



Fall, 2006

The Covenant Connection

A Newsletter of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians (Vol 9, #3)

2515 Fillmore St. San Francisco Ca 94115 ♦ 415 351 2196 (v) ♦ 415 351 2198 (f) ♦ www.covenantnetwork.org

Turning Points Featured on Public Television

The Covenant Network video, *Turning Points: Stories of Life and Change in the Church*, was featured this summer on over 70 PBS stations from Anchorage, AK to Gainesville, FL. An 83 year old WWII vet called from Indiana to ask, "What is that beautiful thing? How can I get a copy?" A Princeton sophomore e-mailed for more information on biblical interpretation. A Canadian Anglican ordered a copy for adult ed in his church. In San Francisco, a young Korean-American returned to church after years away, after learning from the broadcast that the church can welcome him and his partner. One sign of approval, on-line orders for copies of the video followed showings across the country.

Congregations Support the Covenant Network Through Alternative Gift Fairs

Covenant Network would like to be a part of your congregation's Alternative Gift Market. Many congregations offer their members and the larger community an opportunity to contribute in a loved one's honor toward important causes and life-changing missions in place of neckties that don't get worn or toys that break too fast. As you plan your congregation's Alternative Gift Market, please join Immanuel Church, Milwaukee, Pasadena [CA] Presbyterian Church, Covenant Church, Napa, CA, and others in including Covenant Network's ministry and witness among the choices - helping to distribute our booklets and videos, for example, or supporting scholarships to attend our Covenant Conferences.

Now is also a good time to review your session mission giving budget for 2006 and 2007. Please join the Covenant Network's work of advocacy, education, and networking as we prepare and distribute solid, biblically based resources to help individuals, congregations, and presbyteries discern calls and live together as mandated by the 217th General Assembly.

Rain, Worship, and Study Ground A Church for Our Time

It was a week notable for rain: not just dust-settling showers, but measurable, miraculous inches of life-giving precipitation in the high desert. Participants in the "Church for Our Time" group at Ghost Ranch marveled at veils of rain visible for miles, dramatic banks of clouds, and operatic lighting effects on the shining cliffs of multi-colored stone.

Only serious and task-oriented Presbyterians like these could miss any of the sky-theater to concentrate on the challenges of being church in these times. Only skilled leaders like Cynthia Campbell, Fred Holper, Dan Anderson-Little, Nannette Sawyer and David Lewicki could keep them focused on the topic, and only an irresistible music leader like Paul Vasile could get them singing, clapping and even occasionally moving (!) with such vigor.

After daily showers of blessings they gathered in the evening for life-giving worship services, and after the last class they lingered for an unscheduled and deeply moving half hour of prayers for each other.

2006 Covenant Conference
Registration Details Inside

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

Let's Talk About It

By a 91% vote, the 217th General Assembly urged Presbyterians to “engage in processes of intensive discernment through worship, community building, study, and collaborative work.” The Covenant Network is glad to offer resources to study sexuality and faithful living. For a complete list: www.covenantnetwork.org/resource-cat06.htm

Study Guide now Available for *Jesus, The Bible and Homosexuality*

A six-session study guide for Jack Rogers's book, *Jesus, The Bible and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church* is now available in PDF form from several websites and by request.

Written by Freda Gardner and David Maxwell, the study guide offers a clear, well designed process for discussion that allows for safe exploration of the issues raised in this popular, well-written book. The study guide is free and the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation offers a discount for multiple orders of the book. The study guide can be found at www.drjackrogers.com and at www.ppcbooks.com/studyguides.asp.

Hard Wired – the Science of Sexual Orientation

This Powerpoint presentation reviews what is (and is not) known about the biology of sexual orientation. It goes on to evaluate the success rates of attempts to change orientation and ends with a summary of current findings and policy statements from nearly every professional mental health organization in the U.S. and includes a short bibliography for further reading. For more information and to order a CD: www.covenantnetwork.org/hardwired06.htm.

Adult Sexuality Curriculum Available

Becoming One in Christ by Kevin Frederick is a thoughtful and comprehensive adult education study for congregations. The 13-part curriculum considers sexuality and sexual ethics within the context of divine/human relationships using a Reformed understanding of Scripture. Available for free as two PDFs (Student and Leader guide) at www.covenantnetwork.org/resource-cat06.htm#b1x.

FAQ about Sexuality, the Bible, and the Church Book Also Available in PDF Form

Frequently Asked Questions about Sexuality, the Bible and the

Church: Plain Talk about tough issues offers twenty six short essays on biblical, theological, and even international approaches to faithful sexuality and the appropriate place of gay and lesbian people in the church.

Individual

Call to Covenant Community Study Guide

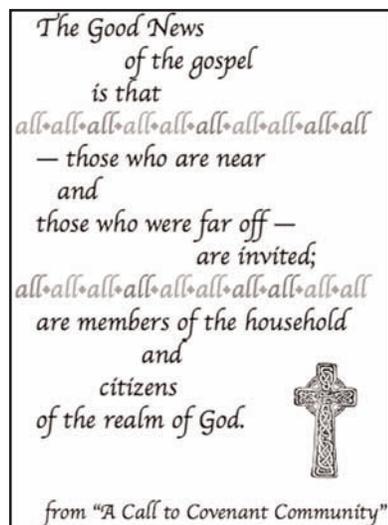
This four-part adult education course is designed to help congregations and presbytery groups consider biblical hospitality, biblical interpretation, the church's relation to society, and living faithfully together in a diverse church. The PDF can be downloaded at www.covenantnetwork.org/resource-cat06.htm#call2cov.

Individual chapters are available in PDF form for inserting into newsletters, study and discussion in small groups, or display for member use. For more information, PDFs, and a link to buy the book (discount for multiple copies), please visit www.covenantnetwork.org/faqsbc06.htm.

Turning Points Can Now Be Ordered With Closed Captions

The Covenant Network video, *Turning Points: Stories of Life and Change in the Church*, can now be ordered with closed captioning. The hour-long video can be viewed in four segments and comes with a study guide to support small group discussion. This award-winning video explores the impact that current ordination standards have had on people and congregations. To order a VHS or DVD version, visit www.covenantnetwork.org/tp-order.htm.

Announcing Covenant Network Note Cards



Just in time for Christmas – Notecards with the popular, colorful design of “The Good News of the gospel” are now available. With plenty of writing space inside, the card also features the musical setting of this refrain written by Thomas Pavlechko for the 2005 Covenant Conference. Packets of ten can be ordered for \$10 through the Covenant Network E-store

**Covenant Network Staff
San Francisco Office
(415) 351-2196**

**Pam Byers
Executive Director
pambyers@covenantnetwork.org
Rosemary Bledsoe
Conference Coordinator
Address Changes
rosemaryb@covenantnetwork.org
Anitra Kitts
Director of Communications
anitrakr@covenantnetwork.org**

Regional Offices

**Tricia Dykers Koenig
National Organizer
triciadk@covenantnetwork.org
Phone: (216) 658-1770
Lou McAlister East,
Southeast Regional
Coordinator
loueast@covenantnetwork.org
Phone: (336) 643-9424
cell: (336) 324-2525
Carol Davis
Director of Development
caroldavis@covenantnetwork.org
(303) 918-0677**

Covenant Network at the 217th General Assembly

The Covenant Network of Presbyterians continued to present a strong witness toward a Church that is as generous and just as God's grace in June at the 217th General Assembly meeting in Birmingham, Alabama. Rosemary Bledsoe, Lou East, and a team of volunteers staffed a booth on the exhibit floor which saw a steady stream of visitors, some old friends and some meeting the Network for the first time. Tricia Dykers Koenig worked with Overture Advocates from around the country who presented a powerful testimony to the Church Orders Committee on the full inclusion of all baptized Presbyterians in the Church. Volunteers, board members and staff monitored the work of the General Assembly in multiple committees and facilitated sharing information among commissioners.

Covenant Network Co-Moderator Kim Richter and Board members Laird Stuart and Joanna Adams led three morning worship services. The video, *Turning Points: Stories of Life and Change in the Church*, was screened four times in the conference center auditorium. Former Moderator Susan Andrews addressed Covenant Network supporters at a pre-G.A. dinner and briefing. Cynthia Campbell keynoted the overflow Covenant Network Luncheon (see next page). And everywhere the Network went, the message of God's inclusion for all of God's baptized community was proclaimed.

Twenty-two presbyteries sent overtures to the 217th General Assembly seeking the removal of G-6.0106b from the Book of Order. Nineteen of those presbyteries chose to pool their time before the Committee on Church Orders in order to make a common, coherent presentation.

"We come before you as women and men who love Jesus Christ, and seek to serve and follow him... All of us at this Assembly have that in common," the overture advocates began their presentation. They spoke first of Holy Scripture, then of the Confessions and the Book of Order, and then about real human experiences such as the story of a gay man who gave a gift of companion ministry to an elderly woman dying of cancer and who was later asked by the session to be ordained and as a deacon. The Overture Advocates said, "Some people say this is about some people; we believe it is about all of us."

The overtures were narrowly disapproved by the committee in light of the pending Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church Task Force

Report. The General Assembly chose not to reverse the committee recommendation.

Out on the exhibit floor Covenant Network staff, board members, and volunteers heard from visitors how much the Covenant Network's witness meant to them. Lives have been

touched and stories were told. In a church that all too often declares sexual orientation as a barrier to God's loving presence, both gay and lesbian Presbyterians and family members who love them, stopped by the booth to check in and to express their gratitude.

One volunteer, Carol Shaw of Montgomery, Alabama, came to staff the booth specifically because of how the Covenant Network helped to support her and her family when her eldest son came out to Carol and her husband. "I worked for the pastoral counseling center at a large church at the time," Carol told us. "Of course I immediately went to my boss for help, but there wasn't any help for me there." Instead, Carol was told her son was going to hell, that he was evil.

"It was hard when he first came out," Carol said. "My husband and I were both a big mess when he dropped that one on us. But we hugged him and told him that we loved him and to please give us time." Instinctively rejecting the message of her home church and workplace, Carol started researching for

both a theological and a physical understanding of sexual orientation. Through the Covenant Network she found both a local congregation where her family could worship and thoughtful writings that helped her to fully embrace her son. "I think that Covenant Network explains it very well," Carol said. "Not only did I find a church through you, but you also had some great articles by some very smart people that helped us a lot."

"I'm just so grateful to be a part of a church and a part of Covenant Network where I and my family feel welcomed," Carol said.



North Anderson Presbyterian Church members Fletcher Hawkins and Rob Gentry and board member Bill Calhoun catch up at the Covenant Network Lunch.

To read more about the 217th General Assembly including sermons, speeches, presentations and observations, please visit www.covenantnetwork.org/news/217news06.htm

Reformed: Not 'What' We Are But 'How'

217th General
Assembly
Covenant Network
Luncheon

Cynthia Campbell,
McCormick
Seminary President

One of my favorite lines in the “Brief Statement of Faith” occurs in the last section on the work of the Holy Spirit. It reads: “In a broken and fearful world, the Spirit gives us courage ... to hear the voices of peoples long silenced.” It was my great privilege to serve on the Committee of 15 that proposed the final version of the Brief Statement to the General Assembly and the church. I will never forget our discussion of that evocative sentence. The statement asserts that it is not only individuals but “peoples” ... groups or classes of people whose voices have not been heard. And it is not only that they have been silent – not speaking, but silenced – not able or permitted to speak.

As the committee debated that line, one member told a riveting story. Henry Fawcett is a long-time member of the faculty of Dubuque Seminary. He is a Native American from Alaska and a third generation Presbyterian. Some years previously, Henry’s father had died and as the oldest son, it fell to him to close up the family home in the village where he had been raised. As he worked his way through furniture and boxes long-stored away, he eventually came upon a trunk in the very back of the attic. On the top were old blankets and bedding. When he got to the very bottom, he found something else: a carefully folded, beautifully beaded ceremonial robe.

Henry knew immediately that it had belonged to his grandfather who had been the religious leader of the community. He had been among the first to embrace Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord,

In these cases, either/or thinking is dangerous ... it does not lead either to unity or peace because the desire is for one side to impose its will on the other. It may end up with a kind of purity but it will be a purity of the like minded. In the long run, this kind of thinking silences thoughtful voices in the community. In doing so, it does damage to the truth.

and he went on to raise generations of his family in deep Christian faith. But, as was the custom of the time, all who converted were instructed to burn all the costumes and paraphernalia of their former religious life. This robe escaped the fire and had been carefully preserved. Henry said that as he

put it on his own shoulders, he could hear his grandfather’s voice and the voices of those who had gone before him – voices once silenced that were silent no longer.

It has occurred to me this year, as we come to this General Assembly with all the troublesome issues before us, that it is not only people – human beings – that have been silenced down through the years. It is also the case the voices

from the tradition and even the Bible itself have been silenced and that it is the work of the Holy Spirit among us that gives us courage to hear those voices as well. Whenever we listen and really hear, we are led deeper into our discipleship of Jesus Christ.

I am convinced that one of the most important contributions of the Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church is found in a grid between lines 699 and 700. The section is entitled “Resources for Constructive Engagement.” Here (and in the wonderful background paper that accompanies it), the authors argue that Presbyterian life is held together by maintaining a dynamic tension between various theological principles or “points of balance.” At first glance, these ideas or principles may look contradictory or even mutually exclusive. But the genius of Presbyterian life and thought has been to see that truth often resides in more than one place at the same time. One of the hallmarks of our tradition has been to resist the simplistic either/or answers in favor of a more complex both/and.

So, in the examples from the Task Force Report, we believe that the community/the church together discerns God’s will and we believe that God alone is Lord of the conscience. We affirm that there are necessary beliefs and practices that make the church truly Christian and we respect freedom of belief and practice in nonessential matters.

Why is such an approach to Christian faith important? We live in a culture of either/or thinking – either you support the Chicago Cubs or the Chicago White Sox. Either the Palestinians or the State of Israel has justice on its side; but not both. Either you affirm the dignity and value of all human life or you acknowledge the possibility of abortion and end of life decisions. Either congregations and Presbyteries have the right and responsibility to ordain or there will be a national standard approved and followed by all. In these cases, either/or thinking is dangerous ... it does not lead either to unity or peace because the desire is for one side to impose its will on the other. It may end up with a kind of purity but it will be a purity of the like minded. In the long run, this kind of thinking silences thoughtful voices in the community. In doing so, it does damage to the truth.

The truth is that often, more than one thing can be true at the same time; in fact failing to hold various truth claims or ethical values in tension can lead to theological as well as ecclesial disaster. I am convinced that the Task Force did not invent this idea of theological “points of

balance.” Rather, as they sat together and listened to one another, they listened as well to the voice of the Reformed tradition and in the process heard a voice long silenced.

One of the principal examples of hearing the voices of peoples long silenced is what we are celebrating in 2005-2006 in the anniversaries of the ordination of women in the Presbyterian Church to the offices of deacon, elder and minister of Word and Sacrament. In order for the church to change its mind on this matter, the church had to learn how to listen not only to the voices of women but to the tradition itself. For centuries, the church looked primarily to selected passages in the writings of Paul for the answer to the question: are women called to governing and pastoral leadership in the church? In order for the church to change its mind, I would suggest that the church had to listen to the whole tradition. Once the church stopped reading Jesus through the lens of Paul, what we rediscovered was the important roles that women played in Jesus’ life and ministry and by extension in the life of the early church.

I have always loved the fact that when noted biblical scholar, Elisabeth Schuessler-Fiorenza wrote her ground-breaking study of women in the New Testament, she titled it *In Memory of Her*. Surely, this story of the woman who anoints Jesus in Mark 14 is the most ironic in all the church’s history of thinking about the role of women. Here, Jesus commends a woman for caring for him in anticipation of his death. He commends her because she (unlike the rest of the disciples) gets it about what is going to happen. And in commending her, he uses the phrase that appears again only in the institution of the Lord’s Supper: “Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.” The irony, of course, is that first of all, the community forgot her name and then forgot her story. But there it is and there it has been all along, like Henry’s grandfather’s robe wrapped up carefully in the trunk in the back of the closet, waiting for the right moment to be rediscovered.

In both cases, I believe that we see something of the essential nature of the Reformed tradition. The Brief Statement calls it “hearing the voices of peoples long silenced.” Our ancestors in the faith called it “ecclesia reformata sed semper reformanda” ... reformed and always being reformed ... open to change as the Spirit gives us wisdom and courage. I call this an “essential” because I am coming to believe that it is not particular doctrines that are essential to our tradition. Rather, what makes the Reformed

tradition what it is, is how we do theology and how we do church. When you come right down to it, there is only one Christian essential: that Jesus Christ is Lord and through him, we believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All the rest of doctrine is commentary. To be sure, there are different developments and diverse ways of being Christian. Ours is one, and it is (among other things) one that is open to hearing the voices of peoples long silenced.

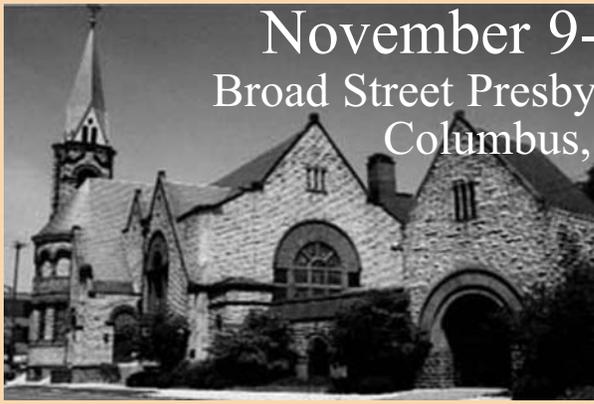
In both examples I have discussed here – the idea of theological ideas held in tension or balance and the conviction that God calls women as well as men to all offices of the church – in both cases, we Presbyterians are by far the numerical minority among the world’s Christians. But that does not make us wrong. Doctrine and practice cannot finally be determined by majority votes. They are determined by communities of believers who listen for the Spirit’s leading.

The Covenant Network has been together for nine years now in the belief that God can and will use the lives and gifts of God’s people regardless of sexual orientation in God’s service. We are committed to hearing the voices of gay and lesbian brothers and sisters and children and neighbors and colleagues and friends. We also believe that in coming to this conviction, we have heard the Holy Spirit opening the scriptures and the tradition to us in new ways.

But this cannot be the extent of our listening. As the Theological Task Force reminds us, gay and lesbian people are not the only ones who feel that their voices are or have been silenced. And so as we live through this week and these challenging times in our church, let us recommit ourselves to disciplines of humility and openness, to genuine listening, to a ready willingness to work with one another, and above all to God who has called us to be God’s people.

It is still my favorite section: In a broken and fearful world, the Spirit gives us courage to pray without ceasing, to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior, to unmask idolatries in church and culture, to hear the voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace. Amen.

Rather, what makes the Reformed tradition what it is, is how we do theology and how we do church. When you come right down to it, there is only one Christian essential: that Jesus Christ is Lord and through him, we believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All the rest of doctrine is commentary



November 9-11, 2006
Broad Street Presbyterian Church,
Columbus, Ohio

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit ... To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."
(I Corinthians 12: 4, 7)

Who can appropriately serve the church? We have focused for decades on issues of gender and sexuality, questioning whether women, sexual minorities and others are fit to serve. The recent General Assembly has invited us to refocus from "bodies" to "the Body"—to a richer and deeper perspective on how we live together as faithful members of the Body of Christ, particularly in times of difficulty.

As we celebrate anniversaries of women's ordained service, join us to deepen our understanding of vocation and ordination and help imagine how to grow into new ways of living together as Christ's body.

Discerning^{the} Call

Ordination and mutual forbearance

2006 Covenant Conference on Ordination after Birmingham



Deborah Block

is pastor of Immanuel Presbyterian Church in Milwaukee, WI, where she has been on staff since 1978. A graduate of Louisville Presbyterian Seminary and McCormick Seminary, she is on the Board of Directors of the Presbyterian Publishing Corp. and is Vice Chair of the McCormick Seminary Board of Trustees. She has served as Moderator of the Presbytery of Milwaukee and as Co-Moderator of the Covenant Network.

Sheila Gustafson

is pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Santa Fe, NM and a founding Director of the Covenant Network. She is a noted preacher; her sermons have been published in *Renewing the Vision* and *Preach for Peace*. Dr. Gustafson graduated from United Theological Seminary, was ordained in 1977, and has served churches in Minnesota and Wisconsin.



Lisa Larges

is Regional Partnership Coordinator of That All May Freely Serve. She joined the TAMFS staff in 2002, after graduating from San Francisco Theological Seminary in 1989. She organized the Witness for Reconciliation Project to promote dialogue on the full participation of GLBT Presbyterians. Lisa is a deacon at Noe Valley Ministry in San Francisco and a candidate for ministry under care of the San Francisco Presbytery.

Dale Morgan

is author of the 2004-05 *Horizons Bible Study, What She said: Quotable Women in Scripture*. She has been senior pastor of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Santa Barbara, CA since 1987. Rev. Morgan is a member of the San Francisco Theological Seminary Board. She has written youth and



adult curriculum for the PC(USA) and has spoken at numerous churchwide conferences.

Photo by David P. Young, courtesy of Presbyterian Women

Deborah Mullen

is Dean of Master's Programs and Director of the Center for African American Ministries and Black Church Studies at McCormick Seminary. She graduated from Colgate Rochester Divinity School/Bexley Hall/Crozer Theological Seminary in 1982 and was ordained in 1983. Dr. Mullen chaired the 1989-92 denominational Task Force on the Study of the Theology and Practice of Ordination in the PC(USA).



Doug Nave

is a member and former trustee of Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York, and a trustee of McCormick Theological Seminary. Doug is a 1981 graduate of Whitworth

College and a 1984 graduate of Columbia Law School. A partner in a New York law firm, he currently heads the firm's international antitrust practice in London.

J. Herbert Nelson, II

is pastor of Liberation Community Presbyterian Church in Memphis, TN, a tent-making new church development that evangelizes the poor into PC(USA) membership. Dr. Nelson is also the Associate Director of the Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change at the University of Memphis. He has become a noted ecumenical preacher, consultant, writer and workshop leader.



Jack Rogers

served as Moderator of the 213th General Assembly He is Professor of Theology Emeritus at San Francisco Theological Seminary, and earlier taught for 17 years at Fuller Theological Seminary. Dr. Rogers has just published his tenth book, *Jesus, the Bible and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church*.



Margaret Towner

was the first woman ordained as pastor in what is now the PC(USA). She became pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Syracuse, NY in 1956. She has served congregations in six presbyteries. In 1981, Dr. Towner was vice-moderator of the 193rd General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church (USA).

Speakers & Preachers

Conference Registration

Full name _____

Name for badge _____

Mailing address _____

City/state/zip _____

Phone *office* _____ *home* _____

E-mail _____

Minister Elder Deacon Seminarian Other _____

Presbytery _____

Congregation/Ministry affiliation _____

Clergy position _____

Emergency contact and phone _____

Vegetarian meals Other special needs _____

Seminary or college _____

Seminarian congregation of care _____

Early bird rate, until
Sept. 22, 2006 ___ \$125
Regular rate
Sept. 23 - Oct. 31 ___ \$160
Last minute rate
Nov. 1-7 ___ \$180

Check enclosed - or -
 Visa Master Card

Card number _____

Expiration date _____

Signature _____

Seminarians and college students _____
Free
Complete and return this registration form

Schedule Highlights

subject to change

Thursday, November 9

- 12:00 Covenant Network Young Adult Pre-Conference Gathering
- 3:30 Conference begins
- 4:00 Plenary - Dale Morgan: "Didn't Our Hearts Burn Within Us?"
- 5:00 Plenary - John Buchanan: "The Church We Are Called to Be and to Become"
- 8:15 Opening worship: J. Herbert Nelson preaching
- 9:45 Welcoming Reception

Friday, November 10

- 9:00 Morning worship: Lisa Larges preaching
- 10:00 Plenary and Keynote Address
 - Deborah Block & Margaret Towner: "This Far By Faith"
 - Deborah Mullen: "Ordination: An Instrument for Faithfulness"
- 1:30 Plenary - Doug Nave: "Interpreting and Living into our New Life Together"
- 4:45 Plenary
 - Greetings and remarks by Moderator Joan Gray
 - Town Hall meeting: The state of the church, and where do we go from here?

- Jack Rogers, "Faith stories and teachable moments on the road."
- 8:00 Worship and Communion: Deborah Block preaching
- 10:00 CovNet Young Adult Reception

Saturday, November 11

- 8:30 Workshops
- 10:00 Workshops
- 11:30 Closing worship: Sheila Gustafson preaching
- 12:30: Conference adjourns

Covenant Network Young Adult Pre-Conference Gathering

Seminarians, pastors, and other friends under 40 (or so!) are invited to come early for a Pre-Conference Gathering at noon on Nov. 9. Share worship, fellowship, and serious thinking about the future direction of our church with colleagues from around the country and younger Covenant Network board members.

Workshops

Discernment: more than just talk; *Hard Wired: what determines sexual orientation, and can people change it?*; Being a Non-Anxious Presence in Anxious Times; *Interpreting and Using the new Authoritative Interpretation in CPM's and COM's*; No Longer Strangers: building community across difference; *What the Bible Says (and Doesn't Say) about Homosexuality*; and more...

Hotels

Red Roof Inn-
111 E. Nationwide Blvd.
\$79/night
Call 1-800-874-9000 for reservations **by 10/18**; ask for rooms in Block Number B262COVENA.

Hyatt Regency Columbus -
360 N. High St.
\$104/ night.
Call 1-800-233-1234 for reservations **before 10/18**.



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

A Statement of the Board of the Covenant Network On the Authoritative Interpretation of G-6.0108 by the 217th General Assembly

The 217th General Assembly has given the church a hopeful vision of life together in a time of disagreement. Drawing on our traditional polity, the Assembly has provided an Authoritative Interpretation and other resources to help the Presbyterian Church (USA) deal constructively with fractious issues. While reaffirming church-wide Constitutional standards for ordination, the Assembly lifted up a basic principle of Presbyterian church order: standards are interpreted and applied by sessions and presbyteries – those who know candidates best.

Despite our disappointment that the Assembly chose not to remove G.-6.0106b from the Book of Order, the Covenant Network embraces the General Assembly's mandate to live faithfully with all seven of the actions recommended by the report of the Theological Task Force. We are committed to staying in the church and supporting its wider mission. We are thankful that many who find the Assembly's actions difficult to accept have also declared their intention to remain part of this denomination. The Covenant Network will continue to look for ways that Presbyterians with different, even opposing, perspectives can learn from each other and strengthen each others' faith. It will take many years to live into the vision of peace, unity, and purity in the church articulated by the General Assembly. More dialogue, understanding, and trust must be established if the church is to fulfill this high calling.

In recent years, the Covenant Network has provided resources to the church to further the discussion of the theology, polity, and Biblical basis of ordination. We will continue to provide resources at this critical time to help sessions and presbyteries faithfully examine and ordain candidates called by God and the voice of the people.

The Presbyterian Church is ministering today amid enormous challenges in its own fellowship and in the world. The Covenant Network is confident that the Holy Spirit will guide the church in a common life of peace and unity as we honor Christ in our shared worship, witness, and mission.

August 2006