



Spring 2009

The Covenant Connection

A Newsletter of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians (Vol 12, #1)

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Many More Presbyteries Support a More Faithful Ordination Standard

Presbyteries are voting throughout this spring on proposed Amendment 08-B to the Book of Order. This provision would replace the exclusive language of G-6.0106b, with its narrow focus on the “fidelity and chastity” standard, with more comprehensive and Reformed language asking all officers to strive to live “in obedience to Jesus Christ the Head of the church.”

Many presbyteries are following the General Assembly’s invitation to consider the amendment “using processes of listening and discernment.” Presbyteries have held regional “conversation groups,” have presented panel discussions, have used facilitated small-group discussions, and in other ways sought more discernment than is often found in alternating two-minute speeches at opposing mikes. In many places votes have been preceded or followed by communion services, often officiated by presbyters known to take opposite positions on 08-B.

Voting will continue through May 19. By late March, more than two dozen presbyteries that voted against changing G-6.0106b in 2001-02 have switched their votes to support 08-B this year. The percentage of total presbyters supporting change is also significantly higher.

Vote totals are reported as they occur on the Covenant Network website, www.covenantnetwork.org.

GAPJC Directs Synod PJC To Hear Appeal in Capetz Restoration

The General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission has ruled that the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area acted within its rights when it voted to restore Dr. Paul Capetz to the exercise of ordained ministry (from which he had voluntarily asked to be relieved in 2000) and then validated his ministry as a theology professor. The GAPJC upheld this action even though Dr. Capetz declared that he is gay and refuses to take a vow of celibacy under G-6.0106b. However, the GAPJC ruled that the PJC for the Synod of Lakes and Prairies must have a trial to consider separately whether the Presbytery acted irregularly in treating Dr. Capetz’s declaration as a departure from G-6.0106b and then voting that that departure is constitutional.

The March 2 decision (219-08) emphasized that questions about “individual exercise of freedom of conscience . . . must be considered in the context of the ministry and circumstances of the individual at issue [and] require case-by-case consideration.”

Meanwhile, one Synod PJC has denied a challenge to John Knox Presbytery’s decision to advance Scott Anderson to candidacy, and another has lifted the “stay” that prevented San Francisco Presbytery from examining Lisa Larges for ordination. Both decisions may be appealed to the GAPJC.

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, D.C. May 4-5 to advocate for LGBT equality. The Covenant Network Board has planned its spring meeting for D.C. in order to participate. For more information and to register yourself, go to www.hrc.org/issues/religion/9194.htm. (Please see more events on p. 5).

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

Double Dare: Going Public

Mark 1:40-45

Laurie Kraus

Excerpted from her sermon to
Riviera Presbyterian Church, Miami, FL

“If you choose, you can make me clean.” The dare implicit in this invitation is a double dare: it is thrown at Jesus, and rebounds on the leper himself: involving, in the end, everyone who stands near or passes by in a category-shattering act of world-making, which is the kin-dom of God breaking in.

... In a mere forty verses, the young, developing ministry of Jesus of Nazareth has run the gamut. From the Center where his healing work began, it is a decidedly downwardly mobile trajectory that does not bode well for his future. By only the forty-first verse of the first chapter of the gospel, the healing work of Jesus crash lands at the ultimate “outside,” on the fringes of town where the unclean, the forgotten, and the forbidden scratch out a living.

As Jesus leads his anxious band of disciples out the gate, there is a man—a beggar, an outcast Timidly, deferentially, this man approaches Jesus, kneeling, begging: *If you choose, you can make me clean.*

If you stop to think about it, it’s not all that atypical a scene ... and of course, *that’s* the problem in a nutshell. A man—a *man!*—is groveling, kneeling, begging for the most basic of his human needs to be addressed, and only Jesus stops to listen ... why, in the name of all that’s holy, *isn’t* it atypical?

The man, we are told, is a leper. In the bible, it doesn’t get much worse than that ... a judgment from God visible to humankind, an absolute exclusion mandated by law and custom and monitored by the culture’s religious mores.

Let’s just think about that for a moment... let’s create in each of our minds an image of who that leper might be today. Put that face on the body of this man in Mark’s gospel, this man begging and kneeling as he challenges, “*If you choose, you can make me ‘clean.’*”

Can we bear to have such responsibility? Do we want to get involved?

There are a variety of ways for Jesus—or for us—to “choose” to make someone clean. Some of those ways are private, others, less so.

Some of those ways challenge us and those who have made their way to our “outskirts.” Others challenge not just ourselves and those who would be clean, but also the communities and

society in which we all have found (if not made peace with) our place.

We can choose the former. When confronted with “lepers” whose circumstance we pity or abhor, we can always send money, make friends in private, not ask, and never tell. We can legislate a little change, settle for “good enough for now.” And whenever we choose that smaller path of healing as the way for us and others, we may change a little, by risking loving a lot. And the one we choose thus to love *may* also be healed, after a fashion But if we leave it at that, at the mere miracle of healing, no one will be made “clean,” even if they are made well.

If you choose, you can make me clean. The dare implicit in this invitation is a double dare: it is thrown at Jesus, and rebounds on the leper himself: involving, in the end, everyone who stands near or passes by in a category-shattering act of world-making, which is the kin-dom of God breaking in.

... When Jesus saw the man—a human being made in the image of God—begging; when he knew that the religious and social system was entirely indifferent, if not utterly hostile, to a person’s desire to be more than well, to be *clean*; Jesus put out his hand and touched him, making himself unclean, because it was the only thing left for him to do. Touching him, he drew the man into his circle ... and placed himself ritually *outside*.

However rageful and passionate, however loving and healing we make our own small and private choices, our own sanctuaries, until we, too, are outside and “unclean,” until the systems of faith and family, of town and country, are able to declare along with us, “*I do choose, ‘be clean,’*” no one will be clean. Put another way, in the words of the old gospel song, *none of us are free, none of us are free, none of us are free with one of us in chains, none of us are free.*

It is not enough to create sanctuaries where we are clean and free ... because when we and those we have welcomed leave those sanctuaries to take up our larger place in our cities, our culture, our work and our faith traditions, our partial healing, our conditional cleanness, will become painfully, unbearably apparent. Sanctuaries are not enough: we must create a world, a faith, a denomination, a city ... where all of us are clean.

[When our Presbytery was voting on the revised Amendment B], a minister who serves with our clerk of session and me on the Peace, Unity, and Purity Discernment Commission suggested that we might consider, in light of General Assembly successes and the increasing



During this year in which the General Assembly has asked Presbyteries to engage in dialogue and a vote on our constitutional language about ordination, we are awed by the stirring of God's Spirit throughout the Church. More than two dozen Presbyteries have switched their position from past votes, voting in favor of Amendment 08-B. Several more congregations have engaged in study of the Call to Covenant Community and have become Covenant congregations. We are grateful for the faithful perseverance of so many and share biblical reflections on this amazing time from two of our Board members—Laurie Kraus here, and on page 4, Bill Calhoun.

fear and anxiety of our brothers and sisters on the conservative side of this issue, a vote of “no action.” I have friends throughout the PC(USA) whom I deeply respect who have struggled with this same question. We who practice full inclusion of GLBT persons in the church have, legally, enough room to breathe now, enough room to keep our sanctuaries of inclusion safe and free. A “no action” vote says, “Let’s not push it now, let’s leave room so that the rest of the system, those on the inside who now feel threatened and marginalized, can have some time to learn what it means to declare ‘You are clean.’” My friends who advocate this position make a moving, even compelling argument. Who wants to be on the margin? We didn’t—and don’t—like it. We feel compassion, even pity, for those who now feel that our actions have threatened their clean bill of health, their place at the Table. And to choose to wait a little longer—when indeed that choice may be made for us anyway—could that not be a kinder, more peaceable way?

Is it possible for the leper in Mark’s story merely to be healed and to forget until later about going to the priests for a declaration of full inclusion? I, too, worry about losing long-beloved friends to schism; I have no desire to fracture the unity of the church. Surely, by and by, they will come along and join in—if we are patient, loving, and don’t push harder than the system can bear.

If we do that, we can be well. But can we be clean? We can be healed, but not whole. We can be politic, but not honest. We can have a private, even a small public arena of loving, healing space—but we cannot be clean. And until we can all be clean, none of us is clean, and the

kin-dom for which Jesus worked and died cannot come among us.

So it was that Jesus took the dare, the risk that day—and so did the man who was more than healed of leprosy. And when he went to the priests and was declared clean, a tiny crack opened up in the Wall that separated us from them, the clean from the unclean.

Much is made of the fact that, when Jesus told the man not to tell anyone, he immediately went out and told *everyone*. What was that all about? Why could he not keep silent? Did he not know that his refusal to practice “no action” just about blew Jesus’ ability to work inside the system, within the city walls? Didn’t he understand his speaking out was risking everybody, and everything? But then again, how could he keep silent, when being clean made him want everyone to celebrate?

I don’t pretend to understand what Jesus had in mind—but I think I get why the man could do nothing other than tell. Because once he was clean, once he knew what it was to be clean, he couldn’t bear for anyone not to have that same opportunity. I think of him this morning, and I hear him singing this song:

*My life goes on in endless song
above earth’s lamentation.
I hear the clear, though far-off hymn
that hails a new creation.
No storm can shake my inmost calm,
while to that rock I’m clinging,
since Love is Lord of heaven and earth,
how can I keep from singing?*

*And until
we can all
be clean,
none of us
is clean, and
the kin-dom
for which
Jesus worked
and died
cannot come
among us.
So it was that
Jesus took the
dare, the risk
that day.*

Conversation as the Emmaus Moment

Bill Calhoun

Co-pastor, Montview Boulevard Presbyterian Church, Denver, CO.

You know the story: “Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus.” This story gives us our right path for our life together as the Body of Christ in our diverse yet sadly disconnected church. The listening dynamic of this story gives us our steps to being a church as generous and just as God’s grace.

The two were walking along, “talking with each other about all these things that had happened.” Their talking together began from different slants on their alienation and despair. Their listening together slowly became a friendship of vulnerable hearts until it seemed that a third voice entered the conversation.

We met this dynamic in the Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church. The Task Force members listened to each other’s hearts until differences met new hearts. While the different perspectives remained, friendships were born with new eyes for our living oneness in the Risen Christ. The Task Force report asks that we do the same thing. This Emmaus moment is all that the Head of the Church really asks: “Yes, you have different understandings, but let me bridge your differences as you hang together in and through me. I’ve got your back!”

In my recent years in Denver, my Emmaus walk finds me listening to the hearts of conservative and liberal, poor and rich, gay and straight, Imams and Rabbis, as well as the hearts of the rich ethnic diversity of our social fabric. The more I really listen, the more I see how alike we are in our beautiful diversity. And the more I listen, the more the Risen Christ keeps showing up with the blessing of new insights that I can only receive as gift.

Across the church, people with all perspectives on sexual orientation, on the Bible, on the politics of church, all are battle weary. Beneath this weariness lies the old hunger to be church, to come alive through God’s dynamic Word, to live Jesus in our broken world, to move beyond turf battles over rules to the power of the personal “in this together” moment.

How do we get there? We connect. We move from combat to conversation. We intentionally make the Jesus move to sit down with those who see and hear differently than we do, say little ourselves, and hear ourselves into the Christ heart in the other.

When I say this, most say back: you must hold your ground on the issues, for some are left out. Yes, some are left out. This breaks my heart. Yet when I hear the other heart beyond the issues, I will have held my ground. Listening conversation will finally birth the conversion for which the Risen Christ so patiently waits. And the church’s door of welcome will open wider.

“No to Fear and Yes to Hope!”

As exciting as the tide changes in Presbytery voting outcomes are, even more so are the many heart-felt reports from friends and colleagues throughout the church, who have shared their impressions of this opportunity to speak and vote their convictions.

Millie Sieber reporting from East Tennessee:

“If you had asked me before the voting results were announced if I believed in miracles, I’d probably have asked for your definition of miracle before I’d answer. Not now—I believe! Brothers and sisters, I believe!—However you want to define miracles!

“Actually, there was an earlier miracle. Nine members of the presbytery with widely ranging views on this and other concerns have been meeting for months to really listen to each other, share their stories, hear each others’ concerns, etc. They asked for the chance to lead the worship service which began our day together, and through it we heard them ask for forgiveness for not truly listening to each other earlier, for avoiding each other’s company, etc. They shared with us what they had learned from their experience together, learning to trust each other, recognizing their need for even those with whom they differ, etc. Humor played a part, as they shared what they had learned. It was very moving, and I think it set the tone for the whole day, as people reached out to those with whom they differed.”

And this word of hope from a participant at General Assembly:

“Last summer I felt so strongly the movement of the Spirit in the Church Orders Committee and in the Assembly. I well remember going to eat with a friend after the vote and calling our spouses so full of joy and excitement that the Assembly had actually done it. It wasn’t that they had done it so much as the spirit with which they did it. They said No to fear and Yes to hope. Still, some of that expectation passed over time. How quickly I lost the moment and moved on, assuming that the presbyteries would never approve it. Me of little faith. It’s becoming clear now that the Spirit didn’t abandon us and that fear has been banished—not entirely, but it is no longer driving our decision-making. I can only explain it as a movement of the Spirit.”

Save the Date for Covenant Conference 2009:

The Church We Can See from Here

November 5-7, 2009 ♦ Church of the Covenant, Cleveland, OH

Change Is in the Air

We see signs of change not only in national elections and presbytery votes, but also in countless small shifts in everyday life. This year's conference will explore changes in four areas: Reformed theology, race and ethnicity, youth ministry, and Christian ethics of sex. We will hear from established leaders in the denomination and some fresh new voices. We will think together about what is changing, why it is changing, how it is changing—and how it is not. But more than this: the conference will invite participants into conversations about faithful ways to be the church in these changing times. We will look for, pray for, and work together towards the church we can see from here.

Add Some R&R To Your Conference Experience!

The Church of the Covenant, host church for the conference, sits surrounded by Case Western Reserve University. Also within walking distance are the Cleveland Art Museum, the Botanical Gardens, and the Museum of Natural History, to name just a few of the local attractions you may enjoy. Or plan to arrive in time to tour the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame before the Conference begins.

Young Adult Caucus

As we gather to reflect on “The Church We Can See From Here,” the presence and participation of our college students, seminarians, and young clergy will be more important than ever! This year, we plan to build upon the experiences of last year's first Young Adult Caucus and look forward to leadership from this group.

2008 Conference CDs—Available Through June 30, 2009

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.

2009 Covenant Conference Leadership Includes:

Mark Achtemeier, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Ethics, University of Dubuque Theological Seminary
Gregory Bentley, President of the National Black Presbyterian Caucus and pastor, Brown Memorial Presbyterian Church, Tuscaloosa, AL

Melva Costen, Professor Emerita of Music and Worship, Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, and author of *In Spirit and In Truth: The Music of African American Worship*

Kenda Creasy Dean, Associate Professor of Youth, Church, and Culture, Princeton Theological Seminary, and author of *Youth and the Church of “Benign Whatever-ism:” What the Faith of American Teenagers Means for the American Church*

Eddie Glaude, Professor of Religion and African American Studies, Princeton University

Dawne Moon, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Marquette University, and author of *God, Sex and Politics: Homosexuality and Everyday Theologies*

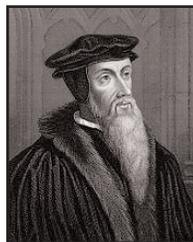
Ted Smith, Assistant Professor of Ethics and Society, The Divinity School, Vanderbilt University

Big Tent
June 11-13, 2009
Atlanta, Georgia



Ten PC(USA) ministries and groups are planning partner conferences around this first ever “Big Tent” event. Common worship and shared meals will feel like “a big Presbyterian family reunion.” For more information:

www.pcusa.org/bigtent



Calvin Jubilee
July 8-11, 2009

Montreat, North Carolina

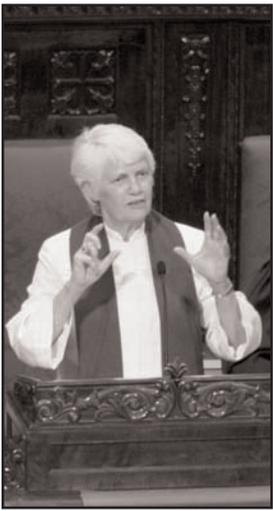
Explore Calvin's wide-ranging but often misunderstood legacy during this 500th anniversary of his birth. Leaders include

Ted Wardlaw, Cindy Rigby, Stacy Johnson, Jane Dempsey Douglas, and many more. For more information:

www.montreat.org/current/2009-calvin-jubilee

Information about other conferences of interest is at www.covenantnetwork.org/events06.htm.

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Crumbs and the Covenant

Isaiah 56:1-8, Matthew 15:21-28
Barbara K. Lundblad

Associate Professor of Preaching
Union Theological Seminary

Excerpted from her sermon at the
2008 Covenant Conference

*Isaiah
dared to
proclaim
a new word
different from
the word
written down.*

*If he had
been a
literalist,
he could
not have
spoken this
expansive
word.*

Threads of exclusion and expansion are woven together in the great tapestry of the Bible with no attempt to get rid of one or the other ...

◆ Ruth, the woman of Moab, becomes great, great grandmother to Israel's greatest king; and she lives in the same testament as Esther, the faithful Jew who saved her people, God's chosen people.

◆ The Ninevites—consummate evil empire—repent and receive God's forgiveness in the book of Jonah only a few pages from Daniel, the faithful Jew who refuses to bow to any God but the God of Israel.

And Isaiah, writing after exile, seems to open the door to everybody, not only foreigners but eunuchs:

For thus says the Lord: To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters. (Is. 56:4)

How could Isaiah say such a thing? Surely he knew the prohibition: "Those whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall not be admitted to the assembly of the Lord." (Deuteronomy 23:1) ... *The prohibition was written down.* Whether someone was born a eunuch or castrated later in life, the text is clear.

Where did Isaiah get this new word? "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," said the prophet, "because the Lord has anointed me, and sent me to bring good news to the oppressed" (Isaiah 61:1a). That is, the Spirit didn't wait until Luke chapter 4. Isaiah dared to proclaim *a new word different from the word written down.* If he had been a literalist, he could not have spoken this expansive word.

Let me be clear: there is no indication that the eunuchs in Isaiah's text were gay, bisexual or transgender—though it seems likely they weren't lesbian! ... We need not turn the eunuch into a homosexual to see the *similitude* between his life and the lives of those judged as "other" based on gender identity alone. A eunuch is a man, yet not quite a man. He doesn't measure up to the culture's definition of what is masculine. A eunuch is defined by his genitals even if the term "eunuch" is sometimes used metaphorically. Though eunuchs often hold positions of responsibility in the military, as teachers, as personal attendants to kings and queens, as financial officers—like the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts chapter 8—eunuchs are still seen as "other" in the culture. Even if a eunuch has a high position in the military or the king's court, the written text makes it clear that a eunuch has no place "in the assembly of the Lord." Yet, Isaiah promises eunuchs just such a place—a place in God's house and within God's walls. Perhaps Isaiah already knew what our brother Walter Brueggemann dared to tell us: "God violates Torah for the sake of relationship."

Let me be clear about something else: Isaiah didn't make this bold promise to eunuchs because they were eunuchs. No, it was because they keep the Sabbath and do those things that please God, *because they hold fast God's covenant.* A few years ago a gay Orthodox rabbi wrote an article for the journal *Tikkun*. For obvious reasons he used a pseudonym, Yakov Lavado:

In these verses Isaiah is speaking to his ancient Israelite community and trying to convince them that God's covenantal plan for Israel is larger than they think ... He speaks to two obvious outsider groups, the foreigners of non-Israelite birth, and the eunuchs ... In the chain of the covenantal family, the foreigner has no past and the eunuch no future ... It is their "exclusion" that the prophet addresses. The prophet comforts the pain of eunuchs with the claim that there are other ways in which to observe, fulfill, and sustain the covenant. (1)

Isaiah's promise is deeper than a new *category* of people. For too long, categories have been the beginning and end of our moral deliberations in the church: heterosexuality is good, homosexuality is bad; heterosexuals are good; homosexuals are bad. *But categories alone cannot bear the weight of moral discernment.* Isaiah spoke not only of "eunuchs" as a category, but of "eunuchs who keep my sabbath, who do the things that please me." Rabbi Levado is clear

Jesus heard this Canaanite woman and he was changed... If Jesus could be changed to see and act in a new way, can the Church also be changed? If Isaiah could speak a new word that contradicted the word written down, can we hear God speaking a new word in our own time?

that Isaiah's promise goes deeper than category to covenant:

Gay people cannot be asked to be straight, but they can be asked to "hold fast to the covenant." God will work the story out and link the loose ends as long as we hold fast to the covenant ... Holding fast to the covenant demands that I seek a path toward sanctity in gay life ... being gay does not free me from the fulfillment of *mitzvot*. The complexities generated by a verse in Leviticus need not unravel my commitment to the whole of Torah. (2)

Of course many have protested, saying, "How can we overturn two thousand years of Church teaching?" Longevity of tradition does not insure its faithfulness. *It is possible to be wrong for a very long time.*

Even Jesus discovered that, when he ventured into the region of Tyre and Sidon. He shouldn't have been surprised to meet a Canaanite woman, for this was her home. He was the one out of place. Some have tried to deal with this troubling story by saying that Jesus was testing the Canaanite woman to see if she really had faith. Well, that sometimes works to get Jesus off the hook. But in recent years, many New Testament scholars have dared to stop making excuses for Jesus' harsh words to this desperate Canaanite mother. Mary Hinkle, who teaches New Testament at Luther Seminary, speaks directly to the Canaanite woman:

Did you teach the teacher? I think you did. When he finally heard you and saw the face of your fierce need, God's own Son came to see his life's work as bigger than before. What he had not thought to look for in someone like you, he saw:

faith. He saw your tenacious conviction that he could help, and amazed, he did.

I have thought that fear makes it impossible to imagine things. "*Perfect fear casts out all imagination,*" I have thought. But you were afraid—you must have been afraid of the demon and of your daughter's suffering and afraid of all those foreign men and all their insults. You must have been afraid, yet you could see a new thing—healing—at the same time ... You imagined healing before it happened and you showed it to the Healer. (3)

Jesus heard this Canaanite woman and he was changed ... If Jesus could be changed to see and act in a new way, can the Church also be changed? If Isaiah could speak a new word that contradicted the word written down, can we hear God speaking a new word in our own time? The Canaanite woman dared to claim her right to crumbs that fell from the master's table. Many people [in the church] have been given crumbs and have been told to be satisfied ... Some have given up and gone away. But some of us stubbornly stay because we believe that "God has determined not to be God without us" [Stacy Johnson] ... and because it is possible to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender and hold fast to God's covenant.

...We've seen GLBT people in congregations small and large who are faithful to God's covenant ... people whose committed relationships are marked by fidelity and mutuality, and hopefully blessed by the church even when the state refuses.

Soon we will see something miraculous right here: the eunuch and the Canaanite woman will come off the page to stand with us. Then each of us will reach out our hands for a piece of bread that is barely bigger than a crumb. But we believe it is more than a crumb. This is the Bread of the New Covenant. This is the very Bread of Life.

1) Yakov Lavado, "Gayness and God: Wrestlings of an Orthodox Rabbi," *Tikkun*, 8:5, 58 and 59

2) Lavado, 59

3) Mary Hinkle, "Letter to a Canaanite Woman" (sermon preached at Luther Seminary and posted on the website www.pilgrimpreaching.org)

Insights from William Stacy Johnson and Walter Brueggemann are from presentations at the 2008 Covenant Conference.

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

A Letter from our Co-Moderators: *Spring 2009*

Grace and peace to you in the name of the risen Christ!

As we write to you, the PC(USA) is in the midst of presbytery deliberations on the new Amendment B, and a decisive vote—87 of 173 presbyteries voting either yes or no—will come later this spring. Meanwhile you and we are working hard toward passage, energized and hopeful by the way this effort is unfolding. There have been some expectedly solid votes in presbyteries like Milwaukee, Utica, Cascades, and Mid-Kentucky. To date, every presbytery that supported the “delete B” amendment in 2001 has supported the proposed change of “new B.” There have been some two dozen unexpected switches, in places like Western North Carolina, East Tennessee, Yellowstone, and Greater Atlanta. And there have been some disappointments; the votes in three presbyteries were tied, counting as “no.”



There's an encouraging “yes” in all of this. “New B” continues to evoke a new spirit—the kind of respectful, candid, thoughtful conversation we've been encouraging and hoping to model over these past years. Since the 2001 vote there has been a steady movement toward engaging one another through processes of discernment, through building relationships, through study and prayer. We've practiced persistence and patience, we've been pastoral and prophetic, we've tried to be good Presbyterians and honor both processes and persons, unity and diversity. We've tried to be faithful Christians and embody and extend the ethic of hospitality. There's an encouraging “yes” in all of this, as we hear the stories from so many of you about faithful witness and about presbytery experiences marked by a fresh resolve to work toward a church as generous and just as God's grace.



Thank you, good friends in Christ, for your steadfast work and witness, for your generosity of time, spirit, and resources, for your solidarity in prayer and action.

Walter Brueggemann edified and inspired us at our conference last fall. He has words of prayer for this season in our life together:

“Sink your generosity deep into our lives ... so that the world may be made Easter new.”

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

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