



Summer 2008

# The Covenant Connection

A Newsletter of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians (Vol 11, #2)

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

## The church gathers in General Assembly June 20-28 in San Jose, California

*Covenant Network will be there and we hope you will be, too!*

### Commissioners' Convocation Dinner

Friday, June 20, 6:30-8:30 pm  
San Jose City Hall Rotunda

An opportunity for commissioners, advisory delegates and observers to think together how to make a difference in the coming week. Commissioners and advisory delegates will have an opportunity to meet others on their committee, and the volunteers who are committed to supporting them throughout their G.A. experience.

Plan to join us in the beautiful glass-domed rotunda of San Jose's City Hall. **Susan Andrews**, Moderator of the 215th General Assembly and General Presbyter of Hudson River Presbytery, will address our legislative hopes for this G.A.

Order tickets for both events online at <http://www.pcusa.org/ga218/registration/reg-accommodations.htm>

### Covenant Network Luncheon

Monday, June 23, 12:00 noon - 1:30 pm  
Fairmont Hotel, Imperial Room

Hear our founding Co-Moderator **John M. Buchanan** (Moderator of the 208th General Assembly, Editor and Publisher of *The Christian Century*, and Pastor of Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago) reflect on our continuing vision of a church that celebrates the welcoming gospel.

Also, **Harry Knox**, Director of the Religion and Faith program of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), will speak about HRC's 2009 Clergy Call initiative. Join old friends and new at our (now bi-)annual celebration.

**Ways you can help!** - If you'll be in San Jose, Covenant Network would love your help! From hospitality to errand-running to supporting commissioners and advisory delegates; from an hour to a day to the whole week and more -- we have numerous opportunities for service that can help you enhance your knowledge of the PCUSA, make new friends, and make a difference in the church's witness. To learn more or to sign up, contact National Organizer Tricia Dykers Koenig at 216-658-1770 or [triciadk@covenantnetwork.org](mailto:triciadk@covenantnetwork.org).

••• Plan to visit the Covenant Network Booth - #105 - in the Exhibit Hall. •••

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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](http://covenantnetwork.org/call2cc.html).

# Covenant Network Urges General Assembly to Take These Actions

The Covenant Network of Presbyterians was founded over ten years ago with two goals: to support the full inclusion of LGBT Presbyterians in the life and leadership of the church, and to work for the health and unity of the church in the midst of deep disagreements.

The Covenant Network affirmed the actions of the 217th General Assembly (2006) in approving the recommendations of the Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church. We believe those recommendations called the church back to principles deeply ingrained in our Presbyterian tradition and so offered a way for our church to move beyond the controversies which divide us.

In the months since the 2006 GA, we have been encouraged by signs in some places of bridge-building, healthy dialogue, and a renewed emphasis in presbyteries and sessions on discerning the movement of the Holy Spirit while examining those who understand themselves to be called to ordained service as deacons, elders and ministers.

The hard work of the diverse (and unanimous!) Theological Task Force, and the prayerful discernment of commissioners to the 2006 GA, has been threatened by a recent decision of the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission in the case of *Bush, et al. v. Presbytery of Pittsburgh*. While the GAPJC decision affirmed most of the principles of the 217th GA's authoritative interpretation of G-6.0108, it also declared that the second sentence of G-6.0106b ("fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness") -- alone among the provisions of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) -- is not subject to potential departures. Elevating this one clause to a standard above all others directly contradicted a key reminder from the Task Force about our tradition: that ordination standards should be established nationally and applied locally, all with respect for freedom of conscience and emphasis on mutual forbearance - and that this Presbyterian process is especially important when standards are controversial.

We believe the *Bush* decision was not just bad polity, but also a threat to the way of being church offered by the Task Force and affirmed by the 217th Assembly. Given this judicial decision, we believe that seeking the peace, unity and purity of the church requires working at this Assembly both to reaffirm the traditional Presbyterian process ratified by the 2006 Assembly and to change the standards for ordination.

To that end, we urge the General Assembly to take several actions:

**Approve the overtures designed to support the 217th GA's approval of the authoritative interpretation of G-6.0108.**

When the Task Force proposed the authoritative interpretation adopted by the 217th GA, it was emphasized that the principles would apply regardless of how the church's standards might change in the future. The John Knox overture [Item 05-12, "On Adopting an Authoritative Interpretation of G-6.0108 to Ensure Proper Application of Ordination Standards"] is necessary to restore the integrity of our polity, and the overture from Scioto Valley with multiple concurrences [Item 05-03, "On Directing the Stated Clerk to Collect and/or Develop Models of Examination Procedures] would help the church learn to live out those principles.

**Issue an Authoritative Interpretation making it clear that the "definitive guidance" statements that preceded G-6.0106b, and the subsequent affirmations of them, have no force or effect, and**

**Send to the presbyteries an amendment of G-6.0106b that would remove the provisions aimed at excluding LGBT persons from ordained service.**

The PCUSA has been suffering for decades from G-6.0106b and the exclusionary policy that preceded it, which was first called "definitive guidance" in 1978; the current "standard" is theologically, pastorally, ecclesiastically, and evangelistically disastrous. The health of the church and our witness to

the Gospel of Jesus Christ demand that we remove this failed policy so that we can move into God's future embracing all whom God has welcomed and called. Items 05-6, 05-8, 05-9, 05-11, and 05-13, from the Presbyteries of Albany, Baltimore, Boston, Cincinnati, Genesee Valley, Hudson River, National Capital, New Hope, New York City, the Redwoods, and Santa Fe, offer various approaches that would accomplish this goal.

**In our other legislative priorities, we also strongly recommend these measures:**

- The overture from the Presbyteries of Denver and New Brunswick that would strengthen Presbyterian commitment to **pastoral care** and to **equal civil rights for families of same-gender partners**, and establish a study committee to explore the theology and practice of marriage and related matters.

Issues of equality for all families, and the questions posed by the interplay between varying state laws and church policies, confront pastors and sessions. The church's response should be based on prayerful and thoughtful theological work, informed by both Scripture and the realities of contemporary family life.

- Overtures to initiate the process of replacing the inaccurate translation of the **Heidelberg Catechism** currently in our Book of Confessions with a translation faithful to the original language.

Our Confessions are both a witness to our faith, and a teaching tool for the faithful. The version of the Heidelberg Catechism currently in the Book of Confessions contains several passages that are inaccurate translations of the original language. For the integrity of our witness - historical and contemporary - a more faithful translation should be substituted.

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## If You Can't Attend G.A., You Can Still Take Part!

- Sponsor your presbytery's commissioners, or an Advisory Delegate or two, to attend Covenant Network's Convocation Dinner and/or G.A. Luncheon by offering to buy their tickets. Contact Program Coordinator Lou East, 336-643-9424 or [loueast@covenantnetwork.org](mailto:loueast@covenantnetwork.org) to hear how CovNet Chapters can make this happen in their Presbyteries!

- Knit rainbow-colored scarves for commissioners and others to wear at GA, to show their support of an inclusive church. Janet Edwards is organizing this project and can be reached for information, knitting directions, etc. at [JMEA08@comcast.net](mailto:JMEA08@comcast.net), 412.302.3827. She would like to receive the scarves by June 9.

Do justice Love kindness

Walk humbly with your God

## How to Keep Up with News from General Assembly

Find full information about the General Assembly here: <http://www.pcusa.org/ga218/index.htm>

G.A. is posting all business it will consider on a special site, <http://www.pc-biz.org/ClientHomePublic.aspx>. You can also follow business during the meeting through this site.

Once again, Covenant Network is partnering with several progressive groups in hosting JustPresbys.org <http://www.justpresbys.org/index.html>. Add this site to your 'Favorites' and stay tuned for information and recommendations concerning the business of the General Assembly.

## Election of Moderator

The Moderator of the 218th General Assembly will be elected on Saturday evening, June 21. The candidates are:

The Rev. Carl Mazza (New Castle Presbytery)  
see [www.carlmazza.org](http://www.carlmazza.org)

The Rev. Bruce Reyes-Chow (San Francisco Presbytery) - see [www.mod.reyes-chow.org](http://www.mod.reyes-chow.org)

Elder Roger Shoemaker (Homestead Presbytery)  
see [www.rogershoemaker.org](http://www.rogershoemaker.org)

The Rev. William Teng (National Capital Presbytery)  
see [www.billteng.org](http://www.billteng.org)

Extensive information can also be found in the Candidates' booklet, available for download at <http://staging.pcusa.org/ga218/pdf/moderator-book.pdf>

## The Family Gathers

Do you know the way to San Jose? Commissioners are preparing to find their way. They are making hotel reservations, booking airline tickets, scheduling events during the week including the Covenant Network Commissioners' Dinner on Friday, June 20th and the annual CovNet Luncheon on Monday, June 23rd. It's time again for what is now the biennial gathering of the clan. We are a family. Sometimes as a family we are a bit dysfunctional, sometimes embarrassing, sometimes wonderful to be with, and other times we have our disagreements. But we belong together. City folk and country folk, rich and poor, black and white and Asian and Native American and Latino. We are Midwesterners, Southerners and Northerners, Alaskans and Hawaiians, Pacific Northwesterners... a gathering of the commonwealth of God that only God could have imagined. Sometimes we are happy to be together and sometimes we wonder as we pack our bags to go to G.A. whether the time and money and effort is really worth it.

But the truth is that G.A. is an important part of what it is to be God's people, to travel some distance to be together. Since Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years, and the captives returned to Jerusalem from Babylon, we have been a people on the move, packing our bags to find a place where we can be together, worship God, give thanks for the blessings of this life, and recommit to being God's people together.

This Assembly will have hard work to do. The GAPJC in its Bush decision upheld many aspects of the right to exercise individual conscience and the right to declare a departure from "non-essential" doctrine. But in bracketing chastity and fidelity as inviolate and essential doctrine from which no one may depart, the PJC has offered the church a decision that represents the overturning of the Spirit-guided wisdom of the majority of the commissioners of the 217th General Assembly as well as the rationale of the Theological Task Force which spent over four years preparing its report. Lifting chastity and fidelity to preeminence in the concern of the church above Bible, the Confessions, Reformed theology, or a proper understanding of the sacraments makes no logical sense at all. This ruling must be corrected. Fortunately the John Knox and Scioto Valley overtures would allow the church the opportunity to do precisely that.

It is also time that G-6.0106b was either deleted, or rewritten to be welcoming of the gifts of all, rather than discriminatory against the gifts of some. Several overtures before this Assembly address this bankrupt and exclusionary standard.

Let us pray that the God who gathers us, will join our hearts and minds as family so that when we sit at table together, it is a joyful feast of all the people of God, the city and country cousins, the crazy Uncle Joes and the gracious Aunt Sarahs, and all are together in unity if not in uniformity. If we live up to the theme of this year's Assembly and "Do justice, Love kindness, and Walk humbly with your God," we will be thankful and glad that we have been together.

Grace and peace,



Deborah A. Block  
Pastor, Immanuel Presbyterian Church  
Milwaukee, WI



Jon Walton  
Pastor, First Presbyterian Church in  
the City of New York



# Making a Difference at General Assembly

As a commissioner to the 215th GA, I was sitting on what I was sure would be the most boring of committees when an opportunity arose to actually do something. I wasn't sure what that might be or how to start, so I grabbed the Covenant Network liaisons to my committee and asked for help. They put me in touch with Tricia Dykers-Koenig, national organizer for Covenant Network, whose first question to me after I described what was happening on the committee was, "What do you want to do?"

Well, I didn't know what I wanted to do. That's why I needed her help. But I started babbling about the situation I was facing on the committee and my frustration with the discussion and my concern that a small opportunity through my committee work to support inclusive ordination was going to be lost.

"So what do you want to do?" she asked again. AUGHH! I kept talking, and she kept listening, carefully, until I was able to figure out for myself what it was I wanted to do - write a motion to be presented the next day in the meeting.

"What do you want it to say?" she asked. Oh, come ON, give me a little help here! Tell me what to do!!! But no, this woman was not going to tell me what to do. I had to figure it out for myself. Once I figured that out, she would be glad to assist me, but it had to be on my terms. I needed to be in the driver's seat.

Although it was five years ago, I still remember my "ah HA" when it dawned on me that Tricia was a person of great integrity. She was not going to insert herself into the process; she was not going to try to manipulate committee workings from the outside; she was not going to even give me a suggestion about what to do. She was going to honor the process, and she was so hands-off it was frustrating. But once I figured out the direction I was headed, she was incredibly helpful, knowledgeable, articulate and wise. And she made me proud, once again, to be part of the Covenant Network, where integrity is at the top of our values.



**Mary Lynn Tobin**

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I can safely say that the Covenant Network, through two of their representatives in Dan Vigilante and Camille Cook, radically changed my 2006 General Assembly experience. As a twenty year-old Youth Advisory Delegate from the Greater Cleveland area, my church leadership experiences had been frustrating. Serving on the Worship and Spiritual Life Committee at my suburban church, I grew accustomed to some realities of church polity. I certainly came to GA excited for what and who I would encounter, bringing along strong viewpoints and beliefs but not knowing how those would realize themselves.

I was fortunate to be placed on a committee that was dealing with a pressing issue to the church, that of relations with Israel and Palestine, and there I forced my young adult voice to be heard despite other members' perception that I was too young. The most poignant issue of that General Assembly was of course the PUP Report, which dealt generally with homosexual ordination. I was very passionate about the issue and desired to express my thoughts and beliefs in some effective manner; but because my committee did not deal with those resolutions, I feared that my effect would be limited.

And then Camille and Dan came into the picture. They really allowed and encouraged me, along with other YADs, to find our voices among the masses, allowing us to demand that the "youths" be heard. I spent enjoyable, fruitful time with them honing my thoughts into a speech that could be presented succinctly and effectively. Instead of trying to inculcate the YADs with party line positions, Dan and Camille encouraged us to express our true identities and beliefs, as they accompanied us along the trying journey. General Assembly began as an intimidating experience; but with some help from members of Covenant Network, I found my strength to put into practice the faith that we all hold so dear.

In the end, I was astounded at the impact I had, both within my committee and even on the floor itself. All at once, GA can be profoundly intimidating and extraordinarily beautiful, and the real difference lies in the faith that anyone can affect our church, with firm resolve and the confidence and joy that comes through faith in our mission in this world.



**Tony Damelio, III**

# Plain Talk about Tough Issues

Excerpts from *Frequently Asked Questions about Sexuality, the Bible and the Church: Plain Talk about Tough Issues*, Ted A. Smith, editor -- Short, accessible essays by 26 scholars from 19 seminaries and colleges, published by Covenant Network in 2006. \$5.00 per copy. Order on-line on the Covenant Network website ([www.covenantnetwork.org](http://www.covenantnetwork.org)) or at Booth #105 in the General Assembly Exhibit Hall.

On the subject of same-sex sexual activity, Jesus says nothing - either positive or negative. Some scholars have argued that Jesus encounters a same-sex sexual relationship when he is asked to heal the *entimos pais*, the beloved male “servant” or “slave” of the centurion. The *entimos pais* may or may not have been having a sexual relationship with his boss/owner. Such relationships were common at the time, but there is no specific evidence here. When confronted with the request for healing, Jesus cures the slave/servant without comment about or investigation into the nature of the relationship between this centurion and his *entimos pais* (Matt 8:5-13; Lk 7:1-10). Where modern readers might be full of questions, Jesus and the Gospel writers are silent.



Margaret Aymer,  
Assistant Professor of  
New Testament,  
Interdenominational  
Theological Center

The Gospels remember that in the midst of great social chaos, Jesus was asked what the most important law was. He responded, as have Jews for generations before and since, with the words of the great Shema: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” And then, without missing a beat, he added a second: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39). Perhaps, finally, even on this issue of sexuality, that is all that needs to be said.

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The issue before the church is not whether persons of this or that sexual orientation can be ordained to ministry. They are already ordained to ministry by virtue of baptism. As is the case with ministers of the Word, elders, and deacons, all baptized Christians have had hands laid upon their heads as a sign that they are set apart as ministers of Christ and as a sign of the presence, power, and blessing of the Holy Spirit. That same Spirit has given to the baptized all the gifts and graces the church needs to sustain its life and engage in its mission, and the whole church is called to be good stewards of these charisms and gifts.



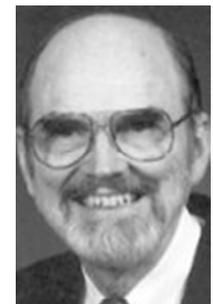
Thomas G. Long,  
Bandy Professor of  
Preaching, Candler  
School of Theology

So the real question that baptism places before us is not who shall be ordained. That one has already been decided at the font. The real question is one of the stewardship of gifts. If the Holy Spirit gives to this one among us the gift of teaching, and to another among us the gift of preaching, and to still others the gifts of discernment, leadership, and care, who are we to turn these spiritual gifts away? What we are truly summoned to decide is not who among the baptized receives these spiritual gifts or who is entitled to exercise them. The Holy Spirit decides that. We are summoned, rather, to receive these gifts with joy and gratitude and to be the kind of church that orders its life in such a way that these gifts are honored, exercised, and nourished to the glory of God and the blessing of the world.

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The issue of granting equal rights to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender has been a source of conflict in our denomination for 30 years. There is a biblical way to resolve the conflict in the church. Jesus said: “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets” (Matt. 7:12). All we have to do is to apply the same hermeneutic, the same gracious interpretation of Scripture, to all people.

In the Reformed tradition we know that God's first word to us is grace. Our thankful response is obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit. When we finally accept Christian people who are LGBT as full and equal members of the church - as we will - we will be wonderfully blessed.



Jack Rogers, moderator  
of the 213rd General  
Assembly

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

The Covenant Network board elected two new Directors and returned six others at its meeting in March. The Board welcomes Laurie Kraus, pastor of Riviera Presbyterian Church in Miami, and Karen Turney, an elder from Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church in Overland Park, Kansas. The Board is grateful for the ongoing work of Janet Arbesman, Tim Cahn, Bill Calhoun, Jay McKell, K.C. Ptomey, and David Van Dyke.

Deborah Block, pastor of Immanuel Presbyterian Church in Milwaukee, and David Van Dyke, pastor of House of Hope in St. Paul, Minnesota, were elected to serve as Co-Moderators beginning in November of 2008.

The Board warmly thanks retiring directors Dan Anderson-Little, Heidi Hudnut-Beumler, Kirsten Kingdon, and J. Herbert Nelson. They will continue to serve on our Board of Advisors.

### What does the Gospel lived out look like?

Through time many have suggested that the great sermon is lived out more than spoken. For the three of us, one of the highlights of our years at Montview Church was early in March when the congregation welcomed the Denver Gay Men's Chorus as our worship choir. Our tears were in response not to words spoken but a living Gospel Word lived out in a shared and safe love.

What does the Gospel lived out look like? Listen to the words of members of the Denver Gay Men's Chorus in response to that worship time together:

"The message and the Montview members gave back so much that it caught me off guard. Thank God we were singing Siyohamba at the end of the services as I was so choked up that I lost my voice and my eyes were filled with tears of joy. In my 14 years in signing with the DGMC, I never had such an embracing feeling by the parishioners at Montview as we experienced on Sunday....It has been about 25 years since I stopped going to church because of the negativity the modern day members were exerting toward the GLBT community. Yesterday helped me to know that the views of at least this church have progressed and I am now welcome."

"I would never have believed 20 years ago when I came out that I would be singing in a mainstream church with 75 other homosexuals to their congregation -- with their arms open wide in acceptance of us! We have come a long way from the times when our kind met in dark places that were hidden from the rest of the world, where we feared for our lives. The thought of that truly chokes me up."

"To feel complete strangers unified in Christ's love on Sunday was something I have not felt since a child. It felt warm and welcoming and I felt like I belonged."

We are so grateful for the transforming experience of that Sunday - both for the Denver Gay Men's Chorus and for each of us.

Co-Pastors Bill Calhoun, Cindy Cearly, Greg Cummins

The *Covenant Network Connection* is free to all who request a subscription. To have your name added to our mailing list or to change your address, please contact Karla Lemon at (415) 351 2196 or [karlalemon@covenantnetwork.org](mailto:karlalemon@covenantnetwork.org). You can also make changes on line at [www.covenantnetwork.org/conscribe.htm](http://www.covenantnetwork.org/conscribe.htm).



Do justice Love kindness

Walk humbly with your God

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



Logo design by Kim Krueger, member of Grace  
Covenant in Overland Park, Kansas

## 2008 Covenant Conference

November 5-8

Westminster Presbyterian Church, Minneapolis

*Plenary Speakers include:*

**Walter Brueggemann**

Professor Emeritus, Columbia Theological Seminary

**William Stacy Johnson**

Associate Professor of Systematic Theology  
Princeton Theological Seminary

*Preachers include:*

**John Wilkinson**

Pastor, Third Presbyterian Church, Rochester

**Barbara Lundblad**

Associate Professor of Preaching, Union Theological Seminary

**Eily Marlow**

Co-Moderator of TAMFS and  
Lilly Project Associate, Macalester College