



Summer 2009

The Covenant Connection

A Newsletter of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians (Vol 12, #2)

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More Presbyteries Than Ever Vote for Inclusive Ordination Standard

Presbyteries have finished voting on proposed Amendment 08-B, which would have replaced the exclusive language of G-6.0106b with a more faithful ordination standard centered on discipleship to Christ. The amendment was not approved—78 presbyteries voted Yes, 95 presbyteries voted No (including three that tied and one that did not vote).

Total votes cast by elders and ministers in the presbyteries show how closely divided the church remains on the full inclusion in church leadership of gifted and called gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender Presbyterians: 49% of all recorded votes were Yes. The 78 presbyteries that voted Yes include 5,614 churches and 10,829 ministers; the 95 presbyteries that voted No include 5,521 churches and 9,187 ministers. Thirteen of the twenty largest presbyteries (in number of churches or number of ministers) voted Yes.

More presbyteries voted against the current G-6.0106b than did so when it was adopted in 1996-97. Thirty-four presbyteries that voted to preserve G-6.0106b in 2001-02 voted to change it in this year's voting. A complete tally is posted on our website.

As the Covenant Network Board says in the statement reprinted on page 2, "Clearly our church has reached no consensus, and the work of learning to live faithfully in a time of disagreement remains before us. . . . The conversation continues."

Synod PJC Rules in Favor of Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area in Capetz Restoration

In March the GAPJC upheld the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area in its votes restoring Dr. Paul Capetz, who declared that he is gay and refuses to take a vow of celibacy, to the exercise of ordained ministry (from which he had voluntarily asked to be relieved in 2000), and validating his ministry as a theology professor. However, the GAPJC also 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 his declaration as a departure from G-6.0106b and then voting that that departure is constitutional.

In the trial held on May 11, the SPJC determined that the Presbytery's action was not irregular because "the stated departure of Dr. Capetz does not infringe on the rights and views of others, and does not obstruct the constitutional governance of the church," and it is the Presbytery which has the responsibility to determine whether an individual has departed from the essentials of Reformed faith and polity. The SPJC found that the Presbytery had not "waived" the "fidelity and chastity" requirement, but properly extended mutual forbearance after concluding that Dr. Capetz had not departed from an essential.

Covenant Network Director Doug Nave represented the Presbytery.

Save the Date for Covenant Conference 2009!

Plan now to join us for the upcoming Covenant Conference, *The Church We Can See from Here*, November 5-7, 2009, at Church of the Covenant in Cleveland, OH. See p. 3 for profiles of this year's conference leaders. Further information about the conference, including how to register, will be available in July on the Covenant Network website.

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/c2cc06.htm.

The Conversation Continues

A Statement by the Board of Directors of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians

Voting on Amendment 08-B in the presbyteries is now complete, and the board of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians, while disappointed by the outcome, is encouraged by signs of progress and still hopeful about the future of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

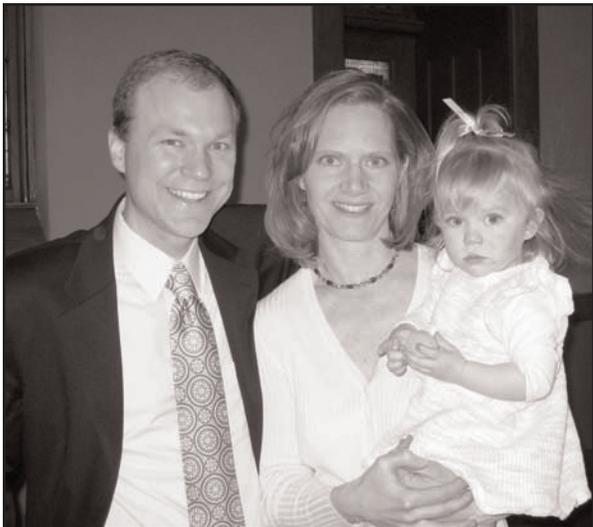
We were grateful that the 218th General Assembly in 2008 approved two important Authoritative Interpretations that provide the immediate opportunity for faithful and inclusive ordinations. That G.A. also approved an amendment, 2008-B, that proposed alternative language to the controversial G-6.0106b. After the General Assembly, the Covenant Network stated that we were going to “organize for conversations, not combat” and that the way in which presbyteries engaged this amendment would be as important as the voting results.

People in many places have reported that their presbyteries took seriously the General Assembly’s recommendation to use “listening and discernment” leading up to and voting on Amendment 08-B. In many presbyteries discussions and processes were more collegial and mutually respectful than in past voting. In accord with the best of our tradition, Presbyterians thoughtfully engaged one another across lines of difference and together sought the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We are very encouraged that seventy-eight presbyteries voted “Yes” to Amendment 08-B. Thirty-four presbyteries from North Carolina to Ohio to Texas to Utah that did not vote to remove G-6.0106b in 2001-02, this time voted in favor of 08-B. Three tie votes, which count as “No” votes, also demonstrate how closely divided the church is on this question. The total votes cast were nearly equal: forty-nine percent of presbytery commissioners voted in favor of 08-B. Clearly our church has reached no consensus, and the work of learning to live faithfully in a time of disagreement remains before us.

While Amendment 08-B did not pass in the required majority of presbyteries this year, it is clear that change is coming to the church. We recommit ourselves to work for the full inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Presbyterians in the life and leadership of the church while simultaneously working for unity within our denomination. Voting on 2008 amendments is now complete, and the conversation continues.

In accord with the best of our tradition, Presbyterians thoughtfully engaged one another across lines of difference and together sought the guidance of the Holy Spirit.



David Colby with his wife Laura and their daughter Amaya

Change Is Coming To the Church

David Colby

When the 218th General Assembly in 2008 passed an amendment that would replace the controversial G-6.0106b in the Book of Order with alternative language, no one was sure what would happen. The world has changed quite dramatically since the Presbyterian Church (USA) last voted on a similar amendment in 2001-02. The Covenant Network board—remaining true to our founding twin goals of removing all barriers discriminating against the full participation of GLBT Presbyterians while working for the unity of the church—declared that we would “organize for conversations, not combat.”

And organize for conversations we did. Working with leadership in our presbytery chapters, from the outset we encouraged them to use resources to help people in their locations do theological reflection, bridge divides, and share hopes and fears for the church.

To track best practices, share resources and success stories, and hold the church in prayer, we organized conference calls for organizers in presbyteries. It was a great privilege for me to hear first-hand accounts of the hard and faithful work being done in places like Western North Carolina, Eastern Virginia, Greater Atlanta and Great Rivers in Illinois. I want to thank all the people who participated in those calls as well as our national organizer, Tricia Dykers Koenig. *(continued on page 5)*

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.

Meet This Year's Conference Leaders!

Mark Achtemeier, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Ethics, University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, Dubuque, IA. He is the author of *A Passion for the Gospel: Confessing Jesus Christ for the 21st Century*.

"I am grateful that **Mark Achtemeier** will provide leadership at our Conference. I came to know and appreciate Mark as we served together on the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church. Though we started from different places, I came to appreciate his theological sensitivity, his intellectual integrity, and his deep love for Jesus and the Presbyterian Church. The unique combination of his theological insight and ecclesiastical perspective will lead us to a deep consideration of the church's future vision."

—*John Wilkinson, pastor of Third Presbyterian Church, Rochester, NY.*



Gregory Bentley, Pastor, Brown Memorial Presbyterian Church, Tuscaloosa, AL.

"As pastor of Brown Memorial in Tuscaloosa, home of the University of Alabama and Stillman College, **Gregory Bentley** has successfully led a ministry that brings together both town and gown, or Athens and Jerusalem! Currently President of the National Black Presbyterian Caucus, the oldest and largest of the racial ethnic caucuses in the PC(USA), he has been able to lead the caucus in a time of shrinking financial resources. He will be the host pastor when the caucus meets at Stillman College in July 2009. An energetic, compassionate, witty person, Greg is able to successfully keep several issues in the air at the same time he keeps his feet on the ground."

—*Jim Reese, HR, long-time national staff, PC(USA)*

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

"**Melva Costen** has been a friend for almost fifty years, as I have watched her develop into one of the outstanding lay Presbyterian theologians. Melva recently retired after many years as the Nielsen Professor of Music and Worship at the Interdenominational Theological Center. She is frequently on the road, speaking and teaching in churches, seminaries, and conferences on the place of music in worship. She is an energetic and inspirational speaker, which does not surprise anyone who knew her Sunday School Missionary father. Melva keeps her listener connected to the history of music in worship as she speaks in the Spirit of the Lord and of her understanding of the Truth of His Word."

—*J. Oscar McCloud, Associate Pastor Emeritus, Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York, NY.*



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*

"When I think of **Kenda Dean**, I think of lessons I learned in her classroom at Princeton Theological Seminary: that youth ministry is not just about youth; that you must have your theological "rocks" in order; that "mission" is not a trip. She is a professor, an author, a speaker, preacher, pastor, wife, mother, and to so many students past and present—a trusted friend. As one who now works in ministry with youth full-time, I believe there is no one else writing today who has her finger on the pulse of young people both inside and outside the church better than Kenda. She speaks of fidelity, transcendence, culture, passion—topics relevant not only in youth ministry but vital to any discussion about the Church we can see from here." —*Daniel Vigilante, Director of Youth & Young Adults, St. Mark Presbyterian Church, Newport Beach, CA. (continued on p. 7)*

What Does It Mean To “Be” Church?

Katie Ricks

I moved around a lot as a child, and the Church became my home base—the place where I knew I belonged. I was nurtured by Presbyterians across the country who, through their lives and witness and worship, taught me about God’s abundant Love for all. I developed an understanding of the connectional church—the ways in which people who came from different backgrounds and understandings worshiped and served and loved in similar ways. It was within this framework that I entered seminary eleven years ago.

I had no idea that the connectional church also meant contentious meetings, strategy sessions, and church tribunals. I had no idea that I would still be talking about the gender of my partner over a decade later. I had no idea that the church would say “No!” to my ordination without even listening to what I believe or exploring how I serve.

As I sit here today, I am far more cynical about humanity yet far more confident in the power of God’s Grace and Love in my life. I have experienced the joy and power and challenge of God’s presence as I have journeyed with children and youth and adults in two fantastic Presbyterian congregations. I have also experienced deep sadness and anger that the denomination will not permit me to live fully into God’s call.

It’s in times like these—when spreadsheets analyze the intricacies of each vote, when the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons are debated across the country, and when we find ourselves again licking the wounds of loss—that I am most challenged by this home base of mine.

As much as I know, cognitively, that this debate is *not* about me, it is impossible to simply refer to it as a “cause.” It is *my* life and *my* livelihood. It is *my* identity and *my* way of being in the world.

I’m not talking about sexual orientation here; I’m talking about being a child of God.

I believe our identity as ones “sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ’s own forever” is the most important identity we have. I believe that the Church in its best moments will begin all conversations there. I believe, at our core, that we Presbyterians still desire—and attempt—to teach about God’s abundant Love for *all*.



Katie Ricks (right), her partner Paula, and their daughter Jordan

At one time, I thought we would be able to “change people’s minds”—that eventually, the Spirit would move through the Church and the barriers to ordination would disintegrate because people’s beliefs would be transformed.

I do not think that kind of change will happen anymore. And, I don’t think it’s the cynicism talking.

I’ve come to a greater appreciation of this “called out” community of Presbyterians. We may interpret Scripture, sing, and do mission differently; yet, in all that we are and all that we do, we have proclaimed Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. He is the source of our unity. It is not something we have to work for or avoid conflict in search of; it is something that we must “simply” recognize and live into. Living into our Oneness means that each of us enters this community of faith as beloved, forgiven, and whole people of God.

The Church I can see from here is one that is as unique and diverse as we are today—perhaps more so if we do it right! All who are called by God—including LGBT persons—will have the doors to ordination opened. And, our theological differences will be what hold us together, not divide us, because we will know that *together* we have a deeper understanding of who God is.

I don’t know exactly how we get there, but I do think we must discern, as One Body, an answer to the following question, above any other: How can we learn to live in the Holy tension that is created when God calls out and unites in Christ a community of unique and diverse people?

As we wrestle with this in our Unity, we will find a way to be the church that Christ has called us to be.

Katie Ricks is the Associate in Ministry at the Church of Reconciliation PC(USA) in Chapel Hill, NC, where she has served since graduating from Columbia Theological Seminary in 2002. She is an ordained deacon and elder and remains a candidate under care of the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta.

What's Love Got To Do With It?

Laura Becker

In his long farewell address to his disciples in the gospel of John, Jesus offers amazingly simple advice for keeping the young Christian community alive: Love one another. He does not seem concerned with making sure they have memorized the essential tenets of the Torah or expect a well articulated understanding of his divine/human nature; he doesn't sit down with them and help them write a mission statement for the soon-to-be Christian church. His parting instructions have nothing to do with belief and everything to do with action: Love one another. Those three words sum up the gospel of Jesus Christ in a way few others can.

I was ordained this past November and began serving as a pastor in the Presbytery of East Tennessee in December. During my first presbytery meeting here, we discussed and voted on the new Amendment B. I must confess that I was expecting a difficult meeting. We began with worship led by a diverse group of leaders in our presbytery who had dedicated a significant amount of time to prayer and study and sharing one another's stories. I was impressed by the respect, humility, and genuine love that they exhibited. It was the kind of love that allows you to disagree but still remain brothers and sisters in Christ. It was the kind of love Jesus was talking about.

Even though there were not enough presbyteries to ratify the new B this year, I remain hopeful. I long for the day when our denomination will acknowledge my GLBTQ brothers and sisters whose call to ministry is as valid as mine. But in the meantime, perhaps we should spend less time arguing and more time listening to each other and to the Spirit of God among us. I wonder sometimes if we hide behind our polity, our theological language, and our battles over scriptural interpretation. We allow them to take up so much of our time and energy that they keep us from engaging in the simple and much more difficult task of loving one another.

So maybe the Beatles had it right all along: All we need is love. Once we allow ourselves to receive the boundless love of God, we can be free to share it with others. I pray that we as a community can be humble enough to make room for the Spirit already at work among us. And I hope that we will have the courage to be the church God is calling us to be. It is a painfully simple plan that just might work.



Laura Becker is pastor of Northminster Presbyterian Church in Chattanooga, TN.

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Change Is Coming To the Church

(continued from p. 2)

Many of the next steps in our struggle will take place out of the limelight. Our work will continue as individuals and congregations continue to proclaim the inclusive gospel of Jesus Christ, show support to GLBT members and families, and support candidates for ordination to the offices of deacon, elder, and minister of word and sacrament. Transformation will happen one person at a time. Please—talk with those who disagree, listen to those who feel excluded, organize local events, support the Covenant Network with your financial resources.

Margaret Mead once said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it's the only thing that ever has.” Amendment 08-B did not pass this year. But I have no doubt that change is coming to the church, for I have been privileged to witness close up small groups of thoughtful, committed Presbyterians, working in presbyteries around the country, witnessing to the gospel, sharing personal testimony, and organizing to make the church more welcoming.

David Colby is Pastor of Central Presbyterian Church in St. Paul, Minnesota. He is a member of the Covenant Network Board of Directors and chair of its Strategy and Organizing Team.

A Relevant Faith for Our Time

Acts 17:22-33

Christopher A. Henry

Excerpted from his May 24, 2009 sermon at
Morningside Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, GA

“When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed; but others said, ‘We will hear you again about this.’”
Acts 17:32

Maybe you have heard of the international project, “This I Believe,” which asks diverse people to share and discuss the core values that shape their daily lives. The short faith statements are recorded and can be heard on the radio. My favorite is by a kindergartner named Tarak McClain. In the interview, Tarak reads 30 of his 100 beliefs. Included are, “I believe God is in everything. I believe hate is a cause for love. I believe everyone is weird in their own way. I believe people should go outside more. I believe I should not whine. I believe it’s okay to die but not to kill. I believe we live best in a community.” It is a worthwhile exercise for all of us: what do you believe; what are the guiding values that shape your life? And how would you communicate them to others? What words and phrases would you use?

The Apostle Paul arrived for a short lay-over in the great city of Athens, hometown of Athena, goddess of wisdom, and Paul found there a fertile ground for his message. Only Paul would have seen it that way. Athens was the center of philosophical debate and reasoned rhetoric in the ancient world. Well-heeled citizens sat in the city square and argued with one another about what made for the good life. The city was filled with dozens of temples to different gods and goddesses, and with devoted followers of them all. And the Greeks were always on the lookout for a new god. . . . After only a short time in town, Paul is invited to speak at the Areopagus, the most public pulpit in all of Athens, What would he say? How would he convert the pagans to worship of the living God? “I see how extremely religious you are in every way.” Flattery is always a good place to start . . .

And so, in a city filled with idol worship, Paul stands atop Mars Hill and he preaches the gospel. This I believe. He does so using the language and themes of his pagan audience. Pointing to an altar dedicated to an unknown god, Paul reveals that he knows precisely who this god is. The creator of all that exists, the name above every name, the all-powerful and only God. Using the language of Greek poetry, Paul explains that this is the one in whom we live and move and have our being, this is the one who created us. Passionately, he proclaims that the one true God cannot be cast in gold or silver and cannot be confined in shrines of human design. This God, our God, is dynamic, active, and on the move.

The title “a nation of seekers” could have described First Century Greece as well as it does 21st Century America, where we find our neighbors, and ourselves, searching for meaning anywhere they (or we) can find it. What gives our lives meaning? The questions are no different than those asked at the town square in Athens two thousand years ago. In that setting, Paul proclaims the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the gracious providence of God. Without timidity and with conviction, Paul preaches the gospel in relevant and compelling ways.

It is time for the Christian community to do the same. For far too long we have allowed our faith to be defined by those who proclaim fear and division rather than hope and unity. We have remained silent while the church slid into irrelevance and the wider culture fell into the traps of selfishness and greed. Now is the time to proclaim what we believe. I think of [the baby] baptized this morning in our sanctuary. I think of the promises you all made to him and his family as part of the sacrament. What kind of Christian community will be waiting for him when he is old enough to ask questions and have crises? Will the church be able to capture his imagination and feed his soul and give him hope and guide his decisions? What is the church that we can see from here? A dying institution at war within itself and oblivious to the needs of the world around it, or a resurrected community of believers poised to proclaim hope to the world in word and deed?

As a pastor, I have found that friends, acquaintances, and people I have just met often share with me the reasons why they are not in the church. Some tell me apologetically, others with righteous indignation, and some with outright dismissal. For some it is an inability to believe the doctrine and theology of the church, or to accept the Biblical scriptures. The stories that hurt me the most, however, come from those for whom the largest impediment to active faith is not our scripture or our theology but first-hand experience in the church.

Some of you could give witness to the feelings of exclusion. One friend put it as simply and painfully as I have ever heard, “I could not be a part of an institution that preached love and acceptance in the abstract and practiced hostility and exclusion when it came to me.” Such inconsistency simply will not sustain us in Athens, whether Greece or Georgia. What both places cry out for in our time is a relevant faith.

Relevant faith for our time cannot run from honest debates, must not retreat to ivory towers or stained-glass cathedrals. Relevant faith for our time does not make an idol of stability but is prepared to follow God’s Spirit into the future. Relevant faith for our time is a witness to the world of the boundary-breaking, inclusive, overwhelming, and unstoppable love of God. Jesus Christ preached and taught along the roads of ancient Palestine. The Apostle Paul traveled thousands of miles to stand in town squares unembarrassed to say what he believed and why. Are we



Christopher A. Henry

ready to do the same? The world around us wants to hear a word from the church; which word will it be?

In his newest book, *Preaching from Memory to Hope*, Tom Long recounts the story of Grace Thomas. Several years ago she was buried at the First Baptist Church cemetery in Decatur. Chances are that you have never heard of Grace Thomas. She was the child of a streetcar conductor from Birmingham, Alabama. She married and moved to Atlanta where she raised a family, worked as a secretary at the state capitol and attended law school at night.

After several years, when she finally graduated from law school, she astonished her family by announcing that she had decided not to practice law and instead to enter the 1954 election race for governor of Georgia. There were nine candidates for governor that year, eight men and Grace, but there was really only one issue: the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision that the Supreme Court had made earlier that year declaring that school segregation was unconstitutional . . . Eight of the gubernatorial candidates spoke out angrily against the court's decision. Only Grace said she thought the decision was fair. Her slogan was "say Grace at the polls." Not many did; she came in dead last . . .

Eight years later, in 1962 she ran for governor again. The civil rights movement was in full bloom and the stakes were high. She traveled around the state with a message of tolerance and racial harmony. She received death threats and traveled with her family to protect her.

One day, Grace made a campaign appearance in the little town of Louisville, Georgia. In those days, the focal point of the town square in Louisville was not a Civil War monument or a county courthouse, but an old slave market where human beings had once been bought and sold. She decided to give her speech under the canopy of that slave market. She addressed a crowd of farmers and merchants and she pointed at the slave market and said, "The old has passed away and the new has come. This place represents all about our past over which we must repent. A new day is here, when Georgians white and black can join hands and work together." Provocative talk in the Georgia of 1962. Somebody in the crowd shouted at her, "Are you a communist?" "No. I am not." She said softly.

"Then where did you get those crazy ideas?"

Grace thought for a minute. And then she pointed at the steeple of a nearby church and she said, "I got them over there . . . in Sunday School."

The story from the Book of Acts ends with an intriguingly hopeful phrase. Those who do not mock Paul's proclamation leave him with these words: "we will hear you again about this." Sisters and brothers, we are blessed to live in a time when the world is again willing and eager to hear from us. There is still time to show the world what the Christian community is at its best. The world will hear from us again. This I believe.

Christopher A. Henry is Associate Pastor of Morningside Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, GA.

Meet This Year's Conference Leaders!

(continued from p. 3)

Eddie Glaude, Professor of Religion and African American Studies, Princeton University, and author of *In a Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America*



"**Eddie Glaude** is one of the best people I can think of to help us understand – and faithfully respond to – the changing landscape of race, religion, and politics in America. His books and articles have earned him wide-ranging respect, and here at Princeton students line up to get into his classes. Cornel West has called him 'the towering public intellectual of his generation.' As we seek a vision of the church for the 21st century, Eddie Glaude is one of the shining stars to whom we need to pay attention."

—*Stacy Johnson, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ.*



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

"**Dawne Moon** is a sociologist with a novelist's ear for dialogue and the ways different people use the same words. She combines sympathetic and careful observation of actual congregations with an outsider's ability to notice the assumptions churchgoers (and citizens) take for granted. Students find her lively and engaging, even as she challenges what 'everybody knows' about sex, gender, and personal identity. As we enter a new period of necessary conversation, I am looking forward to fresh insights on how we Presbyterians might productively talk with one another about sex!" —*Pam Byers, Executive Director, Covenant Network of Presbyterians.*

Ted Smith, Assistant Professor of Ethics and Society, Vanderbilt Divinity School, and author of *The New Measures: A Theological History of Democratic Practice.*



"**Ted Smith** is one of our brightest young pastor/scholars. He brings acute analysis, creative synthesis, and a deep pastoral sensitivity to complex ethical and ecclesial issues. His insights are always worth hearing and genuinely helpful. The editors of *Christian Century* called his *New Measures* book 'a minor classic'; and students appreciate his deep faith, thoughtful scholarship, and practical understanding of ministry. His profound and determined belief that God is still at work in our world will help shape our conference and point us toward the future." —*Joanna Adams, Pastor, Morningside Presbyterian Church, Atlanta.*



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

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

Voting in the presbyteries is now complete, and two things are clear: The denomination remains deeply divided over ordination standards, but powerful winds of change are moving through the Presbyterian Church. While disappointed with the final outcome of the vote, we are extremely grateful for the numerous reports, even from unlikely places, of how the voting this time around was different, better than in previous years. In many presbyteries there was true dialogue and respectful sharing and listening. We are grateful for the model of discernment and collegiality given to the church by the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church. If Amendment 08-B had been passed by a majority of presbyteries, it would have been by a narrow majority and a narrow majority of voting commissioners. One day Amendment B will be amended or removed from the Book of Order—maybe in 2010, 2012, or beyond? But until that happens and even after it does, ongoing conversation and the building of trust needs to continue throughout the church. There is nothing unusual or unprecedented about Presbyterians of good faith and character differing and engaging one another over their differences.



We can see a more faithful church from here. A change we in the Covenant Network continue to celebrate is the growing number of young people attending our conferences. It reminds us that the future of the church isn't as bleak as some would have us believe. The theme of this fall's conference, *The Church We Can See From Here*, is particularly timely given the emerging voting pattern in the presbyteries. This edition of our newsletter features the voices of a young generation of Presbyterians who love the church and are committed to its future. You will find their words encouraging and inspiring, a preview of our conference in the fall. Plan to come to Cleveland in November! Together, we hopefully work toward a church as generous and just as God's grace. It really is a church we can see from here.



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

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