

THE COVENANT CONNECTION

A newsletter of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians

3210 Michigan Ave., Ste. 300, Kansas City, MO 64109 • 816-605-1031

Join us at GA... in person or in prayer

The Covenant Network will be in Detroit this summer, continuing our efforts *"toward a church as generous and just as God's grace."* We hope you will join us, especially at our two ticketed events, which we pray will have transforming effect on the Assembly's work:

- Orient yourself to the possibilities that can be realized at this GA at the **Commissioners' Convocation Dinner**, Friday, June 13, 6:00-8:30 p.m. CovNet Co-Moderator **Randy Bush**, pastor of East Liberty Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, is the featured speaker. Candidates standing for Moderator have been invited to come and introduce themselves.
- Theologian **Mark Achtemeier**, whose forthcoming book on the biblical case for same-sex marriage will debut at GA, will speak about how *"Marriage Matters... for Everyone"* at the **Covenant Network Luncheon**, Monday, June 16, 12:00-1:30 p.m. Mark will reflect on the biblical, theological, and pastoral importance of change in the church's position on these issues, and talk about how he, as an evangelical scholar, came to change his mind.

Both events will be at the Detroit Marriott at the Renaissance Center. Tickets can be purchased until May 30 through the GA Meeting Service during or after registration: <http://oga.pcusa.org/section/ga/ga221/how-to-register/>.

After May 30, please contact our Kansas City office directly to inquire whether space is still available. As usual, banquet meals are unavoidably expensive; **commissioners and advisory delegates**, if the price of these meals is prohibiting your participation, please contact our Executive Director, Brian Ellison, at brian@covnetpres.org or 816-605-1031 to make arrangements – **we want you to be there!**



COBO Center



Detroit Marriott at the Renaissance Center

COVENANT NETWORK OF PRESBYTERIANS



May 2014 (Vol. 17, No. 1)

Will you be in Detroit as an observer at GA?

Make your time count by **volunteering on the CovNet Team**. From hospitality, to running errands, to supporting commissioners and advisory delegates; whether for an hour, or a day, or for the whole week – we have a number of opportunities for you to serve, learn, make new friends, and have an impact. National Organizer Tricia Dykers Koenig is eager to fill you in on details – triciadk@covnetpres.org or 216-658-1770.

Your support is vital even if you can't attend GA!

- Help us connect with commissioners and advisory delegates who share our vision of the church and would appreciate our support at GA. Put in a good word for CovNet, and suggest that they contact us before GA.
- Encourage commissioners and advisory delegates to attend our events. In addition to alerting them to our Friday and Monday meals, some CovNet members and chapters have offered to purchase their commissioners' tickets.
- Make a financial contribution now. (www.covnetpres.org/donate) General Assembly stretches our budget and affects cash flow; your generous donation will enable us to continue our work.
- Keep praying! Commissioners and advisory delegates, staff and volunteers with the Office of the General Assembly and the other GA agencies, the CovNet team and other observers, all Presbyterians and others who are affected by the decisions of the General Assembly, the folks in Detroit who are preparing to welcome us – may all rejoice in God's gracious presence, and may God's will be done.



Brian D. Ellison

*Executive Director
Covenant Network of
Presbyterians*

3210 Michigan, Suite 300,
Kansas City, MO 64109

brian@covnetpres.org

office 816-605-1031
mobile 816-668-6886

*For more
information about the
Covenant Network,
contact Brian Ellison
or Tricia Dykers Koenig
or visit
www.covnetpres.org.*



Tricia Dykers Koenig

*National Organizer
Covenant Network of
Presbyterians*

triciadk@covnetpres.org

office 216-658-1770
(call before faxing)
mobile 216-926-6588

From the Executive Director

Not long ago, I was asked how much longer the Covenant Network will be around. It's a good question—one I obviously care a great deal about! My answer then, and my answer now, is this: Until our work is done.

Our work, since our founding in 1997, has been to seek to strengthen the church by working for inclusion of all God's people—including LGBTQ people—and promoting its unity. We long for a church that is together and whole. We sought the freedom of presbyteries and sessions to ordain, regardless of sexual orientation. Now we are seeking the freedom of pastors and congregations to exercise discretion about whom they marry legally in the church. And always, we seek to model and encourage unity across the lines of difference and division that tear at our communion.

These years have seen great progress, and the upcoming General Assembly holds great promise. But the votes on key overtures and recommendations are far from certain, and the outcome of voting on amendments we hope pass in presbyteries is even less so. To bring about the church we believe God is calling us to will take effort, expense, many partners, and your support.

And no matter what happens with this Assembly, there will still be much to do. LGBTQ candidates still struggle to find calls as pastors, even in the most supportive presbyteries; it seems impossible in others. Marriages will still be a source of misunderstanding and conflict in many a congregation. We are already entering a new period in the denomination's life in which we all are re-learning what it means to be church together in light of our seriously differing views. The Covenant Network's ministry of education, advocacy and seeking unity and understanding will be more necessary than ever in years to come—and with your continued support, we will not stop until the work is done.

Join us, won't you? Help us see this through. Help us make transforming changes at this General Assembly... and beyond.

To donate, click www.covnetpres.org/donate or use the enclosed envelope. And thank you, always, for seeking a church as generous and just as God's grace.

**Join us,
won't you?**
Help us see
this through.
Help us make
transforming
changes at
this General
Assembly...
and beyond.

New congregations commit to the Covenant Network

The Covenant Network is pleased to welcome two new congregations as supporting congregations. Their Sessions, with more than 300 others, have affirmed the “Call to Covenant Community.” To see the complete list, visit www.covnetpres.org.



Towson Presbyterian Church

A 178-year presence in the Baltimore area, Towson Presbyterian Church has long identified hospitality to all and service seeking justice as part of its identity. But the April 2014 decision to join the Covenant Network marks a new and definitive step in the congregation’s commitment to seeking a church that truly welcomes all.

“We’ve gone through a period of discernment about where God is leading us and discovered that welcoming all is a core value for us,” said the church’s pastor since 2003, the Rev. Lindley DeGarmo. “Doing that in a way that preserves our unity as Presbyterians is an important goal for us, too. The Covenant Network embodies both of those values.”

The decision followed serious and sometimes difficult conversation and a visit from the Network’s executive director, Brian Ellison. In the end, the leaders of the 650-member congregation knew this was the right step at the right time in the church’s life and mission.

“It’s another way of proclaiming the gospel of God’s radical love,” DeGarmo said.



Church of the Pilgrims

Church of the Pilgrims in Washington, D.C. has long publicly identified as a welcoming church—its mission statement declares that its members “follow Jesus, seeing God’s image in every face, inviting all people into the circle of God’s grace.” But deciding to join the Covenant Network now was an important step for the congregation.

“We have long been committed to opening the church doors as wide as possible,” said Jeff Krehbiel, pastor of the church since 2000. “As a two-time commissioner to General Assembly, I believe the Covenant Network is unmatched in strategic thinking and action toward building a more inclusive church, where everyone’s gifts are welcome, and everyone’s relationship is celebrated.”

Besides its intentional outreach to LGBTQ persons, the congregation’s other important mission projects include “The Pilgrimage,” which welcomes individuals and groups to experiential service projects in its urban Washington, D.C. setting. The congregation also equips and supports important community organizing work in the metro.

For information on how you or your congregation can join the Covenant Network, contact Brian Ellison at brian@covnetpres.org or visit www.covnetpres.org.

Our Top GA Priority: Marriage Matters

The 221st General Assembly has an historic opportunity to deepen and broaden the Church's understanding of marriage, and the Covenant Network calls on the Assembly and the whole church to embrace this opportunity with particular actions that will strengthen the Church.



The Covenant Network's **top priority** for this Assembly is addressing a pastoral crisis facing teaching elders and congregations, who in exercising their historic discretion about whom they can legally marry, may be risking discipline in the courts of the church. To ensure their freedom to proclaim God's love and the church's care for all God's children now and in the future, the CovNet Board supports both an **authoritative interpretation** of the current *Book of Order*, and an **amendment** broadening and deepening its section on the meaning and significance of marriage.

- **Item 10-03**, *On Issuing an Authoritative Interpretation of W-4.9000 to Affirm Pastoral Discretion in Performing Marriage Ceremonies*, is from the Presbytery of Heartland and 19 concurring presbyteries. Emphasizing the long Presbyterian tradition of freedom of conscience in the interpretation of Scripture, the requested authoritative interpretation (AI) would clarify that the existing *Book of Order* does not make it an offense to perform a marriage service for a same gender couple. (Two other overtures, **10-04** and **10-06**, seek similar clarification – making the request for an AI on marriage the most strongly supported business coming to this GA from the presbyteries.) An authoritative interpretation, effective when issued by the General Assembly, will provide immediate resolution of the current ambiguity while not requiring any teaching elder or congregation to perform a marriage of which they do not approve.
- **Item 10-02**, *On Amending W-4.9000, Marriage*, from the Presbytery of the Cascades and 16 concurring presbyteries, seeks amendment of the marriage section to affirm that the church's historic understanding of marriage need not be limited to opposite-gender couples. A substantial revision of W-4.9000, the amendment is in the spirit of the new Form of Government, creating a broad constitutional framework within which the councils of the church may adapt practices, procedures, and structures to the needs of particular mission. In richer and broader language than even the current section, the proposal lifts up values of love, mutual support and covenant faithfulness, both for married couples and for the faith community. If approved by the Assembly, the action would require affirmative votes from a majority of the church's 172 presbyteries.

While the authoritative interpretation addresses the immediate pastoral crisis, an amendment is a longer-term correction to make the *Book of Order* factually accurate, responsive to the needs of diverse Presbyterian families, and more faithful in its witness to God's love and grace.

Item 10-01, *On Amending W-4.9000 Concerning the Church's Role in Legal Marriage and Services of Christian Covenant*, would remove from Presbyterian ministers the authority to conduct a legal marriage for any couple. While the overture raises intriguing questions on the relationship between church and state understandings of marriage, it also conflicts with the important principle of pastoral discretion. Therefore, the Covenant Network Board urges the **disapproval** of this overture.

Other Business ‘Toward a Church as Generous and Just as God’s Grace’

While every item of business to be considered in Detroit is important to the church in some way, there are a few others of particular concern to the Covenant Network:

Item 06-01, *On Amending G-2.0104b by Replacing “Guided by” with “Obedient to” in Reference to Scripture and the Confessions*, would amend language for ordination standards just approved in 2011 by a majority of presbyteries. The proposed amendment would require examining councils to be “obedient to Scripture,” while the current constitutional ordination questions require ordained persons to be “obedient to *Jesus Christ*.” The Board urges **disapproval** of this overture.

Item 06-09, *On Amending F-2.05, G-2.0105 and W-4.4003c to Clarify What is Meant by Essentials of the Reformed Faith*, would break with centuries of Presbyterian practice by establishing a checklist of essential tenets, rather than empowering councils with this crucial work of discernment. This idea has been rejected repeatedly through the generations by Presbyterian entities, and the Board urges its **disapproval** once again.

Item 06-11, *On Amending G-3.0403(c) to Allow Churches to Realign with Other Established Presbyteries within the PC(USA)*, would allow a congregation that “finds it is disengaged from its own presbytery due to theological or practical differences” to request transfer to another presbytery. Because such an option would foment further separation rather than real engagement and the unity of the Church, the Board urges **disapproval**.



David Van Dyke

Pastor
House of Hope
Presbyterian Church
St Paul, MN

Co-Moderator of the
Covenant Network
Board of Directors

From the Co-Moderator

Same-gender marriage became legal in Minnesota on August 1, 2013, when the state’s governor, Mark Dayton—a Presbyterian, no less—signed the bill into law on the steps of the state capitol before a huge, enthusiastic crowd. As a pastor, I had requests from two couples in my congregation to have their weddings at their church that same month.

Having to sit down with those loving couples, who had waited a long time for such an opportunity and who deeply love their church, and explain to them that which I never have to explain to heterosexual couples—namely, that the state of Minnesota is more accepting and supportive of their love and commitment than is the denomination in which they are members, worship, and supposedly experience God’s grace—was painfully awkward as a pastor. And that is unfortunately true for pastors and parishioners in the now 17 states (plus the nation’s capital city) where same gender marriage is legally recognized and celebrated.

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church meeting in Detroit can go a long way in advancing the church’s witness and recognizing the God-given dignity of every human being. The ability of Presbyterian pastors to minister freely to all families is a primary goal of the Covenant Network and you will read about our efforts to make that a reality in this newsletter. My colleague Randy Bush and I invite you to join in supporting the important organizing and educational outreach work of the Covenant Network at the GA. Volunteer at GA, send a check—send an additional check. Encourage your presbytery’s commissioners to seek information from the Covenant Network both before arriving in Detroit and while at GA.

The road before us is a familiar one and we know where it eventually leads. By the grace of God and through the hard work of the committed, may it be soon.



Welcome New Board Member Baron Mullis

The Covenant Network continues to add new and experienced voices to its Board of Directors, giving vision and leadership to our work of seeking inclusion and unity in the Presbyterian Church (USA).

The Board's newest member is the **Rev. Dr. Baron Mullis**, who has served since 2011 as senior pastor of Morningside Presbyterian Church, one of the fastest-growing churches in the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta and host of a 2013 Covenant Network regional conference.

"A friend of mine once said to me rather surprisingly, 'There are no second-class citizens in the kingdom of God.'" Mullis says. "I believe that too. That's why we have to continue to work for a church that reflects a love as deep and wide as the love of God. I'm so glad to join with the Covenant Network to continue working for the church to look like that - with a place for all of us."

Mullis previously served as associate pastor and acting head of staff at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Charlotte and was a Lake Fellow in Parish Ministry at Second Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis. He is a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary, where he received the Grier-Davies Prize in Preaching.

"As the pastor of the Morningside Church, I have the privilege of saying every single week that we extend our welcome in the name of Jesus Christ, therefore there are no qualifiers attached," he says. "Joining the board of the Covenant Network is a natural extension of that wide welcome that Morningside seeks to offer."

Baron Mullis

Pastor
Morningside
Presbyterian Church
Atlanta, GA

Covenant Network
Board of Directors

Covenant Network Board of Advisors

The Covenant Network is reactivating its Board of Advisors, a group of noted leaders across the denomination with a deep and broad record of service to the church and to the mission of seeking a church as just and generous as God's grace.

The members each offer particular gifts of wisdom and insight, and the Board of Directors will be calling on members of the Board of Advisors at national events, such as the General Assembly and the Covenant Conference, as well as throughout the year. While not involved in the day-to-day oversight of the organization, the Board of Advisors will serve an important role connecting the Covenant Network both to its own heritage and to the church at large.

As of this writing, the current members of the Board of Advisors are:

Founding Co-Moderators of the Board of Directors of the Covenant Network

The Rev. Robert W. Bohl, Moderator of the 206th General Assembly (1994)

The Rev. John M. Buchanan, Moderator of the 208th General Assembly (1996)

The Rev. Joanna Adams

The Rev. Susan Andrews, Moderator of the 215th General Assembly (2003)

The Rev. Gene Bay

Ruling Elder Betsy Britton

The Rev. James D. Brown

The Rev. Bill Calhoun

The Rev. Heidi Calhoun

The Rev. Cynthia McCall Campbell

Ruling Elder William Capel

The Rev. Kim Clayton

Dr. Jane Dempsey Douglass

The Rev. Erika Funk

The Rev. Cynthia Jarvis

Ruling Elder Kirsten Kingdon

The Rev. William McIvor

The Rev. Stephen Montgomery

Ruling Elder Gay Mothershed,
Vice Moderator of the 208th General
Assembly (1996)

The Rev. Harriet Nelson, Moderator of the 196th General Assembly (1984)

The Rev. Kent Organ

The Rev. Bruce Reyes-Chow, Moderator of the 218th General Assembly (2008)

The Rev. Bruce Rigdon

The Rev. J. Barrie Shepherd

The Rev. Ted Smith

The Rev. Mark Smutny

The Rev. Laird Stuart

Ruling Elder Karen Turney

The Rev. Herbert D. Valentine, Moderator of the 203rd General Assembly (1991)

The Rev. Louise Westfall

The Rev. Richard Wohlschlaeger



Why Marriage Matters... A Story from Pittsburgh *by Randy Bush*

As is often the case, a couple came to me and shared the good news that they wanted to get married. They were church members well-known to me, active for more than a decade and present most weeks in worship here at East Liberty Presbyterian Church. They have served in a wide range of roles, from being on committees to playing in the handbell choir. They are deeply committed in their faith and to one another, so I rejoiced when they shared their news with me.

As is less often the case, the couple who shared their good news with me is sadly barred from being married in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania because they are both women. Everything in the conversation we shared was exactly the same as if it had been a man and woman telling me their news in my office – the love, the commitment, the faithfulness, the deep ties to our church family, the desire to celebrate their union before God and a loving congregation – and yet, for legal reasons, a typical wedding service could not be planned. They knew this was the present reality in Pittsburgh, and yet there was no denying the disappointment and deeper level of pastoral sadness that colored our conversation together that day.

We exist in an “in-between place” regarding the institution and consecration of marriage in America today. For centuries, the dominant language around marriage focused on unions of men and women, even though for many people, a marital covenant was not going to be part of their life story. Many people remained single, often happily so. Many other people did not marry because their sexual identity did not coincide with the dominant social model of heterosexual unions. Over the years, though, we have come to recognize the breadth and diversity of “households” and “families.” We have learned to value a single-person household, a single-parent family, a blended family, a family that has navigated necessary seasons of divorce, a multi-generational household, a home built around the love between two men or two women, a family that has been blessed by relationships including bisexual and transgender relatives, and other expressions of covenantal, mutually-committed love. We have also learned that the language and values of Christian faith have a place in each of these forms of married/non-married family life.

Currently, 17 states and the District of Columbia grant marriage licenses to same-gender couples. Several other states have court cases in place, including Pennsylvania, that challenge laws prohibiting same-sex marriage, and it is conceivable that a far reaching legal response to this imbalance will be completed in the coming six to twelve months. This is both a legal and a pastoral issue, since it affects whether ministers may perform marriages for both heterosexual and homosexual couples in their congregations.

What happened with the engaged couple in my office? Happily, they were married in March in the District of Columbia and then celebrated a “Christian marriage for those previously married in a civil ceremony” (Rite III from our PCUSA *Book of Common Worship*) on a Saturday afternoon at ELPC in early May. Above all, it was a faithful moment in which a church family could celebrate a couple’s love and surround them with our prayers as they committed themselves to a married life together. My prayer is that our General Assembly and national courts will soon make this entire process less divided, cumbersome and unjust by affirming that marriage matters... for all.

Randy Bush

Randy Bush

Pastor
East Liberty
Presbyterian Church
Pittsburgh, PA

Co-Moderator of the
Covenant Network
Board of Directors

COVENANT NETWORK OF PRESBYTERIANS



3210 Michigan Avenue, Suite 300
Kansas City, MO 64109
covnetpres.org



Facebook: www.facebook.com/CovNetPres

Twitter: @CovNetPres

The Covenant Connection is published several times a year by the Covenant Network of Presbyterians. Thanks to: Kim Krueger (graphic design) and Tom Northenscold (photos). To change your address, to receive this newsletter electronically, or to receive additional copies, contact the Covenant Network office at brian@covnetpres.org or 816-605-1031.

Non-Profit Org
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Shawnee Mission, KS
Permit No 223

INSIDE: Important News about General Assembly!

Mission Statement

The mission of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians is to strengthen the church of Jesus Christ, with the help of God's grace. We are called to achieve this goal by furthering the inclusion of LGBTQ persons, and by working for the unity of the PC(USA).

Call to Covenant Community

With the help of God's grace, the Covenant Network of Presbyterians is called to strengthen the Church of Jesus Christ by furthering the inclusion of persons identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ) that was signaled by the adoption of G-2.0104b; by supporting sessions and presbyteries as they apply these ordination standards; and by working for the unity of the church, engaging in conversations with those with whom we disagree, seeking understanding and reconciliation. In this crucial time in church and culture, the Covenant Network remains committed to serving the church, believing that Jesus Christ has already made us one and that we are better equipped to carry out our larger ministry and witness when we are together.

Saturdays this fall – CovNet may be coming to you!

After a successful series of events around the country in 2012-13, the Covenant Network is continuing its new pattern of alternating a national conference one year (as in fall of 2013) with a series of **regional conferences** the other (coming in late 2014 and early 2015). While all the events will include worship, a featured speaker, and opportunities for fellowship and discussion, each will have its own local flavor.

We are currently in conversations about scheduling one-day conferences in **Southern California, the Philadelphia area, Central Illinois, Virginia, Texas, and more**. Watch for details coming soon – and if you are interested in hosting, we'd still love to hear from you!

More on Marriage Matters...

Our website has a full collection of resources on the biblical, theological, and polity issues facing the church and society around the subject of marriage.

Find out more at: www.covnetpres.org/marriage-resources/.

And for more information on the business and events at General Assembly, visit:

www.covnetpres.org/221st-general-assembly-2014/.