

Winter 2011



# The Covenant Connection

A newsletter of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians (Vol. 14 #4)

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## 220<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2012): Pittsburgh, PA, June 30-July 7

Ordination standards, marriage, the structure of the councils of the PCUSA, the *Book of Confessions* – all these items and more will be back on the agenda when the General Assembly convenes next summer, and the Covenant Network will be back as well, supporting commissioners and advisory delegates who share the vision of “a church as generous and just as God’s grace.” Please contact National Organizer Tricia Dykers Koenig for ideas about how to contribute before, during, and after GA.

[triciadk@covnetpres.org](mailto:triciadk@covnetpres.org)

In the years when the PCUSA lived with G-6.0106b in the *Book of Order*, many presbyteries, sessions, and individuals benefited from the Covenant Network’s *Guidelines for the Examination of Church Officers*. Now that G-2.0104b has replaced the problematic paragraph, *Guidelines* author Doug Nave has updated the resource for the post-‘B’ era; check it out at: <http://covnetpres.org/resources/guidelines/>.

## **NEW! Updated Guidelines for the Examination of Officers!**



Tis the season of gift giving and we’re asking to be remembered with a gift to support the work of Covenant Network! It’s critical that we receive the funds to maintain the progress we’ve made with G-2.0104b. Won’t you take a moment to visit the website, [covnetpres.org](http://covnetpres.org) and click on the “donate” link? Or call the office and make a gift in honor of someone who shares your commitment and vision for the church. We can’t do this important work without your help.

Thank you, in advance, for giving as generously as you are able.

## **Supporting a greener Covenant Network!**

Thanks to all those who have indicated a preference for receiving communications from the Covenant Network electronically. We’re in the process of making changes to our data base, and hope that you’re only reading this online!! For those who had every intention of indicating the ‘greener’ preference, but have not yet done so, please take a moment to send an email to Lou ([loueast@covnetpres.org](mailto:loueast@covnetpres.org)). Thanks so much!

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/](http://covnetpres.org/resources/call-to-covenant-community/).

# Personal Impressions of the Conference

by Alice Anderson

When I left for the Covenant Network Conference in Durham, I promised my friends on the staff at Westminster PC in Charlottesville, VA that I would pay special attention so I could bring them up to speed when I got back. Both of Westminster's pastors were envious that I had the freedom to go and they did not. Their envy was well placed.

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As usual, "Reconciling Voices, Visions and Vocations," the Covenant Network Annual Conference, was a feast of profound ideas, innovative and moving worship, provocative speakers, and a family reunion. The food was good too, embracing two Durham traditions, southern barbecue and southern vegetarianism. The foliage was at its most brilliant this autumn season, impressing attendees from the southwest and west coast who had forgotten what seasons are. I have missed a few of these conferences in the last five or six years, so I was delighted to see that even though the congregation was mostly gray, there is evidence of new and younger leadership coming to the fore. Younger pastors and seminarians were well represented in worship and workshop leadership. First Presbyterian Church in Durham and their colleagues in the presbytery and synod did a masterful job of displaying southern hospitality.

The conference reflected the Covenant Network's twofold mission, "to work for the removal of ordination barriers to the full participation of LGBT Presbyterians, and to support the mission and unity of the denomination." The theme of reconciliation was woven throughout the conference offerings.

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Preachers this year included: Director of the Wisconsin Council of Churches and recently re-ordained, long-suffering gay Presbyterian minister Scott Anderson; Duke theologian Mary McClintock Fulkerson; and Covenant Network Co-moderator Mary Lynn Tobin. The music, as I have come to expect, was fabulous. The night Scott preached, the Triangle Gay Men's Chorus treated us to fine classical compositions from various faith traditions. Friday night's music, provided by the First Presbyterian Church of Durham's choir and Kathryn Parkins, the Minister of Music, was especially moving. In addition to several excellent offerings by the full choir, a quartet sang Bobby McFerrin's Psalm 23 a cappella - a powerful testimony, especially to any of you who were part of Stonecatchers, a precursor to the Covenant Network. Local musicians Mark Weems and Julee Glaub supplied North Carolina style folk music with dulcimer, bodhran and banjo Saturday morning. Morning worship offered us opportunities to participate in the work of reconciliation through remembrance and symbolic actions.

The Rev. Anderson challenged us to continue the work of reconciliation by continuing to remedy the wrongs that have been perpetrated on gay and lesbian Presbyterians by seeking even more justice. He talked about the importance not only of being a good host, but also of being a good guest; being willing to put oneself in the position of learning, of relying on the kindness of others, of trusting in God to provide one's sustenance. The Rev. Tobin danced into the sanctuary singing Miriam's song, "I sing to God, triumphant is he. The horse and the chariot he cast into the sea," then quickly changed her tune, speaking to the joy we feel in winning freedom and the guilty pleasure we often take in those we perceive as enemies being vanquished. Tobin reflected on the responsibilities of freedom and the new opportunities this new time in denominational life offer for furthering the work of reconciliation.

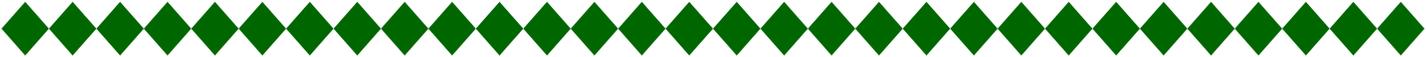
Plenary speakers included: James C. Davis, religion professor at Middlebury College; PCUSA Moderator Cindy Bolbach and Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons; Union Presbyterian Seminary Professor of Biblical Interpretation Frances Gench; and the PCUSA Office of Public Witness'

Linda Lader. Davis, author of *In Defense of Civility: How Religion Can Unite Us on Seven Moral Issues* spoke to the need for civility in Presbyterian dialogue, lifting up the Reformed virtues of humility, patience, mutual respect and Christian forbearance as guiding principles for our continuing work. Gench led us through an exegesis of 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2:8-15, a passage that includes, “I permit no woman to teach or have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve.” Gench suggested we might think of the author as a “distant great uncle, a little bit creepy but a member of the family.” Weaving her way gently, she found the liberating word in even this passage. Bolbach gave an update on the State of the Church and with Gradye Parsons led us

through intricacies of the new Form of Government. Lader introduced the Respectful Dialogue Initiative and like Davis, spoke of ways for people who are in disagreement to speak together about mutual interests and work together on mutual concerns.

Relationships were re-knitted, possibilities considered for developing a community in the PCUSA that is truly capable of working toward a “Church that is as generous and just as God’s grace.”

Alice Anderson, author of *Far from Home*, is a minister member of National Capital Presbytery. She has served churches in Washington, Detroit, Austin and Berkeley. She currently resides in Charlottesville, Va.



## “We Will Be There!”

### Remarks to 2011 Covenant Conference

by Tricia Dykers Koenig,  
Covenant Network National Organizer

It feels pretty good, doesn’t it?

Amendment 97-A, Amendment 01-A, Amendment 08-B, were all passed by General Assemblies but not by a majority of the presbyteries. This year, finally, we celebrated **May 10-A** when we got our 87<sup>th</sup> and 88<sup>th</sup> presbyteries to put us over the top and change the blight on our constitution and the Gospel that was G-6.0106b; and in the following weeks, all the way to **97 Amendment 10-A** supportive presbyteries, bringing us to **July 10-A** and a new *Book of Order*. How I love to open this book and gaze upon the bold paragraph here, good riddance G-6.0106b and welcome to the new Presbyterian world of G-2.0104b. Hallelujah!

And – we’re not there yet. Getting rid of laws designed to exclude is a huge step, but it doesn’t instantly bring us inclusion.

We are committed to supporting individual candidates as they discern and develop their gifts, navigate the preparation for ministry process, look for calls, face the ordination examinations that are anxiety-provoking for every candidate and can be even more so for those who have experienced roadblocks and even hostility from the church. I get phone

calls and have conversations regularly, and this is one of the places that the *network* really springs into action.

We will be there to help sessions and presbyteries ensure that the ordination process is open, fair, and constitutional. Some of you may have used our *Guidelines for the Examination of Church Officers* in the past, and we are just rolling out the updated, G-2.0104b-era *Guidelines*.

As has been true in the past, we will be there if a presbytery or session is challenged in the church courts for approving an LGBT candidate for ordination.

Some presbyteries and sessions have faced or will face proposals intended to thwart the progress accomplished through Amendment 10-A. This has usually taken the form of a policy that purports to establish an extra-constitutional ordination standard, generally some variation of “fidelity and chastity,” which they declare will be required of all who are seeking to be ordained or installed. Based on previous Permanent Judicial Commission decisions that declared that “no lower governing body can constitutionally define, diminish, augment or modify standards for ordination and installation,” we are convinced that these policies are unconstitutional, and while it is not our desire to spend lots more time in judicial process, we are committed to upholding

**“We Will Be There” continued:**

the *Book of Order* and preserving the right of every candidate to be heard and evaluated on his or her own merits. Some of these proposals have passed and others have been disapproved. One presbytery’s policy has been challenged in a remedial complaint and the synod PJC has granted a stay, so that the policy cannot be enforced pending the hearing of that complaint. We will be there supporting those who are standing up for fair process with the legal expertise that has already assisted in leading to Scott Anderson’s ordination and, we pray, will soon do the same for Lisa Larges.

We will be at the General Assembly in Pittsburgh next summer, defending G-2.0104 against attempts to restore some form of “fidelity and chastity” – already there have been four overtures passed by presbyteries that would amend the new wording, and while I doubt that the church wants to go back there, we can’t take anything for granted.

Every General Assembly is important to the life of the church, and the 220<sup>th</sup> will be no exception. Another particularly significant item of business will be the report of the committee that has been considering a new translation of the Heidelberg Catechism. In 2008 a diverse committee – theologically and in every other way – unanimously recommended that the PCUSA pursue the possibility of a more faithful translation of the Catechism, joining with two other Reformed partners in the United States. The next GA is expected to be urged to send that new, more historically and theologically accurate translation to the presbyteries for approval. Changes in the confessions require not a simple majority, but 2/3 of the presbyteries in order to take effect. Many of us were disappointed, to put it mildly, when the Belhar Confession received a majority but not the required supermajority to become the newest document in our *Book of Confessions*, and we don’t want to see that happen again, so we will be there to encourage education and action on Heidelberg.

And another way we are committed to advancing the cause of full inclusion is in the ability of ministers to conduct marriage services for same-gender couples where the civil authority allows; there are a growing number of jurisdictions where marriage equality is a

reality, New York State being the most recent, and the largest. Pastors in our congregations in those places are in an untenable position if they fear that providing pastoral care to members of their congregations might subject them to threats of being charged with an offense in church court.

With the end of “don’t ask, don’t tell,” military chaplains have now been given permission to officiate at same-gender marriages where they are legal. We need to have the same freedom and permission to exercise pastoral care in the PCUSA, without the threat of having a congregation’s ministry disrupted by the large amount of time, energy, money and other resources that would be wasted on judicial process if a minister is hauled into church court for giving a same-gender couple the same ministry that is routinely provided to heterosexual couples. The presbyteries just approved an amendment to the ordination questions that adds a promise to “pray for” the people; it’s absurd to tell ministers that there are situations in which they are forbidden to fulfill that promise. Therefore we are in the process of encouraging overtures to the GA to issue an authoritative interpretation that would clarify the rights and responsibilities of ministers to exercise pastoral discretion in responding to requests to perform legal marriages. We believe that will be the most effective way to approach marriage at the 2012 GA.

2011 saw major progress, but if we expect to maintain those gains we can’t afford to be complacent. Our focus is on living into the reality of G-2.0104b, and we are concentrating our energies on initiatives that will advance that mission.

In pursuit of the health and witness of the PCUSA, *we will be there* – continuing the vital work in which the Covenant Network has engaged since 1997. Please join us!

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## A Message from the Interim Executive Director

There was a commercial in the 1980's that featured a gorgeous woman who said, "Don't hate me because I'm beautiful." The ad- for a shampoo- became a cultural icon of the 80's.

An odd reference for a Covenant Network newsletter article, I admit. But a related phrase, "don't hate us because we're successful," has been creeping into my thoughts lately. It seems that our instrumental role in helping attain G-2.0104b has made us the target of people who want to take issue with how Covenant Network does things. In particular, we get a series of communications each week that argue why we should be more aggressive about promoting a change in constitutional language concerning the definition of marriage and worry less about denominational unity. Similarly, we receive messages that say we're pushing too far when we recommend Authoritative Interpretation of the constitution to allow individuals pastoral discretion to bless same gender marriages in states where that is legal. Those communications say we're hurting the cause of unity and should back down. Damned if you do, damned if you don't.

The Covenant Network has long found itself in the unpopular territory of having critics argue that we do too much on behalf of LGBT Presbyterians seeking ordination, and those who feel we don't do enough. The perceived conflict between full inclusion and unity is not a new dynamic, and we make no pretense that we always find the proper balance. But it has been the goal of the Covenant Network to hold a middle ground that lifts up the biblical, prophetic role of finding the common ground that holds us together in service to Jesus Christ. We have long avoided polarizing positions that force people to think only one way, our way, on a given issue. We believe that the fewer churches that leave the PCUSA, the better it will be for LGBT people in the long run. One of the things Covenant Network has always done is to reach out to those who disagree, and we are continuing to do that – not in spite of the welfare of LGBT people, but because of it.

The Covenant Network believes that keeping G-2.0104b in the *Book of Order* is critically important. We aim to anchor its principles and embed the spirit of change that welcomes LGBT Presbyterians seeking to respond to God's call to ordained leadership. There will always be people who wish we would push harder for more change, as well as those who wish we would push less for any change. We remain committed to listening to all voices, and the Board is open to hearing what people think as we seek to discern where God is leading us.

In my short time serving as the interim executive director, I have been impressed with the Covenant Network Board's prayerful consideration of where Scripture and God's Spirit is leading this organization. The wisdom, experience and insight of the people who lead the Covenant Network have forged a path that we believe is faithful to God's living, reforming Spirit in the PC(USA). We hope most of you who read this newsletter share this view. But if you don't, we hope you'll stay in the conversation and continue to work with Covenant Network toward a church "as generous and just as God's grace." There is much work ahead, and we cannot do it without your help.

Respectfully, Nancy

*Interim Executive Director, Nancy Enderle, [nancy@covnetpres.org](mailto:nancy@covnetpres.org)*



## **Free at Last... Now What???** (excerpted)

Exodus 15:19-24, 20:1-3

2011 Conference sermon, by Mary Lynn Tobin, Co-Moderator of the Covenant Network Board



*When the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his chariot drivers went into the sea, the LORD brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground. Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. And Miriam sang to them: 'Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.'*

Exodus 15:19-21

I remember a conversation with Del, an evangelical Presbyterian who has become a good friend, not in spite of, but *because* of our disagreements over ordination. He even attended the last two Covenant Network conferences and relished the theological and biblical meat that is offered here. When I asked if he would be coming to *this* year's conference he responded, "If I come, they're not going to rub my face in it, are they?"

If we're honest, that's exactly what we want to do. You won't find anyone admitting it publicly, but c'mon, there is a part of most of us who long to shout "Neener neener neener!!" and imagine God tossing our opponents into the sea. Right? Or is that just me?

We have been liberated. Freed from oppression! Freed to be the people God created us to be! Freed to fully answer God's call! And so we dance and sing ... Liberation is FANTASTIC! So the Hebrews thought. For about 10 minutes.

Until they discovered what they had been liberated to: a harsh wilderness where food and water was scarce, where without the Egyptians breathing down their necks, they weren't sure what to do with themselves. There were enemies to fight, they were stuck with a leader who seemed unsure as to what to do and who disappeared for long periods of time to "talk with God." And that "promised land" of milk and honey? It was nowhere in sight. They were not happy campers.

And what about **us**? Now, after 15 years of labor to achieve freedom; now, standing on the other side of the Red Sea, we have a few minutes to breathe. And we stick our heads up,

look around, and discover that while we have been working so diligently, so faithfully, so hard to win this freedom, we have been "liberated" from things we didn't necessarily *want* to be liberated from.

***You see, we are in our own wilderness.***

...We may have thought that with the deletion of the oppressive language in the BoO, we were finally getting our church back. But do we want it? Do we want what some are calling the "deathly ill" Presbyterian church?

...Like the Hebrews longing for Egypt, we long for the way things used to be, when churches stood at the center of communities' lives; when the voices of Presbyterians were taken seriously in Washington, D.C.; when our Sunday schools were bursting at the seams with baby boomers and we had more money than we knew what to do with, and our leadership had a road map for exactly what to do each step of the way.

Like the Hebrews looking back with rose-colored glasses, we forget about the other side of life in Egypt. We may not have even noticed it because it was in the air we breathed – but there was a downside: the gods of status and power and wealth crept stealthily into our decision-making; success was too often valued over faithfulness; numbers were too easily valued over transformation of lives; and contentment with people "just like us" was valued over the challenge to seek out and *empathize* with those who are different than we are, embracing our differences. In those days, we didn't have to leave the safety and security of our church buildings.

So...like the Hebrews, we have been thrust, somewhat impoverished and stripped of authority, into a wilderness that is unfamiliar and terrifying. The Hebrews, confused by the place in which they found themselves, expressed *their* fear by turning on Moses and turning on each other.

I wonder how *we'll* behave? Well, from our motley crew of people who have worked long

and hard to be freed from G-6.0106b, we have noted voices of anger and frustration:

“Why aren’t we celebrating?” “Why are we pandering to these people who have treated us so poorly, who are now trying to take off with our congregations and our property?” “What about the others who still are not welcome at the table?” “I’m not ready to talk about reconciliation!” “What about marriage?”

“Where is our water?” “Where is our food?” “Where is our promised land?????”

Now hear me out. I am NOT saying that any of those questions are inappropriate. I’m not critiquing the content. I’m sensing that ... “the issue isn’t the issue,” if you know what I mean?

***Here’s the issue: We’ve won our freedom and inherited a church that is falling apart at the seams.*** ...Do you see? Sometimes liberation is just not what we thought it would be. And we take our disappointment out on each other.

But it was to people like us, like the Hebrews – newly liberated, perhaps even begrudgingly liberated – that God gave a gift.

***Yes – God gave the gift... of the law.***

...Perry Yoder, a Mennonite and Old Testament scholar, writes that the gift of the “... law is necessary for liberation, because it is *law* that allows the liberated to become liberating. ...In response to liberation, the law sketches out the way by which God’s people **live** liberation.”

Poet and author Wendell Berry adds that the 10 commandments tell us “what to do with our freedom”... They spell out “the responsibilities without which no one can be legitimately free, or free for very long.” They are a gift. A gift of grace.

... Jesus summed up the commandments with two rules: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind,” and “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Well, I don’t mean to one-up Jesus, but I think I can name that tune in just *one* commandment: “You shall have no other gods before me.” ***We can’t move from being a liberated people to a liberating people if we are following other gods.*** And we are all following other gods. We just are. We humans do that.

This commandment reminds us that only God can and should take all our best energies; God should be, as Tillich would say, our “ultimate concern.” ... Because the truth is that only God frees us and sustains us in that freedom. Only God does that. No other gods live up to that.

In this wilderness time – and if we stay true to our history, we are in the wilderness for much longer than we expect – much longer than we’d like; in this wilderness time when tensions are high and freedom is very new; in this wilderness time when it takes incredible commitment and hard work to sustain that freedom for ourselves and for others; perhaps we’d best concentrate on and discipline ourselves to obey the law that was God’s gift to the newly liberated everywhere.

How might we do that? ... In the context of our continuing work as part of the Covenant Network gang, how might *we* detect the gods that we are in danger of swapping for GOD?

...If we want to be a community that is not only **liberated**, but is also a joyful **liberating** force, we must be brave enough to examine our hearts to discover what and who our actual gods might be. ...And if along the way, we can practice being **aware of** and **honest about** who and what our gods are, when we look in the mirror, we will see in our reflection traces of our Egyptian genes.... Perhaps then we will see how our wheels are becoming mired in the mud of the Red Sea – how our chariots are breaking apart and we are drowning.

If we can be courageous enough to observe the ways we rush into the waters of the Red Sea on our Egyptian horses and in our Egyptian chariots, we will find ourselves rescued from the chaos of what really are **baptismal** waters. When we realize that, we will be able to step up on to dry land as liberated, yet drenched Hebrews in bright white robes.

God **will** save us from ourselves. And then we will have something to cheer about!

“Liberated by Law,” by Perry Yoder, in *Sojourners*, September-October 1999

*Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community: Eight Essays*, Wendell Berry, p. 150, 1992-93

Full text of Mary Lynn’s sermon is on the Covenant Network website.



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

As one year gives way to another, we also find ourselves entering a new era in the life of our church. It is a new era based on a gracious welcome and a desire to see the gifts of all people used to the glory of God and in strengthening the church. The Covenant Network of Presbyterians is committed to embedding this refreshing and long-awaited change into the life of our denomination.

One of the many things we learned in this struggle over the years, is that people often don't know who they know! In other words, there are so many LGBT people who, along with family and friends, have quietly, faithfully, and lovingly served the church while working for the day when change would come. To help the church embrace the new reality effected with the passing of Amendment 10-A, to help this become the "new normal" in the PC(USA), we will be launching an initiative called the *Season of Welcome* Campaign. The campaign will feature a web-based 'Registry of Gifts' featuring stories and testimonies of LGBT Presbyterians who have been ordained since the removal of G-6.0106b, or who quietly served the church all along and now feel safe to share their particular story. We think people will be surprised how many names begin to appear on the website as we move forward.

We continue to be mindful, however, of the disappointment expressed by some in the church over this change and continue to support efforts at ongoing conversation across theological divides. And sadly, with the next General Assembly six months away, we are aware that there will be legislative attempts to roll back the progress we have made. Those challenges need to be taken seriously and we cannot afford to become complacent. If you have not yet done so, please consider making a financial commitment to support the work of the Covenant Network, particularly as we head into GA. In many ways, our work as an organization has never been more important.

Blessings,



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



Mary Lynn Tobin  
Pastor, Davis (CA)  
Community Church