

## Looking toward the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly

June 21 - 28, 2008, in San Jose, California



 Do justice Love kindness  
Walk humbly with your God

**A gift from  
the Witherspoon Society**

**to commissioners  
and advisory delegates**

**with our hope that we can  
come together in San Jose**

**to  
“let justice roll down  
like waters,”**

**and to**

**build bridges of peace  
among us  
and in God’s world**

See back cover for a list of contents



The Co-Moderator's Column

## A word of welcome

from Jake Young



Jake Young

**To commissioners and advisory delegates to the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly –**

Congratulations! Your Presbytery has entrusted you with a serious and sacred obligation – one that, by Tuesday of General Assembly, may feel like an onerous task. That's why you should join more than four hundred other Presbyterians on Tuesday night at the Witherspoon Dance Party! (Fairmont Ball Room, 9pm-1am)

But the Witherspoon Society is about much more than dancing and affirming the Creator's gifts of grape and barley. For more than 35 years, we have been the only multi-issue affinity group in the PC(USA) whose major focus is seeking and working for peace and justice. We are progressive in our theology and, therefore, concerned to listen to and work with the poor and the marginalized in all we do.

At GA, affinity groups advocate for their favorite issues. This happens in a variety of ways. Be attentive to the different groups present. Ask yourself, "What do they advocate?" Just as important, ask "How do they advocate?" Advocacy can be a high calling. It can also be something else. Who benefits from the advocacy of a certain group? Is it those who need advocacy or the comfortable, the powerful, the privileged few? If the latter, then we don't use the word "advocate." Instead we say, "lobbyist."

You are the trustee of your Presbytery. Unlike a representative, you are not bound by the opinions of your constituency. Your sole guide is your conscience. (Your prayerful conscience, we all hope.) Along with all the reading of business you'll have to do, you have the privilege and responsibility of watching the elaborate dance that is a GA. Observe your fellow Commissioners and Advisory Delegates. Observe the affinity groups. Pay attention to the dozens upon dozens of national staff who work so hard to help this great ballet happen.

Most of all, get as much sleep as possible . . . except for Tuesday night!

See you at the Dance.

Yours in Christ,  
Jake Young

## We invite you to join us!

**If you're looking for a community of progressive Presbyterians, witnessing and working for peace and justice in God's world, we can help provide you with information, theological reflection, and companionship on the journey.**

**Just use the return envelope in the center of this newsletter, or contact our Membership Coordinator:**

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# Witherspoon events at the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly

You're invited!

Friday, June 20, 1:00 to 3:30 pm

## Semper Reformanda Pre-Assembly Conversation

(sponsored by the Witherspoon Society)

This is an occasion for progressive Presbyterians to gather informally as they begin to arrive for the General Assembly, to talk about issues coming to the Assembly and other concerns. Special speakers will include Rita Nakashima Brock and Noelle Damico.

Dr. Brock has written extensively on issues of justice, including human trafficking in Southeast Asia. She will touch on themes discussed in her forthcoming book (with Rebecca Parker) entitled *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire*. Her book will be for sale at the Cokesbury Bookstore, where she will be signing it.

Noelle Damico is director of the Presbyterian Hunger Program's Fair Food campaign, and the PC(USA)'s liaison with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in their campaign for improved wages and working conditions in Florida's tomato fields.

### Ramada Hotel "Upper Room,"

455 S. 2nd Street, San Jose

Tickets will be free for TSADs. For others: \$15.

Saturday, June 21, 7:00-9:00am

## Commissioners' Orientation Breakfast

This breakfast meeting is offered especially for GA commissioners and others who will be involved in the Assembly. Brief presentations will be given on the many important issues coming before the Assembly – analyzing them from a progressive point of view.

It will also give you a good chance to get acquainted with other commissioners.

The event is free for commissioners and advisory delegates. Others may order tickets through the General Assembly ticket service, at \$15.

### Ramada Hotel "Upper Room,"

455 S. 2nd Street, San Jose

Sunday, June 22, 1:00-3:00 pm

## Witherspoon Awards Luncheon

The keynote speaker is Carol Hovis, who is the Executive Director of the Marin Interfaith Council and an ordained Presbyterian minister member of Redwoods Presbytery. Out of her experience she will address the intersection of interfaith relationships with peace and justice advocacy. (See more about her on page 4.)

The Andrew Murray Award will be presented to the Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick, an outstanding leader of the Presbyterian Church (USA), as he retires as Stated Clerk. The Whole Gospel Congregation Award will be given to First Presbyterian Church of Palo Alto, California

Witherspoon's biennial Membership Meeting will be held immediately after the luncheon.

Convention Center Ballroom

Tickets \$45

Tuesday, June 24, 9:00pm-1:00am

## Witherspoon Party and Dance!

Time for a break! This is a great chance to relax and enjoy great music, dancing and conversation – and an informal place to meet and mingle with others at the Assembly.

Convention Center Ballroom

Tickets \$20, available at the door!

**Finding the "Upper Room"** is easy. It is at the Ramada Limited, where most of the Witherspoon board members will be staying, at 455 South 2nd Street, about a five minute walk from the Convention Center. Just go north-east on San Salvador St., just across Market Street from the Convention Center. Turn right on Second St., and go about a half block southeast. The Ramada Inn will be on your left; the stairs to the Upper Room are toward the far end of the complex.

**The deadline for ordering tickets has passed, but you may be able to buy them at the ticket counter in the lobby of the convention center. We will do our best to keep some available. Tickets for the Witherspoon Dance can be purchased at the door!**

## Introducing the Witherspoon Awards Luncheon speaker, the Rev. Carol M. Hovis

Carol is an ordained Presbyterian minister (PCUSA) and the Executive Director of the Marin Interfaith Council, since July 2004. Prior to her position with MIC, she served for six years as the Community Advocate with the San Rafael Canal Ministry in San Rafael, CA.

She moved to northern California from northern Virginia in January 1998. Born and raised in metropolitan Washington, DC, Carol attended college in Pennsylvania and Union Theological Seminary in New York City. She returned to the DC area in 1988 to serve a Presbyterian congregation in Fairfax, VA. After nine years on staff at Providence Presbyterian Church, seven as associate pastor, she resigned in November 1997 to begin an eleven-month personal sabbatical which took her to northern California. In September 2000, Carol received the Diploma in the Art of Spiritual Direction from the San Francisco Theological Seminary in San Anselmo, CA.

### Carol Hovis describes her work:

### Seeking justice with patience, while building interfaith community

When I served on the Board of the Marin Interfaith Council (MIC) from 2003-2004, I experienced the challenges of addressing social and public policy issues amongst a diversity of colleagues who represented 8 religious traditions. Because we were essentially re-building the Marin Interfaith Council after a low period of several years, creating healthy and respectful relationships was paramount to our process. Thus, I found myself praying for much patience and compassion as my justice-seeking heart wanted to stir things up.

When I became the Executive Director of MIC in July 2004, I knew that my new role required my commitment to ongoing relationship-building, while at the same time I believed there was a way to marry the interreligious values of community, compassion and peace with my particular passions for truth-telling, community-organizing and action. Time would tell.

It was a great moment in April 2006, almost 2 years later, when the MIC Board of Directors, representing 14 congregations or nonprofits and 10 faith traditions, voted unanimously to approve its Board Resolution, **Compassionate Immigration Reform**. [The full text of the Resolution is



**Carol M. Hovis**

on the next page.] At the same Board meeting, the Directors also approved a Resolution entitled **Moratorium on Executions in the State of California**.

In my talk for the Witherspoon luncheon, I will address how a vitally active and diverse interfaith council has been able to debate, discuss and decide on contentious social issues facing our nation, our state and our county.

**If you're at the Assembly ...**

**Please visit our booth –  
# 117 in the Exhibit Hall!**

You'll find it, we hope, located on an outer wall where people will enter/exit the hall.

Our next door neighbors will be the Knox Fellowship and Amish Furniture.  
(Should be a place for interesting conversations!).

We'll provide you with a warm welcome, useful handouts, up-to-date information, a chance to sit and chat – and perhaps most important, a huge selection of buttons and M&Ms  
(or turn them around so they'll be W&Ws).

**MARIN INTERFAITH COUNCIL  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
RESOLUTION**

**COMPASSIONATE IMMIGRATION REFORM**

We, the members of the Board of Directors of the Marin Interfaith Council, aware of the current national debate regarding immigration reform, call attention to the moral dimensions of any immigration policy. As religious and ethical persons, we believe any and all public policies must honor and uphold the inherent human dignity of each person.

Our representative faith traditions teach us to welcome the stranger in our midst with love and compassion. We recognize that current immigration law and enforcement policies are broken and call for compassionate, just reform.

As leaders in our communities, we witness the human consequences of the current immigration system. We see and hear the suffering of immigrant families who have been abused at the hands of smugglers, who have lost loved ones in the desert, and who have experienced exploitation in the workplace, both in their countries of origin and here in the United States. We call for our elected officials and the media to recognize that the rising tide of immigration to the United States from many of the world's poorest countries is directly related to long-standing economic and political policy decisions of our country, other rich nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

To the extent that they are humane and fair, we support the call for the United States government to enforce its laws and control our borders. At the same time, we support comprehensive immigration reform to include legalization for the millions of immigrants who are already here and the creation of humane, effective and fair channels for future immigrants to come to the United States.

We reject the punitive nature of House Resolution 4437 and call for comprehensive and just immigration reform which will balance national security with the general welfare of all persons.

April 20, 2006  
Marin Interfaith Council  
Board of Directors

*Plan now to join in a major  
Ghost Ranch event  
this summer!*

**July 28 - August 3, 2008**

## **Paths toward Peace and Justice:**

**Spirituality, Earth-Care,  
and the Prophetic Word  
in a time of Violence**

**details on page 32**

### **“Let Justice Roll Down”**

#### **The Witherspoon Society Mission**

We are a network of concerned Presbyterians responding to God's call to let justice roll down, and to work for healing in a wounded world.

Our mission is:

- To listen and learn from those who have been silenced as we seek solidarity with them;
- To nurture the prophetic voice of the church;
- To equip Presbyterians for faithful participation in the church and world;
- To challenge unjust relationships of power;
- To advocate for peace, justice, the integrity of creation, and the full inclusion of all God's people in church and society.

We seek to revitalize the church's proclamation and action, informed by the whole gospel, and living into the promise of God's reign.

## The new Social Creed for the 21st Century

by Gene TeSelle, Witherspoon Issues Analyst

The 216th General Assembly called for conversations and studies to commemorate the centennial of the 1908 Social Creed of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. That statement engaged churches in advocating for reforms such as an end to child labor, the six-day week, occupational safety, a living wage, and other steps aimed at moving American society closer to what a “Christ-like God” was believed to want for all Americans.

Beyond celebrating the past, the action called for looking forward with “a survey of key Christian principles to guide 21st century Presbyterians and others in addressing major and likely future concerns, such as the lack of health insurance for 44 million Americans, the outsourcing of jobs to countries without human rights or environmental safeguards, and the impact of growing economic inequality on our democracy ...”

Out of that study has come a new, ecumenical “Social Creed for the Twenty-First Century,” which is being submitted to this Assembly for action.

Witherspoon Issues Analyst GeneTeSelle has written a number of essays over the past two years exploring the background of this new statement. Here, to help those preparing to deliberate on it at the Assembly, he lays out some of the distinctively Presbyterian responses to that 1908 ecumenical creed during the past 100 years.

The 1908 Social Creed became part of the mainstream of the Presbyterian Church. In an altered version it was adopted by the General Assemblies of 1910 (the one that also adopted the five “fundamentals”!) and 1920. Being Presbyterians, they wanted more biblical and theological grounding, and five Presbyterian churches jointly adopted a statement in 1914. Here are the essential texts:

### The 1910 Statement by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

A Special Committee on Social Problems made its report in 1910. It noted that “the industrial organization of society” had created new problems, and that moral and religious ideas “have not kept pace with industrial and commercial progress.” “Conscience is aroused, but perplexed,” it went on to say. And yet it is Christianity, or more precisely the gospel that it preaches, that “has largely created the present demands for social and economic justice.”

*After a prefatory statement of beliefs (that Jesus is the final authority over all aspects of life; that righteousness in the midst of the complexities of modern conditions is realizable only through the principles of the kingdom of God; that the church must show how these principles apply to human affairs; that the church’s teaching should be related to “present practical conditions,” and that “the time has come” for the Presbyterian Church to “speak its mind concerning particular problems now threatening society”), it made fourteen declarations, based on those of the Federal Council but thoroughly rewriting them.<sup>1</sup>*

We hold that our Church ought to declare:

1. For the acknowledgment of the obligations of wealth. . . .
2. For the application of Christian principles to the conduct of industrial organizations, whether of capital or labor.
3. For a more equitable distribution of wealth. . . .
4. For the abatement of poverty. . . .
5. For the abolition of child-labor — that is, the protection of children from exploitation in industry and trade, and from work that is dwarfing, degrading, or morally unwholesome.
6. For such regulation of the conditions of the industrial occupation of women as shall safeguard the physical and moral health of themselves, the community, and future generations.
7. For adequate protection of working people from dangerous machinery and objectionable conditions of labor, and from occupational disease.
8. For some provision by which the burden imposed by injuries and deaths from industrial accidents shall not be permitted to rest upon the injured person or his family.

9. For the release of every worker from work one day in seven. . .

10. For such ordering of the hours and requirements of labor as to make them compatible with healthy physical, mental and moral life.

11. For the employment of the methods of conciliation and arbitration in industrial disputes.

12. For the removal of unsanitary dwellings and the relief or prevention of congestion of population, so that there may be the proper physical basis for Christian family life.

13. For the application of Christian methods in the care of dependent and incapable persons, by the adequate equipment and humane and scientific administration of public institutions concerned therewith.

14. For the development of a Christian spirit in the attitude of society toward offenders against the law. . . .

These were followed by recommendations for church action at every level.

### **The 1914 “United Declaration” of the Presbyterian Churches**

*A joint committee was appointed by the General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S., the United Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., and the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Synod, to give biblical and theological grounding to social concerns. Its report was approved by all of the General Assemblies in 1914.<sup>2</sup>*

V. We believe that the social conditions of our day require emphasis upon the divine message for the following reasons:

1. The tremendous advance in our time of scientific discovery and invention and of commercial, industrial and civic enterprises by which men have been brought into closer relations of reciprocal dependence and service towards one another as individuals and towards society as an organized body.

2. The vast increase of wealth, its unequal and often unjust distribution, and the consequent increase of the power of the privileged few to exploit their fellow-men for private and selfish ends.

3. The development of great business corporations which discharge many of the functions once belonging to individuals, and as a result of this the weakening of the sense of individual responsibility for social wrongs.

4. The fostering or protection of vice as an instrument to private gain or to selfish ambition for place and power.

5. The submergence of large classes in ignorance and poverty so that the difficulty of reaching them with the message of Christ is greatly increased.

These reasons require that the Church of Jesus Christ, which takes its stand as Christ did against the sins of social injustice and tyranny, as well as against other forms of sin, should emphasize:

1. The duty of man towards his fellow-men as individuals and toward society, with reference to the life that now is as well as to the life which is to come.

2. The duty of men to put into practice the Christian principles of love, justice and truth in all their social relations, economic, industrial or political; as officials or citizens of the state, as employers and employees, as capitalists and laborers, as stockholders or officers in corporations, and in all similar relationships.

3. The responsibility of men both for the manner in which they acquire positions, possessions and power in their social relations, and for the manner in which, as stewards of God, they use these, lest, in the great day of judgment, they be found unfaithful.

4. The responsibility of every individual not only for those social wrongs to which he may be a contributing cause, but for those which, by his prayers and efforts, he could assist in abolishing.

5. The duty of Christian citizens to observe those principles of our religion which require that every man do his full share of the world’s work; which oppose injustice and tyranny, even when these are entrenched in the usages of our civilization; which lead men to endeavor to maintain themselves in a self-respecting, God-fearing way, this self-maintenance being understood to include a fair return for labor, sufficient to support the man and his family, conditions of labor that are safe and healthy, opportunity to provide against illness and old age, and relief from labor on one day in seven; which lead to movements to secure childhood against forced labor and woman against conditions degrading to womanhood.



6. The duty of every man to accept Jesus Christ and obey His teachings as the only cure for the injustice, tyranny and sins now looming so large upon the world's horizon.

### **The 1920 Statement of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.**

*The 1919 General Assembly had directed the Board of Home Missions to make a report on "the church and industry"; this was submitted the next year and was approved by that year's Assembly.<sup>3</sup> It reaffirmed the 1910 statement, which had already been reaffirmed in 1914, prefixed a doctrinal declaration about the ground and goal of social concern and the Christian approach to social progress. Then, under the subtitle "The Social Creed," the Assembly made additional statements on subjects "regarding which recent and contemporary developments seem to require the Church to speak":*

We hold that our Church ought to declare:

1. For the Christian social obligation resting upon every man, for his family, his community, his nation and the whole world.

2. For the Christian obligation to use wealth and power as trusts from God for fellowmen.

3. For the application of Christian principles to the conduct of industrial, agricultural and commercial organizations and relationships. Among these Christian principles are:

(a) The sacredness of life and the supreme worth of personality, so that a man must always be treated as an end and never as a means.

(b) The brotherhood of man, demanding for every worker a democratic status in industry, and mutual understanding, good will, coöperation and a common incentive among all engaged in it.

4. For the right and duty to work, since human society cannot endure unless each of its members has the opportunity and feels the obligation to serve the common good to the extent of his ability.

5. For a worthy and just return to every man according to his contribution to the common welfare, and for a social order in which no man shall live on the fruits of another man's labor and no man shall be denied the fruits of his own labor. "The laborer is worthy of his hire." Worthiness of return for

honest work is measured today first of all by the standard of "a living wage," by which is meant a wage adequate to maintain the worker and his family in health and honor, and to enable him to dispense with the subsidiary earnings of his children up to the age of sixteen.

6. For the abatement of poverty, some of which is due to vice, idleness or improvidence, but much also to low wages, preventable disease, uncompensated accidents, insufficient education and other conditions for which society is responsible; and the Spirit of Christ requires that society shall make provision for adequate education for all, for public health and for the relief of those in want.

7. For the protection of children from exploitation in industry, agriculture or trade and from work that is dwarfing, degrading or morally unwholesome.

8. For such regulation of the conditions of occupation of women as shall secure an adequate living wage and at the same time safeguard their physical and moral health and that of the community and of future generations.

9. For the safeguarding of working people from harmful conditions of labor, dangerous machinery and occupational disease, and for the education of the workers in avoiding hazards in connection with their employment.

10. For the assumption by industry of the burdens entailed by industrial accidents, disease and death, and for the training of injured workers for continued production and self-support.

11. For the release of every worker for rest one day in seven, which, wherever possible, should be the Lord's Day.

12. For the ordering of the hours of labor to secure at once sufficient production and sufficient leisure for the physical, mental and moral well-being of the workers.

13. For the employment of the methods of investigation, conference, conciliation and arbitration in industrial disputes.

14. For the inviolability of agreements, both in letter and in spirit, since good faith is the foundation of social and industrial stability and progress.

15. For the right of wage-earners to organize and to deal, through their chosen representatives, with the management of the industries in which they work, because an adequate representation of all parties (Labor, Capital, Management and the Public) in industry is needed for production and to

secure attention for the human factors involved.

These affirmations were followed by recommendations for action by the General Assembly, ministers and congregations, and educational institutions. A climactic statement was formulated this way:

That the General Assembly urge Christians everywhere to insist that labor is incumbent upon all; that idleness, whether among the rich or poor, is sinful; that it is wrong to take advantage of the necessities of the public, to adulterate goods or to charge exorbitant prices for them; that such industries as can only be carried on by methods which degrade human beings ought not to be carried on at all; that if an institution or an organization is socially harmful no vested interest in it is a valid plea for its maintenance.

### The Presbyterian Confession of 1967

The reconciliation of humanity through Jesus Christ makes it plain that enslaving poverty in a world of abundance is an intolerable violation of God's good creation. Because Jesus identified himself with the needy and exploited, the cause of the world's poor is the cause of his disciples. The church cannot condone poverty, whether it is the product of unjust social structures, exploitation of the defenseless, lack of national resources, absence of technological understanding, or rapid expansion of populations. The church calls each of us to use our abilities, our possessions, and the fruits of technology as gifts entrusted to us by God for the maintenance of God's family and the advancement of the common welfare. It encourages those forces in human society that raise people's hopes for better conditions and provide them with opportunity for a decent living. A church that is indifferent to poverty, or evades responsibility in economic affairs, or is open to one social class only, or expects gratitude for its beneficence makes a mockery of reconciliation and offers no acceptable worship to God.<sup>4</sup>

With an urgency born of . . . hope the church applies itself to present tasks and strives for a better world. It does not identify limited progress with the reign of God on earth, nor does it despair in the face of disappointment and defeat. In steadfast hope the church looks beyond all partial achievement to the final triumph of God.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1910), pp. 229-33.

<sup>2</sup> *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (1914), pp. 52-56; *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* (1914), pp. 161-64.

<sup>3</sup> *Minutes of the General Assembly of the P.C.U.S.A.* (1920), pp. 181-86.

<sup>4</sup> Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Book of Confessions*, 9.46 (II, A, 4, c).

<sup>5</sup> *Book of Confessions*, 9.55.

#### For further reading:

*Prayers for the New Social Awakening*, edited by Christian Iosso and Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty (Westminster-John Knox, \$19.95).

*Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21st Century: The Classic That Woke Up the Church*, by Walter Rauschenbusch, with current responses by Phyllis Tribble, Tony Campolo, Joan Chittister, Stanley Hauerwas, Cornel West, James A. Forbes, Jr., and Jim Wallis (HarperCollins, \$27.95).

*Toward an Evangelical Public Policy*, edited by Ronald J. Sider and Diane Knippers (Baker Books, \$24.99).

*The Call to Conversion: Why Faith Is Always Personal but Never Private* (HarperSanFrancisco, \$13.95).

### Stereotyped reactions from the Presbyterian right

Alan Wisdom of Presbyterian Action, a project of the conservative Institute on Religion and Democracy, has criticized the NCC Social Creed as "liberal," "a laundry list of primarily progressive causes" ([www.ird-renew.org](http://www.ird-renew.org), 12/4/2007). A major criticism is that most problems are solved by government action, while Wisdom seems to tilt toward privatized approaches. Mention of "greed" arouses a defense of the profit motive, which is described as meeting customers' needs at the lowest cost. Tax reforms are put down as "forced redistribution of wealth." The "fair trade" movement's support for protection of local economies and cultures is met with the brash and insensitive suggestion that individuals might need to *change* their local economies and cultures, which totally ignores the question of *who* makes those changes. While Wisdom acknowledges that this new Social Creed, unlike the one a hundred years ago, uses theological beliefs as its framework, he immediately faults it for



not going further into theology, which, of course, was not the task of a brief document like this.

James Berkley of the IRD more recently criticized the preparation of a new Social Creed for the 21st century under the auspices of the PC(USA)'s Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, mentioning once again the link with the National Council of Churches ([www.theird.org/NETCOMMUNITY](http://www.theird.org/NETCOMMUNITY), January 25, 2008). He says, "Liberal or progressive Presbyterians will laud it; conservative or evangelical Presbyterians will harbor some reservations about the creed's theology and assumptions. There are definitely two sides to the matter." He goes on to criticize the spending of denominational money on production of "a slick, half-hour video to sell the creed with affecting music, stirring images, and carefully scripted patter from a progressive theologian."

The Institute on Religion and Democracy has the rather narrow agenda of defending free enterprise economics and an assertive foreign policy. While it often works together with other conservative Presbyterian groups, its agenda is not of great importance to most of the evangelical organizations.

Most recently, Bob Davis, editor of Presbyblog and a commissioner to the 2008 General Assembly, criticized the draft Social Creed ([presbyblog.com](http://presbyblog.com), April 17, 2008). He objected to its being called a "consensus statement," which he read as saying that it speaks for him; he calls it a "spiritual blank check." He raises the objection, heard at every Assembly, that commissioners are overwhelmed by the amount of material and will be unable to read it carefully. His own approach is (1) to vote No unless there is a compelling reason to vote Yes and (2) to require a vote of the presbyteries on all social policy statements.

Davis scoffs at the mention of a "family-sustaining wage," and asks whether it is more than a living wage. Well, it's not a new idea. The 1914 joint Presbyterian statement includes "a fair return for labor, sufficient to support the man and his family," and the 1920 statement calls for a "living wage," "adequate to sustain the worker and his family in health and honor." Who is out of touch with the Presbyterian heritage?

In recent years it has often been asserted (usually by pundits looking for a story or ready to invent one) that Republicans are religious and Democrats are secular. But it has never been true, as Presbyterians who know their fellow Presbyterians can testify. And in recent years the phenomenal popularity of Jim Wallis and the Sojourners Community has demonstrated to a broad public that evangelicals are often social progressives.

A national survey of likely voters by the Barna Group found that born-again voters, who make up about half of the total number of votes cast, now lean toward the Democratic Party (this was made public on February 4, 2008, and it was linked to by PresbyWeb, a conservative web site). Out of the born-again adults likely to vote in November, 40% said they would choose the Democratic candidate, and only 29% would choose the Republican. The remaining 29% were not sure, preferring to vote on the basis of the candidate, not party affiliation.

Those who characterized themselves as "evangelicals" were more conservative in their leanings. But even out of this group, "a whopping 40%" were undecided. George Barna concluded that evangelicals are frustrated about the moral condition of the country and uncomfortable with the way things are going in the world.

In early May, a group of seventy evangelical leaders issued the Evangelical Manifesto ([www.anevangelicalmanifesto.com](http://www.anevangelicalmanifesto.com)), warning about the dangers of engaging in partisan politics, and specifically urging evangelicals to broaden their agenda beyond opposition to abortion and gay rights. There has been a tendency, they said, for evangelicals to become "the regime at prayer," with the result that they become "useful idiots" in the strategy of political parties.

## A Social Creed for the Twenty-First Century

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We churches of the United States have a message of hope for a fearful time. Just as the churches responded to the harshness of early twentieth century industrialization with a prophetic “Social Creed” in 1908, so in our era of globalization we offer a vision of a society that shares more and consumes less, seeks compassion over suspicion and equality over domination, and finds security in joined hands rather than massed arms. Inspired by Isaiah’s vision of a “peaceable kingdom,” we honor the dignity of every person and the intrinsic value of every creature, and pray and work for the day when none “labor in vain, or bear children for calamity” (Isa. 65:23). We do so as disciples of the One who came “that [all] may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10), and stand in solidarity with Christians and with all who strive for justice around the globe.

In faith, responding to our Creator, we celebrate the full humanity of each woman, man, and child, all created in the divine image as individuals of infinite worth, by working for:

- Full civil, political, and economic rights for women and men of all races.
- Abolition of forced labor, human trafficking, and the exploitation of children.
- Employment for all, at a family-sustaining living wage, with equal pay for comparable work.
- The rights of workers to organize, and to share in workplace decisions and productivity growth.
- Protection from dangerous working conditions, with time and benefits to enable full family life.
- A system of criminal rehabilitation, based on restorative justice and an end to the death penalty.

In the love incarnate in Jesus, despite the world’s sufferings and evils, we honor the deep connections within our human family and seek to awaken a new spirit of community, by working for:

- Abatement of hunger and poverty, and enactment of policies benefiting the most vulnerable.
- High quality public education for all and universal, affordable, and accessible healthcare.
- An effective program of social security during sickness, disability, and old age.
- Tax and budget policies that reduce disparities between rich and poor, strengthen democracy, and

provide greater opportunity for everyone within the common good.

- Just immigration policies that protect family unity, safeguard workers’ rights, require employer accountability, and foster international cooperation.
- Sustainable communities marked by affordable housing, access to good jobs, and public safety.
- Public service as a high vocation, with real limits on the power of private interests in politics.

In hope sustained by the Holy Spirit, we pledge to be peacemakers in the world and stewards of God’s good creation, by working for:

- Adoption of simpler lifestyles for those who have enough; grace over greed in economic life.
- Access for all to clean air and water and healthy food, through wise care of land and technology.
- Sustainable use of earth’s resources, promoting alternative energy sources and public transportation with binding covenants to reduce global warming and protect populations most affected.
- Equitable global trade and aid that protects local economies, cultures, and livelihoods.
- Peacemaking through multilateral diplomacy rather than unilateral force, the abolition of torture, and a strengthening of the United Nations and the rule of international law.
- Nuclear disarmament and redirection of military spending to more peaceful and productive uses.
- Cooperation and dialogue for peace and environmental justice among the world’s religions.

We – individual Christians and churches – commit ourselves to a culture of peace and freedom that embraces non-violence, nurtures character, treasures the environment, and builds community, rooted in a spirituality of inner growth with outward action. We make this commitment together – as members of Christ’s body, led by the one Spirit—trusting in the God who makes all things new.

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The complete report to GA, including recommendations and rationale, is online at <http://www.pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?m=ro&id=1629&promoid=27>

## Overtures Dealing with Ordination of Gay and Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Persons

Gene TeSelle

The “ordination question” is an old one in the Presbyterian Church, going back to the 1970s and the “definitive guidance” issued by the 1978 General Assembly which cast doubt on the ordination of persons with same-sex orientation. Several overtures coming to this GA include language rescinding that definitive guidance.

Debate was intensified with the adoption of G-6.0106b (“Amendment B”) in 1996-97, with its restrictive language. Several attempts have been made to delete or amend this article, losing narrowly in the presbyteries.

As the church tried to deal with serious differences, the 2001 General Assembly appointed the Theological Task Force (TTF) on the Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church (PUP), and its key recommendations were adopted by the 2006 General Assembly, including a new Authoritative Interpretation (AI) that affirmed paragraph G-6.0108 in the Form of Government. This defends freedom of conscience in all matters that are not “essentials” of faith, polity, or practice.

Tensions were increased earlier this year when the Permanent Judicial Commission (PJC) of the General Assembly ruled that one restrictive provision of G-6.0106b (“fidelity and chastity,” not all the other practices that the confessions call sin) is, in effect, an “essential” that must be upheld. This went contrary to the letter and spirit of the 2006 AI.

Some of the overtures coming to this GA are responses to these most recent developments, the 2006 AI and the recent PJC decision. Others deal with long-term questions about the church’s attitude toward same-sex relationships and specifically the restrictions in G-6.0106b.

## Overtures related to G-6.0108 and the “PUP AI”

In the wake of the PJC decision making one sentence in G-6.0106b an absolute requirement for ordination, an overture from the Presbytery of John Knox calls for a new AI declaring that G-6.0108 applies *equally* to all ordination standards. This overture has been advocated by Mark Achtemeier, a conservative member of the Theological Task Force. (Some angry conservatives, apparently viewing him as a traitor, are calling this the “Achtemeier overture.”) Adopting this AI is certainly the least that this Assembly can do to get the church back on the course set by the 2006 AI.



Issues Analyst Gene TeSelle

Many presbyteries are bringing overtures that reinforce the 2006 AI and, building on the experience of sessions and presbyteries, seek its more effective implementation. The overtures

(a) commend those presbyteries and sessions that have incorporated theological reflection and prayerful discernment into their examination procedures;

(b) direct the Stated Clerk to collect models of such procedures and make them available to the whole church; and

(c) remind governing bodies to take theological reflection and discernment seriously as they carry out their constitutional responsibilities.

These overtures come from Scioto Valley, Cayuga-Syracuse, Giddings-Lovejoy, Redwoods, Maumee Valley, Middle Tennessee, Cascades, Western Reserve, Albany, National Capital, and Heartland.

But not all presbyteries favor the 2006 AI. Their overtures follow several different strategies:

(1) rescind the AI (South Louisiana, St. Andrew, Sacramento, Huntingdon, and Central Washington);

(2) amend the AI with additional wording to make it more restrictive (St. Andrew, Pittsburgh);

(3) offer substitute wording that is more restrictive (St. Andrew, Huntingdon, Pittsburgh);

(4) make all the “shalls” in the Form of Government essential for ordination (Cherokee, Los Ranchos, Charleston-Atlantic).

### Overtures related to G-6.0106b

A number of overtures call for an amendment to the Form of Government, *deleting* G-6.0106b (“Amendment B”) and issuing a new AI. These come from Hudson River, National Capital, Baltimore, Albany, New York City, Redwoods, and Genesee Valley.

Various people have commented that this approach, while it would remove a paragraph that has caused much hurt and division in the church, is simply negative, trying to remove it from the face of the earth.

They favor a “let’s make it better” approach, and there are several overtures that offer wording to *replace* the unjust and prejudicial language in G-6.0106b. No fewer than three different choices are being offered. One formulation comes from Boston; another from Cincinnati and Santa Fe; a third from New Hope.

From the conservative side, an overture from St. Andrew would amend this paragraph with stricter wording. And a proposed AI from Huntingdon would declare it an essential of Reformed faith and polity.

### Overtures dealing with marriage

The definition of marriage in the Directory for Worship has led to several controversies in past General Assemblies. Overtures proposing a broader definition of marriage as a “covenant between two people” have been sent by Baltimore and Hudson River.

An overture from New Brunswick and Denver would affirm equal civil protections for same-sex couples and call for a special committee that would study marriage laws and their effects and examine the unique needs in pastoral care for same-sex couples.

These overtures dealing with marriage have perhaps gained urgency in this Assembly, with the recent decision by the GA’s Permanent Judicial Commission in the case of the Rev. Janie Spahr. See the article on pages 16-17.

### Overtures dealing with the Book of Confessions

In the Heidelberg Catechism, the answer to Q. 87 includes “homosexual perversion” as one of the marks of those who cannot inherit the kingdom of God (C-4.087). People who know the text of the catechism from other Reformed churches, or have looked up the original German, will know that this language is not there. It was added in the 1960s, when the entire Book of Confessions was adopted in order to include more of the rich tradition of the Reformed churches. Its wording, furthermore, seems to make sexual orientation, not behavior alone, into a sin.

A number of overtures call for a more authentic wording, with three different approaches.

Some ask, in a general way, that the translation of the Catechism be replaced with a more faithful one (Northern Kansas, Pittsburgh, New York City, Chicago).

Two (from Boston and Winnebago) would adopt the translation now used by the Christian Reformed Church. [Author’s note: this translation, while accurate, loses much of the colloquial force of the original German and thus takes on a more dogmatic tone.]

One, from Newark, offers specific changes of wording not only for this but for three other passages in the Heidelberg Catechism.

For more on the Heidelberg Catechism, see the article on pages 14-16.

### Where we stand:

The Witherspoon Society has championed inclusiveness in the church for the last 35 years. It opposed the 1978 definitive guidance and the 1996 “Amendment B.” It has sought removal or alteration of G-6.0106b. It favored the adoption of the 2006 AI, while regarding it as only a partial measure, and it deplores the PJC decision that goes against the letter and the spirit of that AI. We urge the Assembly to adopt another AI that reaffirms the 2006 AI, and to send to the presbyteries an amendment that removes the prejudicial language of G-6.0106b. We also commend the overtures regarding marriage and the Heidelberg Catechism.

## Overtures Seek Authentic, Reliable and Faithful Heidelberg Catechism

By John E. Harris

Among the overtures Commissioners to the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly will consider, two request a more historically faithful, honest, and accurate translation of the Heidelberg Catechism than the one currently in the *Book of Confessions*.

At the center of the controversy are questions and answers 19, 33, 55, and especially 87 (*Book of Confessions* 4.087), one of the few references to “homosexual perversion” in the *Book of Confessions*. Considering that the Heidelberg Catechism was written in German in 1563 and the word “homosexual” is a term that originated late in the nineteenth century and did not come into widespread use in European languages until the twentieth century, the translation problems are apparent. In fact, of all the many English translations of the Heidelberg Catechism made since the sixteenth century, all but one, the 1962 Miller-Osterhaven translation contained in the *Book of Confessions*, lack any reference to homosexuality.

Concerns about the translation of the Heidelberg Catechism in the *Book of Confessions* were first raised after Johanna W.H.van Wijk-Bos, (Professor of Old Testament, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary), who had studied the original German text of Heidelberg extensively as a young woman in The Netherlands in preparation for her confirmation in the Reformed Church there. She discovered the error through a perusal of an article in *Monday Morning* of April 22, 1996. That article quoted the Heidelberg in a way that to her eyes

was totally unfamiliar. After she mentioned the matter to her then still-to-be colleague Christopher Elwood (Assistant Professor of Historical Theology, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary), the two of them put their minds together to rebut the article in *Monday Morning* and to provide rationales for the overtures that went to the 1997 and 1998 Assemblies (their original article, *The Heidelberg Catechism and Homosexuality*, is available at [www.witherspoonsociety.org](http://www.witherspoonsociety.org)). While

the overtures brought to those two assemblies failed, more than ten years of reflection may prove that this part of the *Book of Confessions* is not only inaccurate but contains a distortion that needs to be corrected.

The 1962 Miller-Osterhaven translation became part of our *Book of Confessions* because the Special Committee on a Brief Contemporary Statement of Faith presented a report to the 1965 General Assembly of the UPCUSA to include it in a Book of Confessions. Presumably the committee chose this translation because it was the most recent at that time. Princeton Seminary Professor Emeritus Ed Dowey, chair of the Special Committee, later acknowledged that

Here are the two German versions, one in old German (1563) and one in easier to read spelling (from the German Reformed Church in the U.S. 1860), from *The Heidelberg Catechism in German, Latin and English: with an Historical Introduction* / Prepared and published by the direction of the German Reformed Church in the United States of America. *Tercentenary Edition* New York: Charles Scribner, 1863.

Frag 87: Können denn die nicht selig werden, die sich von irem undanckbaren unbussfertigen wandel zu Gott nicht bekehren?

Antwort: Keineswegs: denn, wie die Schrift saget: kein Unkeusscher, Abgöttlicher, Ehebrecher, Dieb, Geissiger, Trunkenpols, Lesterer, Rauber und dergleichen, wird das reich Gottes erben.

1860 version: Können denn die nicht selig werden, die sich von ihrem undankbaren unbussfertigen Wandel zu Gott nicht bekehren?

Keineswegs: denn, wie die Schrift sagt, kein Unkeuscher, Abgöttlicher, Ehebrecher, Dieb, Geiziger, Trunkenbold, Lasterer, Rauber und dergleichen wird das Reich Gottes erben.

Johanna W.H.van Wijk-Bos (Professor of Old Testament, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary) notes that in a footnote the original version refers then to 1 Cor.6; Eph.5 and 1 John 3. “You can tell even without knowing German” she writes, “that the two versions only differ in spelling. The words “homosexual perversion” are inserted between the adulterer and the thief in the Miller/Osterhaven version.”

both he and the committee as a whole were “guilty of negligence,” and that “there should have been thorough editorial work on all the documents,” but because of time pressures the committee settled for some brief spot-checking of the translation. The change to question 87 was not spotted. In Professors Dowey’s words, he was “dumbfounded that I and such careful scholars as [Leonard J.] Trinterud, [George S.] Hendry, [James D.] Smart, et al, failed to discover the illicit change.” Without recognizing that the authors’ words had been tampered with and without reviewing adequately the version of the document adopted, the denomination received the translation now presently in the *Book of Confessions*.

The problem with the words in the ’62 version of the answer to Q87 is not that it is a flawed translation. The problem, admitted by Osterhaven, is that they intentionally ignored the words of the original catechism and inserted, instead, the New English Bible translation of 1 Corinthians 6: 9-10 which was one of four Scriptural references footnoted by the writers of the catechism. Furthermore, the New English Bible translation of those now highly controversial verses was the first time in an English translation (including King James and the Revised Standard Version) that the Greek *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi* were translated as “homosexual perversion.” It was an editorial decision that violated the trust we place in translators to adhere to the words of the writers. This explains why other translations, including the one on the website of the conservative Westminster Theological Seminary, does not include “homosexual perversion,” as those are actual translations of the German and Latin in Q87, which was really a harmony of the vice lists that left out those two words, included only in I Corinthians 6:9-10, from the

four Scripture passages footnoted.

The more recent Christian Reformed Church (CRC) translation, prepared for the CRC and adopted by the Synod of 1975 with some editorial revisions made and approved by the Synod of 1988 (See *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* [Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1988]) is a more accurate and better translation than the 1962 Miller-Osterhaven translation because it is a livelier translation with a more contemporary feel. The liveliness comes, in part, from the fact that this is a translation of the German text rather than the Latin. There are no substantive differences in meaning, but the German gives an opportunity for a bit more vital rendering in contemporary English. The CRC translation is not a free translation. It stays close to the meaning of the original. It does not contain the outright errors included in the 1962 translation at questions 19, 33, 55, and 87, and avoids the carelessness of renderings that creep into the 1962 translation at other places.

The CRC, considered by some a more conservative denomination than the PC(USA), is a Reformed body with which we are in Full Communion. Adopting a translation of the Heidelberg Catechism that already enjoys constitutional status in a Reformed denomination with which we enjoy full communion would not only be a wise decision affirming our ecumenical agreements but save both time and money needed for preparing a new translation.

Overture 36 (OVT036), from the Presbytery of Northern Kansas, seeks appropriate steps to “restore The Heidelberg Catechism to an authentic and reliable English version of the historic document by replacing the 1962 translation, *The Heidelberg Catechism, 1563– 1963. 400th*

*Anniversary Edition*. [1962, United Church Press], with a translation that more faithfully renders the original text.” The presbyteries of Chicago, New York City (of which I am a member), and Pittsburgh have concurred with this overture.

OVT036 actually originated with Pittsburgh Presbytery. Kent Winters-Hazelton, the Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Lawrence, KS, gave a copy of Pittsburgh’s draft to an Adult Ed class that was studying Jack Rogers’ book. The class decided to bring the overture, as a concurrence, to Session. The session approved it and sent it to Presbytery. The Presbytery of Northern Kansas then approved it before Pittsburgh Presbytery, thus making Northern Kansas the Presbytery of Record.

Overture 45 (OVT045), from the Presbytery of Boston, would direct the Stated Clerk to request permission from the Christian Reformed Church in North America to print their 1988 translation of the Heidelberg Catechism in *The Book of Confessions* of the PC(USA), and if such permission is granted, to use that text as the official text of the Heidelberg Catechism until such time as directed otherwise by the General Assembly, and if such permission is not granted, to make a recommendation to the 219th General Assembly (2010) regarding the choice of an appropriate translation of the Heidelberg Catechism to be the official text in *The Book of Confessions*.” The Presbytery of Winnebago has concurred with this overture.

While both overtures are worthy of full consideration, Overture 36 is the better of the two. The rationale of Overture 36 mentions some of the history and many of the textual problems associated with the current translation of the Heidelberg Cat-

echism in the *Book of Confessions*, history and problems which beg for correction. It is also well footnoted. Additionally, the overture recognizes that replacing the current translation, even with an already existing translation, it is truly an “amendment” to the *Book of Confessions* and not a mere editorial change, a precedent established when the *Book of Confessions* was amended in 1999 by replacing the then current translation of the Nicene Creed with a new contemporary translation.

Overture 45, however, does bring to light in its rationale section a published assertion by Osterhaven that changes in the text of the answer to Question 87 “had been entirely intentional.” It also better establishes the ecumenical consensus for the more accurate and preferable CRC translation. Thus OVT036, while perhaps not as strong as OVT045, bolsters the need for action.

Once aware of this history, a Presbyterian may wonder how commissioners to the General Assembly cannot choose [could ever choose not] to be guided by the most authentic, reliable, faithful and accurate translation possible. Given our tradition of respecting scholarship, it seems inconceivable that one of these two overtures, perhaps in an amended form, cannot pass both the committee and the General Assembly and be sent to the presbyteries for their approval.

For a fuller discussion of the above issues, Commissioners and other readers are encouraged to look at Jack Rogers’ recent book, *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006, pp. 115-199), which has been sent to all commissioners and advisory delegates.

### The author

The Rev. John E. Harris is serving as Designated Pastor of North Presbyterian of Flushing, NY. He is also the Membership Co-ordinator of the Witherspoon Society.

Kent Winters-Hazelton, Johanna W.H. van Wijk-Bos, and Janet Edwards provided assistance with this article.

For further discussion of the Heidelberg Catechism, please go to [www.witherspoonsociety.org](http://www.witherspoonsociety.org), where you will find an essay by Professors Johanna Bos and Christopher Elwood of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, who have studied in depth the use (or misuse) of the term “homosexuality” in the translation of the Catechism which is currently included in the PC(USA) *Book of Confessions*.

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## The PJC Decision on Same-Gender Unions

by Gene TeSelle

A “late-breaking issue” that will doubtless create much heat and hopefully a bit of light is the decision in late April by the GA’s Permanent Judicial Commission (PJC for short) in a case involving the Rev. Janie Spahr, Presbyterian minister who serves in the GLBT community. She had conducted two same-gender services in 2004 and 2005. In response to a complaint, the PJC of the Synod of the Pacific directed Redwoods Presbytery to issue a rebuke to her.

### The Decision

The GA’s PJC looked at the Directory for Worship (W-4.9001), which defines marriage as between a man and a woman. In addition, the 1991 GA had issued an Authoritative Interpretation (AI for short) that did not prohibit the blessing of same-sex unions, but declared that they should not be called weddings and should not even look like them (this is a difficult call to make, of course).

In view of these authoritative statements, says the PJC, Spahr could not be held guilty “of doing that which, by definition, cannot be done.”

It went on, “One cannot characterize same-sex ceremonies as marriages for the purpose of disciplining a minister and at the same time declare that such ceremonies are not marriages for legal or ecclesiastical purposes.”

The PJC acknowledged Spahr’s caring and compassionate ministry, in ways that are authorized by a number of statements in the Book of Order, to persons who have been marginalized, and that her work has been characterized by some in the church as “prophetic.”

The PJC was following church law, which is what lawyers and courts are supposed to do. But legal reasoning can look narrow and nitpicking to non-specialists, and that's how many people reacted to the decision. That impression was intensified when they read the decision to the end. They found that the majority's ruling is followed by several concurring opinions that put different "spins" on the matter.

### The Concurrences

- One concurrence adds that while Spahr could not be disciplined for something that happened earlier, the PJC has now ruled and she is on notice that any further actions would be subject to disciplinary action.
- Another alludes to an unspecified conflict of interest at some stage of the appeal process.
- A third said that Spahr's compassion and advocacy, even though in tension with the rules of the church, could well be compatible with her faithfulness to her calling.
- And a fourth warns that the majority has engaged in legislation rather than interpretation, suggesting that several issues (which it doesn't specify) should have been left to the General Assembly.

### Reactions

In the days following the decision there were many reactions on web sites and blogs. Perhaps the most interesting was on *Presbyblog.com*, edited by Bob Davis, who will be a commissioner at the 2008 GA. He emphasized the puzzling number of concurring decisions and suggested that the decision is self-contradictory, maybe doubly so.

### What Will Happen at General Assembly?

Many conservatives have reacted to the PJC decision with alarm, and their first

thought may have been to counteract it at the upcoming GA. But the decision comes too late for overtures to be sent from the presbyteries. The only way new business can be introduced is through Commissioners' Resolutions, and the rules will not allow CRs to be introduced concerning constitutional issues, nor on business already before the GA.

There are two items of business that are related and will be before the Assembly. Ironically both of them are designed to broaden our definition of marriage, not narrow it.

- Baltimore and Hudson River have sent overtures proposing a broader definition of marriage as a "covenant between two people." For some reason the General Assembly Council has already taken a position against this overture, perhaps to placate conservatives.
- An overture from New Brunswick and Denver would affirm equal civil protections for same-sex couples and calls for a special committee to study marriage laws and their effects and examine the unique needs of pastoral care for same-sex couples.

Since these overtures put the issue of marriage on the GA's agenda, it is possible that conservative groups will try to freeload on them, attaching amendments or offering substitute language that would be even more restrictive. That is quite possible under parliamentary procedure, and commissioners should be on the lookout for it.

### Can We Live With Pluralism?

This decision by the PJC does not really change anything in church law. It simply confirms what W-4.9001 tells us about marriage and what the 1991 AI tells us about blessings of same-gender unions. All that is new is its declaration that Janie Spahr cannot be found to be in violation.

It is quite unlike the other PJC decision, which has tried to reverse the 2006 GA's Authoritative Interpretation of G-6.0108. The AI had expressly permitted divergence from provisions of the church's constitution if they do not affect "essentials" of Reformed faith, practice, or polity. Then the PJC decreed that one sentence in the Form of Government (G-6.0106b) is an "essential."

In this matter of blessing same-gender unions, we remain in the same situation as before, allowing a diversity of actions on the principle that GLBT people, too, ought to be able to expect the ministrations of the church, especially during life's important transitions (W-6.3010). A situation of pluralism seems to frustrate many people if they have clear convictions and are convinced that they are right. A moment like this may be calling us to learn to live with our diversity and develop policies that respect all our members.

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution has made a more nuanced analysis of the issues. Among other things, it asks whether the church should be limited by civil definitions of marriage, which of course vary. If not, there could be a place for "acts of prophetic and compassionate witness against civil definitions it deemed too narrow."

The ACC's comment that civil definitions of marriage are varied turns out to be especially relevant after the May 15 decision of the California Supreme Court, overturning the state's ban on same-gender marriage. Laws do vary, even in the U.S., and certainly when we look at Canada and many of the European countries. Since the Protestant tradition views marriage as a civil relationship, careful consideration of the variety of civil definitions of marriage is certainly needed.

## Reports Concerning Social Witness Policy

by Gene TeSelle

ACSWP (the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy) is bringing a number of reports to the Assembly. These have been called for by previous Assemblies; they are in continuity with a long history of Presbyterian statements on social issues; and they have gone through a detailed study and consultation process that is outlined toward the end of the *Manual of the General Assembly*, under the title “Forming Social Policy.”

To find the social witness statements made by past General Assemblies on the entire range of issues, online in the Presbyterian Social Witness Policy Compilation searchable database, just go to [http://index.pcusa.org/NXT/gateway.dll/socialpolicy/chapter00000.htm?fn=default.htm\\$f=templates\\$3.0](http://index.pcusa.org/NXT/gateway.dll/socialpolicy/chapter00000.htm?fn=default.htm$f=templates$3.0)

Is that address a bit long to retype? You can just go to <http://www.justpresbys.org/business.htm>. Scroll a little more than half-way down the page. Find an inset box just above the headline “Four candidates seek election as GA Moderator.” Where it says “Just click here,” do it – and that should get you to the Compilation.

There you’ll find links to a compilation (arranged by general topics) from Assemblies from 1946 through 2003 (with the more recent Assemblies to be added.)

“**Comfort My People: A Policy Statement on Serious Mental Illness**” offers definitions, identifies professional bodies concerned with this issue, and urges Presbyterians at all levels to be informed and to encourage training and service.

“**Social Creed for the Twenty-First Century**” is dealt with in another article. [See pages 6 - 11.]

“**Costly Lessons of the Iraq War**” is accompanied by a study paper, with four foci: “Repent” [of an unnecessary war], “Restore” [Iraqi sovereignty and security], “Rebuild” [coordinated foreign aid, healthcare for the wounded and maimed], “Reconcile” [the many political, ethnic, and

religious groups, with resettlement of refugees and the internally displaced].

“**From Homelessness to Hope**” calls for “communities of hospitality,” starting with shelters and moving to transitional housing and permanent affordable housing. There are recommendations for federal, state, and local housing policies and use of funds. The topic has fresh relevance with the wave of foreclosures, and the paper reminds us that the 2006 GA adopted a position paper on lending and usury.

“**God’s Work in Women’s Hands: Pay Equity and Just Compensation**” calls on Presbyterians to look at the church’s own employment and compensation practices, and supports legislation to promote pay equity.

“**Lift Every Voice: Democracy, Voting Rights, and Electoral Reform**” explores many issues — the right to vote, registration procedures, accessibility, prohibition of deceptive practices and voter intimidation, and verifiable vote counting. It also suggests shortening the primary season and refers to various proposals for a nationwide primary schedule.

“**Election Logistics 101**” is an appendix that looks specifically at issues around registration, ballot format, and verifiable vote counting.

“**Struck Down, But Not Destroyed: From Hurricane Katrina to a More Equitable Future**” praises the work of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance and countless volunteers, but notes many problems: “triage, planned and unplanned,” moldy homes and hazardous trailers, and issues of resettlement and the continuing vulnerability of coastal communities.

“**The Power to Change: U.S. Energy Policy and Global Warming**” deals with issues of energy efficiency, sustainable production, and stewardship, in both the church and public policy.

“**Report on Human Rights in Colombia**” urges a reorientation of U.S. policy, attending more to civil rights and dealing with the drug problem in other ways than massive fumigation and military intervention.

For a longer description of these reports, please go to <http://www.justpresbys.org/business.htm#ACSWP%20iosso>

## National Capital Presbytery calls church to repent of our silence on gun violence

by Jim Atwood

Just recently we learned of another milestone in the War in Iraq. No one knows how many Iraqis have been killed in that conflict, but we do know that 4,000 American service men and women lost their lives in the five years that this war has been waged. Each of their deaths is a tragedy.

But to put those tragic deaths in perspective, we lose 4,000 persons to gun violence in the United States every fifty days, and it continues over and over and over again. Eighty people every day are killed; nine of them are children or youth. These deaths are homicides, suicides and accidental shootings. That's where we are domestically.

Recently the US supplanted France and Russia as the leading exporter of small arms to the developing nations of the world. One thousand persons die every day with these weapons which are sold to any nation that would side with us in our War on Terror, in spite of State Department warnings that many of these countries have abominable records on human rights. That, in short, is where we are internationally.

This reality, especially the domestic carnage is not something other nations face. They, in fact, are baffled as to why we permit it, especially when the vast majority of Americans support strict gun control measures. Gun violence is a unique national problem that needs to be addressed by Christians whom Jesus called peacemakers. It is impossible for me to believe that Almighty God wills the deaths of 30,000 people every year through gun violence in our country.

God is concerned that America has lost more people to gun violence since 1963 than have been killed in all the wars of the 20th century.

The resolution on gun violence sent by National Capital Presbytery to the General Assembly calls on the Church of Jesus Christ to repent of the fact that we are as quiet about gun violence as the proverbial church mouse. But repentance in New Testament terms never means hanging our heads in despair but lifting up our heads in faith and trust in God and breaking our silence as we begin to talk about the problem; to talk with one another, to discuss, to argue, to dialogue, to come to some measure of discernment as to what God would have us do in this world so that God's reign on earth would be as visible as God's reign in heaven.

A faithful Church needs to hear about gun violence from the pulpit, from the Sunday School Class, from women's circles and men's groups. We need to talk about the problem. Some people, particularly those who believe that guns save lives will be angry that the discussion is taking place at all and will say this is not an appropriate subject to discuss in church. They will want the preacher to pray about it, because that's what the church does, right? Well, partly. But prayer is not enough; we must talk and we must act, but first we must actually talk about it. Certainly the numerous Presbyterians who hold advanced degrees, can develop ways to have responsible civil discussions within our church families on this issue.

Then again, this resolution encourages the church to take some concrete action. One measure to renounce the violence that is taking over our cities and towns is for Pastors and Sessions to organize a group of members and or friends and go to

places in your neighborhood where there have been shootings or killings and have a brief time of worship. In those few moments the church can tell the world that we deplore gun violence and there is a better way to solve anger and injustice than killing our neighbors who are also God's children.

I trust that you will see the merit of this resolution and will encourage your presbytery's commissioners to vote for it at GA.

### The author:

Jim Atwood is a retired Presbyterian Minister who has served churches in North Carolina, and Virginia and as a missionary in Japan where he was the Co-Director of the Student Christian Fellowship in Tokyo. He has been fighting gun violence since 1975 when one of his members at Grace Church in Springfield, Virginia, was brutally killed by a teenager who was out of money and picked up a gun from a buddy at the local bowling alley. He has represented the PCUSA on the Board of the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence and served two terms as its Chair. He was also The Interfaith Chair of the Million Mom March.

## Surprise, Surprise

### On interfaith relations

by the Rev. Mitchell Trigger,

Witherspoon Secretary and co-pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Rockaway, NJ

“I believe in the Virgin birth and the miraculous works of Jesus.”

“I believe that Jesus will return as a sign of the Last Hour.”

“I am a Muslim.”

Most of us who profess to be Christians would be surprised to learn that all of these statements come from a single person – in fact, they come not just from one Muslim, but from a majority of Muslims. I know I was surprised to hear these things and to read many more excerpts from the Qur’an that spoke positively about both Christians and Jews and our shared ancestry. In a world where religious extremists want to pit our peoples against each other, it’s time for all people of faith to understand not only our own faith, but the faith of others.

Many people have arrived at this conclusion. In October 2007, a large number of Muslim clerics, theologians and academics sent an open letter to all Christian leaders, saying the two religions need to work more closely together, especially since we share the basic principles of worshipping one God and loving our neighbors. These Muslim leaders recognize that 55 percent of the world’s population is either Christian or Muslim, “making the relationship between these two religious communities the most important factor in contributing to meaningful peace around the world.” In March of this year, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, home of Islam’s holiest

shrines and the hardline Wahabi sect of Islam, announced plans to pursue a dialogue between Islam, Christianity and Judaism. In watching world events, the king noted “There is a lack of ethics, loyalty and sincerity for our religions and humanity.” The king added, “If God wills it, we will then meet with our brothers from other religions, including those of the Torah and the Gospel to come up with ways to safeguard humanity.”

So how do we do come to understand more about each other’s religion? There are hundreds of books offering insight into Islam, Judaism and Christianity – which is the right one? I can’t say I’ve ever found a book that perfectly described my personal faith in God through Jesus Christ – how can I expect a book to do that for a Muslim or a Jew? The only reliable way I’ve found to understand another person’s faith is through dialogue.

After living in many parts of the United States, my wife and I came to be co-pastors of a congregation in Rockaway, New Jersey. I soon realized that we had moved into the most diverse state in our nation. Our congregation was involved in interfaith dialogue and I had my first intentional dialogue with Muslims. That continued dialogue has helped me appreciate the beliefs we share and the beliefs in which we differ, and yes, it’s even helped this pastor understand his own faith a bit better.

I also realized that I never would have had this opportunity nor taken the initiative for this kind of dialogue if I had not moved into this diverse community. For many of my fellow Presbyterians, the need for this dialogue may not be so apparent. I’ve lived in Iowa, Minnesota, Arkansas, Kentucky, and Indiana, and never had the chance to meet, let alone talk with, a Muslim. But we live in a much greater community today than our

immediate home towns. The world has truly become a smaller place as communications, television, the Internet, all bring the world closer. It’s important for Christians to understand the faith of Islam so that we can all work together to lessen the tensions in the world and to combat those who want Christians and Muslims (and Jews) to spend their time trying to destroy each other, rather than building a peaceful world.

One of the building blocks for any mutual dialogue is respect. While we do have many concrete differences between our two faiths, both Muslims and Christians believe in one God. Yes, we understand God through the Trinity, but it is still ONE God. When we recognize that we each believe, worship and pray to the one God (“Allah,” as both Muslims and Arabic Christians call God), then we are able to begin dialogue without demonizing one another. This respect is the pathway to understanding.

From our church to our presbytery and now to the General Assembly, we have brought an overture (07-01: “*On Calling for Tolerance and Peaceful Relations between the Christian and Muslim Communities*”) that we believe is a good first step for our denomination, as leaders among Christians involved in interfaith relations. We hope that all of us will find ways to study our faiths (with guidance and materials from our denomination), that more of our congregations will invite Interfaith Listening teams to come and speak with them, and that we will all be intentional at reaching out to and looking for the people of other faiths in our communities, to begin the dialogue that is needed for the future of our world. We may find that God’s call to work for peace, justice and healing is being heard by others. And we may then hear God’s unique call to us even clearer.



## WHAT'S OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO FUTURE GENERATIONS?

by Gene TeSelle

On August 25, 2007, the Presbytery of New Covenant (southeastern Texas, centered on Houston) approved an overture that had been brought by the session of the First Presbyterian Church of Pearland, TX, whose pastor is the Rev. Casey Jones, a frequent critic of Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick and a candidate for his office in 2000.

Raising the theme of “intergenerational injustice,” it urges the 218th General Assembly to declare the federal government’s unfunded or underfunded mandates — specifically Social Security and Medicare — “a grave moral concern” as well as “a clear danger to the republic.” In strong language it calls on the church and the nation to “repent of the sins of greed and of stealing from future generations who cannot defend themselves.”

This overture could help start a Presbyterian dialogue on the often-mentioned issue of justice toward future generations — and specifically the federal budget. First let’s look at the problem.

### The current situation

There has been much discussion in recent years about the future obligations of Social Security and Medicare, especially when steadily enlarging “age cohorts” of Baby Boomers begin collecting benefits. (They’re now starting to reach the age of 62, when they can opt to receive Social Security payments.)

Many conservatives predict a major fiscal crisis. Other analysts point out that the squeeze is building up slowly, and that it can be avoided by using a variety of measures, such as making relatively small adjustments in retirement age, or removing the “cap” on Social Security taxes (currently \$90,000) so that corporate executives will pay their full share in this insurance plan, or restructuring government’s relation to health care, not only for seniors but for all.

Social Security and Medicare are not the only area of the federal budget identified as imposing a burden on future generations. Another is the Iraq War, whose costs currently total around \$500 billion, spent without any corresponding increase in tax revenues. Economists Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes have done some detailed analysis in *The Three Trillion Dollar War: The True Costs of the Iraq Conflict* (Norton, 192 pages, \$22.95 paperback). For one sixth of the cost of the war, they say, we could have fixed Social Security for the next 50 to 75 years. And they direct their attention to the generally ignored issue of sick veterans. The government is paying more than \$4.3 billion each year to veterans

of the First Gulf War; physical and emotional costs of this one will total at least \$700 billion.

And since 2001 there have also been warnings about the steady increase in the national debt, which was halted during the Clinton administration because of the furor raised by the Concord Coalition and other “deficit hawks,” but began rising again with Bush-era cuts in income and inheritance taxes. Currently the debt is over \$9 trillion.

Concerns are also raised about *who* owns Treasury bonds. They are held not only by private individuals and large banks and investment funds but by other governments or their “central banks,” since there is a worldwide money market in which currencies are traded. Japan holds the most, followed by China, the United Kingdom, and the OPEC countries. Over \$5 trillion of the debt is held by these private and governmental investors. The rest, nearly \$4 trillion, is held by U.S. government entities, especially the Social Security and Medicare trust funds. (See [www.treasurydirect.gov/NP/BPDLLogin?application=np](http://www.treasurydirect.gov/NP/BPDLLogin?application=np)) Critics say that this hides nearly half of the debt in “soft” obligations of the federal government.

Discussion of these obligations cannot help being saturated in politics. The figures quoted in the New Covenant overture come from David M. Walker, Comptroller of the United States, and they conclude with an exhortation to rethink, and doubtless reduce, government programs (see [www.gao.gov/cghome](http://www.gao.gov/cghome)). Democrats like Congressman Jim Cooper (TN-5) accuse the President of painting too rosy a picture when he talks about national debt, and they emphasize that the growth in debt and obligations occurred during his watch ([www.cooper.house.gov](http://www.cooper.house.gov)).

Much of the increase in future obligations is the result of the prescription drug benefits voted by Congress at the instigation of Senator Bill Frist. The plan is widely criticized as a giveaway to the pharmaceutical companies, because it accepts their prices and prohibits any negotiation over prices, even though the Veterans Administration has bargained this way for years.

At the same time there has been decreasing growth in government revenues because of the massive cuts in both income and inheritance taxes during the Bush administration. The argument has been that these would free more money for private investment. And that has certainly happened. The result is a dramatic upward redistribution of income and wealth in the U.S., giving rise to inequalities that have not been seen since the Gilded Age of the late nineteenth century.

### What are we to do?

The New Covenant overture quotes several passages from the Bible: “The good leave an inheritance to their children’s children”

(Prov. 13:22). “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel” (1 Tim. 5:8 KJV). Special emphasis is placed on the Jubilee Year, which “was instituted so that even a profligate and irresponsible generation in the life of a family could not permanently endanger the inheritance of its heirs by selling off the family wealth forever.”

While the purpose of the Jubilee Year was to *restore* the family heritage, the emphasis of the New Covenant overture is upon the irresponsibility of getting into debt in the first place. The overture does not ask *how* one got into debt. And it does not say how the current inequalities are to be relieved over the next fifty years. It looks as though the Jubilee idea is simply repealed.

In the light of passages like these, what are we to do about our intergenerational responsibilities?

One approach (and this seems to be implied by the overture) would be to revise downward the financial commitments that have been made.

The other is to stand by the commitment and begin making financial provisions adequate to those needs.

We usually urge people to keep their promises and fulfill their commitments. To make a promise without the intention to keep it is regarded as a sign of carelessness at best, and cynicism or plain dishonesty at worst. Jesus’ parables note that someone building a tower will first count the cost to see whether the project can be completed (Lk. 14:28-30), and that a king before going to war will ask whether his forces are strong enough (Lk. 14:31-33). Discipleship, he goes on, involves a similar counting of the cost. The opening of the passage indicates what can be involved: alienation from family members, even loss of life (Lk. 14:26-27).

The Bible does not represent all promises as worthy; Jephtha’s vow (Jud. 11:29-40) was especially unreflective, made without considering the consequences. The current Iraq war is often considered to be a commitment of this sort. At the same time, many of those who now call it a mistake feel that we must work through the problems that it has created.

While we usually praise foresight and promise-keeping, there are many who feel that the commitments made in federal legislation to future generations are not *their* commitments; indeed, they may be *opposed* to those commitments for a variety of ideological or pragmatic reasons. The same people who call for a cancellation of Social Security and Medicare commitments insist that to withdraw our armed forces from Iraq would violate solemn obligations; they argue that the sanctity of contracts prohibits legislation that would allow bankruptcy judges to reduce mortgage responsibilities when homes are foreclosed.

While we may debate the merits of any policy decision, there is an issue of civic responsibility. It is often said that society at large and public life in particular depend upon trust and trustworthiness. This is a responsibility borne by all of us but especially by all those who, having sought public office, were elected to it and swore to administer the laws faithfully.

### **Do we have the resources?**

It is not that our society is lacking in the resources needed to carry out these commitments. The economy was doing well until the mortgage crisis hit, and there are some people who have a lot of available money, as manifested in ways ranging from the escalating size and luxury of first, second, or third homes to the growth of private investment funds with billions of dollars, enabling them to purchase huge corporations, restructure them, and put them back on the market with new stock offerings.

This brings us back to the theme with which we began — Social Security and Medicare, and retirement more generally, for it is not only these government programs that are in trouble. Corporations, too, are complaining about the rising costs of their commitments to retired employees. Retirees are living longer than expected because of improved health care in the U.S. At the same time the costs of that health care are increasing, now approaching 15 percent of the gross national product.

The rising cost of health insurance for these retirees makes it difficult for U.S. corporations to compete with corporations in other countries where health care costs are covered by governments. This is one of the strongest arguments, of course, for a national health care plan that covers all persons. It would be most efficient if it were a “single-payer” plan administered by the Social Security Administration. At a minimum, tax revenues would make up for the gaps in social insurance or in privately purchased coverage.

### **Do-It-Yourself: Is It an Adequate Model?**

During September of 2007 the United Auto Workers struck General Motors, concerned about pensions, medical expenses, and job security. The debate gave the public an education about at least one way of dealing with retirement obligations: the VEBA, or Voluntary Employees Beneficiary Association Plan, and General Motors agreed to put about \$35 billion in cash and securities into a VEBA managed by the UAW, in return for which it would be freed of any other obligations to current or retired workers. This became the model for similar agreements made with Chrysler and Ford in coming weeks.

The UAW will now have the responsibility of investing the funds and getting the income needed to fulfill the obligations. But at least we are getting serious public discussion of the issues.

In one sense this move is an advance, since it gives unions more of a voice in investments. It puts them in the same league as the pension funds for state employees, especially those of California (CalPERS) and New York, which not only have many dollars to invest but are paying increased attention to *where* they are invested. They consider labor and environmental standards, for example, and the social consequences of investments; they prefer to invest, therefore, in constructive projects like housing and job creation.

But this approach also brings to light new problems. Those who benefit from retirement plans do not have all the investment expertise that is needed; even expert investors hire other investment managers because they have specialized knowledge or an independent perspective. But whose benefit are they really seeking?

In 2006 the AFL-CIO published a study of what these investment managers actually do. They discovered that many of them make political contributions to organizations seeking to privatize Social Security and promote individual retirement accounts (IRAs) that will give higher commissions to the managers. Retirement savings, they argue, should not be used to undermine the future security of working and professional people for the benefit of the financial industry.

Whatever the future holds by way of a mixture of private retirement funds and Social Security, these are important considerations for anyone who regards foresight as a virtue — especially when they claim to have concern for the welfare of future generations.

## Per Capita

by Gene TeSelle

The General Assembly Council and the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly are making a joint recommendation to the 218th General Assembly — that it approve a four-page document, “Introduction to the Per Capita Budget,” as “a statement of the principles, values, and purposes” of this budget.

The report emphasizes that “per capita funding is how Presbyterians mutually share the costs of coming together” for a variety of ministries, and that it is “a fundamental way in which all of the nearly 11,000 congregations and governing bodies of the PC(USA) are connected, and the way that allows its members to participate in the work of the wider church.”

The per capita assessment is based on the total number of members of congregations in each presbytery, and the presbytery is responsible for making this payment. It is an old tradition, going back to 1857. Its primary purpose is to fund the “*ecclesiastical*” functions that are grouped under the Office of the General Assembly and administered by

the Stated Clerk — matters having to do with church government, ordination, the Book of Order, and ecumenical relations with other churches, and, commissioners might note, their own expenses in coming to General Assembly. It also funds some of the “*mission and service*” activities that are administered by the General Assembly Council.

In recent years, some congregations have withheld per capita payments to protest various actions of the General Assembly. Some years ago the Permanent Judicial Commission ruled that per capita payment is voluntary. The shortfall was 2% in 2007, 3.2% in 2006, and 3.9% in 2007. This kind of monetary boycott is seen as a powerful way to exert pressure on the national church. And some presbyteries have gone along with these pressure tactics, refusing to call on congregations to pay their assessments, and also refusing to make up the difference out of their own budgets.

This year four overtures are proposing new restrictions on the use of per capita funds.

The most comprehensive comes from Indian Nations, with concurrence from Santa Barbara. This would transfer all

funding of ecumenical relations, and anything else not related to the Office of the General Assembly and commissioner expenses, to the general mission budget, which is voluntary and controlled by the General Assembly Council.

The most blunt is from Grace, which calls quite simply for the total elimination of per capita assessments.

An overture from Sierra Blanca calls for removal of ecumenical relations from the per capita budget.

And an overture from Santa Barbara would affect all governing bodies above the session. It would require all governing bodies which make per capita assessments to use this income only for ecclesiastical expenses, not for ecumenical dues, and not for mission causes, either.

A new web site ([www.pcusa.org/PerCapita](http://www.pcusa.org/PerCapita)) explains the concept, its importance, and what the dollars provide. The web site includes a downloadable brochure to encourage grassroots discussion.

## The FOG (Form of Government) Task Force

by Gene TeSelle

This Task Force, created by the 2006 General Assembly, is bringing a report which rewrites the first four chapters of the Form of Government (the “foundations” of Presbyterian polity) and offers a replacement for chapters 5-18.

The Task Force was trying to be as permission-giving as possible; therefore they avoided as many regulations as they could. This shift of focus from structure toward function seems to reflect what we are learning from current organizational theory. Moving away from a regulatory style toward an “enabling” style also seems healthy in many ways. It might both permit and encourage a more inclusive and diverse faith community, which would reflect the inclusiveness of God’s grace which we see in Christ.

At first glance this has great appeal, since we generally want freedom for ourselves, and we trust our allies. But then we wonder what other camps might do, and begin to formulate regulations to prevent “irresponsible” behavior on their part.

Suspensions have been raised across the theological spectrum. Probably it is the result of the attempt to “simplify,” which means that one or another treasured feature of the FOG is left out, and people who have experienced conflicts begin imagining “loopholes” that would let “bad behavior” slip through without corrective procedures.

Aside from the suspicions that various people may have on the basis of

their own experiences, let me highlight two more general concerns.

First, the proposal leaves out the formation of Committees on Representation (G-9.0105), and the groups that make up the diversity of the church and are guaranteed full participation (G-4.0403) are no longer named. The draft does say that the church “shall not deny participation or representation to persons or groups within its membership for any reasons other than those stated in this Constitution.” In addition, the Articles of Agreement that effected reunion in 1983 provided for Advocacy Committees on Women’s Concerns and Racial Ethnic Concerns. Since ancient patterns of discrimination based on gender, race and ethnicity are still very much with us, these bodies, too, should be made a part of the Form of Government, since questions have been raised from time to time about their permanent status.

Second, some of the language, and the “deregulation” mood in general, is reminiscent of the slogan that “the church is mission” — a slogan that first gained currency during the Sixties. In that spirit it replaces the language of “office” with “ordered ministry”; “governing body” with “council”; and “union” or “federated” congregations by “joint congregational ministry.”

The “church is mission” slogan is currently being used by the conservative New Wineskins movement, which speaks about the need for flexibility but regards this as quite compatible with insistence upon very

specific tests of orthodoxy. The Presbytery of San Diego recently declared itself to be no longer primarily a “governing body” but a “relational community” that is “becoming a mission agency.”

There is nothing wrong with flexibility and noble purposes, but we will still have disagreements about both belief and action. When controversy arises and we face clever lawyers on all sides of an issue, we find that we still need procedural guidelines and criteria for decision-making. We still need ways to define boundaries, and ways to resolve differences about how and where these should be drawn.

Since the new draft has been opposed by a number of groups in the church, many observers think that it will not be adopted by this Assembly but will be referred for further analysis and revision. While we can appreciate the need for careful study and deliberation before taking such a major step, we believe it is worthy of very serious consideration.

### Something special at the Assembly

**Dr. Rita Nakashima Brock**  
will be signing her new book  
at Cokesbury Bookstore,  
Exhibit Hall.

**Tuesday, June 24,  
Noon to 1:30 p.m.**

Dr. Brock, who will be a main speaker at Witherspoon's Semper Reformanda Conversation on Friday, June 20, will be signing her new book *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire*. Cokesbury will have that book for sale, as well as several of her earlier ones.

## Pittsburgh overture calls for single payer health care for all Americans

by Darcy Hawk, minister member of Pittsburgh Presbytery, and Witherspoon Society treasurer

The current system of rationing health care has had a devastating effect on our nation – in lost earning potential, in the acute care that is necessitated because of delayed treatment, and in skyrocketing costs for poorer returns. The Pittsburgh Presbytery local chapter of the Presbyterian Health Education and Welfare Association crafted an overture to the upcoming General Assembly urging the denomination to study and lobby for single payer health care for all Americans. Several sessions studied the proposed overture and agreed to bring it to the presbytery.

Arguments against passage of this overture generally cited instances where the British, French, or Canadian systems have catastrophically failed individuals. These arguments overlook the social benefits of universal health care and obscure the devastation our current system visits on people of limited means, through bankruptcies, denial of service for the underinsured, and the reluctance of people to seek treatment because of the cost.

Furthermore, unlike other national health systems, this overture recommends leaving intact the private sector providers, physicians and hospitals. A national insurance pool brings low risk people into the system to balance costs. It removes the burden of healthcare from business, reducing labor costs. In terms of Christian ethics it provides for a fairer, more equitable sharing of health care resources. I am pleased to report that our Presbytery passed the overture, making it available for consideration in San Jose this summer.

## Candidates for Moderator respond to Witherspoon questions

One of the first acts of the 218th General Assembly will be the election of a new Moderator. To help our readers weigh this important choice, the Witherspoon Society has invited each of the people standing for this high office to respond briefly to four questions that reflect Witherspoon concerns – and, we believe, the concerns of the wider church.

With gratitude to the candidates for their cooperation in responding, we are happy to share their comments here, presenting them in alphabetical order, beginning on the next page.

The four questions were:

1. Jesus, following in the footsteps of John the Baptist and the Hebrew prophets, had some sharp things to say to the religious leaders of his time. (“Whitewashed tombs” comes to mind.) What do you think he might have to say to us if he were to drop in on our Assembly in San Jose?
2. The Presbyterian Church (USA) has a long-standing commitment to peacemaking. What might we do to further the cause of peace in our still-warring world today?
3. In a time of increasing economic stress for many Americans, how should we understand the prophets’ call to “do justice”? What might the PC(USA) say or do about the growing gap between the rich and the poor in our own nation, and in the world?
4. Recent decisions of the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission imply that the Authoritative Interpretation approved by the 217<sup>th</sup> GA does not allow the ordination of men and women who feel that in conscience they cannot conform to the requirement for “fidelity in marriage or chastity in singleness.” Do you believe that this situation should be changed, and if so, how?

**The responses from the four candidates are on the next four pages.**

## The Rev. Carl Mazza

Pastor / Director, Meeting Ground, Cecil County, Maryland

[www.carlmazza.org](http://www.carlmazza.org)  
[www.meetingground.org](http://www.meetingground.org)

### 1. What might Jesus say to us if he were to drop in on our Assembly in San Jose?

A few years ago I was “visited” on the Arizona/Mexico border, while standing at sunset beside a beautiful orange grove. The tranquility masked the terrifying fact that scores of families were living there, struggling to make a living in the dirt, sleeping among animals beside drainage ditches filled with pesticide. They were economic refugees – undocumented and demeaned as “illegal.”

Unexpectedly, a girl about 5-years-old appeared out of the thicket. The rays of the bright sun made her white dress appear angelic. I turned away for a moment; when I looked again she had vanished back among the trees, her home. For a brief moment I dared to imagine I had been visited by Jesus himself.

If she were to appear in San Jose, perhaps she would say to us: *“My single life, humble as it stands, is as dearly important to God as all of what you hope to do in this Assembly. If you ever forget me as you deliberate, all your words and solemn declarations will be nothing more than that.”*

### 2. What might we do to further the cause of peace in our world today?

*“If we want peace, we must work for justice.”* It is the Biblical command. There is no alternative plan. In this regard, congregations must become mission, as well as do mission.

### 3. What is our calling to “do justice” in this time of increasing economic stress and the growing gap between rich and the poor in our own nation, and in the world?

My greatest insight came in visiting with Christian faith communities in Salvadoran refugee camps during the 1980’s civil war. They were so money-poor, their economy was bartering.

Yet, their faith was powerful and rich. They were courageous in their love for each other and in the bonds of Gospel-based community. I felt so poor among them and powerless in realizing that nothing material I could offer was of any real help.

The justice they demanded, and eventually got, was to return home and live with pride by their own means. The “gap” only partially involved money. Their wealth was the confident awareness and courage as a community – their power to access housing, food, and livelihood in self-reliant dignity. They were economically poor, yes, but rich in faith, bonding and love as a neighborhood.

The Gospel empowers us with the means of creating such community, right relationships and true freedom. The Presbyterian Church needs to strengthen its mission in learning, teaching, and sharing such means,



Carl Mazza

and to realize that its own liberation is inextricably bound to that of the world it serves.

### 4. Following the recent GAPJC rulings, do you believe the requirement for “fidelity in marriage or chastity in singleness” should be changed, and if so, how?

The short answer is: yes, I think the situation should change. The unending discussion has a poisonous win/lose character. It is making us myopic, narrow, and unloving. Most tragically, it saps vision and energy to work together in mission. It makes ministry candidates, and us all, fearful of authentic dialogue and candid relationships.

Jesus was condemned as Satan for his open heart and joyful association with all us sinners. We may have strayed too far from him, and a blessed future requires that we move forward toward our own roots. “Jesus with us all” is our root, branch, and frankly, all we need. God grant in our powerlessness that grace will be made perfect.

## The Rev. Bruce Reyes-Chow

Pastor, Mission Bay Community Church, San Francisco Presbytery, California

<http://www.mod.reyes-chow.com/>

### 1. What might Jesus say to us if he were to drop in on our Assembly in San Jose?

I think Jesus would simply wander around the exhibit halls, lounges and tables telling stories of the faith. Among other things, he would speak of eternal life, the cost of discipleship, the importance of community and the call to serve. His stories would infect the minds and spirits of the assembly so much so that a movement of action would swell and the General Assembly would burst forth with a clear mandate to serve. In the midst of the details, some of us would feel attacked, alienated and judged while others of us would feel vindicated, liberated, loved. But such are the compelling and challenging words of Jesus.

### 2. What might we do to further the cause of peace in our world today?

“Peace be with you.”

When Jesus says this to the disciples in the locked room, we are given a powerful message. Peace is communal. In order to achieve peace, we have to understand it. We must see the difference between peace simply as an absence of conflict and a peace that is built on a just resolution to conflict. Too often we hope that if one side would simply give in to the other, there would be peace. This is not peace.

True peace must be built on a willingness for all involved to admit their part in the brokenness and embrace the needs of the other. In a world of war, this is even more applicable as peace should not just be about a fragile halt of violence taken at the cost of the freedom of the other, but a peace that will be sustained by the power that is given to it by a foundation of justice.



Bruce Reyes-Chow

### 3. What is our calling to “do justice” in this time of increasing economic stress and the growing gap between rich and the poor in our own nation, and in the world?

We will not adequately address issues of poverty and wealth until we can re-direct our emotional, fiscal and spiritual energies away from other internal conflicts. While important to our future as an institution, our internal harmony will only be as effective as the mission that comes out of it. Many in the church are already passionately addressing issues of poverty and economic justice despite our institutional struggles. If we are to address large-scale issues of

economic justice, institutional resources and grassroots movements must converge and work together.

### 4. Following the recent GAPJC rulings, do you believe the requirement for “fidelity in marriage or chastity in singleness” should be changed, and if so, how?

I believe at the heart of this question is the subtext of ordination of GLBTQ folks. I have always been supportive of full ordination and believe the way should be made clear for that to happen. At the same time that is not where our church is today nor is this the primary focus of my call to be moderator. With that said, I believe that will need to come to a decision beyond the often called for, “agree to disagree” stance because fundamentally, like the ordination of women before, opposing positions cannot co-exist. In the meantime, each of us will need to discern what is our level of acceptable disagreement so we can discern that same thing for our denomination. My greatest hope is that no matter what happens, the discourse will be grace-filled, and any leaving or returning can be done with dignity.

## Elder Roger Shoemaker

Southern Heights Presbyterian Church, Lincoln, Nebraska

www.rogershoemaker.com

### 1. What might Jesus say to us if he were to drop in on our Assembly in San Jose?

I do not believe that Jesus followed in the footsteps of anyone except God. As for the Assembly, it depends on whether he came during worship or to a committee meeting or to a debate on the floor. Jesus gave us neither, simple tasks or easy answers. Jesus might say to some: "Come follow," and to others "I do not know you," or to some "First take the log out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye." He would laugh and shed a few tears and tell us to keep trying and maybe someday you will "love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul and your neighbor as your self." I think Jesus would tell us that we could not solve our disagreements with rules but only with love. Then Jesus would say, you are my children and I will be with you always.

### 2. What might we do to further the cause of peace in our world today?

First we must find peace within our denomination. It is hard to promote peace with anger in our hearts. If some one came to you from PC (USA) as a peacemaker to help you, how would you receive that person knowing of the dissension within the denomination? We need to continue to feed the hungry, to heal the sick and seek justice for the oppressed so

there will be a certain renewal of creditability of who we are as the church.

### 3. What is our calling to "do justice" in this time of increasing economic stress and the growing gap between rich and the poor in our own nation, and in the world?

I think economic stress is a good reason for the people in the pews to re-evaluate their life style. We are known for our over consumption of worldly goods when others do without. Contributions to the church in 2006 were \$2,133,177,995 and at one time that was about 2.5% of our income, which leaves us 7.5% short of God's calling for a tithe to the church. Our economic stress may be caused by the inability to pay the credit card bill for our past life style indiscretions or house payment or is it because there is no work and no food on the table. It would seem that had there been more time spent focusing on who we are called to be as Christians and sharing wealth, we may have been able to avoid some of the economic stress of today. If each member gave 25 cents each Sunday to feed the world, in one year it would raise, (2,267,188 members times 25 cents times 52 Sundays, that's), \$29,473,444. How do you compare that quarter to some one who has no house, does not know what a credit card is, has no job and little or no food let alone fresh water. The store shelves are empty in Zimbabwe and there are no stores in Darfur. Can you spare a quarter?



Roger Shoemaker

### 4. Following the recent GAPJC rulings, do you believe the requirement for "fidelity in marriage or chastity in single-ness" should be changed, and if so, how?

No. I also think that we cannot solve the problem through rules and regulations. G-60106b and the Authoritative Interpretation speak to the behavioral problems of all who are ordained as Deacon, Elder or Pastor. It also places upon the presbyteries and sessions a responsibility to uphold their commitment to be guided by the Book of Confessions and the Book of Order. The other side is that there needs to be a better understanding of the GLTB cultural issues involved. I think that in the human community there are those who because of their behavior should not be ordained. I like Paul's letters to the Ephesians and chapter 4:1-16 as guidelines for who we are as a people and church community.

## The Rev. Bill Teng

Pastor, Heritage Presbyterian Church, Alexandria, Virginia

www.BillTeng.com

### 1. What might Jesus say to us if he were to drop in on our Assembly in San Jose?

I think Jesus might say that we've been dwelling and holding on to traditionalism which has prevented us from participating in God's mission effectively in a radically changed North American context. Tom Gillespie once said that "Tradition is the living faith of people now dead, and traditionalism is the dead faith of people now living." In holding on to traditionalism, we somehow still think that the world would listen to us just because we publish pronouncements and statements on certain social issues from the General Assembly.

Jesus might say that our business should be congregations faithfully embodying the Gospel in their own communities, not about clinging on to yester-year and the bygone hopes of a "Christian Century." We must develop a post-Christendom mindset – stop assuming that we still live in a Christian culture and that our neighbors and friends are familiar with Christian expressions and/or principles, and wringing our hands when they aren't. This will free us to share with them the most basic Christian truths.

### 2. What might we do to further the cause of peace in our world today?

Since Jesus is also called the "Prince of Peace," I believe it's only right

that we become peacemakers ourselves. However, I don't believe in the concept of "peace at any cost" or "cheap peace" – since in order to have true peace, justice must first prevail!

While the General Assembly can do some positive things in encouraging peacemaking, the primary significance should be at the congregational level. If our congregations cannot turn our minds and hearts toward working for the *full* extent of God's *shalom*, then everything becomes only empty-speak. The General Assembly should embrace fully-informed and well-balanced position papers to help guide the lives of our congregations.



Bill Teng

### 3. What is our calling to "do justice" in this time of increasing economic stress and the growing gap between rich and the poor in our own nation, and in the world?

Again, this must first be realized at the congregational level – it's only when we actually "do" justice at that level that we've earned the right to speak to the rest of the world. I believe the PC(USA) must say

we're called to "do" justice in this secular world as we're chosen to live life as if God's love and justice were the order of the day. We need to ask questions when things don't seem right, advocate for people whose voices are not heard in the halls of power – we are chosen to make every decision based on our faith commitment to God!

### 4. Following the recent GAPJC rulings, do you believe the requirement for "fidelity in marriage or chastity in singleness" should be changed, and if so, how?

I don't believe it's the intent of the GAPJC rulings to keep anyone away from the call to ministry but to hold all Presbyterians accountable for living into the call of ministry – beginning with the realization that God's claim on our life is a whole-life claim, which supersedes any claim we may have on our own desires, habits or lifestyles.

I believe the GAPJC decisions have simply clarified for the church that if standards are to be changed, it would need to be done through the constitutional amendment process. Though we don't all agree on these standards, the amendment process reflects the deep wisdom of our tradition: it allows the church, collectively, to discern what boundaries God intends for us to live within. I support our denomination's discernment on the matter of sexual relationships for elders and pastors, and at our better moments these standards are applied with grace and integrity.

## Theological musings

### A Role for the Left

A regular column by Dr. Douglas F. Ottati, Distinguished Professor of Reformed Theology and Justice Ministry at Davidson College, Davidson, N.C.

If you are a Presbyterian and a progressive, then this year you've seen some good news and some bad news in both the church and the nation.

#### First, some good news from the church.

- On January 15, the Presbytery of San Francisco voted 167 to 151 that Lisa Larges, a lesbian who works for That All May Freely Serve, is ready to seek ordination. Larges registered her disagreement with the "fidelity and chastity" standard or G. 6.0106b of the *Book of Order* and, in accordance with the recommendation of the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity, the Presbytery judged this not to be a barrier to her proceeding with the ordination process.
- Later that same month, and by a considerably wider margin, the Presbytery of the Twin Cities voted to reinstate the ordination of my good friend, Paul E. Capetz, a Professor of Theology and United Seminary of the Twin Cities, and an openly gay man. Capetz also scrupled G-6.0106b.

So, there was evidence of progress in the continuing effort to ordain called and qualified GLBT Presbyterians.

#### But there was also some bad news.

- The vote in San Francisco was close, certain to be appealed to the Synod of the Pacific, and perhaps all the way to the General Assembly's Permanent Judicial Commission.
- Before that could happen, however, the GA PJC ruled in February that a gay or lesbian who is expressing disagreement with the wording or meaning of provisions of the constitution, but does not permit disobedience to those behavioral standards." (Presumably, then, as a married, heterosexual male I might scruple G-6.0106b since, in that instance, I would be departing only from the *belief* that this is a legitimate behavioral standard for ordination.) This, of course, renders the decisions in San Francisco and

the Twin Cities uncertain and problematic, and (apparently) blocks any further such actions.

Under these circumstances, many Presbyterian progressives are trying to decide whether to support overtures to the General Assembly that would allow presbyteries to consider departures from *all* ordination standards once again, efforts simply to delete G6.0106b from the *Book of Order*, or both. The first option would allow presbyteries to decide once again what the Presbyteries of San Francisco and the Twin Cities Area did decide, namely, that gay and lesbian sexual relationships represent *nonessential* departures from our ordination standards.

#### Now for some good national news.

- The popularity among American voters of George W. Bush and the War in Iraq have plummeted to the point where both seem likely to present real challenges to the presumptive Republican nominee for President of the United States.
- The Democrats managed to come up with a good, even historic field of candidates for their presidential nomination, all with generally positive inclinations when it comes to Iraq, international policy, the economic situation of poor and middle class Americans, immigration, and more.

#### But there was bad news on this front as well.

- The leading Democratic candidates have managed to get caught in a protracted struggle for the party's nomination that is not making either of them look good.
- Their struggle is giving

John McCain, whose domestic and international policy preferences seem genuinely disturbing, some much-needed time to shore-up and sharpen his national campaign.

In this circumstance, many Presbyterian (and other) progressives found themselves having to decide between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama.

#### So, which particular initiatives regarding ordination standards in the PC (USA) should we support? Which Democratic candidate should we support?

My answer comes from my short-lived baseball career. Years ago in northern New Jersey, I played Little League

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[A] basic task of the left ... is to present arguments ... that committed and mutual gay and lesbian sexual relationships fall within a theologically normative understanding of human sexual relationships, and then to press for changes in church and world that accord with this judgment.

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for a team with forest green caps sponsored by the *JD Construction Company*. I wasn't very good. (Hey, have you ever tried to get a Brazilian father to play catch?) Anyway, our coach tried valiantly to teach us how to play the game, and he must have told us a thousand things, but I only remember one. "Keep your eye on the ball, kid." His point was that, in baseball, where the ball is and what you do with it is almost always essential. Yes, it's easy to get distracted by other things that are going on, e.g., a friend yelling something from the bench, planes flying overhead. But then you lose sight of the ball, and that is almost never good. So, straight from Coach Smith, here is my answer: we should keep our eyes on the ball. Let me say what I mean.

First, consider *ordination*. The Peace, Unity and Purity Report offered a theology of conversation and discussion for the church in contentious times plus an argument that Presbyterian polity allows candidates to depart from ordination standards in ways that Presbyteries deem nonessential. When the GA adopted its recommendations, in effect, it asked presbyters to judge whether or not GLBT sexual relationships represent nonessential departures from the ordination standards published in the *Book of Order*. Please note, however, that any judgment on this question finally presupposes the same thing that any judgment for or against deleting G-6.0106b presupposes, namely, a substantive theological argument or position on human sexual relationships. But a theological argument or position on the basic substantive issue at hand is precisely what (for a variety of reasons) the Task Force did *not* furnish.

In this circumstance, a basic task of the left is not just to decide about the relative merits of attempts to reinstate the recommendations of the Task Force or of deleting G-6.0106b. It is to present arguments in favor of the judgment that committed and mutual gay and lesbian sexual relationships fall within a theologically normative understanding of human sexual relationships, and then to press for changes in church and world that accord with this judgment.

Among other things, this may include "commissioning" some short and clear outlines of substantive theological arguments in favor of the judgment that gay and lesbian sexual relationships may fall within the theologically articulated norm of faithfulness, and making these outlines available to persons and groups. *If* it also includes pressing to restore the possibility of scrupling G-6.0106b, then it should do so *only* as an interim, ameliorative measure *together with* pressing for what is judged as a matter of

theological and ethical principle to be right and good, namely, the removal of barriers to the ordination of called and qualified GLBT persons who are involved in committed and mutual relationships, and the recognition of same sex unions and marriages.

Next, consider the question, Hillary or Barack? Many of us have our preferences. (Just before the Pennsylvania primary, a friend told me he might find it easier to vote for my dog, Sugar, in the fall than for H.C. In exit polls, a significant minority of the Pennsylvanians who voted for Clinton said they wouldn't vote for Obama in the fall if he turns out to be the nominee.) Even so, whether to support one or the other of the remaining candidates as they fight for the nomination is *not* the most important question facing Presbyterian (and other) progressives in this election. (And, remember, Sugar is not at all likely to be on either major party ticket.) The far more important thing is to articulate responsible arguments and positions on the main issues of the day, e.g., Iraq, the economy, and immigration, support the candidate in the fall who will best advance those positions and, in the case that this candidate needs to be pushed further, to go ahead and push him or her both before and after election day. In short, after eight years of W. and his many accomplishments, both foreign and domestic, our chief electoral responsibility seems nicely summarized by a sticker I saw the other day on another friend's car: "Enough is enough. Vote Democratic."

It really all comes down to this. Those of us who count ourselves Presbyterian progressives have recently had our ups and downs. We face a variety of challenges and also a number of strategic decisions, but if we keep our eyes on the ball, we will see that there is a continuing and clear role for Presbyterian left, namely, to frame explicit theological and ethical arguments about substantive issues of faith and life, to bring these into public conversations and debates, and to press church and society to act.

## ***A major Ghost Ranch event this summer!***

**July 28 - August 3, 2008**

### **Paths toward Peace and Justice: Spirituality, Earth-Care, and the Prophetic Word in a time of Violence**

In partnership with the Witherspoon Society, the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, Presbyterians for Restoring Creation, and the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program.

Jane Hanna, Coordinator

Come to Ghost Ranch for a revival of the old fashioned "cowboy camp-meetings" of its history. Each morning will offer high quality workshops on a wide variety of issues and artistic expressions related to peacemaking, justice and earth-care. Afternoons will include some activities and free time to enjoy Ghost Ranch. Nancy Eng MacNeill and Mark Koenig of the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program staff will offer an intergenerational activity each day after lunch.

Evenings will center on all-Ranch worship with former PC(USA) Moderator John Fife and Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb offering the prophetic word in the beautiful Agape Center, looking out over the valley toward Pederal. This year the "arts" side of the program will be coordinated with the "seminar" side. Rev. Carol Wickersham, founder of No2Torture, will design and coordinate the worship experiences.

There will be a special "Peace and Justice Track" for high school students this year, in an experience that integrates the high school students into the broader community and conversation. High school seminars will be highly interactive, activity-based, and a lot of fun.

Rick Ufford-Chase and Gail Brown will reprise the popular "camp culture" begun in 2007, offering a low-cost housing and food option in the campground. Enjoy fellowship over shared meals and late night campfires.

To join us, you can register for any one of these courses:

**The Covenant Community** (Peace and Justice Witness through developing a religious order that centers on a vocational commitment to peace and justice work) led by Rick Ufford-Chase, Tucson, AZ, Director of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, Moderator of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the PC(USA).

**Faith, Workers and Economic Justice** (the economic challenges facing workers, concrete strategies for challenging unjust treatment of workers, and hands-on practice in

putting our faith into effective action) led by Kim Bobo, Executive Director of Interfaith Worker Justice and co-author of *Organizing for Social Change*, and Trina Zelle, Witherspoon Society co-moderator, and Director of Arizona Interfaith Worker Justice.

**Preaching the Prophetic Word in a Time of Fear**, which will be team-taught by conference preachers Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb and the Rev. John Fife.

**Singing Songs of Peace in a Turbulent World** (looking at the rich history of the music of peace, and crafting music and words that help express the human longings for peace), led by Tom Zehnder and Tim Gibbs Zehnder, who compose, arrange, perform and record as an independent duo based in Los Angeles.

**Restorative Justice: Building Peace through Relationships** (exploring peace building educational practices that are based on relationship skills), led by Amy McConnell Franklin, Taos, NM, an educator and trainer in emotional intelligence.

**Prophetic Ministry in an Eco-Justice Frame** (practical strategies for transformation combined with theological reflection and ethical analysis about the environmental crisis), led by the Rev. Peter Sawtell, Executive Director of Eco-Justice Ministries.

**Creating a Culture of Peace: Nonviolence Training for Personal and Social Change** (a holistic and practical foundation in the spirituality and practice of active nonviolence) led by Janet Chisholm, who coordinates peace and justice programs at Kirkridge Retreat Center.

**Poetry of Protest** (looking at poetry as a strategy for speaking out about the ideas and issues which matter most to us), led by Anita Skeen, Arts Coordinator for the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities at Michigan State, and author of five books of poems.

**"Do Not Forsake Us in Our Time of Conflict"** (meditative prayer, teaching and sharing, rest and silence, and reflection and embodiment of our week's theme in the evenings) led by J. Philip Newell, Companion Theologian for the Community of Casa del Sol; Alison Newell, Teacher of Spiritual Direction in Scotland; Rabbi Nahum Ward-Lev of Santa Fe, NM, and a representative of the Islamic Community of New Mexico.

**More information** — both general and about each of the seminars — is on the Witherspoon website: <http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/2008/ghost%20ranch%2008.htm>

For more information, and to register, go to the Ghost Ranch website: <http://www.ghostranch.org/>

## The Editor's Spot



### “Missional church” – a slogan or a reality?

by Doug King

The term “missional church” has appeared frequently in recent discussions of the new Form of Government proposal. The use of the term – especially by some evangelical groups – seems to be a positive description of the “FOG” report, indicating what they see as a more flexible structure that serves the primary purpose of the church, which is mission.

This primacy of mission is not a new discovery, but it's very helpful to be reminded of it. My experience in “mission” (as working outside the U.S.) was long ago, in the 1960s and '70s, when I spent ten years working with the Christian churches in Indonesia. But I believe as strongly now as I did then, that mission is the heart of the church's life, and of the Christian's calling.

The idea of a “missional church” concerns me, though. I worry that it can be used as a distraction, when being “missional” is set over against everything else that the church is and does. Mission sometimes seems to be viewed as a set of activities, and set over against the structures for institutional support, which seem to be dismissed as just the demands of stodgy bureaucrats (mainly “in Louisville,” with an implied “Yech!”). Certainly any large organization can become rigid and ineffective and irrelevant. But it's hard to find any group of people engaging for any length of time in a coherent activity (to win baseball games, to teach kids to

read, to help sick people get well, or for that matter, to raise children) without some kind of persisting structure, with rules and patterns of behavior and consistent expectations of one another.

Witherspoon Board member Bill Dummer has contrasted the notion of a “missional community” with a “maintenance congregation,” whose main concern is “keeping the local church machinery running just for the folks inside.” Certainly we all know – and probably love – congregations like this. We need to recognize that “maintenance” is necessary and good – but is never enough.

So we need a balance between mission and maintenance. The great German theologian Emil Brunner offered the insight that “The church exists by mission as fire exists by burning.” Mission is simply what we do when we're being the church. A church that loses its mission is every bit as effective as a fire that has gone out. Just ashes.

So what *is* that mission?

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, under the leadership of the global ecumenical movement (which grew out of the earlier “missionary movement”), we began to see our churches' mission as a three-fold engagement with the world. Following the work of New Testament scholars, we understood the church as called to engage in *marturia*, *koinonia*, and *diakonia* – witness, fellowship (or community), and service.

As our church gathers once again for the General Assembly, we might benefit by being guided by this wholistic vision of being a “missional church.”


We can engage in **witness** to the world around us – our near and far

neighbors – as we help people to see their lives in the light of Jesus' deeply human and profoundly Godly life. Thus they may come to know that *all* of us are loved, and to know that our ways of living together, with our abuses of power and wealth, are always under the judgment of God. This witness, like that of the prophets, is always both an *announcing* of love and grace, and a *denouncing* of the injustice and violence that violate the sacred value of God's creatures.

And we can take seriously our call to **community** – to caring for one another, and to welcoming the strangers at our doors as if they were “family” – as indeed they are. And so we may come closer to showing the world what the Reign of God can be for all of us.

And finally, we can engage in **service** – following Jesus' example by healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and responding to all the other forms of human need. More than that, as we see in our Presbyterian mission programs around the world, we must engage the structures and systems of society, resisting their exploitation and pollution and other violations of humanity and nature.

May this great gathering of our church in San Jose be an occasion for celebrating all that we are doing in mission – proclaiming the Good News, resisting the evils being done through violence and the materialism of the global market economy; building up our church as a community of care and respect and welcome; and helping people – both face-to-face and through broader social and political changes – to live fuller, joy-filled lives.

If we do this we will truly be a missional church. And it will be good – for us and for God's creation. 

# Witherspoon News

## Membership Meeting following Awards Luncheon will elect new officers

Because our last class of officers was elected late, we have not conducted an election by mail for the officers who should, according to our by-laws, be elected by a ballot in this issue of Network News. Therefore a slate of officers will be presented to our membership meeting on Sunday, June 22. The Luncheon will begin at 12:30, and the business meeting will be convened when the lunch gathering concludes, probably around 2:30.

Offices to be filled will include one Co-Moderator, Treasurer, Membership Coordinator, Issues Analyst, and at least one member at large.

The Nominating Committee will welcome your suggestions – and it's just fine to suggest yourself. **So please send us your suggestions!**

Just copy or clip this form, and send it to the chair of the Nominating Committee:

The Rev. Edie Gause  
2889 San Pasqual St. #D91  
Pasadena 91107-5364  
(626) 792-8191  
momgause@sbcglobal.net

I would like to suggest for

Position on Board: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone(s): \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

My name/address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone/e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Please add a note with any other information that would be helpful:

If you're at the  
Assembly ...

Please visit  
our booth –  
# 117 in the Exhibit  
Hall!

You'll find it, we hope,  
located on an outer wall  
where people will enter/exit the hall.

Our next door  
neighbors will be the  
Knox Fellowship  
and Amish Furniture.  
(Should be a place for  
interesting conversations!).

We'll provide you with  
a warm welcome, useful handouts,  
up-to-date information,  
a chance to sit and chat –  
and perhaps most important,  
a huge selection of buttons  
and M&Ms  
(or turn them around so they'll be  
W&Ws).

And if you can get to our  
**Witherspoon Awards  
Luncheon**

on Sunday, June 22  
following the Assembly Worship,  
*please come!*

Check at the Assembly Ticket Desk  
about the availability of tickets  
or come by the Witherspoon booth,  
and we'll see what we can do.

**Most of our Board members will  
be at the Assembly, and will have  
our cell phones, as listed on the  
next page.**

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### The next issue of *Network News*

will bring you reports and analysis from the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.

There will be other items of interest to all who are committed to furthering the reign of God in the world.

If you have news or comments you'd like to add to the collection, please let us know!

Please contact *Network News* editor Doug King:  
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**Deadline for the Summer issue is July 20, 2008.**



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**Ghost Ranch Week for Peace and Justice**

**July 28–August 3, 2008**

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### **Network News**

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