



Fall 2011

The Covenant Connection

A newsletter of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians (Vol. 14 #3)

2515 Fillmore Street, San Francisco, CA, 94115 ♦ 415.351.2196(v) ♦ 415.351.2198(f) ♦ www.covnetpres.org



Well done, good and faithful servant

Tricia Dykers Koenig has been awarded Presbyterian Welcome's 2011 *Faithful Servant Award* in recognition of her gifts for ministry and service to the church. Covenant Network joins our partners in celebrating our fearless national organizer!!



July 10, 2011 party cake, celebrating G-2.0104b!

2011 Covenant Network Conference
November 3-5, First Presbyterian Church
Durham, NC

Join us for inspiring worship, challenging plenaries, energizing conversations and engaging workshops, designed to equip and empower us for the ministry of reconciliation.

Supporting a greener Covenant Network!

A number of recent communications have been received from Network supporters, requesting that Covenant Network newsletters, conference brochures, etc. be sent to them electronically rather than through the mail. We also know that many of you enjoy receiving our information in the mail and being able to pass it along to others. So, we are planning to go through our 14,000 plus mailing list and do our best to maintain our communication with you in your preferred mode. If you wish to receive the newsletters and conference brochures via the internet, please take a moment to email your preference to Lou (loueast@covnetpres.org).

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 covnetpres.org/resources/call-to-covenant-community/.

The Meaning of G-2.0104b (formerly Amendment 10-A)

The approval of Amendment 10-A by a majority of the presbyteries has caused consternation among some Presbyterians, who are expressing the view that the new paragraph represents a retreat from our Presbyterian commitment to the authority of Scripture. Some are even concluding that their own faithfulness is threatened by associating with the rest of the PC(USA).

In one of the opening addresses at the recent gathering of the Fellowship of Presbyterians, the Rev. Jim Singleton acknowledged that Presbyterians who supported Amendment 10-A and those who opposed it do not differ in their commitment to the *authority* of Scripture, but rather in the set of interpretive tools they bring to the Bible.

As Presbyterians who worked for the adoption of 10-A, the Covenant Network appreciates Rev. Singleton's affirmation that faithful, Bible-believing Christians may have differing interpretations of what Scripture teaches. The principle was illustrated by Dr. Richard Mouw, who in his address expressed a strong commitment to the ordination of women although there are Reformed believers whose understanding of God's will expressed in Scripture prohibits it.

For over 30 years, the policy of the Presbyterian Church (USA) sought to prohibit the ordination of persons in same-gender relationships, based upon an interpretation of Scripture with which many could not agree. Amendment 10-A (now G-2.0104b) did not replace that interpretation with an opposing understanding – it simply acknowledges that Presbyterians are so divided on the question that, as a body, we cannot claim a consensus sufficient to allow one interpretation to trump another.

We are convinced that 10-A was approved by the 219th General Assembly (2010), and by a

majority (97) of the presbyteries, precisely because it removed a provision that spoke only for a portion of Presbyterians and replaced it with a statement that all Presbyterians can affirm together. G-2.0104b lifts up Jesus Christ as the source of our denomination's standards, and affirms the high call of all persons in ordered ministry to live out the fundamental Christian affirmation, "Jesus Christ is Lord," in all aspects of life.

We affirm our continued commitment to G-2.0105: "freedom of conscience with respect to the interpretation of Scripture is to be maintained" – for those who disagree with us, just as we desire it for ourselves.

It is true that we disagree about what the Lordship of Jesus requires; the New Testament shows us that this isn't new. For example, Paul wrote to the church in Rome regarding how to live with one another when there are divergent understandings about clean and unclean (Romans 14).

With G-2.0104b in place, every presbyter retains the right and responsibility to consider the fitness of each individual candidate for ordination and/or installation, based on his or her understanding of what it means "to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life." Rather than imposing one view of the morality of same-gender relationships on everyone, or implying an "anything-goes" sexual morality, G-2.0104b affirms that Pres-

byterians remain united in our conviction that we are called to honor Christ in our sexuality – as in all our living.

G-2.0104b requires thorough and rigorous examinations. It focuses on all the requirements in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation, including the promise "to fulfill your ministry in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and continually guided by our confessions." No congregation can be forced to accept any teaching elder, ruling elder, or deacon whose life, it believes, fails to honor Christ, nor is the outcome of any particular examination predetermined. We affirm our continued commitment to G-2.0105: "freedom of conscience with respect to the interpretation of Scripture is to be maintained" – for those who disagree with us, just as we desire it for ourselves.



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The church of Jesus Christ has wrestled with change since the first disciples tried to figure out, day by day, how to be faithful to their crucified and risen Lord. As Rabbi Gamaliel cautioned, *“if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God you will not be able to overthrow them – in that case you may even be found fighting against God.”* (Acts 5:38-39) G-2.0104b is designed to give the PC(USA) the space to discern, in God’s time, whether this undertaking is of God.

Tricia Dykers Koenig,
Covenant Network’s national organizer

A Prayer for the Church

by Rev. Meg McLaughlin

Listening God,

you bid us to hear the voices of those long silenced.
Finally, finally the acoustics of your church are different.
The damper has been removed from pulpit, table and font.
A new harmony of prophets and dreamers,
add their motions and emotions to our meetings.
We imagine that to you it sounds beautifully in tune at last.

And so your children lift to you
their songs of gratitude,
their shouts of joy, and
their deep sighs of relief after a long season of yearning.

And your children lift to you
their desires to separate themselves from such a church,
their expressions of embarrassment, and
their declarations of disappointment.

Does it all sound discordant to you, O God?
Does it hurt your ears?
Do you grow weary of our voices?

Every week as we gather in your name in worship
we pray that you would silence in us any voice
but your own.

Perhaps that is our prayer for this church right now:
that you would silence all articulated agendas
in order that we would hear you speak.



Meg and her daughter, Naomi

For you are also a speaking God.
And we do trust that you have something to say
to this church
in this new time
in this specific place.

It seems wise that we pause
and prepare to hear your voice, hear your call.

And your call
is never to us alone,
is always tugging us forward,
and is rarely to that which is easy.

Holy God, we pray you will not close your ears,
and even more so that we would not close ours.

We make this prayer in the name of the one who is
head of the church, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Meg is Associate Pastor at Village PC, Prairie Village, KS
and member of the Covenant Network Board of Directors



Greetings,

I received a thoughtful email from one of our Network supporters who reminded me that the Covenant Network was going to need to tell our constituents why they should continue to support us financially now that amendment 10-A passed. He's right. More than one person has brought that to my attention in my new role as Interim Executive Director.

In some ways that is an easy challenge to meet. I can point to the many activities and resources that the Covenant Network produces and shares. I can indicate the significant efforts to educate about and advocate for the new reality of amendment 10-A (now G.2.0104b). Interpretation, advocacy, education. These important endeavors take time, focus, energy, and money. We're able to work on these efforts at such a high level of efficiency and impact because of the trust and respect that Covenant Network has earned over the last 14 years. Because of that, we can with all confidence suggest that supporting this work financially is crucial.



Nancy Enderle

It's wonderful that there is new language in our Book of Order concerning the process by which GLTBQ men and women can respond to their sense of call to ordained service. That change occurred because a lot of people worked hard to make it happen and God's Spirit led the church to a new place. The next chapter of implementation will demand equally important commitment. It will demand from all of us the sensitivity to move forward with open spirits as we listen to those for whom this change is troubling. And it will demand our best efforts to monitor and defend the progress that has been made.

That work cannot happen without your help. Thank you for thinking prayerfully about how you can support the Covenant Network. We make donating easy and flexible. Just visit the website: www.covnetpres.org and follow the links that indicate how and when you can make your gift. We've also enclosed an envelope with this newsletter to process your gift should you chose to send it via mail.

As the holiday season approaches, I invite you to consider offering a gift in honor of someone who cares deeply about our work. As you plan your congregation's Alternate Christmas Market, please consider including Covenant Network as a potential recipient. We can supply attractive gift cards for donors. For more information, please contact the office at (415) 351-2196. Also, Covenant Network's colorful "Good News" notecards make great Christmas cards. See our e-store for more information and to place an order. However you feel moved to support the Covenant Network, we welcome your contributions and thank you in advance for your generosity.



Gratefully,
Nancy Enderle, Interim Executive Director





220th General Assembly:

June 30-July 7, 2012

Pittsburgh, PA

The 219th General Assembly (2010) accomplished significant progress for the PCUSA; and our communal discernment about the direction of the church will continue at the **220th GA (2012)**, which will meet in Pittsburgh next summer. Preparations for GA are already beginning, and everyone can be involved.

Your presbytery will be electing **commissioners** and a **Young Adult Advisory Delegate** in the next few months [or has already done so – indicating that it's not too soon to think about nominating open-minded presbyters for 2014!].

- ◆ Have you prayed about whether God is calling you to submit your own name?
- ◆ Have you encouraged other presbyters who are committed to the PCUSA?
- ◆ Commissioners go to GA uninstructed, charged with seeking to hear the voice of Jesus Christ and do his will, not the will of the presbytery majority. But you can take a commissioner to lunch to share your perspective as he or she is preparing.
- ◆ Pray for advisory delegates, commissioners, and all who will attend the General Assembly gathering.

Perhaps you are interested in exploring the possibility of your presbytery sending an **overture**. The earliest deadline, for business requesting amendment or interpretation of the constitution, is March 2. Please be in touch with Covenant Network National Organizer Tricia Dykers Koenig as you make your plans – triciadk@covnetpres.org or (216) 658-1770. She will be happy to talk with you about helpful options.

Please consider attending GA to volunteer. We can offer a range of tasks, whether you have an hour to give or can commit 24/7 – greeting visitors to our exhibit hall booth, helping events run smoothly, supporting commissioners and advisory delegates in their work, and more. There's nothing like the feeling when you know that your efforts have made a difference in the witness of the church! Tricia has an opportunities list available upon request.



Congregations Seeking Pastors

For more information, go to: www.covnetpres.org/about/congregations-seeking-pastors/

The following congregations that share Covenant Network's vision of the church have openings on their pastoral staffs and are currently posting their search on the Covenant Network website:

- ◆ Riverdale PC, Bronx, NY
- ◆ Westminster PC, Sacramento, CA
- ◆ First PC, New Orleans, LA
- ◆ Falls Church PC, Falls Church, VA
- ◆ First PC, Santa Fe, NM
- ◆ Village PC, Prairie Village, KS
- ◆ Church of the Covenant, Boston, MA
- ◆ Middle Collegiate Church (RCA), New York, NY

Covenant Network Staff contact information

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Please contact Jason to let us know about changes to your contact information!

Radical Hospitality: Welcoming Words

Matthew 9:1-8

an excerpt from a sermon by Rev. Randy Bush,
Pastor, East Liberty PC, Pittsburgh, PA and
member of the Covenant Network Board of Directors

Imagine that you are being given a vocabulary quiz; you are asked to define a list of terms. You've just heard a passage from Matthew's gospel and now I want you to define three terms as they relate to the scripture reading. The words are: hospitality, healing, and sins...

Hospitality is associated with being a gracious host. Providing a nice meal, hors d'oeuvres, refreshments, and lively conversation is being hospitable. But being hospitable also means you welcome someone into your house - you invite them to cross your threshold, to step into your place of authority and power, and sit beside you as an equal. To be inhospitable is to bar someone from crossing your threshold, seeing them as a second class citizen. By standards both physical and social, the paralyzed man was barred from normal gatherings. He was considered an outcast, supposedly accursed by God as evidenced in his condition. Yet his friends brought him into the inner circle around Jesus. In Mark and Luke's version of this event, we're told that this man was literally lowered through a hole in the roof in order to be set before Jesus. Hospitality achieved by force - ripping up ceiling tiles and roofing materials to open a breach in the protective social wall built to keep the paralytic out - but it only became real hospitality when Christ radically accepted the hole in the roof, the breach in the social order, and welcomed the paralyzed man as a child of God.

This happened time after time in Jesus' ministry. To the woman cast to the edge of the crowd because of a flow of blood, the leper pushed to the edge of the road, or the woman-turned-prostitute to survive in a male-dominated world who huddled at the edge of the room where Jesus was eating - in each case, Christ welcomed them across the threshold. He showed a radical hospitality to them that challenged the way

those around him had been content to define "hospitality" on their personal bible quizzes.

What about the second word: healing? What's interesting is that the passage we read from Matthew 9 never uses the verb "to heal." Jesus never says to the paralyzed man "Be healed;" Jesus says, "Your sins are forgiven" and "Stand up and walk." We tend to superficially think of this as a healing story, but it is about something else, something deeper. Just because you take medicine to fix a problem or have surgery to cure an ailment doesn't mean that you are healed. If your injury is the result of a violent act, a tragedy like a car accident, or a lifetime of depression or being abused, medicine can perhaps cure you, but it doesn't always heal you. When Jesus showed hospitality to the paralyzed man, in effect welcoming him across the threshold back into normal society, he was modeling a hospitality that was radical and deep and an affront to the patterns of life usually lived out. In the same way, the healing miracle he performed with the paralyzed man

(not "performed on", but "with" the paralytic) was just as deep and radical and life-changing for all concerned.

A superficial reading of the text suggests that the paralytic was simply a man who, for example, had a spinal cord injury and couldn't walk until Jesus miraculously restored that physical capacity to him. But if that is all this story is about, it doesn't have much to say to those of us without spinal cord injuries. There are lots of ways to be paralyzed: paralyzed by guilt, by regret, fear, indecision; paralyzed by unjust laws, racism and oppression and prejudice. We can feel like our life is stuck, as if someone hit the "pause" button on our life and we're not able to go forward or backward.

**[Hospitality]
only became
real ... when
Christ radically
accepted the
hole in the
roof, the
breach in the
social order,
and welcomed
the paralyzed
man as a child
of God.**



Radical Hospitality continued...

The paralysis in these cases is not something physiological, something within our nerves or spinal system. It is something larger - involving us and those around us and society at large.

And somewhere in this equation, sin is also a factor. Our short definition for sin was that it is something we've done wrong and which is an offense to God. Yes, there are sins that fit that description. But sin is not just a legal matter - a wrong answer on God's quiz - an infraction against God's holy law. Sin is something larger than just personal transgressions. In the cities where Jesus walked and taught, the poor were poor because they didn't own much land if any, they were heavily taxed, and the power to change things resided in the palaces of foreign governments or the temples and chambers of faith leaders. The religious leaders had a stake in the economic games of the land, just as the political leaders had a stake in the religious affairs of the land. Was the poor man brought to Jesus paralyzed from a physical condition - and was he paralyzed and treated as a sinner because he wasn't producing enough profit for others from his labor on borrowed land?¹ ... How do you answer that question? It is complex - it is not superficial and able to fit on a few lines on a quiz sheet.

That is why we look again at the radical hospitality of Jesus. To the paralytic, to the AIDS victim, the anorexia sufferer, the cancer patient, the sharecropper or illegal immigrant, he first says, "Take heart, my child; your sins are forgiven." He is not being legalistic nor is he assigning blame to them. He is saying, in effect, "Whatever voice you hear in your head that is telling you that you are unworthy, paralyzed, and powerless, I offer you a different message. You are forgiven. The other voices have no lasting power or authority. None." No true healing - not curing or fixing - no healing can occur until a different voice is spoken to those deafened by the belief that there is no escape from their life or their self-definition of sin.

Then Jesus tackles the big problem with a simple question: "Which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven?' or 'Stand up, take your bed, and go home?'" Both are equally easy to say. Both

are thus equal options. But suddenly the tidy, oppressive boundaries of life have been shattered by Christ's radical hospitality. The ability to forgive sins has moved from the heights of heaven or the inner sanctum of the temple into the very houses and streets of the community. The call to stand up and walk is given to everyone paralyzed by fear or by unjust economic policies or dehumanizing laws written by and for those in power to preserve their places of power. As soon as Jesus said and did these things, the crowd was filled with awe and glorified God, as it was surely right to do.

So having encountered this story from Matthew 9, hopefully, on a deeper level, what are we to do with this new perspective? First, go back and write different answers on your vocabulary quiz. Sin is defined as a brokenness that turns us away from loving God and others, a voice that tells us we are unworthy and paralyzed in a world of opportunity and goodness. Healing is when we find cures both physical and spiritual to silence the demonic voices of hatred, violence and fear spoken within and around us. This healing and forgiveness of sin comes to us through Jesus the Christ, whose radical hospitality breaks down the walls that imprison us, the shackles that bind us and paralyze us in our lives.

What else are we to do? We are to extend Christ's radical hospitality to all. It means breaking down barriers at our communion table, our family table, our city and national places of food and feasting. It means we are to carry others who no longer can walk or move or hope for themselves. It means we are to bring them to Jesus, the one who says "your sins are forgiven" and "stand up and walk," knowing that body and soul are truly interconnected. It means that we too are to be filled with awe, glorifying God in the highest who has given such authority to human beings, children of God, just like us. For such is surely right to do.

Amen

¹Jerry Irish, *Feasting on the Word (Mark 2:1-12)* Theological Perspective, p. 382.



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



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

These are proving to be interesting days in the life of the Presbyterian Church. Since the historic votes last spring on Amendment 10-A and on the New Form of Government, conversations have broken out all across the church. Conversations about who we are as a denomination, what does it mean to be Presbyterian, do our presbyteries function effectively and how can some live with integrity in a church that they believe is in error—an admittedly awkward position experienced and shared by members of the Covenant Network and our supporters for a long time.

Since the votes last spring, we've also seen the ordination of Scott Anderson and the military lift its "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy causing many to ask, "If the military has figured out how to do this without falling apart, why can't the church?"

And we in the Covenant Network are having conversations about the future as well. We are mindful that the Covenant Network was founded with two primary goals. The first was to remove G-6.0106b from the Book of Order; the second was to maintain the unity of the church. It's helpful to remember that the Covenant Network was never only about G-6.0106b. There was always that unity of the church aspect to our work that guided our actions, and which is needed now more than ever as the church moves forward. Now more than ever, the Covenant Network remains committed to ongoing conversation with those who disagree with the direction of the denomination, as well as working to support and nurture congregations, clergy and ministerial candidates dealing with the implications of recent decisions. The future is not clear, it rarely is. The Covenant Network, however, was never only about reforming ordination standards, but has always attempted to model a church as generous and just as God's grace. That work goes on.



Mary Lynn Tobin
Pastor, Davis (CA)
Community Church

Blessings,