

## Occupy Wall Street More voices for justice?

(See page 5)



Photo by Vicki Moss



## The Moderator's Column

# PV4J - Getting Better Organized

By Bill Dummer

The Coordinating Team held a very productive annual face-to-face meeting August 15 to 17 in Pittsburgh. Most of the team plus **Vicki Moss** (our new website manager and media coordinator) was present for the 48 hour meeting. We spent the first block of time doing some brainstorming of what we need to do during the next year. Then we took some steps to get better organized to do it. Here are the decisions that we made, along with plans for the year ahead:

- The Executive Committee consisting of the co-moderators, secretary and treasurer will coordinate conference call and face-to-face meeting agendas.
- The Moderator(s) will keep in touch with CT members to keep them on task ("ride herd") and moderate meetings.
- Vicki Moss will also be our Facebook and Google-groups administrator.
- Sylvia Carlson will be the CT secretary and also co-signer on the checking account.
- Treasurer Darcy Hawk will shepherd the spring fundraising letter in preparation for going to GA. He will also be receiving the membership checks, and will then forward the names to the Membership Coordinator.
- Colleen Bowers and Jeremiah Rosario will write the fall membership renewal letter. She will also be looking into new software for maintaining the membership database.
- Sylvia Thorson-Smith will continue to handle issues and education material, and in so



Bill Dummer

doing will resource the website. She will partner with Colleen in seeing what former members of the two previous groups need to be reactivated.

- Each CT member will select 10 members to do the membership survey over the phone. Lorelei will call Arizona and California; Sylvia (West) will call New Mexico and Iowa; Bill will call Wisconsin and Minnesota; Colleen will call Maryland and Virginia; Darcy will call Ohio and Pennsylvania; Sylvia (East) will call Kentucky; Pam and Jeremiah will call New York and Mitch will call New Jersey. If you live in these states you may be getting a phone call in the near future.

- **Membership:** We will offer half-price memberships at GA for the remainder of the year for \$30.

From now on we will send out membership renewal letters to every member before December 1. At GA we will also offer YAADs and TSADs free two-year memberships if they join during the assembly meeting. The new membership rates will be: Regular \$60, limited income \$30, and students \$10.

- We will have a presence at the PW Churchwide Gathering in July of 2012.

- **2012 GA:** Commissioner Orientation will be done via media – e-mail and mailing the GA issues edition of the Network News. The Awards Luncheon and membership meeting will possibly be held at East Liberty PC on Sunday



## 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 envelope in the center of this newsletter, or go to our website at

[http://www.presbyvoicesforjustice.org/membership\\_form\\_2.htm](http://www.presbyvoicesforjustice.org/membership_form_2.htm)

(and you can pay online, too!)

or contact our membership database manager:

Jeremiah Rosario  
230 East 87th St., Apt. 2C  
New York, NY 10127  
(646) 675-7029

[telumehtar@aol.com](mailto:telumehtar@aol.com)

noon, with the Co-Moderators working on this. The Presbyterian Voices for Justice (note name change) breakfast will be Tuesday, Colleen, Sylvia Carlson and Sylvia Thorson-Smith working on it. The PV4J Dance on Tuesday evening will be worked on by Darcy, Jeremiah and Mitch. Once

again, exhibit hall booth will be handled by Vicki. We will be introducing the Red Tent as a safe place for conversation.

- **Nominating Committee** will be Bill, Darcy and a former Board/CT member.

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## ATTENTION!!!

### Network News going on-line only

In case you missed it in the articles by Bill Dummer and Lorelei Hillman, this is the *last* Network News that will be published in print on paper, with *one* exception.

From now on Network News will be found on the Presbyterian Voices for Justice website:

**[presbyvoicesforjustice.org](http://presbyvoicesforjustice.org)** .

The one exception will be the Spring issue just prior to each meeting of the General Assembly. That issue will carry discussion of issues coming before the Assembly and will be sent to all of the Commissioners and Advisory Delegates, in addition to the PVJ membership.

Whenever a new issue of Network News goes on the website, an email will be sent out notifying the membership. If you are not on the PVJ email list, and would like to be, please send your email address to Vicki Moss, our Communications Coordinator at [Vicki@broadwayucc.org](mailto:Vicki@broadwayucc.org).

We apologize for missing the Spring and Summer issues for this year, and for our inability to continue producing this newsletter in print.

**If you have had a library subscription, or a group membership**, please contact our Membership Coordinator to request a refund.

## PVJ takes a look at the “Occupy Wall Street” movement

Sylvia Thorson-Smith, a member of the PVJ Coordinating Team, has gathered reports from Vicki Moss in New York, Bill Dummer in Milwaukee, and Sarah McKasson in Tucson.

’Tis the season to re-imagine the 60s. For some of us who lived through those times, the Occupy Wall Street movement brings back memories of social activism and solidarity of purpose that has little been seen since then. The movements are vastly different – now being less interested in “dropping out” of the establishment than dropping into a more egalitarian society with jobs and basic security for all.

Frank Rich, in the October 31 issue of *New York* magazine, <http://nymag.com/news/frank-rich/class-war-2011-10/> compares “the death throes of Herbert Hoover’s presidency in June 1932” with some of the events occurring today. In his article, “The Class War Has Begun,” he reminds readers that Congress bailed out “greedy bankers and financiers” while failing to pay a modest bonus promised to veterans of WWI. A “motley assemblage” of up to 20,000 middle-class men who couldn’t find jobs staged a massive vigil on the lawn of the US capitol, keeping their “improvised hovels clean and maintaining small gardens.”

This is the stuff of social movements; we may rarely see them coming, but once they are upon us, there’s no turning back until society confronts the



Occupy Wall Street demonstrators

*Photo by Vicki Moss*

issues that have ignited collective protest. Several board members of Presbyterian Voices for Justice have submitted reports about the Occupy Wall Street movement that is spreading across America. We want to share them with you in the hope of making connections and forging links of solidarity that include a witness by Presbyterians and other people of faith.



## Wall Street

Vikki Moss reports that she and her husband John Harris were in Zucotti Park (in the Wall Street area) as the police kept people moving so the sidewalk wouldn't be blocked. She writes "that there were so many different people there. A girl with pink hair, youngish people handing out Occupy Wall Street newspapers, people in costumes (one as Uncle Sam), lots of signs, a guy with a mask dressed in a suit, a family with kids holding signs talking to the media about their concern for their hamsters if they run out of money or lose their house, people of all ages. The crowd was very low key and peaceful. I didn't hear the human microphone but drumming was going on at the south end of the park. There were lots of police all over the financial district, not just around the park. Most of them seemed relaxed and casual about the whole situation."

## Milwaukee

Bill Dummer, PVJ Moderator, writes of attending Occupy Milwaukee: The first day of action of the movement in Milwaukee was scheduled for October 15. The e-mail information I received said to meet for a rally at Zeidler Union Square. It was not only strategically located but symbolic in its name. Frank Zeidler was the beloved socialist mayor of Milwaukee in the 40s and 50s. It is a small, half-block square park. The information said there would be a rally at 11:00 before a march. So I headed to the park about that time.

However, when I got there, I learned that the plans had changed. There were people of all ages there, some with signs, some without. One that caught my eye early read "Keep your corporate hands off my government." There were a lot of younger people with signs about student loans. The media were there, interviewing some of the people who were gathering. I recognized some of the faces from previous anti-war rallies and such. But I found it curious that I did not see any of the regulars I see when I go to the Milwaukee County Democratic Party meetings. While we waited, little clusters of people would begin chants. The most popular one was from the protests in Madison in February and March, "This is what democracy looks like."

A variety of interest groups had set up booths to provide information on their angle of the cause. The information sheet that was passed out to people indicated that the march would begin at noon. It would go to the intersection of Wisconsin Avenue and Water Street, which is the location of several big banks, namely J P Morgan Chase, Wells Fargo and Associated. At each of these banks yellow crime scene tape would be put on the entrances. The rally would begin there with the first of the "We Are the 99%" speakers. Then the crowd would move a half block north to M & I Bank (which recently became part of Canadian BMO Bank). The same scenario would be repeated there. The march went back to Wisconsin & Water where a teach-in

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was conducted on the role of non-violent civil disobedience in movements for social change. The march then returned the five blocks to Zeidler Park.

The media reported that evening that the march included 3000 people.

The second action event of Occupy Wall Street Milwaukee took place in a different location on October 29. It was billed as Occupy the Hood, and its focus was the lack of jobs for people living in the inner city. The staging area was Lincoln Park on the north side of the city. The event began at Noon with a half hour performance of a “drum line,” which put on a good show of African style drumming. Then there was a series of speakers discussing the employment situation in Milwaukee, particularly as it relates to inner-city residents. Once again, there were people of all ages participating. This time, however, there were more African-American young people. Not everyone participated in the march as it would be about three miles to the empty factory shell of A O Smith, which at one time manufactured many things, including the chassis of almost all of the American-made cars.

It was good to get moving, in order to get warmed up. The escort of about 10 officers on motorcycles (Harleys, of course), plus another 10 on bicycles cleared the two thoroughfares that we walked on, creating quite the spectacle for the residents. Once again, there were a variety of signs, but it seemed

like the most were “Recall Scott Walker” (the Republican Governor). We got to our destination in about an hour. When we arrived at the first gate, the guard would not let us on the factory grounds, so the leaders asked us to sit down where we were (in a minor thoroughfare). Some more speeches were made, calling attention to the fact that this factory at one time employed a couple thousand people. Part of it is in operation, as a Spanish company is using it to make high-speed rail cars. However, it too will soon be moving, since the Governor rejected federal money for high-speed rail in Wisconsin. I left to hike back to my car in the park before the speeches were over. The news reported that only about 300 people participated in this march.

## Tucson

Sarah McKasson, a member of St. Mark’s Presbyterian Church in Tucson (where Sylvia Thorson-Smith is also a member), writes of her participation in Occupy Tucson:

My sister Molly and I followed Occupy Wall Street online and in the papers. When we found out there was going to be an Occupy Tucson, we agreed that we would be there on opening day. Molly and I made our signs the night before – we were ready! The kick-off for Occupy Tucson was held in a city park near the downtown area. Newspapers estimated the crowd at 500 people. It was great to walk around and read all the signs, mostly hand made. Some were “laugh

out loud” funny and many were very poignant. Molly and I stood with about thirty other protesters in a corner of the park and waved our signs at passing cars. Most of the drivers gave us thumbs up or peace signs. It was a really hot day in Tucson, so we moved to a shady area in the park and listened to some of the many speakers address the crowd.

All in all, it was a very peaceful protest, except for one person who walked through the crowd yelling “stop picnicking and get a job.” A few of the protestors attempted to engage him in some dialogue, but he just kept shouting and moving through the crowd. Some of the peacekeepers from Occupy Tucson surrounded him for his safety, even though no one was physically threatening him. That’s the great thing about our country: everyone has the right of free speech. Other than that one event, it was a very peaceful day. The protesters were a very diverse group of ages, background and ethnicity. The best part was the number of young people who were there. It was so heartening to see them step up and participate in democracy!



Sarah McKasson, of St. Mark's, Tucson, with her sister Molly McKasson

Frank Rich has some analysis that seems worth including in this story. “Politicians in either party, of course, never use the term ‘class warfare’ to describe what’s going on in America, unless it’s Republican leaders accusing Obama of

waging it every time he even mildly asserts timeless liberal bromides about taxing the rich. Nor do most politicians want to talk about the depth of the crisis in present-day capitalism, since to acknowledge its scale would only dramatize how little they intended to do about it. The whole system is screwed up, and it’s not all Wall Street’s fault – or remotely in the financial sector’s power alone to solve.”

We Christians are committed to serve a just and loving God who strengthens us to confront the powers and principalities of injustice, trusting that nothing can separate us from God’s love and presence. As we watch and participate in these Occupation movements across the country, may we work to fashion the society that we pledge allegiance to in both church and nation, one that truly institutionalizes “liberty and justice for all.”

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# Network News is Changing!

by Lorelei Hillman, Coodintaitng Team member

Don't worry – we're not changing our stripes (we're pretty proud of those!), but we are changing our format. You've probably noticed that a lot of non-profit magazines are disappearing; that's because printing and mailing are expensive, even in bulk. At our Board's meeting in Pittsburgh this month, much of the discussion was around making sure we provide the in-depth information and theological leadership that our members expect, without wasting their money. The decision was made to emphasize our website, with its accessibility, flexibility and linkability (is that a word?), in order to bring articles and information to members in a more usable way, and reduce our costs at the same time.

What does that mean? Rather than print the *Network News* several times a year, we will be posting articles and notifications on the website [www.presbyvoicesforjustice.org](http://www.presbyvoicesforjustice.org) as we receive them. For those of you who already visit our site on a regular basis, this will be nothing new. For those who have enjoyed and relied on the magazine, we encourage you to try out the internet approach – at the same time that we



realize this is a big change for you. Three times a year, we will gather 'the best of the best' from our contributors, along with information about upcoming events and opportunities, and publish them as an 'issue' of *Network News* online. You will be able to access this from your home computer and print it out (this will be me, as I still can't read without highlighting, underlining, and scribbling notes in the margins). For those whose computer equipment is not able to do this, you may notify me by phone or email and I will see that

you get a printed copy mailed to you.

To this end, the PV4J Board has hired a new Webweaver – **Rev. Vicki Moss** of New York, NY. Our own Doug King has been faithfully staffing the website, bringing you the same quality material that he delivered through the *Network News*; as of this week, Vicki will be redeveloping our online presence. She will be working with other members of the Coordinating Team to see that our wide variety of interests are covered, and she will make sure you are also able to locate and link to special-interest groups which have been selected as helpful for our members.

Thank you so very much for your

patience. We hope you will see that our commitment to bring you pertinent and well-thought-out articles, challenging theological reflections, and information on activities and actions has not changed – only the available means of receiving the same good material.

## We want your input!

Please take a few moments to complete our survey!

Just go to

[http://www.zoomerang.com/  
Survey/WEB22CKTGGYQQ8](http://www.zoomerang.com/Survey/WEB22CKTGGYQQ8)

and tell us what you're concerned about, what you'd like to see us do in the months and years ahead.

It shouldn't take you more than 10 or 15 minutes ... and you'll be helping shape our programs and policies for the future.

Thank you!

### The Mission of Presbyterian Voices for Justice

We are a playful and passionate community of women and men in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) who are called to proclaim the Gospel vision of God's extravagant love and justice in church and society.

We seek the wisdom of the Spirit for following Christ's example and for living into the hope of sustained gender equality, racial reconciliation, full human rights for LGBT persons, economic justice, environmental wholeness, an end to war and all forms of violence, and a justice-loving shalom over all the earth.

We commit to risking the transformation of our own selves and our organization to live into this vision, even as we invite both church and society to meet this challenge.

## *International Peace*

# Struggling in Sudan and South Sudan

The newest country in Africa, South Sudan, came into being on July 9, 2011. This new country is the 4<sup>th</sup> poorest in the world.

There is no infrastructure – paved roads are almost non-existent; years of civil war destroyed many buildings in towns and cities; there are no schools, no public utilities, and no sanitation. Even as people were celebrating their independence from the

Khartoum government, the Khartoum government was waging war on the peoples of the disputed border areas of South Kordofan state, which includes the Nuba Mts. and the Abyei area (read this as the oil-producing area.) What is happening sounds like genocide. In north Sudan, black Southern Sudanese Christians are being persecuted, being fired from their jobs, being denied health care, as well as education. In fact, if you are not an Arab Muslim in the north, you will encounter persecution. Sharia Law is being strengthened in Khartoum and in all of the northern states.



Presbyterian Women has made Sudan the mission focus for the triennium 2009-2012. As a part of this, women from

warring tribes in the south were brought together for the first time last year for conversations around peace-making. These gatherings have been very effective. The Khartoum government has been stirring up intertribal conflict as a means of

forcing people to leave the oil rich areas of Sudan.

The Sudan Action Advocacy Forum (headed by Bill Andress of Trinity Presbytery) which works with the Persecution Project (Bradford Phillips, President) reported on a meeting with members of congress earlier in August. US congressman Chris Smith, chair of the house congressional panel on African issues and international human rights, convened the emergency hearing of three witnesses who recounted claims of "ethnic cleansing, murders, rapes" and a

burgeoning humanitarian crisis in the area. Testimonies were received from Andudu Adam Elnail, a bishop at the Anglican Diocese of Kadugli in South Kordofan; Bradford Phillips, President of Persecution Project; and Luka Biong Deng a member of South Sudan's ruling SPLM party. All three witnesses spoke of wide-ranging atrocities committed by Sudan's army against the Nuba population, and called on the US Administration to rally international efforts to stem the crisis. Bishop Andudu said his own Anglican cathedral, offices and home in South Kordofan's state capital of Kadugli were ransacked and looted. He also said a member of his congregation reported seeing mass graves less than a mile away. He called on the US and other members of the international community to begin to "translate moral outrage into effective action" to save lives. (Sudan Tribune, 08/04/2011)

Sylvia Carlson, member, Sudan Mission Network, Presbyterian Church, USA

## *Women*

### *Stretch Marks*

– 'Prosetry' by Lorelei Hillman  
(March 29, 2011)

Giving birth makes goddesses of us women – whether it is giving birth in sweat and pain, or through love and the color of the imagination; whether it results in congratulations or the ripping of our own souls from our dreams; whether the birth fills our arms or gives new life to another.

Every woman bears within her the body and breath of creation, but we have been taught that it has no value if it comes out of intercourse. Someone 'better' than us must lay the seed or the womb cannot give rise to its bread, but only ferments in sin.

This is history's trap, not God's. It was Mary's egg that gave Christ his dark hair and sparkling eyes. It was the heat of her body which taught him to love; her uterus and breast which filled him with compassion; her heart and hands that gave him the courage to die and face resurrection.

Just so, all women have the capacity and power to give birth, to become the goddess within. Through birth, they will become mothers, whether the child whom they teach to stand and walk ever stretched their bellies or tore their flesh at all.

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## How Holy is the Holy Land?

*John Bivens*

*Member of Steering Committee*

*Israel/Palestine Mission Network of PCUSA*

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What makes the Holy Land Holy? Why should we as Christians care about what is happening in the land called Holy? Most Americans – yes, and sadly most Christians – have only a few clues about the current situation “on the ground” in the Middle East and specifically in Israel and Palestine.

Abraham is acknowledged as being the father of three monotheistic faiths; Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Jews (Israelites) were chosen by God to be his favorite people as long as they were obedient. They suffered greatly and were exiled into slavery in Egypt. Moses led them out of the exile to the “promised land”, Canaan; the land of “milk and honey,” but Moses was not permitted to enter Canaan which was already occupied by Canaanites, commonly known as Palestinians. There were intermarriages between Jews, Canaanites, Moabites, and others. God sent his son, Jesus Christ, as the Messiah to provide salvation, first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles.

The Holy Land is centered on Jerusalem in the West Bank of Occupied Palestinian Territory. Each of the three faiths has communities and specific sites which have religious significance for them. Of

course there are other important communities and areas, as referenced in the Bible, that would be in the Holy Land extended. These include Damascus, Cairo, and communities east of the Jordan River, for example. Jerusalem in Arabic means “Abode of Peace” – certainly not the situation today. For Jews, Jerusalem has been the holiest city since King David first established it as the capital of Israel. Jerusalem for Christians is a holy city because of the ministry, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. For Muslims, Jerusalem is the third most holy city.

For Jews and Muslims, the Temple Mount is the most important and highly contested religious site in Jerusalem. The Dome of the Rock, a Jerusalem landmark, located on the Temple Mount, is the oldest existing example of Islamic architecture. On the west side of the Temple Mount is the Wailing Wall which has been the site for Jewish prayers for centuries. Sacred to Christians is the nearby Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

Now fast forward to 1896 when a Jewish Zionist named Theodor Herzl called for the creation of a Jewish State. At first it didn’t seem to matter where the Jewish State would be located, but then a deal was

made with Great Britain to take over Palestine. The statement “a land without people for a people without a land” really meant a land for Jews only. Palestine was not a land without people since many Arabs had lived in the area for centuries. The Zionists considered the Palestinians irrelevant. Then in 1948 David Ben-Gurion declared that the State of Israel was established and the first Arab-Israeli War began. U.S. President Harry Truman recognized Israel within hours. Israel won this war with the full financial and arms support of the United States. Over 700,000 Palestinians were driven from their homes and became refugees. There have been many more Palestinian refugees since the creation of Israel. So is this Holy Land?

What the U.N. expected in 1948 would be two separate and independent states is in reality the longest military occupation of our time to date. The Presbyterian Church (USA) has a long and rich history of supporting U.N. resolutions seeking peace in the Middle East. The General Assembly of the PCUSA has taken actions and passed significant resolutions regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as far back as 1967. For example, the 215<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in 2003 passed a resolution supporting the U.N. resolution “affirming the right of Israel to exist within secure borders, and the right of the Palestinians to self-determination, including the establishing of their own sovereign state and the right of return

of Palestinian refugees.” In addition, the Presbyterian Church “Challenges and encourages discussion of theological interpretations that confuse Biblical prophesies and affirmations of covenant, promise, and land, which are predicated on justice, righteousness, and mercy, with political statehood that asserts itself through military might, repressive discrimination, abuse of human rights, and other actions that do not do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.”

In an effort to bring about a lasting and just peace, a group of Christian Palestinians on December 11, 2009, released *The Kairos Palestine Document – A moment of truth: a word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering*. [See: <http://www.oikoumene.org/gr/resources/documents/other-ecumenical-bodies/kairos-palestine-document.html>] The General Assembly in 2010 endorsed the Kairos Palestine Document and “lifts the document up for study and discussion by Presbyterians; and directs creation of a study guide...” The description of “the reality on the ground” includes:

- The separation wall erected on Palestinian territory ...has turned our towns and villages into prisons, separating them from one another...”
- “Religious liberty is severely restricted; the freedom of access to the holy places is denied under the pretext of security. Jerusalem and its holy places are out of bounds for many Christians and Muslims from

the West Bank and the Gaza strip...Some of our Arab clergy are regularly barred from entering Jerusalem.”

- “Jerusalem is the heart of our reality. It is, at the same time, symbol of peace and sign of conflict. While the separation wall divides Palestinian neighborhoods, Jerusalem continues to be emptied of its Palestinian citizens, Christians and Muslims. Their identity cards confiscated, which means the loss of their right to reside in Jerusalem. Their homes are demolished or expropriated. Jerusalem, city of reconciliation, has become a city of discrimination and exclusion, a source of struggle rather than peace.”

Isn't it time to stand up and be counted? Let's finally put into action what we've affirmed! As Elias Chacour said: *“A Vision without Action is a Daydream;*

*Action without a Vision is a Nightmare.”* Become informed. Travel, if you can, to the West Bank and Israel and see and meet those who live and work there. Invite knowledgeable speakers and hold discussions and classes in your church. Don't be afraid to let our visions be known. Let's work together to seek peace and justice for ALL in what we call “The Holy Land.”

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## Are you overdue??

Has your membership in PVJ run out?  
Or is it almost up?  
You can check by looking on the address label on the cover of this *Network News*.

And if it's time,  
please use the envelope in the center in this issue, or go to  
[http://presbyvoicesforjustice.org/membership\\_form\\_2.htm](http://presbyvoicesforjustice.org/membership_form_2.htm)

*Thanks!*

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## GLBTQ

### “Thanks PV4J Friends!” ... from More Light Presbyterians!

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We give thanks to God for the historic passage of 10-A. The national tally on 10-A reached unprecedented support for LGBT equality: 97-72. We give thanks for your prayers, years of faithful advocacy work, and your participation in local presbyteries that made this dream a reality. We give thanks to God that the Presbyterian Church (USA) has entered a new era of equality for LGBT persons and their families. 10-A went into effect on July 10.

We know that this change was possible because of the collaboration among all of the justice organizations within the Presbyterian Church (USA). Thank you, **Presbyterian Voices for Justice** for being such a key part of this national organizing campaign. It was a privilege to work with you, Covenant Network of Presbyterians, TAMFS, Presbyterian Welcome, Presbyterian Rainbow and Presbyterian Promise.

Within this national organizing effort, we were able to hire two amazing full-time 10-A Campaign outreach staff, Rev. Debra Peevey and Candy Cox, produce national ads in the *Presbyterian Outlook*, create You-Tube videos, do phone banks, mail educational resource

materials to thousands of ministers and do outreach in all 173 presbyteries to get 10-A passed. Everyone, every justice organization, every Presbyterian committed to ending discrimination in our Church working together made this happen.

With regard to the passage of 10-A, many people are saying with joy and gratitude, “I wasn’t sure that I’d live long enough to see this day!” This is an extraordinary, historic moment in the life of our denomination, the witness to our global Presbyterian partners and within the Christian communion.

More Light Presbyterians has been working for change in our Church since 1974. This seems like a life-time and for many this work for LGBT justice and equality has been a lifetime. Together we kept a laser-sharp focus on repealing the anti-LGBT ordination policy of

G-6.0106b for the last 14 years. Presbyterian Voices for Justice, we are grateful that you have been there from the beginning and your commitment to equality never wavered.

For pro-LGBT work in our

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Church, it is important to ask, “**What now and what’s next?**” As important as achieving ordination policy change is, of course, the work to move from policy to reality is before all of us within 11,000 congregations and 173 presbyteries.

Fair, accurate interpretation and implementation of 10-A, now known as **G-2.0104** is our top and urgent priority. We sent Ordination Guides from an affirming perspective to staff in all 173 presbyteries. This new Ordination Guide is available online at [www.mlp.org](http://www.mlp.org).

In addition to the implementation work for 10-A, marriage equality work at the **220th General Assembly**, Pittsburgh, PA in 2012, is a key priority for us. We are working with Sessions now to draft and pass

marriage equality overtures within their presbyteries. Rev. Darcy Hawk will represent the Presbyterian Voices for Justice coordinating team on a group of progressives who are working on these overtures.

We believe that God is doing a new thing in our midst as declared by the prophet Isaiah in **Isaiah 43:19**. We rejoice that God “made a way in the wilderness” through the passage of 10-A. And now, all of us can be part of God’s making “rivers in the desert” for all of God’s children. May it be so.

Michael J. Adee  
Executive Director  
& Field Organizer  
More Light Presbyterians  
Santa Fe, NM

## ST. MARK'S PRESBYTERIAN IN TUCSON, AZ, SAYS 'ALLELUIA' TO PCUSA "YES" VOTE ON AMENDMENT 10A

By Sylvia Thorson-Smith

On Tuesday, May 10, the Presbytery of the Twin Cities cast the 87<sup>th</sup> and deciding vote to eliminate all barriers to the ordination of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people as ministers, deacons and elders. The vote becomes official on July 10, one year from when the General Assembly sent the amendment to the presbyteries for approval. Presbyterians join a growing Protestant movement of Lutheran, Episcopal, and United Church of Christ denominations in dropping constitutional barriers to LGBT ministry and leadership.

It's been a long wait, and St. Mark's Presbyterian – the church my husband, Mike, and I belong to in Tucson – was anxious to celebrate this historic change for full inclusion. St. Mark's is a More Light church, the only one in Tucson, and is well-known for its activism on all social justice issues. Our pastor (and former Witherspoon board member), Gusti Newquist, heralded the vote in worship on May 15, and the congregation applauded. "I'm long past due with an 'Alleluia'" to this one, and so is St. Mark's," she said.



We were a community ready to celebrate! Since I chair St. Mark's More Light Team, and we've been working and praying for this change for decades, Mike and I had an immediate response: "Party at our house!" As news of the vote came in on May 10, a hastily-gathered group gathered to drink champagne and thank God for this miraculous blessing.

We immediately began making plans for a congregational thanksgiving on our annual More Light Sunday, June 19. We had already invited Dr.

Michael Adee, field organizer for More Light Presbyterians, to preach, and now the occasion took on even greater meaning. In addition to celebrating this landmark vote on Sunday morning, we decided to hold an evening worship service and invite the whole Tucson community to join us. Our Communication Team spread the word, and the *Arizona Daily Star* published a lengthy story about St. Mark's and the vote on Sunday, June 12.

In order to acknowledge the stories of LGBT persons whose leadership gifts have been denied by the PCUSA and other faith communities, we ordered 30 stoles from the Shower of Stoles Project, and their beautiful witness encircled the sanctuary. June 19 was also Father's Day, and Michael Adee's sermon was entitled, "Bridges, Not Walls: Being Family and Church." Following worship, as we have done for years on More Light Sunday, rainbow sherbet was served in the courtyard, and this time participants decorated a large cross with multicolored ribbons.

Sunday night's service was developed around the theme, "Remembering, Rejoicing, Reconciling." Leaders from Southside Presbyterian Church—also well-known in Tucson for its activism and inclusion—participated in both the service and the planning of the evening. A diverse gathering of people joined St. Mark's members in prayers

and singing. A good friend of St. Mark's, Carol Bradsen, spoke of her *remembering* – how she'd been a Youth Advisory Delegate at the 1991 GA, voted against the Human Sexuality report, later came out as lesbian, and ultimately left the PCUSA to seek ordination in the Episcopal Church. Michael and Gusti recalled how we got to this extraordinary moment of *rejoicing* and led us to think about the work of *reconciling* that is needed to become a truly inclusive denomination for LGBT and all persons.

Before the Benediction, a poetically gifted St. Mark's member, Sharon Kha, led the congregation in a "rap" that she wrote for Michael Adee. Shouting "Alleluia, Alleluia!" we raised our arms and voices in joyful exuberance, with gratitude for this amazing vote and the promise of this new day.

# Immigration

by Lorelei Hillman

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This afternoon the little red light on my phone blinked – another Facebook message, this time from Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform. If you live in Arizona, you live with SB1070. It colors our lives at home, in business, in government and in the church.

That's right, I said *in the church*. This is probably true for you as well, no matter where your home is – the immigration issue is simmering in every state of the US, and in countries far and wide. It affects the church, from pastor to pew, and here is one story of how a law like SB1070 in a state like Arizona impacts real people in a real congregation.

A few weeks ago, I sat down with Rev. Gonzalo Derney Ramos, the pastor of Betania Presbyterian Church in Phoenix to interview him on the experience of his church concerning immigration law changes. Betania is one of two established Hispanic churches in our Presbytery (Grand Canyon); the building is both worn and welcoming, seated on a neighborhood corner between two schools. Their stated mission is “to love God and love their neighbors,” and they have a long history of serving in this place, where they have been doing ministry since 1920. Pastor Ramos came to Betania some

seven years ago from Colombia, where he was a teacher and the director of a seminary.

Betania's members come from eleven different home countries. About 28% of participants have come into the United States without immigration documentation. The rest are either US citizens, are in process to become citizens, or have their documentation to work in the US. It is important to realize that it is this latter half of the body who provide stability to the church, both for leadership and for finances.

Rev. Ramos welcomed me warmly – he is obviously proud of Betania, and feels blessed to be their pastor. When I asked him what made him decide to come to the US for this call, he mentioned that the change offered greater opportunities for him as a religious leader, and for his daughter in her education. Although he says his English is not good, I felt very comfortable talking with him, and there were only a few occasions during the one-hour interview when I felt I had to ask him for clarification – he is quite clearly a highly intelligent man who is an insightful thinker.

Knowing that a pastor's life is busy, I came to the point quickly. “Pastor Ramos,” I asked, “what has

been your experience and the experience of this church as a result of the immigration law changes which have come to Arizona?" He began: "Immigration is a complex issue..."

The majority of the church's members (including those without documentation) have lived and worked within the United States for 20-25 years; their children came into this country when they were two or three years old. For the now-adult children, this means they are not legally from here, but they are not socially from 'there,' either. "You may say, Lorelei, that the parents are at fault, but the children cannot be blamed." For the most part, these young people would describe themselves as Americans, culturally and emotionally.

About 46-47% of the church's members are Americans of Hispanic heritage, born in the United States. These are the core members of the congregation, the stable and consistent support of the ministry. Quite a few have been members of Betania for most of their lives. Their families live in many countries and some have family members in process to become American citizens. All of them – citizens and undocumented immigrants alike – recognize that immigration is a political issue which does not seem so political when you speak to the individuals involved.

The political problem, as Pastor Ramos sees it, is a conflict between the needs of the state and the reality of the national government's handling of the issue. Both state and national

economics are also involved, since immigration does not affect Arizona alone, but touches every state in the US. Still, the people are here, and a political solution will be the only way to finally make a difference.

"Two or three years ago," Pastor Ramos continued, "there were many problems with the local authorities. A young woman who worked at the post office was standing in line to buy groceries when an Anglo woman behind her said, 'Go back to Mexico and stop taking our jobs!' The young woman was in fact a US citizen." Traffic stops are one way the local police have of checking a person's citizenship; Pastor Ramos himself has been stopped in a school zone and simply released when he showed his immigration papers. Racial profiling is illegal, but it was hard for Rev. Ramos to ignore the fact that white drivers were going by at speeds well above the limit while he was stopped and asked for documentation.

As the pastor of the church, he often receives phone calls to come to the police station – once for a man who had been stopped on his way to a regular kidney dialysis appointment, and at other times for people who have forgotten their papers at home. Perhaps the most insidious problem comes when the community itself uses the situation of the undocumented for personal reasons. A husband threatens his undocumented wife with deportation, warning that she will never see her children again if she doesn't submit to him. A jealous girlfriend threatens her rival, "I

will call Arpaiao (the sheriff) on you...”

From time to time women will come to Sunday worship with their children, the family weeping because their husband and father has been deported. These men often simply don't come home; they may have been delivered into Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE), or they may have been put on a bus to the border and dropped into Mexico, whether that is their country of origin or not. The women and children wait at home, praying that they will hear and know their loved one is safe. The church has also had to care for children whose parents are both suddenly missing. Hearts are broken and lives are changed forever. The church and its people grieve, but can do nothing to prevent the suffering of their brothers and sisters in Christ. Some families have moved back to their homelands; some have moved to other states. “I don't have enough words in English to express how the church feels,” Pastor Ramos tells me. “It affects everyone; we all feel it.”

Eighteen days before our interview, a mother stood crying in church because her adult son had been taken away. She had no support and no income. One week later, he was back. In his worry for his mother, he had risked the long and extremely dangerous walk through the desert of southern Arizona in the middle of summer to return.

For a pastor in Arizona, immigration can be isolating. In Presbytery of Grand Canyon, some attempts

have been made to get members of Anglo churches to visit with members of Hispanic churches and fellowships, but no assistance is given for legal issues, for the practical needs of those whose lives have been torn apart, and there is no financial assistance for families who are forced or finally decide to move. Pastor Ramos has made some connections in the ecumenical community, but longs for reliable guidance from his own denomination. In the last two months, a team has been called together, with the goal of developing an action at the national level through the General Assembly, and this gives some hope; but there is such dislocation and such anxiety in the Hispanic/Latino community that it can be overwhelming for clergy and for lay leadership. The director of a seminary in Columbia, Pastor Ramos finds this work in a parish “at the heart of a political storm” much more difficult than he had ever expected because of the way the political environment has affected the people he is called to serve.

Perhaps the most difficult part is speaking hope to a community that struggles to see hope. Their incomes have been slashed and many are unable to support their church as they have in the past. Their lives are precarious. Even their children are in limbo. Six young people from the congregation graduated from high school this spring, but without documentation they cannot go on to college. The situation is particularly worrying for their young women, who

tend to turn their attention to boy-friends and end up pregnant. The congregation has done what they can to support some of the students through the local community college, but the classes are \$600 a semester, and their money cannot stretch much beyond basic needs.

Church members work six to seven days a week, often much more than eight hours per day. On Sunday, they take care of home chores and spend time with their families. They miss church, and lose their connection, or are ashamed that they cannot make a contribution and stay away out of embarrassment. The same problem which Anglo congregations experience, of losing members and the membership aging, are exaggerated in the Hispanic churches by social and economic attrition.

Betania has in the past received financial help from the Presbytery. They would like to be a self-supporting church. Yet month by month the members lose their jobs, or their hours are cut, and the church struggles to continue its ministry in new and different ways. In the meantime, insurance bills, utilities, and expenses are all on the rise. The stress makes everyone tired and emotional. All problems eventually come to look like “immigration issues.” Several months ago, a young man – the son of a Betania church member – was killed in the area, and the killing was blamed on racism sparked by immigration tensions. “When everything exists in this context, everything becomes the con-

text,” said Pastor Ramos.

Today, seventy-five people gather to worship at Betania Presbyterian Church. Pastor Ramos studies his Bible, seeking that message of faithfulness and hope that has kept the Body of Christ alive for over two thousand years. Then he closes his eyes and prays: for the people, for the community, and for the future. He knows that God has a vision for the world, and he believes in that vision. From Ur to Haran, Haran to Egypt, Egypt to the land God promised, there is a way ahead, even when it cannot be seen from here.

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*Book Review*

## Reflecting on Marcus Borg's *Putting Away Childish Things*

A theologian writes a novel ... and it works!

by Doug King

A theologian writing a novel might make you curious – as you might be curious about a dancing elephant or a singing turtle. In fact that's the reason I picked the novel off the library shelf: what would this be like – a novel coming from a theologian?

But Marcus Borg, one of the leading scholars and teachers of contemporary thinking about “the historical Jesus,” has given us a novel which puts his theology into a form that will be more inviting, perhaps, for many who don't consider themselves scholars and theologians. For me, at least, it was a good story, with characters whom I came to care about, and a plot that engaged me so I wanted to see how the story came out. And woven through it all was the theological vision that has been generated by the work of the Jesus Seminar over the past few decades.



Borg speaks to us primarily through his main character, Kate Riley, who is a professor of religious studies at Wells College, a liberal arts school located in Wisconsin. She is greatly appreciated by many students for her creative and engaging style of teaching, along with her readiness to question traditional views of Jesus and Christianity. One of her gifts, though, is the ability to relate to

students for whom traditional Christianity still holds great meaning. She doesn't do what I've seen numerous “liberal” professors do: looking down on those who cling anxiously to the old forms of faith.

Kate's ability to connect with a few conservative students may be the most important thread running through the novel. She draws one conservative student, Erin Mattson, into real conversation and thinking about her own faith, as Erin moves

between a close (and closed) fundamentalist fellowship group and a much more open group of students who are followers of Kate. Borg manages to offer critical reflections on the conservative faith that Erin and others represent, without dismissing that tradition at all. He does this partly by showing Kate's own continuing depth of devotion to many elements of the tradition, especially in prayer and meditation, and the images and myths of the Biblical foundation of that tradition. Thus Borg deals with many of the objections that conservatives have raised against his scholarly work, but through respectful conversation rather than hostile debate – something we might like to see a few folks in Washington try out!

I especially appreciated Borg's portrayal of Kate's own deep religious/spiritual experience as a powerful sense of the connectedness of all things, and of her own loving participation in that infinite cosmic network. That fits with my own experience, and it was good to find it in this story.

Finally, if you're looking for a book to use in a reading group in a congregation, or even a book group of miscellaneous friends, this might provide a starting point for good conversation among people of various spiritual persuasions – or of no defined religious faith. (Some "suggestions for reading groups" are

even included at the back of the book.) Borg provides structured expositions of some of his major theological/Biblical ideas, in the form lecture notes given by Kate to her students. He also gives us glimpses of some her own moments of mindful meditation and prayer, as we follow her through her own struggles with faculty politics, personal relationships, anxiety about her own career, and much more.

Through Kate, Borg also helps us to consider viewing religion not as a divine "revelation" dropped in our midst, but as a human, cultural creation – a "human construct," as sociologist Peter Berger described it in *The Sacred Canopy*, way back in the 1960s. That, like Kate's sense of spirituality, connects well with my own life and thought.

Through Kate's life and relationships, we are presented with a number of issues to consider: sexuality in a variety of forms; how Christians relate to other faiths and to people of no religious faith; the nastiness that often arises within academic (and other!) institutions; how faith gets wrapped up in our anxieties, sometimes reinforcing them and sometimes helping us work through them. For a refreshing and engaging theological "story," for yourself and for others, give this a try.

# News of Voices for Justice

## PVJ plans for the 2012 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

### **Rev. J. Herbert Nelson to speak to PVJ**

The arrangements for one of Presbyterian Voices for Justice events at General Assembly are pretty well in place. **The PVJ Awards Luncheon will take place at East Liberty Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh on Sunday, July 1<sup>st</sup>.** Due to a change in the General Assembly program, there will not be one very large worship service on Sunday morning at the convention center, but commissioners and visitors will be encouraged to worship at one of the many Presbyterian churches in Pittsburgh (a town where Presbyterians are dense). The Committee on Local Arrangements will be running buses to a select number of churches. East Liberty is one of them.

The event will be in two parts following the 10:00 AM worship service. East Liberty Church is hosting a lunch in their fellowship hall. Those attending the Awards Luncheon will sit together at designated tables for the meal. Following the meal, we will adjourn to the third floor music hall and adjoining veranda for fellowship over dessert, followed by the program. We are pleased to announce that **our keynote speaker will be the Rev. J. Herbert Nelson, Director of the Office of Public Witness in Washington, D. C.** He gained some notoriety earlier this year for being arrested in the Capitol rotunda, along with other religious leaders, as they held a prayer vigil for the poor in the U.S., in the face of the federal budget crisis.

The awards presentation and the biennial meeting of the PVJ membership will follow the keynote address. PVJ members living in the Pittsburgh area are encouraged to attend.

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# Network News

from Presbyterian Voices for Justice

Fall 2011

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<b>PVJ Takes a Look at the “Occupy Wall Street” Movement</b>	5 - 8
<b>The Moderator’s Column</b>	2
<b>Network News going on-line only</b>	4 and 9
<b>Struggling in Sudan and South Sudan</b>	11
<b>How Holy is the Holy Land?</b>	13 - 15
<b>“Thanks to PVJ Friends” ... from More Light Presbyterians</b>	16
<b>St. Mark’s, Tucson, Celebrates the Yes vote on 10A,</b> by Sylvia Thorson-Smith	18
<b>Immigration,</b> by Lorelei Hillman	20 - 23
<b>Book Review:</b> Marcus Borg’s <i>Putting Away Childish Things</i> , by Doug King	24 - 25
<b>PVJ plans for the 2012 General Assembly</b>	26

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