



Winter 2008-09

The Covenant Connection

A Newsletter of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians (Vol 11, #4)

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

Organizing to Approve Amendment 08-B

The Covenant Network of Presbyterians is working hard for the approval of Amendment 08-B. For the past 30 years, the PC(USA) has been actively discriminating against its own sons and daughters who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender; that prejudice was written into our Constitution 11 years ago in G-6.0106b. We are working for the passage of Amendment 08-B for the sake of our congregations and presbyteries, our families and friends, and our church's witness to the world.

The Covenant Network also believes it is very important *how* these conversations happen. The need to talk about the issues raised by 08-B in every presbytery is an opportunity for the PCUSA to move forward in our understanding of the issues and one another, and so we are organizing for *conversations, not combat*.

There is a growing collection of resources that may help as your presbytery considers Amendment 08-B. These materials are available on our website, or through our National Organizer, Tricia Dykers Koenig at triciadk@covenantnetwork.org or 216-658-1770. If you have suggestions to add, or would like to plug in to our ongoing work, please contact Tricia.

Newly revised Guidelines for Examination of Church Officers

Besides sending out Amendment 08-B, the 218th General Assembly issued an "Authoritative Interpretation" allowing sessions and presbyteries to consider the whole scope of a candidate's faith and life, even if she or he declares a "departure" on a particular matter. And it swept away 30 years' worth of exclusionary, hurtful statements barring "ordained service by homosexual church members."

These legal changes are reflected in the new *Guidelines for Examination of Church Officers*. This 40-page booklet provides clear explanations and practical guidance on faithful ordination practice for sessions and presbyteries. Order through our e-store or call the office.

Invitation to Conversations

Two ally organizations working for fairness, welcome, and inclusion for all members of the Presbyterian Church have launched *1000 Conversations*. In an effort to build friendships in the Church during this year when Presbyterians are voting on the amendment to ordination standards, 'Presbyterian Welcome' and 'That All May Freely Serve' invite us all to help bring respect, integrity, and real relationships to the voting process by having a conversation with someone in our community who has a different opinion about the issues or someone we simply don't know. For more information, go to <http://1000conversations.org/>.

Clergy Call 2009

"Moving from Acceptance to Advocacy" is the theme for the Human Rights Campaign's 2009 Clergy Call for Justice and Equality, an opportunity for religious leaders from all over the country to gather in Washington, DC May 4-5 to advocate for LGBT equality. The Covenant Network Board has planned its spring meeting for DC in order to participate; for more information and to register yourself, go to <http://www.hrc.org/issues/religion/9194.htm>.

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.

Snapshots from Minneapolis

By Randy Bush

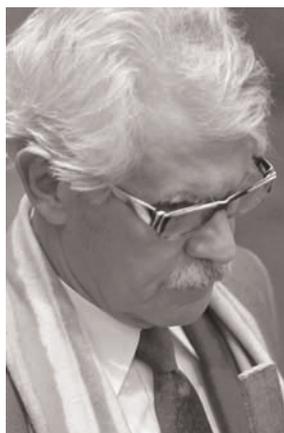
The recent Covenant Conference in Minneapolis left me with a rich batch of images, like a stack of pictures to thumb through. We gathered at Westminster Presbyterian Church with its beautiful sanctuary—its painted ceiling, decorative organ pipes with the split choir rising majestically on either side of the chancel, wooden communion table, and the row of red upholstered chairs near the pulpit. There was something special in the sheer act of coming together—of seeing friends again, of getting acquainted in workshops or at meals. The omnipresent, actively-engaged contingent of young adults brought welcome energy. We were regularly reminded by all that talk of covenants and justice and change is more than mere rhetoric when spoken in gatherings of faith.

Friday, the conference's longest day, is invariably its richest. Morning preacher Eily Marlow told her story with honesty and passion. She remembered the painfully-vulnerable act of dressing "straight" for a Presbytery examination, even as her God-given gifts longed to be recognized and celebrated despite the restraint of her outfit and its matching string of pearls. She was followed by Walter Brueggemann, holding forth as a prophet calling from the other range of life's spectrum; hunched and gray-haired with glasses balanced precariously on his nose, physically overshadowed by a massive, wooden pulpit—and yet, if anything, even more animated than the youthful Ms. Marlow and as passionate as ever about this God who refuses to be God without us.

We came together again in the evening, to worship in that sacred space and listen to the Twin Cities Gay Men's Chorus. We heard from Barbara Lundblad about eunuchs (Isaiah 56) and the Syro-Phoenician woman (Matthew 15), and these biblical figures served as our scriptural hosts at the communion meal that night.

The images linger, as does the spirit of hope and expectancy. I am grateful for what these annual conferences provide me and all the other living stones of the amazing, diverse, reformed/reforming church to which we have been called.

Randy Bush is pastor of East Liberty Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, PA.



Celtic service call to worship by Laurie Kraus

Call To Worship 2008 Covenant Conference

In the morning of creation, when chaos reigned
and the earth was formless and void
the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters
and whispered
"Come, you are welcome in this place."

In the dry and desperate desert
When the people argued and tested
Water burst forth out of the rock of Horeb
And the thirsty children of Israel cried
"Come, you are welcome in this place"

By the waters of Babylon where exiles
weep bitter tears
And cannot find their Voice
The Spirit of justice speaks:
"Come, all you who long for home,
for you are welcome in this place."

Out of the River Jordan,
Where the prophet called,
brother Jesus arose, dripping, from the waters
of baptism, calling:
"Come and follow me—you are welcome
in this place."

Near the crystal River that flows through
the new Jerusalem
By the Tree of Life
Whose leaves are for the healing of the nations,
The Spirit and the Bride say:
"Come, all you who are thirsty
And drink from the springs of the water of Life,
And be welcome in this place."

Laurie Kraus is pastor of Riviera Presbyterian Church in Miami, FL.

John Knox Presbytery Approves a Statement of Conscience

On November 18th, John Knox Presbytery voted 71-23 on a motion by the Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) that Inquirer Scott Anderson's "affirmation of conscience" (scruple), in which he stated a departure from the ordination standards of the PC(USA) as stated in G-6.0106b, did not constitute a failure to adhere to essentials of Reformed faith and polity. Following the decision to accept Scott's statement of departure, the Presbytery voted 64-14 to enroll him as a candidate for ordination. He must remain a candidate for at least one year before a final assessment conducted by the CPM will determine whether or not to recommend him ready to receive a call.



Scott Anderson

The John Knox Presbytery CPM worked diligently to prepare the Presbytery for deliberating scruples. During the past two years, they conducted two "practice" case studies offering commissioners the opportunity to conduct theological discussions on the essentials of Reformed faith and polity. In a third training event, five elders and clergy presented statements on whether G-6.0106b represents an essential of Reformed faith and polity; small group discussion followed.

As preparation for considering Scott's affirmation of conscience, Stated Clerk Alyson Janke reviewed polity issues related to ordination. Mark Achtemeier, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Ethics at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary and member of the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church, presented information about the work and conclusions of the Task Force. And CPM Chair Nancy Enderle provided an overview of the CPM process.

According to Rev. Enderle, the CPM wanted the process for considering Scott's declaration to be transparent and thorough. CPM members participated in several training sessions as well as an extended retreat in order to facilitate an open atmosphere where opinions and positions could be openly shared. They spent time building their fellowship as a committee through devotions and sharing. Though their vote to accept Scott's scruple was not unanimous, their commitment to one another and to the process was unwavering.

Throughout the process, Scott Anderson maintained active, positive relationships with his congregation of care, Covenant Presbyterian in Madison, WI, and with the Presbytery. The vote to accept his scruple grew out of a context of community in which his gifts were known and respected. When introducing him as a possible candidate, the CPM chair reminded the presbytery that they were not suggesting a change to constitutional standards, but rather considering the opportunity to receive an individual scruple from a particular inquirer whose ministry and integrity were known to them.

A link to the full text of Scott Anderson's "Affirmation of Conscience" is on the home page of the Covenant Network website at www.covenantnetwork.org.

From Scott Anderson's "Affirmation of Conscience"

I believe that the Holy Spirit is the giver of the deep faith, love and devotion to God exhibited by gay and lesbian believers who seek to live out God's call in the context of faithful, covenanted, lifelong partnerships.

I believe that in giving these spiritual gifts to gay and lesbian believers, God acts in a manner consistent with the work of the Holy Spirit recorded in Acts 10, 11 and 15. The Holy Spirit revealed to the early church God's acceptance in Christ of an entire group of people—the Gentiles—who had been traditionally excluded from the community of faith. God's acceptance of this people included a calling to positions of leadership within the church.

I believe when the church categorically excludes people such as myself from consideration for ordination, the message it sends to gay and lesbian believers everywhere is that no matter how hard we might work and strive to conform our lives to the shape of the Gospel, we are disqualified on the basis of unchosen aspects of who we are from ever being able to respond to the call of God. This comes dangerously close, I believe, to telling gay and lesbian believers that Jesus Christ has nothing to offer people like me. As such it is the antithesis of the Gospel message I find proclaimed in the Scriptures, of a Savior who invites all to follow and to put their hope and trust in him. . . .

I affirm the authority of Scripture and our obligation as Christians to follow its teaching in all aspects of our lives, including our sexuality. I believe that all Christians are called to lives of holiness and faithfulness that glorify God and give concrete expression to our calling as followers of Christ. I affirm the pattern that Scripture sets out for sexual morality.

But I also believe that the categorical prohibition contained in G-6.0106b represents a grievous misapplication of biblical teaching in the case of gay and lesbian believers who are in faithful, covenanted, lifelong partnerships. For the reasons stated above, I believe this misinterpretation of the biblical witness is unfaithful to God's loving intentions for humankind, and seriously undermines the church's gospel witness to gay and lesbian persons. I cannot in Christian conscience support it.

The God of the Covenant and Amendment 08-B

Excerpted and edited by

William Stacy Johnson

Associate Professor of Systematic Theology
Princeton Theological Seminary

From his plenary address at the
2008 Covenant Conference

“And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people” (Leviticus 26:12).

We Presbyterians are a covenant people who serve and worship a covenant-making God. That phrase from Leviticus, *“And I will walk among you,”* gives us an astonishing glimpse into God's fundamental engagement to be our God. What we discover in this phrase flies in the face of all the stereotypes about the Presbyterian vision of God as aloof, distant, disconnected or dispassionate. Rather than being distant, God identifies with us in our weakness. **Through the powerful drama of God for us; Christ with us; and the Spirit among us, God chooses to walk among us.** Each movement in this threefold drama merits a special word.

First, when we say God is “for” us, we mean that God thought of us before we were and brought us into being. God has set God's heart upon us, loving us with a love that surpasses even the way we love our own children or other family members. God loves us because God can't help but love us. No matter what we do, God is determined to be our God.

Second, when we say God is “with” us, we are intensifying the stakes. If I happen to be for



someone in distress, I might fax them or email them and say, “I’m for you.” That gesture might give a certain kind of comfort. Yet by itself it is inadequate. What people in distress really need is someone who is not only *for* them, but someone who is *with* them. They need not just sentiment; but solidarity. **The Christian claim is that *God is in solidarity with us.*** God is not content to remain aloof from humanity, but in Jesus Christ, God determined to become one with human beings. The Word became flesh in Jesus Christ, Immanuel, God with us. This solidarity is at the heart of the Christian understanding of covenant. **And the compelling nature of this solidarity invites us to give ourselves in solidarity with and for one another.**

This leads us to the third point. The God who is for us and with us in Jesus Christ is also at work “among” us by the Spirit’s power. When we say God is “among” us, we signal that God’s very own life is being shared with us as we respond to God’s grace in faith.

In other words, the covenant must come full circle: *“I will be your God, and you will be my people.”* As we are told in 1 Peter 2:5, God dwells among us in order to build us up into a spiritual house, in which each of us is valued as a living stone. God has a stake in what happens to each one of us. Each one of us is special to God’s covenant, and particularly those who have been shoved to the margins of the community. There is a special place in God’s heart for the outcast, the sojourner, the widow, the orphan, the neighbor in need.

Though God is faithful, we are sinners. We have not followed through on our covenant obligations. There is a problem in the spiritual house of the PCUSA. Our house is broken—so broken, in fact, that only through the grace of God can it be fixed. The amazing thing, however, is that through the workings of the Spirit of God among us, God wants to fix our house. The incredible thing is that God chooses to do this gracious work through us. God’s faithfulness is at work through our faithfulness. God enlists our faithfulness—the faithfulness of all of us—to accomplish God’s purposes.

So how will God’s work among us play out as the church seeks to discern God’s will regarding Amendment 08-B? Only time will tell. But one of the great questions facing the PCUSA is how to move forward despite deep differences. How are we to build a spiritual house for all God’s people? To put it concretely, how will our church avoid an unfortunate splintering, or even an ugly split? My belief is that we need to move beyond the conservative-liberal culture wars that have run through our church’s life for so long. We need to move beyond solutions in which one side wins and the other loses. In such a cut-throat game, we are all the losers.

So then, what should be our stance on the proposed amendment 08-B? Does it offer healing to our broken house or more strife? In order to assess this question, it helps if we stand back and consider how our differences over human sexuality have played out over the last 30 years. My views on this are influenced by the British theologian, Rowan Williams, who is now Archbishop of Canterbury.

One group has sought to deal with human sexuality by asking, “Am I obeying the rules?” This is the group that championed the

current version of G-6.0106b. Sexual conduct is permissible if it conforms to certain standards intended for heterosexual couples. The problem for gay and lesbian couples is that even when they comply with these rules in substance, they still fail to comply with them in form. Their faithfulness goes unrecognized; their longing for inclusion in the church's family goes unfulfilled.

According to Rowan Williams, another group seeks to approach sexual ethics by asking the question, "Am I being sincere?" Sexual conduct is right if it is an authentic expression of concern for the other. An objective standard based on rules is replaced by a subjective one based on feelings or experience. This second approach may be more accommodating to gays and lesbians, but it also leaves things exceedingly vague. How elastic is the rubric of "sincerity"?

Neither of these two approaches is adequate. Instead, argues Williams, we need to ask a different sort of question, namely, "What does my life show forth?" To what extent is the love life of a candidate for ordained church leadership a demonstration of the gospel? In the case of exclusively-committed gay or lesbian candidates for church leadership, to what reality is their relationship bearing witness?

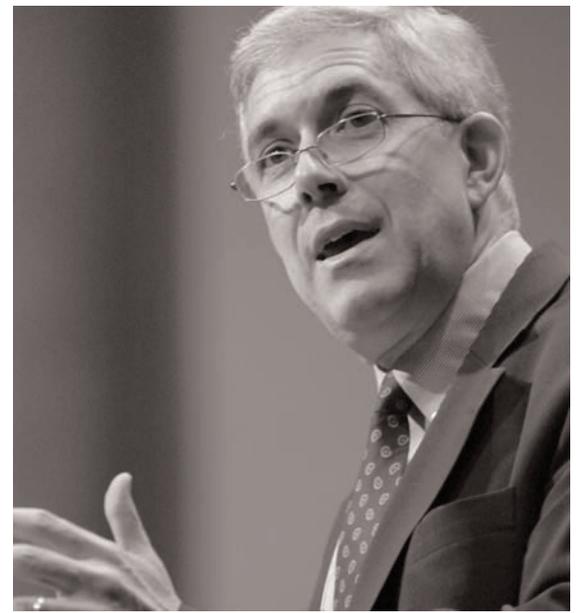
With this as a guiding question, does Amendment 08-B have theological integrity? This is the question we should be asking—not merely will it pass or will it not. Does this amendment help us seek a greater point of theological faithfulness?

One of the interesting things about 08-B is that it combines the subjective attention to sincerity with the objective insistence upon standards and rules. Listen to its last sentence, which will replace the last sentence of current G-6.0106b: "Every governing body charged with examination for ordination and/or installation, establishes the candidate's sincere efforts to adhere to these standards."

One advantage of this language is that it now makes explicit in the Book of Order a longstanding principle of Presbyterian polity: that we have church-wide standards, together with local discretion in applying those standards. By now this framework should be familiar to everyone who has read the report of the Task Force on the Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church. The Task Force insisted that the church's standards apply to everyone, even while reminding us that these standards must be applied with practical wisdom on a case-by-case basis.

The language of 08-B does a similar thing. It improves on the current G-6.0106b by making clear that these standards flow from the church's relationship to Jesus Christ himself, as witnessed to in Scripture, and as interpreted through the lens of the Book of Confessions. Here is what it says: "Those who are called to ordained service in the church, by their assent to the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003) pledge themselves to live lives *obedient to Jesus Christ* the Head of the Church, striving to follow where he leads *through the witness of the Scriptures*, and to understand the Scriptures *through the instruction of the Confessions*."

The controversial question is whether the new amendment changes the current standards. By removing the "fidelity and chastity" language from the Book of Order, does it undermine high standards of sexual ethics? Not if we take seriously the language about Christ himself as the standard.



Not if we all turn to Scripture and the Book of Confessions as our guides. This new language invites all ordained officers to an even more rigorous self-examination as we aspire to an even more demanding life of faithfulness. **Taking Jesus Christ as our standard invites us to ask of every ordained leader whether his or her life bears witness to Christ.**

When read in this way, 08-B follows both the letter and the spirit of the Task Force's work. It invites Presbyterians of diverse perspectives to come together around our common allegiance to the person and work of Jesus Christ. It calls for us to transcend the impasse between objective rules versus subjective sincerity by underscoring that both are important. We need moral standards, but each of us also needs the grace of God and the support of the body of Christ in the living out of those standards.

So where do we go from here? I think it's time for us to quit fighting over gay sexuality and get on with the business of building up the church and seeking to embody is clear: "*I will be your God!*" We need an approach that will allow all of us to join together in a single chorus: "*We will be your people!*" We can join this chorus in confidence, trusting in the God who would rather die than break covenant with us.

Conference CDs Available--The mind-stretching plenaries and all the wonderfully rich worship services from the 2008 Conference, "Covenant: God is Faithful Still," are available on CD or audio cassette. Order through our e-store.

By Any Other Name. . .

By John Wilkinson

(Excerpted from his sermon preached at the Covenant Conference)

Our name has been a statement of faith, a theological affirmation—*covenant*—and an ecclesiastical one—*network*—reflecting the heart of Presbyterianism, the inextricably linked nature of belief and behavior, theology and governance, who we are and how we are, a “covenant network.”

First our *middle* name. *Network* speaks to the connectionalism of the Presbyterian family, with all its messy complexity, always the body even when the network is down.

And it has been suggestive. Connecting has been an alternative vision, an antidote to brokenness and division in church and culture.

That’s why we’ve ... sought to build relationships to the left and right, to see each other’s face. It is easier not to, of course. But it is better, better strategically, politically, certainly theologically.

We are the body of Christ, Paul tells us, and individually members of it. Anything that mitigates against that vision—in any direction—restricts opportunities for building up the body and narrows opportunity for evangelical witness and spiritual development.

... So for the sake of the church, we must say that G-6.0106.b is bad theology *and* bad polity, and of course it needs to be gone.

It is at best: questionable biblically, untenable constitutionally, problematic theologically, harmful pastorally and counter-productive ecclesiastically.

It is unenforceable and un-interpretable ...

It suggests that the God in whose image we are created did a less than competent job.

It suggests that the Christ in whose redemption we are embraced is less than an equal opportunity redeemer.

It suggests that the Spirit whose voice we seek to hear and whose Pentecostal activity transforms us all is somehow limited in its ability to do what it will.

And we know that’s just not so.

... That’s why this network exists, to press for that change. But we need to move deeper and broader than that, for this constitutional brokenness can only be remedied if the network is strong, in all directions, and if the new kind of conversations we are called to have ... are fortified with a compelling theological vision.

Hence our *first* name.

The notion of *covenant* has been a vital Presbyterian affirmation from our beginnings, and a most crucial entry point for our understanding of who God is and who we are called to be.

What we need, because of our understanding of covenant, is a Reformed sexual ethic—faithful, effective, compelling—something more than one prohibitive sentence in the Book of Order.

... We have made the case, [about sexuality] and we will keep making it. ... But can we not contemplate contradictions and sustain differences in the Presbyterian family without going off the deep end...? **Can we not witness to justice faithfully and tend to the**



One hundred Presbyterian clergy, seminarians, and elders came together on October 28, 2008, in simultaneous press events in Los Angeles and San Francisco to express their faith-based opposition to Proposition 8. Gathering on the steps of Calvary Presbyterian Church in San Francisco and Immanuel Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles, participants from seven Bay Area counties and the greater Los Angeles area eloquently expressed their opposition to the state constitutional amendment that eliminated the right of same-sex couples to marry. The Covenant Network of Presbyterians organized the demonstrations.



Over 35 college students and young seminarians participated in the Conference’s Young Adult Caucus.

By Any Other Name ... (cont’d)

wellness of the body at the same time? Can we not nurture the points of tension and balance—and even contradiction—in this gift of covenant?

What’s in a name ... Covenant Network.

A *network* by any other name would build up the church, transform the church, that it become ever more generous and just.

A *covenant* by any other name would be that unbreakable promise and relationship.

John Wilkinson is pastor of Third Presbyterian Church in Rochester, NY.

The Heart of the Church's Role

By Margaret Blankers

Nestled in the heart of Minneapolis, the Westminster Presbyterian Church is at once inspiring and beautiful. And while the temperature fell along with the mixed rain and snow, the teaching and worship at the 2008 Covenant Conference were enough to warm anyone's soul.

As the mother of a transgendered son, it was especially helpful to me to attend two workshops dealing with social justice. I learned that churches *can* legally take an official stance on civil rights for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community. (It's only *politicians* we can't endorse.)

I was most impressed with several practical approaches individual congregations can use to advocate the same rights for our LGBT friends that most of us take for granted. For example, congregations might consider holding forums or publishing white papers that discuss wide-ranging topics, from ordination, itself an internal discrimination issue; to the need for federal hate-crime prevention and non-discrimination laws; to the justice of allowing civil unions—and even marriage—between committed same-sex couples. One point in particular really caught my attention. During last spring's battle over the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, lawmakers frequently heard negative comments from the "religious right." But from more moderate churches? Not so much.

The entire program was a "mountain-top" experience; but next to the extraordinary music, Stacy Johnson's lectures were especially meaningful. Dr. Johnson rightly noted that it's easy to become accustomed to injustice—whether you're the recipient of that injustice or silently witnessing it. It's intuitive that caring for the needs of *all* people, including their equality, should be at the heart of the Church's role—both within the fellowship and in the community. Sadly, most of us need to work harder at it.

Margaret Blankers is a member of Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church in Lenexa, KS.



Conference Team Chair **Jay McKell** invites people to the 2009 Covenant Conference

Save the Date for the 2009 Covenant Conference!

The Church We Can See From Here

November 5-7, 2009

Church of the Covenant, Cleveland, Ohio

We've all seen a child sitting on her father's shoulders, towering over everyone else. That's the posture conferees attending the 2009 Covenant Network Conference—*The Church We Can See From Here*—will be taking. While in Cleveland we will be looking out into a future that is filled with images, opportunities, and challenges that are coming into focus in this Spirit-filled time of transition.

Presbyterians are learning to dialogue about diversity while committing themselves to fresh forms of mission. Christians in the developing world have new and exciting things to teach us. Demographic changes—racial, economic, and religious—are bringing all sorts of challenges to the doorsteps of our churches. Theological stereotypes no longer need keep us from discovering that "we" and "they" often share a common cause.

Climb up on the shoulders of our church mothers and fathers—those whose journeys have brought us so very, very far—and join us as we look toward tomorrow, listening, learning, and sharing winsome visions of what the church is being called to become in the days ahead.

Conference Leaders include **Kenda Creasy Dean**, Associate Professor of Youth, Church and Culture at Princeton Theological Seminary; **Mark Achtemeier**, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Ethics, University of Dubuque Theological Seminary; and **Ted Smith**, Assistant Professor of Divinity, Director of the Program in Theology and Practice, Vanderbilt Divinity School. Stay tuned for further details!!

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 Charity Denlinger at (415) 351 2196 or charityd@covenantnetwork.org. You can also make changes online at www.covenantnetwork.org/conscribe.htm.



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

A Letter from our Co-Moderators: The Spirit of Change

Those who attended the General Assembly this past summer in San Jose, and particularly those of us who spent time observing the Church Orders Committee, experienced something quite moving and powerful. As Commissioners and Youth Advisory Delegates spoke and listened while individuals shared their very personal stories, it became clear that the spirit of this GA was different from previous assemblies. It seemed the commissioners in both that committee and the larger assembly were moved to take the actions they did, less by any organizing or lobbying efforts than by the moving power of the Spirit. By approving two new Authoritative Interpretations, the General Assembly sent the church a clear message that the old combative ways are not working, and that the church is most faithful when everyone is welcome. Many felt a new and encouraging spirit moving, the likes of which we have not experienced in a while

Those who attended the national Covenant Network conference this past November, on the heels of our historic presidential election, also sensed a new and different spirit emerging in the life of our church, as a record number of young people, college students and seminarians actively participated in the conference, demonstrating a love for the church and what it is becoming.

As a result of GA actions last summer, things in the Presbyterian Church have changed. Dramatic change has also occurred in the country since 2001, the last time presbyteries considered recommendations regarding G-6.0106b. As presbyteries vote on amending G-6.0106b, the Covenant Network is strongly committed to supporting local efforts of engaging in constructive dialogue and relating with one another in ways that reflect the generous new spirit evident at General Assembly.

The church has an opportunity to amend the contentious G.60106-b in ways that make it theologically sound and remove the hurtful language that seems even more out of place given the new spirit blowing through the church.

With the seasons of Advent and Christmas fresh in our minds, we continue to live into a future promised to us by God and toward which we are always moving. Certainly this future includes the kind of church we can almost see from here, a church as generous and just as God's grace.



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

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