope the video can be a discussion resource in churches and presbyteries across the church in the coming years.

Some people who won't be at the reunion are profiled in the new booklet, *Far from Home: Tales of Presbyterian Exiles*. They won't be coming, because the church told them they weren't part of the family. We hope you'll take the opportunity to meet them at least on paper, in the copies that went to your church or presbytery resource center last month.

The General Assembly is of course more than just a family reunion. It can be a visible sign of the unity Christ has given his body. The Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity in its preliminary report invites the church to embrace and "live into" the reality that Jesus Christ is Himself our peace, our unity, and our purity. May that very good news guide and inspire our time together in Richmond and throughout our whole church.

Grace and peace,

  
Joanna M. Adams

  
Eugene C. Bay



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