



Fall, 2005

The Covenant Connection

A Newsletter of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians (Vol 8, #3)

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Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity and Purity Draft Reports Are Now Available

The initial reports of the **Task Force on Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church** were released in late July; the final report will be released in early September. For the latest in reliable news and analysis please visit the Covenant Network website. The Task Force reports and recommendations are downloadable at www.pcusa.org/peaceunitypurity. The Covenant Network encourages Presbyterians across the country to organize and participate in dialogues that reach across boundaries. For more information and resources, please visit our website or contact our office.

More Overtures to Overturn Ordination Barriers Are on the Way to GA

Overtures seeking to remove barriers to ordination based simply on sexual orientation have now passed in four presbyteries and are moving forward for consideration in several others. **Cascades** and **Detroit** Presbyteries have joined **Heartland** and **Western Reserve** in petitioning the 217th General Assembly (which will meet in 2006) to remove G-6.0106b and the Authoritative Interpretations that have been held to exclude otherwise qualified gay and lesbian church members from ordination. Text of all four overtures is available on the Covenant Network website (www.covenantnetwork.org/fullyinclusive.htm).

The Four Most Important Things You Can Do This Fall

1. Participate in or set up dialogues in your Presbytery on the Reports and Recommendations of the Theological Task Force.
2. Think about how to expand your congregation's welcoming and inclusion of gay and lesbian Presbyterians and their families.
3. Show the video *Turning Points* as a part of your fall Adult Education Program. Consider inviting a larger community to attend.
4. Ask your session to support the Covenant Network in your congregation's mission giving budget.

New Covenant Network Congregation Web Logo

Is your Church a Covenant Network church? Do you have a web page? Consider adding the new Covenant Congregation logo to your website and a link to the national Covenant Network website. The logo is available at www.covenantnetwork.org/CovNetCong.htm. And if your session hasn't already studied and affirmed the Call to Covenant Community, now is a good time!

Pacific Northwest Regional Conference Returns in October

Covenant Network supporters from all over the Pacific Northwest will be gathering for the second Covenant Network Northwest Regional Conference on October 15, 2005 at Newport Presbyterian Church in Bellevue, Washington. The conference, *A New Way for A New Day: Reframing the dialogue on sexuality in the church*, features **Susan Andrews** and **James Noel**. Please see more information on this conference at www.covenantnetwork.org/Events/nwc05/05nwconf.htm.

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 in its entirety at covenantnetwork.org/call2cc.html.



A Message from our Co-Moderators

August 2005

Dear Friends,

As we write this column, the church is preparing to receive the final report of the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church. The Presbyterian Church today is, as the draft report states so well, “a church both preoccupied with and weary of conflict.” It is our hope, therefore, that the final version of the task force report will move the church closer to the peace, unity, and purity to which we are called.

For the past thirty years, and with increasing tension in the church, we have focused on issues of sexuality and ordination in such a way that factions have deepened and wounds have festered. The passing of time has not brought resolution to our disagreements, it has simply continued the conflict. We are left with a church that is progressively paralyzed by a matter that is important and that does not go away regardless of the number of votes that are taken on it.

The draft version of the report reaffirms a standard of Christian community that calls us back to our unity in Christ and to our membership in the household of God. The report notes that “In a world of divisiveness and violence, it is essential for those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord to show the reason for the hope that is within us by dealing differently with one another.” In a time when divisiveness mars our life together, we must find that better way to live in covenant with one another, even those with whom we disagree.

The Task Force offers several signs of hope that point the church in a new direction. It is not insignificant, for instance, that a widely diverse and theologically divergent group of people on the Task Force have become friends, moving beyond the divisions that have separated them in the past to a unity born of their oneness in Christ that has helped them overcome their differences. Clearly, they have found a more excellent way. As a model for building trust, nurturing mutual concern, and increasing Christ-like affection, this is a model with promise for the whole church.

Perhaps most hopeful is the Task Force’s description of a way for change in the church which does not rely on parliamentary procedures or decision making by up-or-down votes. While it is not yet clear how such a change would be implemented, it will surely be a key element in the report and one we will all want to study closely. There will no doubt be risks involved, but at this point, there may be much to be gained by looking for a new approach to a persistent problem that we have not solved by retracing well traveled roads.

If the model offered by the Task Force to the church is one of “patience, mutual forbearance, and dedicated communal discernment,” perhaps that is a model the church would be wise to consider as it prepares to receive and debate the report of the Theological Task Force. It is a model that may ask us all to re-examine our positions, give prayerful thought to discerning what God is saying to us through this report, and how we as Presbyterians will be being guided by the Holy Spirit to respond. In the months that lie between now and the Assembly’s meeting in Birmingham, that is what the church will be called to do.

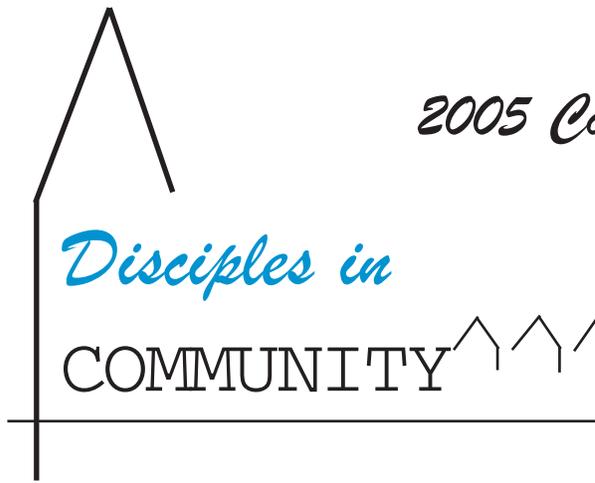
Grace and peace,

Kimberly C. Richter

Jon Walton

As you plan for Advent. . .

Does your church offer an Alternate Gift Market? Plan now to join Immanuel Presbyterian Church in Milwaukee, Pasadena [CA] Presbyterian Church, Bryn Mawr [PA] Presbyterian Church, Covenant Presbyterian Church in Napa, CA, and others by including Covenant Network among your potential gift-giving opportunities. Please contact our office for specific ideas.



2005 Covenant Conference featuring
 Kathleen Norris
 author of *Amazing Grace*

November 3-5, 2005
 Idlewild Presbyterian Church
 Memphis, Tennessee

How do we as individuals and as communities give our lives back to God in grateful response?

Come explore what Christian discipleship means – in our worship and witness, our vocations and commitments, our prayer and

practice, our actions for justice in the church and in the world.

"Faith is best thought of as a verb."
 - K. Norris

Speakers and preachers include Kathleen Norris, Amy Plantinga Pauw, Larry Rasmussen,

Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., Margaret Aymer, Thomas G. Long, Douglas Nave, and Nora Tubbs Tisdale. Worship will be led by Melva Costen.

Workshops and small groups will provide a welcoming entry. Young adults and seminarians are especially encouraged to attend, with scholarships and low-cost housing available.

For more information, visit our website at www.covenantnetwork.org/conf05.html or contact Rosemary Bledsoe at (415) 351-2196

Conference Registration

First time attending Have attended ____ other Covenant Conferences

Fill name _____

Name for badge _____

Mailing address _____

City/state/zip _____

Home office _____ home _____

Email _____

Minister Elder Deacon Seminarian Other _____

Baptistry _____

Congregation/Ministry affiliation _____

Occupation _____

Seminarian congregation of care _____

Seminary currently enrolled in _____

Emergency contact and phone _____

- Check here to attend the Civil Rights Museum Tour* ____ Thurs am ____ Sat pm
- Check here for a shuttle ride (Saturday) to the airport* at ____ 1:20 pm ____ 1:45 pm
- Check here to attend the CNA pre-Conference gathering*
- Check here to be connected to other CovNet Young Adults (seminarians and pastors forty-ish and under),
- Vegetarian meals
- Other special needs _____

*Please visit our web site or request a brochure for more information on these events.

Registration fee

Check enclosed for

Early bird
 \$110 before Sept 15

\$ _____

Regular rate
 \$135, Sept 15 to Oct 22

To pay by credit card:

Visa MasterCard

Last-minute rate
 \$160, Oct 23 to Oct 31.

Card no. _____

Expiration date _____

Civil Rights Museum Tour
 \$10 \$8

Card code _____

(Seminarians attend free, but must register. Thank you.)

Signature _____

Please send this form with your check or credit card information to the Covenant Network at 2515 Fillmore Street, San Francisco, CA 94115.

Who Owns the Kitchen? Casseroles, Kimchee, and Enchiladas

(excerpt)

Barbara Anderson
Co-Pastor,
Pasadena
Presbyterian Church

*First Published in
PCUSA Perspectives,
June 2005*

As the diversity of our denomination continues to grow, so too does the need to understand the joys and pitfalls of multicultural ministry. At the most basic level, these are seen in the hospitality of shared meals of various cuisines and in the power struggles over who is allowed to cook what type of food in the church kitchen.

The United States melting pot has become a stew pot in which each culture adds texture and color to the others, while retaining its own particular character. Pasadena Presbyterian Church, (Pasadena, California) a congregation of 850 members where I am co-pastor, is part of this trend. Each Sunday we worship in three languages: English, Korean, and Spanish.

A Full Kitchen

Pasadena Presbyterian Church (PPC) used to be one of the bastions of the white establishment in Pasadena. Now, the congregation is so diverse



that we have a multicultural Thanksgiving dinner on the Sunday just before Thanksgiving. Church members from all three language groups share the kitchen for two full days of cooking. They make traditional American turkey and dressing; kimchee, Asian noodles, and sushi; and tamales, enchiladas, rice, and beans. They stand side-by-side to serve the

nearly 300 members who attend.

Several models for multicultural ministry are used across the church. Some congregations remain completely English-speaking, but include a mix of European, African, Asian, and Latino peoples, enriching worship, music, and outreach with a range of traditions. Others, primarily immigrant congregations, wrestle with the different cultures of first generation immigrants and 1.5 or later generations who are bicultural and Americanized.

However, when most of us speak today of multicultural ministries, we mean ministry settings that are multi-racial, multicultural, and multi-lingual. Since the changes in immigration law in the 1950s and '60s, the number of immigrants from countries beyond Europe has grown exponentially. This multi-racial/multi-lingual dimension is primarily what makes today's multicultural ministries different from those of the past. Not only are issues of race and culture astir, but the ability to communicate is overtly hindered by language barriers.

Stranger as Neighbor

As congregations reach out to one another across culture and language, they do so from a biblical faith perspective that recognizes the neighbor in the stranger. They remember that Christ has made us one body, no matter our language or race, and that the church is called to give witness to this unity in its life together. In the reign of God, such partnerships would be grace-filled and trouble-free. However, since the reign of God has not yet arrived, both grace and trouble still abound.

Two primary models exist for congregations who feel called to multicultural ministry. The first and most common is nesting, in which two separate congregations with distinct governing bodies share space in one church facility. The second does not have a commonly used, descriptive name. In this second model, multiple language groups are part of the same congregation and under the authority of one session. The image and name I propose for this model is a quilted congregation.

Nesting Congregations

In the nesting model, one congregation is approached by a group from another racial ethnic part of the community seeking space to house their small, but energetic, ministry. The second group usually worships in a language other than English. Sometimes presbyteries begin a ministry in another language and ask a congregation to provide space to the new fellowship. All involved expect the new congregation to grow in size and financial resources until it is able to "fly" from the nest into its own building.

Anyone who has looked closely at a bird's nest knows that it gets quite messy and crowded. What happens in a congregational nest is just as messy. In a nesting relationship, the Anglo congregation retains the building, sets policy for building use, and rents space to the non-English-speaking congregation. Although attempts are made to accommodate the desired schedule of the new congregation, the convenience and patterns of the long-term Anglo congregation nearly always trump the requests of the nesters.

Envy and resentment can become common in nesting, on both sides. Too often, the parties separate with feelings of injury, instead of celebrating the diversity and unity of God's church that has brought them together.

All of this having been said, nesting arrangements can be helpful and transformational to all involved. The difficulties are not insurmountable and are worth tackling, but they require the biblical virtues of patience, kindness, humility, love, and generosity. To work well, nesting partnerships must be able to meet each other as equals.

This is often best accomplished by

establishing a task force composed of members of each congregation's session and the respective pastors. The task force becomes the crucible for working through issues of space, care of property, sanctuary, and kitchen use. Concerns from each language group can be brought to the task force and discussed before being forwarded to their sessions. The task force can also plan joint programs such as dinners, worship, and mission programs that help members know each other as fellow Christians, instead of merely landowner and tenant. In such a setting, the vision of the church in Ephesians 2:1-11 becomes a reality, as those who are near and those who are far off are reconciled through Christ Jesus.

Quilted Congregations

The second model of multicultural ministry is what I have chosen to call a quilted congregation. I've chosen the metaphor of a quilt for this model both because of how quilts are made and their purposes. Quilts are intentionally made of different fabrics, colors, and textures. It is the arrangement of these differences that provide the quilt's beauty. Some fabric is handed down from previous generations, some from old dresses or sheets or jeans, some contributed by neighbors, some purchased specifically for the purpose of being quilted.

So it is with quilted congregations. Different cultures and languages are stitched into a beautiful, exciting, unique pattern that could not have been foreseen, but which, no doubt, existed in the mind of God.

In addition, once quilted pieces have been stitched together, they are attached to one sheet of backing that provides the solidity, protection, and unity necessary to hold the quilt together. Living together under the authority of one session, one polity, one Lord, one witness to the community, and in one church that is home to all its parts provides an interwoven backing that holds a quilted congregation together and makes it strong.

The quilted congregation model is what we have used at Pasadena Presbyterian Church since 1999, when PPC's session decided it wanted to more accurately reflect its multicultural, multi-lingual community.

In a community and world divided along ethnic lines, we at PPC believe God is calling the church to provide models in which people from different races, cultures, and languages worship and work together, make decisions together and care for each other, study Scripture and share our faith with each other. Such a congregation attracts members who want their church experience to be as culturally diverse as their educational and work settings.

Quilted congregations are one church in more than one language. They have one session, one

budget, one staff, and one shared witness to the community. Several models exist for how to quilt a congregation, depending on the linguistic abilities of the pastor(s). Sometimes worship is bilingual, most often combining English and Spanish. In some churches, separate worship is held in each language in different parts of the church campus (sanctuary, chapel, fellowship hall) at the same time, with all language groups worshipping together several times per year.

In those services, various parts of worship are led in different languages, with bulletins provided in each language. Members pray and sing in the language they find most comfortable, and each group brings an anthem of their own style and language to share. I imagine it sounds and looks like Pentecost may have sounded.

Church business is conducted in the dominant language (unless the pastor is bilingual), with members of the other language groups who are bilingual serving on the boards, including the session, trustees, and deacons. It takes a long time for power to become equal on the decision-making boards, but the voices are present, recognized, and valued. And when deacons prepare communion elements, they do so for all language groups at the same time.

Generally, each language group has its own leadership team that plans its worship, education, evangelism, and fellowship. Resentment and envy still occur, but are addressed in a manner that keeps them from tearing the fabric of the church: resentment becomes an opportunity to re-examine subtle forms of racism still afoot in the church, and envy over another group's growth becomes a catalyst for examining one's own evangelism.

All the issues faced by nesting congregations exist in quilted congregations, but with a key difference. It's much like the difference between couples just living together and those who covenant before God in marriage. For example, quilted congregations make a lifelong commitment to each other and become one. They share their resources, their home, and their life. They rear their children together, they decorate together, and they go to church together. And when they have problems, they sit down to talk them out in ways that preserve and enhance the covenant. They are part of something larger than they are, and they are blessed by God.

Whether we nest or we quilt, the church is called to be one body, witnessing to one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. In the providence of God, we have been brought together in this great land at this time, in God's vast diversity of humanity. Now we are called to be instruments of reconciliation, a model of unity in diversity, and a community of hospitality where all are welcome in the kitchen and at the table. ■

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The full text of this article can be found at www.pcusa.org/oga/perspectives/jun05/kitchen.htm

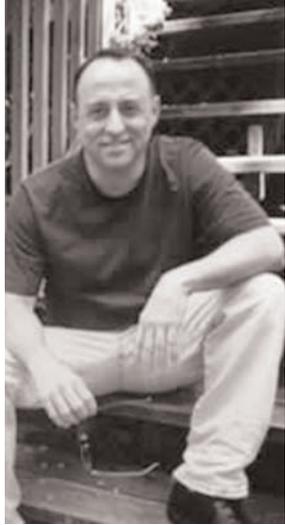
The Freedom to Live by Faith Alone (excerpt)

Paul E. Capetz

Associate Professor of Historical Theology at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities

Hab. 2:4, Rom. 1:14-17, and Rom. 3:28

In July and in August, Presbyterians gathered at Ghost Ranch and at Montreat to consider what A Church for Our Time might look like. Here is an abridged sermon from the Ghost Ranch session. The complete text can be found at covenantnetwork.org/sermon&papers/capetz2.html



Paul Capetz

Our church stands in the tradition of Martin Luther and his followers in the 16th century, including John Calvin, who opposed the medieval church in the name of the freedom of the gospel. The gospel, according to Luther, is a message of freedom and the church has no right to enslave those whom Christ has set free.

If we claim to be a “Reformed” tradition, then we have to ask whether the gospel is rightly preached by us today. And the way to answer this question is to gain clarity regarding what this gospel of freedom is all about that was at stake in the Middle Ages and that is still at stake today.

Luther began his career as a monk, since monasticism was considered by medieval Christians to be the chief expression of commitment to God. Whereas the ordinary Christian would live in the world preoccupied with the tasks of earning a living and raising a family, the monk or nun could give undivided attention to the pursuit of holiness

Luther’s “reformation” was nothing less than a wholesale rejection of this medieval understanding of Christian existence. Luther

came to realize that his commitment to the monastic life

was motivated by fear of God’s judgment. To avoid the possibility of eternal damnation, Luther entered the monastery, hoping thereby to evade God’s wrath against sinners. But soon he discovered that his efforts to be a saint led him to despair of himself. Eventually, Luther concluded that his inherited understanding of the Christian life was at odds with the basic message of scripture which he believed could be found in the teaching of the apostle Paul that we are “justified by faith apart from works of the law” (Rom. 3:28).

For Luther and his Protestant followers, the truth of the gospel is that we are freed from guilt, sin, and the fear of God’s judgment by faith alone. Faith is the confidence that enables the Christian to stand before God on Judgment Day with a good conscience. This good conscience is

not the result of the Christian’s achievement of sainthood; on the contrary, the Christian knows that she or he stands before God only as one who is a sinner, as one who does not measure up to God’s demand for holiness. The paradox of the gospel, Luther discovered, is precisely that God accepts the sinner!

If one follows the logic of Luther’s reading of scripture, the gospel is a message of freedom. Yet the gospel is not only a negative freedom from sin, guilt, and the fear of eternal damnation, it is also a positive freedom for this world that God has created and in which we are placed by God to live as human beings who trust in and rely completely upon God’s mercy. For Luther, this meant that the Christian life was not to be lived apart from the world in a pursuit of holiness; Christians, rather, are called to live in the midst of this world with all its cares and woes, as well as its joys and wonders.

It is difficult for many modern people to appreciate the religious significance of the Reformation. But we can find a modern parallel to Luther’s radical message in the story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran pastor in the 1930s. He joined a conspiracy to assassinate Hitler - deciding finally that he couldn’t let religious scruples prevent him from doing what he believed absolutely had to be done to save Europe from the evils of National Socialism.

Of course, Hitler was not assassinated. The conspiracy failed, and the conspirators were arrested and eventually executed.

In prison Bonhoeffer became interested in what he called the “worldliness” of Christian existence. He contrasted this Christian

worldliness with what he called the “religious” desire to escape from the world.

A CHURCH FOR

our time

I discovered later, and I’m still discovering right up to this moment, that it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith. One must completely abandon any attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be a saint, or a converted sinner, or a churchman....By this worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life’s duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God....That, I think, is faith...and that is how one becomes a [human being] and a Christian (letter of July 21, 1944).

continued on page 7

Freedom *(Continued from page 6)*

Here was a person who set aside religious scruples to be a human being in solidarity with his fellow human beings and was willing to get his hands dirty with the moral ambiguities of life in this world. Because of his confidence that God accepts the sinner, Bonhoeffer knew that he had no higher calling than to be a human being—not a saint, not a religious type, but a human being, living a secular life in the midst of a godless world. He understood, as did Luther before him, that the gospel frees the conscience to act boldly in the face of life's tasks. He realized, as did Luther before him, that the gospel frees us from pre-occupation with our own salvation so that we need not (indeed, must not!) withdraw from the world.

God created the world and called it good (Gen. 1:31). God put the human being in this good world to live in it and to cultivate it. The human being as a sinner falls far short of God's intention. But sin does not have the last word about the human being, at least not according to the "good news" spoken in Jesus Christ. Yes, the human being is a sinner and, as such, stands under God's righteous judgment. Nevertheless, the gospel frees the human being to live in this world with the bold confidence that God accepts the sinner and, therefore, the sinner can trust in God's grace. This is the gospel of freedom. This is the enduring legacy of the Reformation according to which we must test the authenticity of our own preaching. ■

Bible *(continued from page 8)*

"Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye" (Matt. 7:3-5; see also Luke 6:41-42).

Admonitions against self-righteousness also abound. For example, the parable of the Tax Collector and the Pharisee (Luke 18:10-14), which is told in response to those "who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt" (Luke 18:9), should serve as a warning to every Christian, "for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted" (Luke 18:14b; see also Luke 14:11).

Passages related to humility are also relevant to the discussion of homosexuality. The author of 1 Peter counsels, "And all of you must clothe

yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble'" (1 Peter 5:5), and Paul says "in humility regard others as better than yourselves" (Phil. 2:3b).

Arrogance, on the other hand, is never extolled, even when that arrogance is based on correct thought and righteous behavior (Romans 12:3, 16). The Psalmist declares, "One who secretly slanders a neighbor I will destroy. A haughty look and an arrogant heart I will not tolerate" (Psalm 101:5). Likewise the author of Proverbs says, "All those who are arrogant are an abomination to the Lord; be assured, they will not go unpunished" (Proverbs 16:5; see also Malachi 4:1).

Then there are biblical passages that encourage us to welcome "the other," to practice hospitality to the stranger (Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2) and to other believers (Rom. 15:7; 1 Peter 4:9). We also have the example of the public ministry of Jesus who was sent "to bring good news to the poor. . .to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Isaiah 61:1-2a = Luke 4:18-19). In fulfillment of his commission Jesus welcomed outsiders and foreigners (Luke 7:1-10, Matt. 15:21-28=Mark 7:24-30), dined with tax collectors and sinners (Luke 5:27-32, 7:34, 15:1-2, 19:1-10), and healed lepers (Matt. 8:1-4=Mark 1:40-45=Luke 5:12-16), demoniacs (Matt. 8:28-34=Mark 5:1-20=Luke 8:26-39), and other outcasts (Matt 9:20-22=Mark 5:25-34=Luke 8:43-48).

The question that confronts all of us, then, is whether we have lived up to our biblical obligations to love others and to welcome everyone to participate freely and fully in the Christian fellowship. Or have we, by our attitudes and our legislation, made homosexual Christians feel like second-class citizens who are allowed to join our communities of faith but are prohibited from ever serving as church officers? Those who condemn homosexuals because of what the Bible says need to recall that self-righteous condemnation, expressions of contempt for others, and failures to show love and mercy to one another are condemned in the Bible far more often than homosexual behavior. ■

Homosexuality and the Bible can be read in its entirety at www.covenantnetwork.org/sermons&papers/cmymers.htm

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

HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE BIBLE: A Consideration of Pertinent Passages *(excerpt)*

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Homosexuality is not treated extensively in the Bible. Only a handful of verses in the sixty-six books of the Bible make explicit mention of homosexual behavior between consenting adults. Jesus never mentions it at all. In terms of emphasis, therefore, one would have to conclude that homosexuality is a minor concern in the Bible.

Other passages from the Bible that have a bearing on the current discussion, however, are more numerous, more substantive, and more related to the central message of the Bible. While these biblical passages do not mention homosexuality explicitly, these passages do address the proper treatment of homosexuals.

There are, for example, numerous biblical admonitions that encourage believers to love one another. During the Last Supper Jesus told his disciples, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). We see this same thought in other parts of the New Testament as well. In 1 Peter we are told, "Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8; see also 1:22). From 1 John we learn, "Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. . .if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us" (1 John 4:11-12; see also 3:23, 4:7; 2 John 5). Paul also encourages us to "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law" (Rom. 13:8; see also 1 Thess. 3:12).

The need to show mercy to others is a distinctive feature of the biblical narrative. In his Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6 Jesus said, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven" (Luke 6:37; see also Matt. 7:1-2). In other words, how we treat others has repercussions for how we will be treated. In his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel Jesus warns about the danger of judging others when he says,

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Charles "Buz" Myers