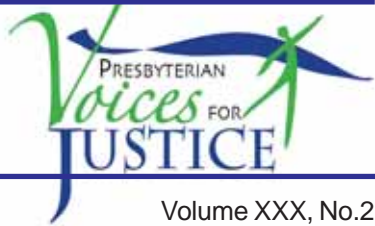

Network News



Spring 2010

www.presbyvoicesforjustice.org

Volume XXX, No.2



The Minneapolis skyline, from the Mississippi River



**A gift from
Presbyterian Voices
for Justice**

**to commissioners
and advisory
delegates to the 219th
General Assembly**

**with our prayer that
we may gather in
Minneapolis**

**to let the rivers of
living water
flow as streams of
justice and peace.**

**See back cover for
list of contents**



The Co-Moderator's Column

A Special Welcome to our Commissioners and Advisory Delegates

by Coleen Bowers, Acting Co-Moderator

I imagine it must be with deep respect and humility that all of you approach your daunting duties during our coming 219th General Assembly – respect for our church and its process and polity, and humility knowing the magnitude of the decisions that will be before you. And it is with grace that Presbyterian Voices for Justice will extend to you a warm welcome as you arrive at the Assembly.

We look forward to meeting each and every one – young and old, male and female, conservative and liberal. Please stop by our booth in the exhibit hall so that we may get to know you. Also, please join us if you can, for our special events during General Assembly: our Commissioner Orientation on Saturday morning July 3rd, the Awards Luncheon on Sunday July 4th, the Voices of Sophia Breakfast on Tuesday July 6th and our now famous and grand event, the dance on Tuesday evening. You'll find more information about all these events on pages 4 and 5. We hope to see you there!

This issue of *Network News* is a special edition prepared for General Assembly and is packed with informative feature articles including an enlightening story of the Kwanzaa Church, which is located in north Minneapolis and will be receiving our Whole Gos-

pel Congregation Award. You will also learn about long-time devoted Presbyterians Manley and Ann Olson who will be the recipients of the PVJ Award for Outstanding Leadership. Also included are our thoughts on many of the overtures and other business that will be coming before you. I hope you will find the time (along with all the other reading you're receiving!) to read carefully and thoughtfully through these pages as a way to prepare for your work during the Assembly.

Since the recent union of the Witherspoon Society and Voices of Sophia, the resulting Presbyterian Voices for Justice seeks to deal seriously with issues affecting women, along with more general concerns for peace and justice. We are not a single issue organization but speak out on many areas of injustice within our church and our world.

As commissioners and advisory delegates to our General Assembly, we offer you our support and prayers.

If you're at the Assembly please visit our booth – # 303 – 305 in the Exhibit Hall near the main entrance into the hall.

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 bumper stickers and lots more!



Vicki Moss at our booth at the 2008 GA

And if you can get to our
Presbyterian Voices for Justice Awards Luncheon
 on Sunday, July 4
 following the Assembly Worship, *please come!*

Check at the Assembly Ticket Desk about the availability of tickets or come by the PVJ booth, and we'll see what we can do.
 See more about our events on pages 4 - 5.

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

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 (and you can pay online, too!) or contact our Communications Coordinator:

Doug King
 2805 Lakeshore Drive, # 9
 La Crosse, WI 54603
douging2@aol.com
 Phone (608) 782-5275

Voices for Justice events at the 219th General Assembly

You're
invited!

Saturday, July 3, 7:00 to 8:30 am

Presbyterian Voices for Justice Commissioner Orientation

(continuing the Witherspoon Society Commissioner Orientation)

Everything Presbyterian progressives need to know in order to be effective participants in the Assembly. This is a wake-up call that will include a continental breakfast, interactive sharing, worship, and information about GA issues. Come, meet people, and be energized for our week together!

If you're a commissioner, we especially hope you will come to this Orientation event! We know the tickets are costly, and we want to encourage you to come by promising a \$10 rebate on the cost of your ticket. Just show us your ticket when you come, give us a slip with your name and address, and accept the \$10. You can use it for candy, ice cream, and coffee during the week when you need a little boost in energy.

Hilton Hotel. Tickets: \$27.00

Sunday, July 4, 12:00 to 2:30 pm

Presbyterian Voices for Justice Awards Luncheon

(continuing the Witherspoon Society Awards Luncheon)

Join us after Sunday worship to see old friends and meet new ones. The keynote speaker, Mary Elva Smith, will speak on the topic, "**God's Urgings: Are We Listening?**" She will be inviting us to explore with her the question of how, in this season of dis-ease and uncertainty, we might have the courage to be still and listen, to wonder and discern in community what God may be calling us to do now.

Mary Elva says of herself: I am a risk taker, love adventures and avoid getting up early! I have been involved in the church all my life and called by the church for 40 years. Having studied the Art of Spiritual Direction at SFTS, I found myself nourished and nurtured by the experience. Happily retired, I delight in being freer to explore the world and to serve as retreat leader, spiritual director and staff member for the SFTS Diploma in the Art of Spiritual Direction.

Our two awards will be presented. See pages 42-46 for more about the recipients!

NOTE: Our Membership Business Meeting (and our first meeting as a newly

merged organization!) will be held immediately after our Luncheon program. See details about our membership meeting on page 50.

Hyatt Regency Hotel, Nicollett Ballroom. Tickets: \$42.00

Tuesday, July 6, 7:00-8:30 a.m.

Voices of Sophia Breakfast

(sponsored by Presbyterian Voices for Justice)

Relmaging Church: De-Centering Privilege as an Act of Global Citizenship

Speaker: The Rev. Dr. Christine Smith, professor of preaching, United Seminary of the Twin Cities (UCC) and preacher for the first “Re-Imagining” gathering in 1993.

What does it mean to have social privilege? How might Christians “de-center,” or relocate, themselves socially? How is this process of de-centering a faithful, prophetic act of justice in our world? Dr. Smith’s message will challenge us to look at the complex language of margin and center, of stranger and other. She will also help us to consider actions and spiritual disciplines that all of us, as privileged citizens, need to adopt in order to live more justice-loving lives. Christine Smith is eminently qualified to help us *re-imagine* a **just church** in a global world.

Hyatt Regency Hotel. Tickets \$27.00

Tuesday, July 6, 9:00pm-1:00am

Witherspoon Dance

sponsored by Presbyterian Voices for Justice

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.

Hilton Hotel. Tickets \$20.00 Tickets can be ordered through the General Assembly ticket service, *and will be also be available at the door.*

Tickets can be ordered through the General Assembly website, by going to <http://www.pcusa.org/ga219/registration.htm>.

To contact us at GA

We want to be available if we can do anything to help you!

You may find us often at the PVJ booth, # 303 and 305 in the Exhibit Hall.

And here are some of our cell phone numbers:

Bill Dummer – 414-232-8450
 Sylvia Carlson – 724-454-5088
 Mitch Trigger – 973-970-5751
 Vicki Moss (in our booth) –
 347-907-9849 (please don't text her)
 Doug King – 952-270-8134

Most of us will be staying at the Best Western Normandy Inn, and we'll be glad to see you there almost any time.

Looking for a place to stay at GA?

Voices for Justice has a block of rooms reserved at a relatively good rate at the Best Western Normandy Inn, just about 5 blocks from the Convention Center. For more information, get in touch with Doug King, by e-mail at dougking2@aol.com, or by phone at (608) 782-5275.

Do you prefer larger type for reading?

You can download this issue of *Network News*, in PDF format, and print it in full 8^{1/2} by 11 inch pages (with larger type!).

Just go to <http://presbyvoicesforjustice.org/NN%20spring%2010%20sm.pdf>. Open the file in your PDFreader.

Click on PRINT. In the box that appears, go to the Page Handling section. In the Page Scaling section, choose "fit to printable area." If the line for "choose paper source by PDF page size" is checked, uncheck it. And we'll hope it works.

Some GA links:

For the first registration page >> <http://www.pcusa.org/ga219/registration.htm>

For the docket of official Assembly events >>
<http://www.pcusa.org/ga219/more/docket.htm>

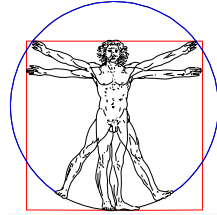
For the complete schedule of events >> (36 pages, in PDF format)
<http://www.pcusa.org/ga219/pdf/scheduleofevents.pdf>

GA hotels – a map >> http://www.pcusa.org/ga219/pdf/minn_hotel_map.pdf



The Editor's Spot

Two images for thinking about GA



Sometimes a picture, an image of some kind, helps us think and talk about difficult subjects. Just recall how many images are used in the Bible to talk about God and about human life. As we approach our 219th General Assembly, with all its difficult subjects and matters of contention, I'd like to suggest two images that might help us in our thinking and our talking with one another.

First a pretty simple one: A circle.

"How Large Is Your Circle?" That was the title of a sermon preached by the Rev. John Shuck on Sunday, May 2, 2010, in First

Presbyterian Church of Elizabethton, Tennessee. I found his use of the image of a circle a very helpful way of thinking about our coming General Assembly. [You can read it on his blog page at <http://www.shuckandjive.org/2010/05/how-large-is-your-circle-sermon.html>]

"How big is your circle?" That, he says, is the crucial question raised by Jesus' call to us to love one another: How big a circle is included within that "love one another"? Is it our family and friends? Or people who believe or look or act like we do? Or is it "everyone?" That, obviously, is a step toward the right answer. It's a tall order,

The Mission of Presbyterian Voices for Justice

adopted by the Board of Witherspoon/Voices
on November 19, 2009

We are a spirited 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.

though, loving everybody.

But here's another step toward the answer: "How do you love six billion people, let alone non-human relations? We do this through politics. We put it in terms of human rights and a just distribution and access to Earth's gifts."

So the question that confronts all of us – in the battles over immigration, and the rights of people who are different from us in one way or another, and what it means to be people of faith in this wildly diverse world – is simply "how large is your circle?"

This metaphor of the circle – and the question of how big we draw it – might be very helpful as we deal with various issues at the Assembly, but like all metaphors it has its limits. A circle is, after all, a geometric figure. It is finite, and no matter how big it may be, it is still closed. And it doesn't really change. It may grow larger or smaller, but if we bend it or squash it or open it up, it's no longer a circle. So we might look for a different kind of image to help us consider our life as a people of faith, a church.

And for that I would turn to a very familiar bible image for the church: the body. The body of Christ, yes – but still the image is of a body. This image comes not from the neat world of geometry, but from the organic, messy world of living beings.

After all, when Jesus talked about his little community of friends and followers, he didn't call them a circle, but his friends, a family, or even (to borrow a phrase Paul seemed to like) his body. It would be hard to find an image more organic than "body." What can this tell us about being open and inclusive?

First, a body obviously does have boundaries, and it cannot be stretched too far. We are bounded by our own skin, for starters, and the psychic boundaries that keep us wary of getting too close to others, or letting them get too close to us. But those boundaries are not absolute. If our boundaries were as closed as a perfect circle, we could not live. Our bodies must have all kinds of permeability – letting air in and out, food and water and ... well, you know the details, some of them more interesting than others. With those permeable boundaries there is risk – germs and injuries and imperfections of all sorts can ruin our bodies and end our lives.

A body, then, always has its risks and joys. It is really an intricate finely tuned network (when it's healthy) with nerve impulses and blood and air and food and fluids being "communicated" throughout the system.

And we're hearing from people like our Moderator, the Rev. Bruce Reyes-Chow, that we need to get that network, the body of Christ that we call the church, functioning in the new ways that are possible today – with on-line social networking and all the rest. But that will take more than technology – it will take the will and the wisdom, the courage and the self-restraint and willingness to listen, that make true communication possible.

That new kind of networking will also take a willingness to be who we are, where we are, doing what we can do to *embody* God's love for the world through the stuff we do, day in and day out. Presbyterian Voices for Justice, in presenting the Whole Gospel Church Award to Kwanzaa Church, is intentionally lifting up that kind of embodying of the Gospel, for just such daily acting out of God's love is clearly

what they are about. But we also do it, as John Shuck reminds us, through politics – through large-scale actions, policies and programs that reach far beyond our own embodiment of divine love and justice and peace.

We live in a new culture, as our Vice Moderator the Rev. Byron Wade has been helping us to see. In a talk in April at the Clearwater 2010 conference, not far north of Minneapolis, he contrasted the now-fading “modern era,” which is characterized by single truth, central authority and standardized worship, with the “post-modern era” with its shifting world views, changing power bases and more expressive forms of worship. “We’re going from control of chaos to people living with ambiguity,” he said. We are becoming a community that is “contextually responsive.”

So we invite you all, especially as you may be participating in our coming Great Presbyterian Family Gathering, to consider the circle and the body. Let’s ask ourselves and our sister and brother Presbyterians how widely we can draw the circle of love. Let’s ask how our body, the body of Christ, can become a network with better circulation, a stronger heartbeat, more effective activity to build and change the world in which God has placed us. What can we receive from one another (in the church and beyond it), and what can we give?

Let’s seek new ways to be present in our world and in our new cultural environment – acting for justice and peace right where we are (not just in thoughts and words, but in deeds, done through our bodies).

And let’s seek ways to extend our love *beyond* the reach of our own actions,

shaping politics and policies that will bring justice and peace and well-being throughout the whole wide circle of nations and races and species that are within the beloved circle of God’s creation.

Doug King, editor of *Network News* and Communications Coordinator of PVJ

THE GIGGLE BOX

Applicants for jobs at a company are asked to fill out a questionnaire. Among the things candidates list is their high school and when they attended. One prospective employee dutifully wrote the name of his high school, followed by the dates attended: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.

A distraught senior citizen phoned her doctor. “Is it true,” she asked, “that the medication you prescribed has to be taken for the rest of my life?” “Yes,” the doctor told her. There was a moment of silence before the senior lady replied, “I’m wondering, then, just how serious is my condition because this prescription is marked ‘no refills’”

Reflecting on some of the work coming to the Assembly

Prepared by Doug King, Communications Coordinator of Presbyterian Voices for Justice

This Assembly, like those before it, will face a daunting amount of work, mostly in the form of reports prepared by committees over the past two years, and overtures sent by presbyteries for consideration and action. They cover a huge range of subjects large and small, from minutiae of rules governing the Assembly itself, to policies dealing with the Middle East, the war in Afghanistan, who may or may not be ordained, and much more.

The purpose of this overview of the issues is not to cover everything – who could write such a document, and who would read it? But we will try to lift up some of the questions and issues that seem most important to the mission of our group: “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.” Well, that may sound a bit ambitious, but those aims all seem essential to the living out of the Gospel in our world today.

This analysis offers some comments and perspectives on the issues that we are lifting up for attention, but this should not be read as a declaration of policy or recommendations for action by Presbyterian Voices for Justice. Our aim is simply to

provide food for thought as you consider the issues.

Our survey is organized following the division of labor among the nineteen committees that will be working on clusters of more or less related issues during the Assembly, and we’ll follow the order by which the committees are numbered. We apologize to those committees whose work seems to get less of our attention; that is not because those issues are less important, but simply because they are not so closely related to our group’s particular aims. It is simply a matter of trying to focus on the matters which concern us most, and on which we feel most informed.

Finally, we want to thank a number of friends and colleagues who have contributed greatly to preparing this survey. A great deal of material on international and peacemaking affairs has been contributed by Marilyn White of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, and the Rev. Len Bjorkman, who has been involved in Presbyterian Middle East peacemaking efforts for many years. Len has produced essentially, and with some help, the entire survey of the work for Committee 14, the comment on item 13-07, and the discussion of items 08-03, -04, and -09. Sylvia Thorson-Smith, a member of the board of Presbyterian Voices for Justice and our Issues Coordinator, has also contributed significantly to this preview of the issues.

Our thanks to all of them, and the others who have contributed in so many ways.

If you have comments or questions you would like to share with us, please do so! You can contact us online with a note to dougking2@aol.com, or call me, Doug King, at (608) 782-5275, in La Crosse, Wisconsin. At the Assembly, we would be happy to see you at the PVJ booth in the Exhibit Hall and at any of our events.

So – here goes.

Committee 03: General Assembly Procedures

This committee deals with some of the mundane but vital matters of how the Assembly is conducted. A couple of critical matters will be discussed here which are of special concern to those who are committed to helping our church become more just and more inclusive.

Committee 03 will deal with proposals that would in one way or another simply have us stop talking about making our policies relating to ordination and marriage more inclusive to Presbyterians who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. *Item 03-07, from the Presbytery of New Harmony*, would require that any “amendment to the Constitution that proposes substantially the same action as that which was approved by one of the two previous sessions of the General Assembly” and then was not approved by the presbyteries, may not be considered by an Assembly unless 75% of the commissioners vote to accept it as an item for business.

Item 03-17, from the Presbytery of Foothills, might accomplish the same

thing – delay of any change – by having the PC(USA) hold a legislative General Assembly only once every six years, and having an “Annual General Convocation Meeting” with no legislative action in the other years.

We believe these overtures are thinly disguised efforts to prevent Assemblies from regularly reconsidering justice issues. Movements for social justice take time, and hearts are changed as each Assembly wrestles with important issues of the day. Passage of these overtures would bind the Spirit of God from moving in the work of each Assembly.

Item 03-19, from the Presbytery of Santa Barbara, seems to call for the creation of a GA “morals squad,” to require that all Presbyterian organizations and events held at an Assembly or in relation to any other PC(USA) event must be evaluated before they occur and afterwards, to insure that they are “conducted in a manner that honor the constitutional standards of the church.” This is proposed in reaction to the celebration of a wedding during the More Light Presbyterians’ dinner at the 2008 General Assembly – a celebration and affirmation of the marriage of two gay men. You can read our report of that celebration on our website, at http://www.presbyvoicesforjustice.org/2007/2008_GA.htm

Not only would this overture be unenforceable; it seeks to regulate affinity groups in the church that are not required to subscribe to constitutional standards that they deem unjust.



Committee 04: Middle Governing Body Issues

Item 04-03 has come to the Assembly from the Presbytery of Santa Barbara, which calls for the creation of a *new, non-geographical synod*, upon the decision of three presbyteries to join such a body, which would “maintain the standards for ordination and continuing ministry,” including such doctrinal affirmations as “the singular saving work of Jesus Christ, [and] the unique and authoritative witness of Scripture,” along with “the standard that its officers will live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness.” The synod would also provide to its presbyteries and congregations some statement such as the “Essential Tenets and Reformed Distinctives” statement which was adopted by the Presbytery of San Diego in 2003. And of course the synod “will celebrate marriages only between a man and woman.”

The Rev. Margaret Thomas has prepared a thoughtful analysis of this proposal, which you can find on our website at <http://presbyvoicesforjustice.org/2010/219%20GA%202.htm>
#thomas%20on%20synod

Item 04-04, from Beaver-Butler Presbytery, seems to aim for *non-geographical presbyteries* as well, by providing “flexibility in presbytery membership,” by replacing the current definition of the presbytery as consisting of churches and ministers within a defined geographical area, so that it would instead include those “who have chosen to affiliate based on geographic, theological, missional or other considerations of importance to those congregations.”

The rationale for this proposal includes the familiar affirmation of G-1.0301(1)(a), that “God alone is Lord of the conscience ...” Further, the rationale includes the affirmation in G-3.0401d that the church today is called “to a new openness to God’s continuing reformation of the Church ecumenical ...” These are all affirmations which most progressives in the church would certainly affirm heartily, so the debate on this may be interesting.

Item 04-05, from the Synod of the Southwest, would create “a Special Committee to Explore the Roles and Relationships of Synods and Presbyteries to Each Other, to the Agencies, and to Congregations.”

Item 04-06, a recommendation from the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly, would deal with the same issue of middle governing bodies by appointing a General Assembly Commission.

We note that both of these last two proposed studies could clearly have a profound effect on the structure and indeed the whole life of our church. Who is named to any such committee, and what groups and interests they represent, should be a matter for serious attention.

Committee 06: Church Orders and Ministry

Item 06-01, from Mission Presbytery, is an important and helpful clarification that Certified Christian Educators are “entitled” to play an active role in their presbyteries.

On Ordination

It’s no surprise that there are lots of

overtures on this topic, but some of them offer new approaches to the issue – some taking further steps toward fair and inclusive ordination policies, others calling for a reinstatement of the more complete ban on LGBT ordination, and still others calling for delay, in one way or another, of any further action.

To restore the ban:

There are of course efforts to overturn the action of the 218th General Assembly, which removed the various statements, of Authoritative Interpretation and Definitive Guidance, propounded since 1978, which effectively banned the ordination of LGBT Presbyterians. The ban remains in effect through provision G-6.0106b in the Book of Order, but it is now left to the ordaining body (congregation or presbytery) to determine how to weigh its relevance to each particular candidate.

Item 06-04, from the Presbytery of San Diego, would reinstate the various interpretive statements, thus restoring the absolute ban on ordination.

Item 06-05, from the Presbytery of Shenandoah, would enact an authoritative interpretation reinforcing G-6.0106b so that “those engaged in unrepentant homosexual practice *or those who affirm their freedom to be so engaged*, may not be ordained as ministers of the Word and Sacrament, elders, or deacons.” [Italics added.]

Item 06-11, from the Presbytery of Beaver-Butler, would replace the current G-6.0106b with a longer and more intricate statement, which claims that “foremost” among the standards for ordination are “the New Testament Epistolary ethical requirements for ordained officers of

ministry, which include but are not limited to chastity in singleness and fidelity in monogamous heterosexual marriage.” This seems to elevate the letters of the New Testament over the Gospels and the life and teaching of Jesus – perhaps because Jesus was never quite specific enough in condemning certain groups or actions.

Item 06-18, from the Presbytery of Central Washington, acknowledges the right of conscience, but says that does not trump the ban in G-6.0108b. In essence, people are free to disagree with the rule, but cannot be ordained if they do.

To end the ban:

Many overtures have been submitted aimed at removing the ban. *Item 06-07*, from the Presbytery of Hudson River, does the job most directly, simply calling for the deletion of G-6.0106b entirely, arguing that “G-6.0106b is superfluous.” If, to quote the old Shaker hymn, “ ’tis a gift to be simple,” then this proposal is indeed gifted.

Item 06-06, from the Presbytery of Detroit, would replace G-6.0106b with an affirmation of the moral commitment being undertaken by candidates for ordination, with the emphasis on candidates’ pledge “to live lives obedient to Jesus Christ the Head of the Church, as revealed in Holy Scripture, striving to follow where He leads through the authoritative witness of the Scriptures, and to understand the Scriptures through the instruction of the Confessions.” There is no specific mention of sexuality or marriage.

Item 06-08, from Hudson River Presbytery, offers another option to the simple deletion of G-6.0106b, by substituting for that narrow ban on certain sexual relation-

ships a much broader and positive call “to proclaim the Gospel to all peoples, to love neighbor and enemy, and to express the love of Christ in faithful relationships with others.”

Item 06-09, from Western Reserve Presbytery, would also replace G-6.0106b with an affirmation that ordained service should “reflect the church’s desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (G-1.0000).”

Item 06-10, from the Presbytery of Southern New England, affirms that “Jesus, the Head of the Church, has established standards for church officers.” Scripture, the Confessions, and the Constitution of the church are all seen as reflecting Jesus’ own standards, and are to be used as the examining body considers each candidate’s “calling, gifts and preparation and their willingness to adhere to church standards.”

Items 06-12 through 06-17 all generally follow one or another of those mentioned above, either replacing or amending the text of G-6.0108b, in ways that interpret our “standards” for ordination as dealing with matters of faith and life, without focusing on matters of sexuality.

Committee 6 will certainly want to weigh the advantages and drawbacks of these various options for change. Our hope is that their choices will help our church move toward a ministry and mission that bears faithful witness to the Christ who proclaimed and demonstrated God’s love for all.

Or – to stop talking about it

Items 06-02 and 06-03 call for either a “moratorium” on discussion of the ordina-

tion standards, or “a season of rest.” And then there are the more extreme proposals referred to Committee 03 – numbered 03-07 and 03-17, which would forbid discussion of the matter in one way or another for some length of time.

Presbyterian Voices for Justice favors continued discussion of ordination standards, and whatever action is needed to end the ban on ordination.

Committee 7: Form of Government Revision

Items 07-01 and 07-02 present the recommendations of the Form of Government Task Force. Gene TeSelle, the former Issues Analyst of the Witherspoon Society, provides an analysis of this important matter in a separate article, pages 29 - 30.

The other items coming before Committee 07 suggest amendments of various sections of the recommended new Form of Government, except for items 04, 07, and 08, which in one way or another would dismiss or delay implementation of the recommendations.

Committee 8: Ecumenical and Inter-faith Relations

Item 08-01, from the Synod of the Northeast, lifts up for attention and further study the Covenant of the Lund Principle and Codicil, which were mentioned in the 2008 Assembly, and which are summarized in the words, “... we recommit ourselves to the historic Lund principle that Christians should take united action whenever they find this possible.” This would invite our church to serious reflection on ways in

which we might deepen our relationships and cooperation with other churches, affirming our unity in Christ both by word and by deed.

Item 08-02, from the Presbytery of Yukon, calls for an amendment of the action of the 2008 General Assembly, which encouraged the creation of better relations with the Muslim community by celebrating diversity of faiths, and joining in acts of prayer and dialogue with Muslims. Given that call to dialogue and understanding, it would be unfortunate to give in to this demand for an attitude of fear toward followers of other faiths.

Items 08-03, -04, and -09: reports on Christians, Jews, and Muslims

Item 08-03 calls for the approval of the paper on “*Christians and Jews: People of God.*” *Item 08-04* would approve the report “*Toward an Understanding of Christian-Muslim Relations*” and commend it to the church for study and guidance. Both papers represent much work by the respective committees, and do contain many helpful perspectives. Nevertheless, we believe such action would be seriously premature, as is indicated by *Item 08-09*, based on an overture from the Presbytery of San Francisco.

Item 08-09 would refer both reports for rewriting, to be based on “broader consultation to include the National Middle East Presbyterian Caucus, PC(USA) partner churches and agencies in the Middle East, relevant mission networks of the PC(USA), the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns, and the Advisory Committee for Social Witness Policy.” A memo from the Israel Palestine Mission Network, which is attached to the rationale of this overture, provides helpful

background. It raises concerns about both the process of writing these documents and such matters as: the relationship between theology and justice, how Biblical metaphors related to the “root of the olive tree” and “the dividing wall of hostility” can be used in the current situation in Israel-Palestine, how Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann has altered his opinion about the promise of the land, or the nature of the Palestinian Christian use of “cruciform” interpretations.

The General Assembly Mission Council has responded to questions raised about the process. There has been further correspondence from the National Middle East Presbyterian Caucus, which raises issues about the process that have not been fully dealt with. Certainly such important statements should not be approved and sent to the Church for study until these significant matters have been resolved. It seems very unlikely that they can be resolved between now and the General Assembly, for the concerns relate to having thorough consultation especially with our partners in the Middle East who have a great stake in the content of both studies, as well as PC(USA) members here in the U.S. Therefore, we join in recommending that the studies be referred for further consultation and rewriting. All these matters are too important, and with lasting influence, to have them approved or recommended prior to the recommended consultations.

As Committee 8 considers these and other complex issues, a basic consideration should always be our understanding of how wide is the circle of God’s love. If the Creator’s love is restricted to some groups and excludes others, then an attitude of anxiety and fear is fostered. But that is not what we have learned from Jesus.

Committee 9 : Mission Coordination

Item 09-01 reflects an overture from Pittsburgh Presbytery entitled “*On Strengthening the Peacemaking Program.*” This is set forth as a celebration of the 30th anniversary of the important document, “Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling,” and the establishment of the Peacemaking Program. It would “celebrate” by creating a nine-member task force to present suggestions to the 220th GA for updating the church’s peacemaking efforts in light of more recent developments such as the emergence of weapons of mass destruction (WMD); the recovery by the U.S., after Viet Nam, of its status as a respected “superpower”; the end of the “cold war”; new wars; globalization and the current global financial crisis; the role of religions in wars and in peacemaking; and “the rise of Muslim influence and militancy.”

The proposal focuses much concern on “weapons of mass destruction,” which is a term used largely in accusations against those accused of terrorism, without any reference to the nuclear arsenal and other forms of warfare such as drone aircraft, which are primarily a part of the arsenals of U.S. and other “Western” nations. There seems to be a certain one-sidedness about the “updating” that is being envisioned.

The proposal calls for the creation of “an advisory committee of six expert persons to meet quarterly to counsel the Peacemaking Program on issues regarding weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and other emerging issues.” It is unclear why the standing committee for the Peacemaking Program would need to be supplemented with such an “advisory” body. It’s worth noting that an earlier advisory committee voted to disband, so that revenue from the

Peacemaking Offering could be devoted to staff, programs, and resources, and not spent on their meetings.

The proposal also includes a very interesting call for “a seminary and college-wide review of peace studies and peacemaking opportunities appropriate to the major shifts in the approach of the United States international relations ...” Its goal would be to “engage students in active peacemaking and to share the wisdom of faculty among our church-related educational institutions.” (Item 13-07 deals with similar possibilities for supporting peace studies and action in the arena of higher education.)

Item 09-03, On Amending the Process for Forming Social Witness Policy, would require that “all social witness policy and resolutions shall be sent to all presbyteries for study, discussion, and comment back to the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy drafts of resolutions to presbyteries and distributing their comments to commissioners in order to warn them in advance about potential controversial recommendations.” While Item 08-09 exemplifies the need for open processes and consultation, this approach might have the unfortunate effect of giving an official voice to unstudied opinions.

Items 09-06, 07, 09, and 18 all point to areas of the work and witness of the PC(USA) that have been neglected or dissolved over the past few years, calling for renewed commitment to them. These include ministries in higher education, the social ministries carried on through the Presbyterian Health, Education, and Welfare Association, the observance of Criminal Justice Sunday, and staffing for women’s advocacy. While financial

constraints are very real, we believe efforts such as these to assert very important priorities deserve careful attention and renewed commitment.

Committee 10: Social Justice Issues A: The Promotion of Social Righteousness

Item 10-02, from the Presbytery of Chicago, calls on the 219th General Assembly “to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the passage of the first social pronouncement of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.” That would be coupled with educational efforts through the church based on the new Social Creed for the Twenty-first Century that was passed by the 2008 Assembly. The new Social Creed could indeed provide stimulus and material for reflection and action as we seek to be faithful to our calling in an increasingly complex world.

Item 10-04 is a call from the Advocacy Committee on Racial-Ethnic Concerns for a continuing review among our denominational agencies to review “Efforts Regarding Cultural Proficiency and Creating a Climate for Change” in the church. This long-term commitment to developing cultural diversity – and making it work – needs serious support, when many might prefer to ignore the need for such change.

Item 10-05 also comes from the Advocacy Committee on Racial-Ethnic Concerns, calling for the creation of a Committee to Study the Nature of the Church for the 21st Century. Noting the lack of clarity and vision in our church about our nature and calling in an increasingly diverse society, this study, combined with the new Social Creed, might truly open new ways into the future for the PC(USA).

Item 10-06, A Resolution to Study Violence Against Women and Children on the Mexico-U.S. Border, comes from the Advocacy Committee on Womens’ Concerns and addresses a serious situation in Ciudad Juarez and along the border in general. It calls for a study involving a wide range of ethnic and advocacy groups, and the preparation of bi-lingual study materials and programs. It offers, in short, a sensitive approach to a situation needing attention.

Items 10-9 and 10-10, “Living though Economic Crisis: The Church’s Witness in Troubled Times,” and “Neither Poverty Nor Riches: Compensation, Equity, and the Unity of the Church,” are important reports from ACSWP which turn needed attention to economic justice issues, including compensation ratios in the church, and unemployment.

The economic crisis study would focus our attention on “the long-term implications of our current economic trends and practices, including their impact on the church itself, and provide appropriate recommendations for consideration by members, congregations, presbyteries, and local, state, and federal government. This assessment should center on the role of fairness and justice in our economy, with particular attention to growing inequality, the decline of the middle class, the tax structure, the shifting makeup of the labor force and its effects on employee rights, the role of regulatory agencies in protecting the public interest, and access to environmental resources that is equitable and sustainable.” This is a fairly tall order, but certainly needed as guidance for our people, our churches, and our society.

The study on compensation would focus on a very practical issue, and one

demanding attention in our increasingly unequal society. It might lead our church to increasing efforts to practice the kind of equality and justice that it preaches, in our staff salary structures, in our family life, and more.

Committee 11: Social Justice Issues B: The Exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the World

Item 11-01 comes from Charlotte Presbytery, calling for a renewed commitment to the “*Call to Restore the Creation*” that was adopted by the 202nd General Assembly 20 years ago. It reminds us that much remains to be done, and calls on the Assembly to “urge congregations, Presbyterian church-related institutions, and church members to adopt institutional and individual lifestyles reflecting greater stewardship of resources, particularly in energy consumption.”

Item 11-02 from National Capital Presbytery calls on the Assembly to endorse “*The Charter for Compassion*,” in which people from Jewish, Muslim and Christian traditions have joined to affirm that “[t]he principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves.” As one small step toward broadening our circle, and finding ways to talk and act across lines of religious division, this might be a real way forward. Among other things, the statement affirms that “any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate.”

Item 11-04, the “*Human Rights Update 2010*,” which is provided by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, focuses this year on the issues of human

trafficking, detention of immigrants, and the use of torture. It raises many questions for consideration and action, and will merit serious attention.

Item 11-05, “*Loving Our Neighbors: Equity and Quality in Public Education (K-12)*,” is also presented by ACSWP, in partnership with the Office of Child Advocacy. It calls on the Assembly to approve the report with the title above, to “affirm the long-standing commitment of the PC(USA) to public education as an essential institution contributing to the common good in a democratic society by its commitment to equip all children to be effective citizens, capable of living full and meaningful lives and contributing to their society,” and to approve a variety of measures “to provide greater fairness and quality in public education.”

Item 11-06 brings another recommendation from the ACSWP: “*Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God’s Call*” advocates incremental improvements in policy and offers many practical ways to involve congregations in reducing gun violence.

Item 11-07 presents a recommendation from the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy that the study paper, “*On Living a Human Life Before God*,” be approved as a resource to help congregations “become communities of moral discourse, ... developing practices of ethical reflection as communities of covenantal responsibility seeking to hear the voice of God and the voices of others in the context of serious and complex issues.” This is the latest in a series of studies, including “*The Nature and Value of Human Life*” (1981), which have dealt with the difficult life-and-death questions of abortion, euthanasia, war, and capital punishment.

The introduction includes this statement of the purpose of the paper: “In this paper, we invite groups within churches to become intentional communities of moral discourse, that is, groups committed to reflect together on who we are, what our values are, and how we can respond to specific challenges we face in this century.” The themes include God’s blessing in creation and our response, blessing in Jesus Christ, God’s call to do justice, historical covenants and renewed blessing, Reformed perspectives on social responsibility, and reflecting God’s image through moral discourse. Some may be disappointed because the paper does not take direct positions on war, hunger, genocide, and abortion, but it does provide some helpful theological foundations for local discussions – or in grander terms, “moral discourse.”

Committee 12: Civil Union and Marriage Issues

The question of marriage has drawn widely differing proposals – some moving toward an inclusive affirmation of marriage, and others rejecting any change. For simplicity, we’ll group the two sets of items, rather than listing them in numerical order.

Affirming marriage as inclusive

Item 12-02, from the Presbytery of Baltimore (with at least three concurrences from other presbyteries), would change the definition of marriage from “a civil contract between a woman and a man” to “a covenant between two people [which] according to the laws of the state also constitutes a civil contract.”

The rationale for this change is headed,

“Marriage: Sharing God’s Gift Equitably in the Church.”

It notes that “The Directory for Worship defines marriage as ‘...a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being of the entire human family.’ (W-4.9001). A gift conferred by God can only be denied by God the giver of the gift.” Marriage as “an act of pastoral care” is clearly a way in which the church supports loving, committed relationships, and there is no reason why such support should be limited to heterosexual couples alone.

The biblical and theological arguments are opened with a quick refutation of the assumption that there is a single “biblical meaning of marriage”:

A search of marriage in the Scripture reveals a broad spectrum of historical marriage practice, some of which we consider foreign today, including: Solomon’s many wives and concubines (1 Kings 11:3), levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5-6 and Matthew 22:23-32), wives sharing female servants with their husband to increase progeny (Genesis 29-30), divorce and remarriage as equal to adultery (Mark 10:12), and women being commanded to remain silent in church and only ask their husbands for instruction at home (1 Corinthians 14:33-36).

Beyond that simple biblical diversity, Jesus’ command to love God and neighbor is presented as the basis for all discussions of marriage – and that love as Jesus spoke of it and lived it is never limited by questions of gender or sexual orientation.

Item 12-03, from the Presbytery of Hudson River, proposes essentially the

same changes in the Directory for Worship. The rationale opens with this fine statement of what marriage is all about:

Marriage is beyond gender. It refers to the commitment of two people to live beside each other with a love expressed as tenderness and justice. It refers to the deep promise to live together through the thick and thin of their journey together through the years. It refers to the mystery in which the love of God meets, is joined to and made manifest in the love of two people whose hearts are a home place to each other. ...

The closing paragraph is equally helpful:

The proposed changes would grant all loving couples the right to have their marriages performed in our congregations, strengthening all our communities and families, gay and straight, since they allow us to recognize the love of two hearts declaring themselves to be a home to each other, before God, with gratitude.

Item 12-04, from the Presbytery of Boston, proposes similar amendments in the Book of Order. In support of these changes, the rationale reminds us of the action of the 218th General Assembly in 2008, which voted by 516 to 151 to “request the Stated Clerk, the General Assembly Council, and other representatives of the PC(USA) to urge state legislatures and the federal government to apply the principle of equal protection to same gender couples and their children.” That action also expressed support for congregations and pastors as they seek “to extend pastoral care as well

as outreach and evangelism to same-gender couples and their nontraditional families who are more and more our neighbors on our streets and our fellow members in our pews.”

Given this action, and the trend among the states to legalize same-sex marriage, “[i]n a state where same-gender marriage is recognized under the law, it is pastorally unconscionable to apply exclusionary principles to certain members of the congregation by declining to perform their marriage.”

Item 12-06, from the Presbytery of Albany, would set forth a new Authoritative Interpretation of W-4.9000, giving discretion to ministers and sessions to allow or to forbid “ceremonies for couples who have obtained a civil marriage license.” Such an action, if approved, would go into effect immediately upon the conclusion of the Assembly, and not need the ratification of presbyteries. *Item 12-08*, from the Presbytery of Des Moines, does roughly the same thing, as does *Item 12-09*, from Heartland Presbytery.

Item 12-07 from the Presbytery of East Iowa, and *Item 12-10* from National Capital Presbytery, propose amendments to W-4.9000 to make the definition of marriage inclusive.

Opposing any change in the understanding of marriage

Item 12-01 from New Covenant Presbytery calls on the Assembly to “joyfully affirm the historic, biblical, and Christological teaching of the Church on the topic of marriage as a gift from God to bless humankind. As God created man and woman, so does God call some men and

women to live together as husband and wife. God's very order and design defines the institution of marriage." [But you might look back at the "biblical meaning of marriage" as summarized so neatly in the Baltimore overture.] Item 12-11, from the Presbytery of Central Washington, is basically the same as this one.

Item 12-05 from the Presbytery of Prospect Hill urges the Assembly to "[d]eclare ... that no sexual union outside the bonds of marriage, such as in cohabitation, adulterous affairs, domestic partnerships, or same-sex unions, is within the will of God or approved by this body." [We note that this list does not seem to include Jesus' apparently negative views of the marriage of divorced persons.]

Presbyterian Voices for Justice regards the issue of same-gender marriage as a matter of justice and compassion, and supports changes in Presbyterian governance that would expand our understanding of marriage to include two persons of the same gender.

Committee 13: Peacemaking and International Issues

Items 13-01, 13-02, 13-03, 13-09 *On the War in Afghanistan.*

Six presbyteries have submitted or concurred with similar overtures calling upon the United States to replace military operations in Afghanistan with nonviolent approaches including diplomacy and material aid and to mitigate the war's impact through restitution and reconstruction. We also need to evaluate the cost of the war to ourselves – in financial, moral, and human terms – in the hope that we can learn to engage in international affairs in

ways that nourish peace, prosperity, and stability.

The rationale points out that no General Assembly has yet addressed the eight-year war in Afghanistan. So there has been no directive to the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program to develop informational and study materials regarding the conflict, and the voice of the church has been silent in a world anticipating its religious bodies to speak out. It is time for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to be heard.

Item 13-04 *On Partnering for Peace in Sudan.*

This overture from the Presbytery of Trinity calls upon the Assembly to support "working toward a just and lasting peace for all of Sudan" by advocating for a renewed international commitment to the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005, increased private investment for the economic development of Southern Sudan, increased development assistance by the US government, and "renewed efforts by all parties to end hostilities in Darfur and elsewhere in Sudan ..." These appear to be genuine steps toward peace in a nation that has certainly known more than its share of suffering.

13-05 *On Protecting Christians in the Muslim World.*

Growing out of a presbytery relationship, this overture is based on a particular situation in Pakistan, but uses general language to appeal to the United Nations to "exhort the religious and political leaders of Muslim nations to moderate extreme behavior and protect (their) religious minorities from ... harm, and

encourage brotherly harmony ...” While the concern merits the GA’s attention, there are several problems with the overture. Most importantly, it fails to set a comprehensive context that includes U.S. military operations in the region and the injustices or resentments that may have motivated attacks on perceived allies of the U.S. It also asks the UN to send a message to all Muslim nations, without documenting that the problem exists in more than a few.

There are several ways that the committee could respond responsibly to the overture. They could issue a statement dealing specifically with the incident documented in the rationale. They could request assistance from the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy in drafting a broader statement on the situation in Pakistan, including this concern. Or they might consider requesting a report to the next General Assembly on the complex situation in Pakistan.

13-06 On Entering a Six-Year Term of Discernment to Seek Clarity on Whether God Is Calling the Church to Embrace Nonviolence as Its Response to War and Terror.

This overture proposes a study that could lead to profound changes in the church’s thinking on war and violence. It challenges us to consider reaffirming the early church’s commitment to nonviolence and to reevaluate our reliance on just war doctrines. While Presbyterian polity will always permit a General Assembly to endorse a particular military option, shouldn’t the presumptive position of the church be in opposition to war? The overture is not about the unrealistic hope of the United States becoming a pacifist nation. Instead, it asks questions about

the role of the Christian perspective in national debates on war and peace. The rationale points out that modern weapons and military strategies have made traditional Just War theory obsolete. Nevertheless, the burden has generally been on war opponents to demonstrate that a particular conflict is unjust, rather than to its supporters to demonstrate that military action is the only realistic and just option. The decision does not need to be a rushed one, but shouldn’t we start thinking about reversing that dynamic?

13-07 Twenty-first Century Peacemaking and Seminaries, Colleges, and Congregations.

This overture calls for several GAMC entities and church-related seminaries and colleges to investigate the possibility of pooling their resources to help Presbyterians deal with challenges in the 21st century, such as wars with no end (on terror or drugs), or those that rage in the Middle East, globalization and pluralism, U.S. foreign policy and developing nations, or climate change and the competition for natural resources. The foundational PC(USA) peacemaking document, “Peacemaking: the Believers’ Calling” (1980) still calls us to the privilege and challenge of taking part in God’s peacemaking in this century by assembling all the resources that God has given us. The hope is that a very intentional plan may emerge from an exploration of how our agencies and educational institutions and congregations can comprehensively cooperate together.

13-08 On Assisting with a Process for Negotiation of a Peace Accord in Colombia.

The 2008 General Assembly called for a

suspension of military aid to Colombia, which would preclude the expanded U.S. military presence which is the concern of this overture. However, it was the hope of our partner, The Presbyterian Church of Colombia (IPC), that the election of President Barack Obama would strengthen the search for peace and respect for human rights. This has not been the case. In September 2009, the government of the United States certified the Colombian government in human rights, even with the revelation of a high number of extrajudicial killings of youth by the army. It was also made public that the Colombian intelligence agency conducted illegal surveillance on leaders of the opposition, human rights defenders, and church leaders, threatening them because of their work for peace. And now our government has made an accord with the Colombian government for the U.S. military to use seven military bases within Colombia.

In February 2010, the General Assembly of the IPC expressed its concern: "... that the democratic security promoted by the [Colombian] government, the increased military costs, and the growth of the army have not shown us the prospect of peace even though they have reduced the actions of illegal armed groups. It is evident that there is a resurgence or strengthening of former armed groups. Furthermore, there are tensions with Columbia's neighbors – Ecuador, Venezuela, and throughout the region because of the announcement of the U.S. Army's use of Colombian military bases."

For this reason the IPC has called on the PC(USA) to join them in making stronger efforts (initiatives) toward peace in Colombia. In light of these new developments and this urgent request from our partner church, it is appropriate for the General Assembly to direct the stated clerk to ask

President Obama to suspend U.S. use of Colombian military bases and to instead promote a peace process to resolve the conflict.

Committee 14: Middle East Peacemaking Issues

14-08 Breaking Down the Walls – From the Middle East Study Committee.

This report is at the heart of the work to be done by Committee 14 and by this General Assembly. It deals with a wide range of Middle East issues, and focuses mainly on Israel-Palestine. Its 42 pages entitled "We Bear Witness" lead into 9 pages of recommendations for our church and its members, our government, and all parties to the conflict. These 50 pages are must reading for all commissioners. The other 123 pages have valuable summaries of perspectives, history, the committee's process, GA policies, Presbyterian Panel results, and two recent documents from Palestinian Christians.

One recommendation has been the focus of special interest because it deals with corporate engagement. The report stops short of recommending divestment, but calls us to "invest positively, after due vetting, in sustainable economic development projects for the West Bank and Gaza (that do not support the occupation) sponsored by Palestinians or jointly by Palestinians and Israelis in equitable partnership." The GA will be able to deal directly with the divestment issue as it considers a separate MRTI report and two overtures on that topic. Focus on this issue should not detract from attention to all the recommendations, which could help the church make a significant contribution to justice and peace across the region.

14-01 and 14-02 – On Divestment from Caterpillar, Inc. and 14-03 – the Mission Responsibility Through Investment Report of Its Engagement with Corporations Involved in Israel, Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank.

Both overtures call for disinvestment from Caterpillar by the Presbyterian Foundation and Board of Pensions, and for no reinvestment unless MRTI is satisfied that Caterpillar no longer sells equipment to Israel that is used in illegal actions such as building settlements and walls on Palestinian land and destroying Palestinian property. They commend the Church of England and Hampshire College for divesting. 14-02 adds that the Israeli occupation should end for the sake of justice and to prevent the extinction of Christianity in the region.

The MRTI Report begins by citing GA policy: "... all corporations doing business in the region [should] confine their business activity solely to peaceful pursuits, and refrain from allowing their products or services to support or facilitate violent acts by Israelis or Palestinians against innocent civilians, construction and maintenance of settlements or Israeli-only roads in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, the Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territory, and construction of the Separation Barrier as it extends beyond the 1967 'Green Line' into Palestinian territories." Corporate engagement with Motorola, ITT, United Technologies, and Hewlett-Packard are to continue, in light of some positive responses. But Caterpillar "has produced, sold, and profited from equipment that has been and continues to be used ... for clearly non-peaceful purposes ... Caterpillar's unwillingness to engage with authenticity and openness is unique and

disappointing." The report then "strongly denounces Caterpillar's continued profit-making from non-peaceful uses of a number of its products."

Since that report was written, Caterpillar took action to have its distributors stop selling to Iran, due to concerns over Iran's nuclear program. The company has not taken similar action in Israel-Palestine and remains, after over 5 years of corporate engagement, non-compliant with PC(USA) policy. In the face of such non-compliance, divestment (as called for in the two overtures but not the MRTI report) is the course needed now.

14-04 – On Recognition that Israel's Laws, Policies, and Practices Constitute Apartheid Against the Palestinian People.

The overture directs the Stated Clerk to encourage the United Nations to find that Israel is committing the crime of apartheid, and to send this information to the President and Congress. It urges all Presbyterians and especially the Office of Interfaith Relations to study this matter and work to end apartheid. Finally, it directs the GAMC to prepare resources and urge study about Israel's occupation of Palestinian land.

The rationale is based upon the *International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid*, adopted by the UN in 1973. The argument is made that the UN should expand the definition of the crime of apartheid to apply to the State of Israel instead of only to individuals. In many discussions in Israel, in the U.S. and elsewhere, comparisons as well as contrasts have been made between South African apartheid and the conditions

imposed by Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands.

By passing this overture, GA will help bring the principles of this Convention to bear on the crisis, in the service of arriving at a decent and just life for all the people of Israel-Palestine.

14-05 – On Commending “A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith and Hope from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering” as an Advocacy Tool.

This overture calls upon the GA to receive an ecumenical statement from Christian Palestinians, known as *Kairos Palestine 2009*, and commend it for study and advocacy by presbyteries and congregations, and especially by the Office of Interfaith Relations in discussions with Jewish and Muslim groups. The first sentence of the Rationale states: “This is the first time we have a common voice from the grassroots Christians in Palestine asking us to help them get rid of the occupation through concrete acts: theological debates on occupation as sin, and boycott, divestment, and sanctions campaigns.” The 10 ½ page document is included in the rationale. (NOTE: “Receiving” a document implies a general recognition and appreciation of the statement, rather than acceptance of all aspects of the statement.)

Palestinian Christians, and their Jewish and Muslim partners in the quest for a just peace, have made another statement similar to the Amman Call of 2007, with was endorsed and affirmed by the 118th GA (2008). This Kairos document brings up to date the descriptions of the conditions of occupation, rejects violence from any quarter, and furthermore calls for “companies and states to engage in divestment

and in an economic and commercial boycott of everything produced by the occupation. We understand this to integrate the logic of peaceful resistance.”

By receiving and commending this document, the 219th GA will assure that it receives the attention it deserves in Presbyterian congregations.

14-06 – On Middle East Peacemaking.

Perhaps emerging from a weariness with controversy, this overture calls on the GA to answer all overtures concerning Israel and Palestine with a statement that, in recognition of the complex and changing conditions, it is best to take no actions that appear to support either side. PC(USA) leadership should influence peacemaking through prayer, tolerance and reconciliation, advocating step-by-step negotiation toward a two-state solution, condemning all terrorism and unwarranted violence, and providing assistance to innocent victims. The GAMC is to make sure that all staff abide by the directives, and the whole church is urged to pray and conscientiously support the overall welfare of all in the Middle East and the world.

While these statements may sound faithful, they do little more than assure the continuation of the statements and processes that have been in place for many years, and that have ended neither the violence of Israel's occupation nor the violence of Palestinian rhetoric and actions. Passing the recommendations of the Middle East Study Committee report and overtures that sensitively support or carry forward those initiatives, plus supporting the Palestinian Christians' Kairos Document and the United Nation's Goldstone Report – these are the ways to be faithful in difficult times.

14-07 – On Iraq.

This overture calls for prayer for the churches, all who grieve, Iraqis as they rebuild, and refugees; commends the GAMC for keeping us informed about Iraq churches, Presbyterian Women in regard to the Birthday Offering for the KG in Kirkuk, and those ministering to Iraqi refugees; directs the GAMC to continue support in these ways and to direct the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy to study from a perspective of Reformed theology and practice, the costs of the war related to the U.S. economy; calls for prayers for the U.S. government and commends it for some actions in the Kurdish areas, and calls for the U.S. to maintain the announced schedules for withdrawal of troops and contractors, to have no permanent bases, to provide more and quicker help for refugees, and more medical and psychological help for military personnel.

With its position that the U.S. maintain its stated withdrawal goals this overture would strengthen the 2008 GA position, which did not set a firm limit to the length of the occupation.

14-09 – On Seeking Compliance to U.S. Government Policy in the Use of Military Aid by All Parties in the Middle East.

This overture calls for the application of U.S. law, as well as international law and human rights protections, to all military aid to the region. Criteria for compliance are found in the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 and the U.S. Arms Export Control Act of 1976. While the relevance of U.S. law is all-inclusive, the primary focus is upon Israel's use of U.S. weapons, which have been used in ways contrary to U.S. law. The main value of the overture is that it makes very explicit long-standing

church policy and two recommendations of the Middle East Study Committee.

Item 14-10 Toward Peace and Reconciliation in the Middle East.

This overture from Baltimore Presbytery calls for the GA to join in international efforts to investigate possible violations of international law by both sides during Israel's military action in Gaza, December '08–January '09. A United Nations report in Sept. 2009 called for independent investigations by both Israel and Hamas. This recommendation has not been implemented; the U.S. Congress voted in Nov. 2009 to have nothing to do with this report, known as the Goldstone Report, after the name of the Jewish South African jurist who led the investigation. The 575-page report alleges extreme violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. The Middle East Study Committee report has many references to Gaza, but does not address this particular concern, probably due to the fact that they were not able to visit Gaza. Passing this overture will appropriately put PC(USA) solidly in line with calling for the parties to conduct their own investigations, and keep alive our church's long-standing commitment to the rule of law in the Israel-Palestine crisis and our calling for accountability whenever violence occurs.

Committee 16: Theological Issues and Institutions

Item 16-01, from Sacramento Presbytery, would reverse the action of the 2008 Assembly by discontinuing the effort to include *the Belhar Confession* in the Book of Confessions. While written and adopted in the church of South Africa, and reflecting the particular challenges faced

by the church in that formerly white-dominated African nation, its inclusion in the PC(USA) Book of Confessions has been seen as a way of affirming explicitly God's call to shape church and society in ways that transcend racial divisions.

This overture would reject such inclusion not to justify racism, but because the Belhar Confession, it says, "is a complex and somewhat confusing document, which some parties – theologians as well as the ordained and laity – have attempted to use to press issues other than racial equality. This overly broad application of the Belhar Confession to champion liberation theology in general or same-sex causes in particular produces a conflicted response to its antiracism message."

The call to reject the Belhar Confession is couched, then, in an affirmation to "uphold the oneness of all believers," as long as LGBT believers are not included. A confessional rejection of racism is fine, apparently – but not a similar rejection of gender discrimination.

For more on the Belhar Confession, please see an article by the Rev. John Harris, beginning on page 28.

Item 16-03 from the Presbytery of Missouri Union, with a concurrence from the Presbytery of Western Colorado, asks the GA to amend the section on baptism (W-2.3008b) to add the phrase "and God pronounces that he adopts our infants as his children before they are born." This change would have the effect of equating infants with fetuses. It would change current policy on problem pregnancy and abortion by privileging one theological understanding of fetal life when our policy currently acknowledges diverse theological opinions in the PC(USA).

Committee 18: Board of Pensions, Foundation, and Presbyterian Publishing

Item 18-01 from the Presbytery of Boston would direct the Board of Pensions to extend benefits to same-gender spouses and domestic partners.

This is a simple step toward equitable treatment of the members of our Benefits Plan and their partners and dependents, in accord with state laws that may apply. *Item 18-06* from New Castle Presbytery would make essentially the same change.

Committee 19: Health Issues

Two overtures have been submitted which are apparently intended to oppose abortion, not in terms of the "rights of the fetus," but specifically as it is linked in some cases to violence against or intimidation of women who are pregnant.

Item 19-03, *On Making a Statement Regarding Violence Against Pregnant Women*, from Boise Presbytery, calls on the 219th Assembly to "condemn assaults, attempts, and actual acts of pressure, force, violence, and coercion upon a pregnant female, especially where the activity inflicts mental or physical injury or death on the pregnant female." Women are depicted in the overture as weak, often victimized, and powerless to make choices of their own. They may be forced into having abortions by those who want to "destroy evidence of child molestation or incestuous activities; ... eliminate personal responsibilities or inconvenience to the perpetrator's lifestyle; dislike for biracial unborn children; or desire to destroy pregnant females."

The overture would call on the Stated Clerk to urge federal and state legislatures “to adopt legislation that recognizes the special vulnerability of pregnant females and to protect them from assaults, attempts and acts of force, coercion, and violence, that inflict physical or mental injury, or death, on the pregnant female.”

Item 19-04, from Prospect Hill Presbytery, similarly views women as victims, calling on the Assembly “to declare that we stand with all women against the injustice of any forced or coerced abortions.” Arguing that “a high percentage (64%) of abortions

are NOT the woman’s choice,” but are forced upon them by others, this overture also contends that women having abortions must be protected against these forms of “violence and injustice.”

While the church needs to stand against any form of coercion against women, the PC(USA) also needs to stand by its policy that women are competent moral agents who can be trusted to make their own reproductive decisions.

We Need Belhar

by John Harris, designated pastor of North Presbyterian Church in Flushing, NY, and former member of the Witherspoon Society Board.

Established by the 2008 General Assembly, the Special Committee to Consider Amending the Confessional Documents of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to Include the Belhar Confession in *The Book of Confessions* is recommending to the upcoming General Assembly that the Belhar Confession be added to *The Book of Confessions*. Produced in 1982 by the Dutch Reformed Church (South Africa) as a theological response to apartheid, the Belhar Confession became the confession of the Uniting Reformed Church (South Africa) in 1986. Two other Reformed Churches in the United States, the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America, are also considering adopting Belhar as their own.

There are many well argued reasons for adding the Belhar Confession to *The Book of Confessions*. According to Special Committee Member the Reverend J.C. Austin, there are two that stand out. First, “Belhar refuses to choose among unity, reconciliation or justice, holding them in a unique tension.” Second, Belhar “gives us a theological argument for being a multi-cultural church which we do not currently have in *The Book of Confessions*. Such an argument is implicit in the Confession of ’67, but in Belhar it is explicit and detailed.”

The above arguments, as well as other reasons for adding The Belhar Confession to *The Book of Confessions*, might lead one to think that amending *The Book of Confessions* to include Belhar is a no brainer. Some think, however, that we do not need it. But Austin asserts that the only reason some might think we do not need it is because they have not

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The FOG (Form of Government) Task Force

by Gene TeSelle, former Issues Analyst of the Witherspoon Society

This task force, created by the 2006 General Assembly, is bringing a report which (1) rewrites the first four chapters of the Form of Government (the “foundations” of Presbyterian polity), (2) replaces chapters 5-18 with shorter and simpler language, and (3) offers an Advisory Handbook for governing bodies, outlining important concerns and asking how they will be dealt with. The 2008 General Assembly reviewed the report and sent it back to the task force for reworking, and the “final draft” is coming to the 2010 Assembly with a unanimous vote by the task force.

The complete report is available online at www.pcusa.org/formofgovernment/

The Task Force was trying to be as permission-giving as possible; therefore it avoided as many regulations as it could. At first glance this has great appeal, since we want freedom for ourselves and trust our allies. But then we wonder what other camps might do and begin to formulate regulations to prevent “irresponsible” behavior on their part.

Suspicions 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 or blunted. People who have experienced conflicts begin imagining “loopholes” that would let bad behavior slip through without corrective procedures.

The new draft consciously avoids certain issues. The task force was instructed to

make no changes in the provisions concerning GLBT ordination (G-6.0106 is carried over as F-2.0104), freedom of conscience (G-6.0108 becomes F-2.0105), the authority of “confessional standards” (G-2.0200 becomes F-2.02), or the “trust clause” (G-8.0200 becomes F-4.0203).

If the General Assembly were to adopt the draft FOG, including these provisions, it would be wise for it also to reaffirm the various rulings of the Permanent Judicial Commission and the Authoritative Interpretations of the General Assembly regarding them, so that we do not start a new round of controversies.

The draft makes some important efforts at ecumenicity. It mentions the four traditional “marks” of the church (one, holy, catholic, apostolic) and the three “notes” of the Reformed tradition (Word, sacraments, discipline) [F-1.0303], and it affirms that the confessions of the church are based in affirmations by the “Church Catholic,” the Protestant Reformation, and the Reformed tradition (F-2.03 to F-2.05).

And yet at the same time it takes some steps backward.

It reverts to the old language of “teaching” and “ruling” elders, abandoning the ecumenical language of “ministers of Word and Sacrament” (agreed to in the “Lima document” on *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*).

And just when we had learned to speak of “governing bodies” rather than “courts,” it now decides to call them “councils.” In

the history of the church, councils were temporary gatherings with a specific purpose (the Roman Catholic Church recognizes 21 ecumenical councils in 2000 years; the Eastern Orthodox Church, only 7). The English language has led to confusion, since we use “council” both for this kind of gathering and for a group whose function is “counsel.” There is a difference between *concilium* and *consilium*, *concile* and *conseil*, which the Anglo-Saxons did not quite pick up from their Norman rulers. The Catholic Church calls its continuing administrative organizations “conferences.” Scholars dealing with the growth of representative government in the German churches (with special credit going to Schleiermacher, the 1848 revolutions, Bismarck, and the Weimar Republic) use the term “synodal.” Why don’t we just continue our more descriptive language of “governing bodies”?

Finally, let me highlight two specific reasons for concern.

First, while the draft affirms “unity in diversity” and says that there is no place for discrimination (F-1.0403), and invites participation and representation by all (F-3.0103), it leaves out the formation of Committees on Representation (G-9.0105), and only says that governing bodies (excuse me, councils) are to establish committees “by their own rule.” The Articles of Agreement that effected reunion in 1983 also provided for Advocacy Committees on Women’s Concerns and Racial Ethnic Concerns. These, too, should be referenced in the Form of Government, since questions have been raised 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 but is currently being exploited 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.

Several years ago the Presbytery of San Diego declared itself to be no longer primarily a “governing body” but a “relational community” that is “becoming a mission agency.” And proposals have been made to the 2010 General Assembly that non-geographical presbyteries be permitted.

Let’s consider the consequences carefully. Presbyteries would become much more homogeneous; votes would be swayed by factional rhetoric, without any need to find broad grounds for agreement; and the rights of minorities would be seriously compromised.

There is nothing wrong with flexibility and noble purposes. But when controversy arises and we face clever lawyers on all sides of an issue, we still need procedural guidelines and criteria for decision-making. Many of the details in the existing Form of Government were added through the years, usually judiciously, as a result of procedural confusions that inevitably arise and need clarification. The new mood that “the church is mission” and “form follows function” might encourage impatience about due process and minority rights in order to “just get the job done.” If that were to happen, there would be a new round of amendments to fill gaps that did not need to be created in the first place.



Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (ACWC):

An Overview of General Assembly

by Jerry Rodewald, a Co-Moderator of ACWC who lives in La Quinta, CA.

ACWC's Advice and Counsel Team has just concluded its meeting in preparation for the 219th General Assembly beginning on Saturday, July 3. ACWC has submitted recommendations that deal with the escalating murder of women in Juarez, Mexico and the ratification by the U.S. of CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women).

The GAMC Review Committee report of ACREC, ACWC, and ACSWP is quite positive; they have recommended that the three committees continue, with further discussion about staffing for ACREC and ACWC. Because of the debacle of losing ACWC staff almost 2 years ago, we have to ask General Assembly to "transfer" the funds we were awarded at GA in 2008 for the design of a research project on the Status of Women throughout the church—we don't really anticipate a problem, but that will be watched closely. As well, there are a couple of issues with regard to the approved (2008) Women of Color Consultation Task Force that have to come back to the GA for additional approval.

The overtures indicate several hot-button issues — as usual! We have identified several of those issues for which we will advocate. We will support the Belhar Confession, with the request that the language be revised to be fully inclusive for God. We will support the efforts toward ordination and marriage, pension benefits for same sex partners, affirm PHEWA, and disapprove the abortion overtures and the baptism for the unborn.

There were several overtures regarding violence in Afghanistan, Colombia, Sudan, but not one mentioned the violence against women, so that is the basis of our comment on those. In addition, there are several very fine papers that have been submitted by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP), to which we have added comments regarding women's vulnerability—the economic crisis, theology of compensation, Human Rights Update.

Language remains a lingering, BIG issue, particularly language for God, and those of us that have been "fighting" this issue for so many years are weary!! We are putting the tried and true "Well Chosen Words" into every commissioner's packet and will have the expansive language magnets in the ACWC/ACREC booth. Some of us on ACWC have already decided it will be a primary issue for the next two years.

We're planning to suggest that any commissioners interested can meet for lunch at a soon-to-be-identified church school classroom or other meeting room at Westminster Church on Tuesday, Wednesday and/or Friday of GA. Calvin's Café has box lunches for \$10. Some of us will be there to be available to answer questions, provide information, and caucus! We'll have more information the morning of our breakfasts, and I look forward to being present, following the Women's Orientation Breakfast. ACWC's Advice and Counsel Team looks forward to interacting with Presbyterian Voices for Justice throughout the Assembly.



A Call for Justice & Grace: Being a Church for All

“Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.” John 7:38

The National Board of Directors of More Light Presbyterians stands with our sisters and brothers who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and with their families, friends and allies calling for the welcome and affirmation of all baptized Christians as equal church members of our Presbyterian Church (USA).

We open our hands in witness and justice work to this call, joining with That All May Freely Serve, Covenant Network, Presbyterian Welcome, Presbyterian Promise, Presbyterian Voices for Justice and all others who are convinced that the promises of God in Jesus Christ are for all people, with no exceptions. Jesus said, “When I am lifted up, I will draw all people to myself.” (John 12:32)

Anticipating the work of the 219th General Assembly, we stand firm in prayer, calling the Presbyterian Church (USA) to remove the obstacles in the Book of Order to the ordination of deacons, elders, and Ministers of the Word and Sacrament without regard to sexual orientation or gender identity; to make the changes necessary in our Directory of Worship to affirm marriage as a blessing for all committed couples; and to correct the language falsely inserted in the Heidelberg Catechism translation in our Book of Confessions.

We make this call trusting in the unmerited grace and mercy of God who welcomes all of us, ever drawing us closer to God through the redemption and presence of Jesus in all our lives. We believe God is doing a new thing now in

reforming us and our church to follow Scripture by embracing our neighbor and reflecting the Love of God.

The National Board of Directors of More Light Presbyterians pledges by God’s grace, to open our hearts so that the living water of the Holy Spirit may enter into all that we do, now and at the 219th General Assembly in Minneapolis, MN, July 3 - 10. We commit to this spirit of love and grace in worship, in testimony and dialogue, at meals and in conversation. As we have known God’s extravagant love in our own lives, we will joyfully share it with all of those we meet.

February 24, 2010

The National Board of Directors of More Light Presbyterians

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spent enough time with Belhar to know the confession.

I have spent time with Belhar, using *A Study of The Belhar Confession and its Accompanying Letter*, published by the Office of Theology and Worship, to learn more about it. After concluding the study, I determined that Belhar should be added to the Book of Confessions as its only non-northern, non-western confession. Austin agrees, saying that “we need Belhar to make a global witness and to be a global church, not just a multi-cultural church.”

Candidates for Moderator respond to questions from Presbyterian Voices for Justice

One of the first acts of the 219th General Assembly will be the election of a new Moderator. To help our readers weigh this important choice, Presbyterian Voices for Justice has invited each of the people standing for this high office to respond briefly to four questions that reflect our 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. It appears that the **Middle East Study Committee report**, “Breaking Down the Walls,” may be one of the more controversial matters coming to the Assembly. Various Jewish organizations have already attacked it – and the Presbyterian Church – as “anti-Semitic” on the basis of the report’s criticisms of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, the denial of Palestinians’ human rights, and so on. What is your own view of the very complex problems of Israel/Palestine? What might you do as Moderator to help the Assembly understand and respond to the committee’s report and recommendations?
2. Once again, this Assembly will be pondering the **role of lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender people in the PC(USA)** – both in their eligibility for ordained office, and in the possibility of the Church’s sanctioning and blessing their marriages. Some overtures would provide complete equality in the matters of either ordination or marriage, while others would rule out any further GA consideration of these questions for some years. What do you see as the two or three key Biblical/theological principles that could best guide us in considering these proposals?
3. These days it seems that the differences and **tensions within the Presbyterian Church (USA)** pale in comparison to the the growing **polarization in US politics**. Many church leaders have recently joined in a call for increasing the “civility” of our political discourse. Other than asking our political leaders to play nicely together, what might our church – both nationally and locally – do to improve the climate of our political life and the tone of our debates?
4. Everyone seems to agree that **U.S. immigration policy** needs to be reformed, but nobody seems to agree on what the changes should be. As people of faith who affirm Jesus’ call to welcome the stranger, how should we be dealing with the continuing influx of immigrants into many of our communities – both locally and in our efforts to influence new national policies?

The responses from the candidates are on the next eight pages.



Elder Cindy Bolbach

Question 1: On the Middle East Study Committee report:

The issues surrounding Israel /Palestine are incredibly complex, deeply rooted in history, and subject to subtleties that demand years of knowledge and experience before they can be truly understood. As a church, we need to commend the Middle East Study Committee for taking on what some might call a Sisyphean task and producing a comprehensive report in less than a year's time. As a church, we should also be mindful, however, that this General Assembly is being asked, in less than a week's time, to make decisions on the report's recommendations.

If we in the PC (USA) have a prophetic word to bring to this issue, we should absolutely do so. The problem, though, is determining whether we in fact do have a prophetic word to share. The danger is that if we speak without a full understanding of all the ramifications of this issue, we risk alienating, and possibly terminating, our relationships with our Jewish and Muslim brothers and sisters.

I believe the wisest decision this Assembly can make is to commend the report to the church for further study, and to especially urge congregations, as they study the report, to engage in conversations regarding these issues with Jewish and Muslim neighbors.

Question 2: On the role of LGBT people in the PC(USA):

I sense that there are some within the PC (USA) who want the ongoing debate over the role of lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender people in our denomination to



Cindy Bolbach

just go away. The reality, though, is that the time for deciding when this issue gets resolved is in God's hands, not ours. Until then we must continue the conversation, even if we feel that there are no new voices to be heard. Those in favor of the full inclusion of gays and lesbians in our life together – and I include myself in that group – believe that we fail to satisfy the Gospel imperative of inclusiveness as we continue to exclude gays and lesbians from leadership in our church. But there are also many within our church who believe that homosexual behavior is a sin that violates Scripture's mandates. I respect their beliefs, and I want to continue in conversation with them about this basic issue. "Come, now, let us reason together" seems an appropriate principle to guide us as we continue this conversation.

Question 3: On dealing with polarization in church and society:

I hope that the 219th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) can improve the climate of our political debate by modeling how difficult and contentious issues can be debated and decided while still being respectful of each other's opinions and views.

Doing that at the Assembly will not be easy. Within the church, just as within the country, debate turns shrill, partisan, and mean-spirited when people feel that the ground is shifting underneath their feet – and they're not quite sure why the ground is shifting. The more we as a denomination can engage in conversation, can build relationships together despite our differences on key issues, the more we can help each other understand and accept that, although changes might be happening all around us, the ties that bind us are strong and will survive.

Question 4: On U.S. immigration policy:

The church must, in a way that is both prophetic yet at the same time non-anxious (and I realize that is a difficult combination), follow through on the Biblical mandate to welcome the stranger while at the same time recognizing and understanding the real fears and emotions engendered by the current lack of a realistic and comprehensive immigration policy. Immigration reform is sorely needed, and the leaders of our denomination have made clear, in their May 3 letter to members of Congress, that the PC(USA) supports immigration reform.

Such action at the national level is needed and appropriate. But we as a church can make the most impact where we ALWAYS

make the most impact – through the mission and ministry of our congregations, supported and resourced by our presbyteries. Congregations know who, right outside their doors, are being affected by this crisis, and congregations need to provide the support that those folks need.

Our country is on the cusp of a new “Know-Nothing” movement, sparked by economic difficulty and fear. The church, through our members and congregations, can and must take the lead to combat that fear and emotion by doing what we always do: ministering to the least of them, which also means ministering to all of us.

Two notes about these responses from candidates:

- Some of the expected candidates for Moderator have not been able to get their responses to us in time for our press deadline. We regret that we cannot wait longer for them, but we will have *all* of their responses posted on our website, at http://www.presbyvoicesforjustice.org/2010/119th_GA%20moderator%20candidates.htm
- Because your Editor did not communicate clearly enough the request that all candidates limit their responses to a total of 750 words, The Rev. Jin Kim prepared responses considerably longer. He has graciously permitted me to shorten his response by over half, but it still is longer than the others published here. We both regret the difference, and hope the other candidates will be understanding.

Doug King, editor

The Rev. Jin S. Kim

Question 1: On the Middle East Study Committee report:

As a Christian, I feel indebted to my Jewish sisters and brothers for my faith. The covenant between God and the Hebrew people became the foundation for the church, and they remain spiritual “elders” to the Christian community. For this reason, the persecution of the Jews at the hands of intolerant Christians over the past two thousand years of church history grieves me deeply.

I also affirm Israel’s right to exist as a state. Israel has a right to defend itself from those who seek its harm, and as Christians, we must also condemn any acts of terrorism and aggression against Israel and its inhabitants. But affirming Israel’s right to exist as a state does not mean that we ignore obvious acts of injustice and bias against the Palestinian people. They also have a right to exist, and a right to statehood.

In recent years the Jewish/Palestinian conflict has grown only worse, partly fueled by an unholy alliance between Fundamentalist Zionism and Christian Premillennial Dispensationalism, which views the existence of the modern state of Israel as a step toward the consummation of God’s Kingdom. My concern is that this dangerous connection between Fundamentalist Zionism and Christian Dispensationalism threatens to silence even reasonable and moderate perspectives on the Jewish/Palestinian conflict.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) has long supported Israel’s right to exist in peace and security. We should not be intimidated by any particular lobby or



Jin S. Kim

interest group into a silent complicity in injustice. We value the longstanding friendship between Presbyterians and the Jewish people in North America, but a true friendship speaks the truth in love, and calls out the best in each other’s nature.

Question 2: On the role of LGBT people in the PC(USA):

My reflections on the life of Jesus lead me to reject *both* complete equality in the matters of either ordination or marriage, *and* ruling out any further GA consideration of these questions for years to come. Both of these approaches are simplistic, leaving little room for struggle, tension, and discernment. True discernment requires that we rely utterly on the Holy Spirit in any given situation. We must ask what the letter of the law calls us to, while remaining open to the Spirit of the law in each particular circumstance. The two biblical texts that have helped clarify this for me are the story of the adulterous woman in John 8:1-11, and the picking of the grain on the Sabbath by Jesus’ disciples in Matthew 12:1-8.

As a lifelong evangelical, my reading of Scripture does not lead me to believe that homosexuality conforms to God’s inten-

tion for human relating, but I do notice in John 8:1-11 that Jesus blesses the adulteress at the very moment when all the “righteous” abandoned her, while calling her behavior sin. Jesus was truly good news to this woman, but we evangelicals need to repent deeply for judging our LGBT sisters and brothers, rather than extending the grace of God and the love of Christian community.

My approach is clarified further through Matthew 12:1-8, where Jesus allows his disciples to eat grain on the Sabbath because they were hungry, not because he was instituting a new law about the Sabbath. He upholds the law, even as he allows his disciples to transgress, because for Jesus the law exists to serve people, not the other way around. So just as Jesus made an exception for his disciples while upholding the traditional teaching on the Sabbath, an ordaining body should be able to make an exception for a faithful LGBT person while upholding the normativity of our constitutional standard.

My primary concern, then, is to not use LGBT people to bolster an ideological agenda, whether on the Left or Right, but to relate to each person deeply, prayerfully discerning what is called for in each particular situation. This allows us to move beyond the tyranny of absolutism – total denial or total acceptance – to respecting the true calling of a church council: to discern together the will of God.

Question 3: On dealing with polarization in church and society:

Mainline Protestantism is collapsing in North America. This has led to increasing polarization within our denomination. What answer do the “Conservative/Evangelicals” and the “Liberal/Progressives” have to the needs of the

American church in the 21st century? Too often we simply hurl vitriolic accusations that the other is unfaithful to the gospel.

Before we try to fix the political climate, we need to face our own failures as a church, so that we model for the world not perfection, but an honesty and non-defensiveness that the world will find refreshing. We need to confess that we have become an inflexible and onerous system, an ecclesial bureaucracy that is often faceless, oppressive, and utterly unimaginative. We suffer from a pervasive fear of change, making the emergence of new life almost impossible. We struggle with an insidious racism that makes us unable to embody the sovereignty of God and the priesthood of all believers in our local congregations.

Jesus said that he is the Way, the Truth and the Life. I find the Reformed tradition to have an overwhelming emphasis on Truth. Liberal/Progressives believe that the truth lies in God’s grace, a grace so boundless as to include gay ordination. Conservative/Evangelicals believe that the truth lies in the Bible and its seemingly plain teaching that homosexual practice is beyond scriptural bounds. Both these camps have been willing to use any means necessary to advance their own agenda while crushing the opposition.

But the Way mattered for Jesus. He would not take any shortcuts to the cross, or use any violence along the way. Jesus did not do whatever it took to gain power, even power to do great good for the world. Only equal faithfulness to the Way and the Truth leads to the fullness of Life. Let the politicians use deceit and violence to achieve their ends. Our Master will be Jesus.

Continued on page 47

The Rev. Maggie Lauterer

Question 1: On the Middle East Study Committee report:

While traveling in the land they both claim, I was welcomed into the homes of both Palestinians and Jews. I broke bread with them and felt with them their sorrows and frustrations. I pondered with them their commonality, differences and history.

Historically, the PC(USA) has been a strong ally to Jews in America. Our principles of tolerance and forbearance and our willingness to be engaged have given American Jews a regular friend in Presbyterians. The PC(USA) has also been deeply involved for generations with Palestinians in joint educational and mission work, leaving them with the expectation and hope that we will help them in their time of need and struggle.

Our denomination has long been a supporter of a two-state solution. That solution will become possible when both parties recognize the need for parity in their positions, in rights, in ownership and in self-governance.

As Moderator I would seek God's guidance for a strong pastoral presence with American Jews attending – meeting with them, seeking a partnership for peace, remaining allies, but allies with compassion for all.

Question 2: On the role of LGBT people in the PC(USA):

We have tried – and failed – to find middle ground between “thou shalt not ...” and the love and inclusivity of Jesus' ministry. The Apostle Paul's laundry list of offend-



Maggie Lauterer

ers in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 includes a message of hope for those who made the list, but now stand purified, sanctified and justified though the intervention of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 10, Peter, an orthodox Jew, is commanded to recognize that, if God says it's OK, it's OK, — as he tells how Cornelius, a centurion, and other non-Jews received the Holy Spirit:

“... As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?”

So, are we there yet? No! But, as my son

used to ask from the back seat, “Are we lost yet?” I believe not. We are, like Peter, slow to consider a new paradigm not a part of the old Law. A key vote in the 218th General Assembly was 54% to 46%—far from consensus. Perhaps when we can speak with a strong majority on matters of human sexuality, we can move on with our mission. In the same vote our advisory delegates, the next generation, voted 67%-33%. God may not change our hearts today – but we can trust God to have a plan.

Question 3: On dealing with polarization in church and society:

When dangerous rhetoric and shrill monologue dominate both the secular marketplace of ideas and national and world politics, we, as a denomination, cannot allow ourselves to be caught up in the dissonance of contentious discourse. Until we get past the unfortunate practice of choosing up sides and embarking on search and destroy missions against differing points of view, we cannot hear the wisdom God has surely placed there. We must treat our friends, and opponents, as honorable human beings with the same capacity for love, and for error, that we have. We must first proclaim the Word of Jesus Christ in our lives, then in our denomination, and finally as agents of peace in the world.

Many of us wear crosses. I challenge all of us who wear this symbol of sacrificial love to remember that we must also live that radical kind of love Jesus lived, taught, and died for. Let us put aside our differences and intolerance and practice peace. Then let us go out together and teach peace to a troubled world.

Question 4: On U.S. immigration policy:

We are fearful today and we live in fearful times. An aggressive and competitive media numbs us with sensationalistic excesses and bombards us with more infor-

mation than we can properly process. We often respond with fear and rage – rage about deficits, health care, failing public schools, loss of jobs, and the extravagance of greed. And in an uncertain time we have found a lightning rod in illegal immigration. Is it fair? No. But it is historically predictable and, to a degree, understandable.

If we accept the above as a fair assessment, then the answers may be deceptively simple, but not easy. Put aside our fears; trust in God; welcome the stranger; reform our laws; set an example for the nation and the world. And implement with faith and courage the Presbyterian tools of reason, education, and compassion.

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The Rev. Eric Nielsen

Question 1: On the Middle East Study Committee report:

As the tensions between Israel and Palestine are long-standing, I do not anticipate a quick resolution. As Moderator, one positive action I can take is to help facilitate the ongoing dialogue within the church about the complex issues surrounding this situation. With much of our national attention on the extended war on terror, few have examined closely the effects the ongoing conflict has taken on the lives of both Palestinians and Israelis, and most especially upon the dwindling number of Christians who have been caught in the crossfire. More education about the historic and modern issues surrounding Israel/Palestine, and the question of Jerusalem, is sorely needed.

I would also caution the church about making broad statements of condemnation to the parties involved without being fully cognizant of our own history. Our own nation has grown as an outcome of war and occupation of territories, and we must be careful not to establish a double standard toward other nations.

As Presbyterians, in all situations of conflict, we must be in constant and earnest prayer for all parties involved, and for the working of the Holy Spirit to bring peace and reconciliation.

Question 2: On the role of LGBT people in the PC(USA):

The verses quoted by those in favor and opposed to the ordination of homosexuals in the church are well known. Beyond this



Eric Nielsen

stalemate there are two additional passages that I believe should shape our reflections. The first is the concept of the “one body of Christ,” manifested in 1 Corinthians 12. No person can proclaim the Lordship of Jesus Christ without the action of the Holy Spirit. The greater question is, therefore, how we allow, or prevent, the Spirit’s work in an individual’s life to be realized. We should reframe our current question to that of what gifts a person brings to the ministry of the church and how we can engage those gifts in the mission of the church.

Secondly, and ultimately, it comes down to Jesus’ final words to his disciples: “*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another... By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*” (John 13: 34-35).

Question 3: On dealing with polarization in church and society:

Be it the regulatory functions that have overtaken our *Book of Order*, debates about ordination or virtually any other issue of contention, our denomination reflects a basic lack of trust in one another. We do not trust the integrity of one another's faith. We do not trust fellow sisters and brothers within congregations and presbyteries to make faithful decisions based upon our understanding of scripture, our confessional heritage, or the commands of Christ. We no longer trust that we all have the best interest of the Church at heart.

There is no policy statement or official action of the Assembly that can restore civility. Trust is earned and respect is given. I hope the Assembly can envision, and members will respond to opportunities for more direct dialogue around our issues of disagreement. We are tired of talking 'at' people. We have to be able to talk 'with' one another.

Question 4: On U.S. immigration policy:

Without question, the Biblical mandate to care for the stranger compels us to treat immigrants with compassion and basic human rights. We also must acknowledge that much of the present chaos and confusion, particularly along the southern border of our country, is the result of inconsistent enforcement of national law.

The starting point for our reflections upon the needs of immigrants and the question of illegal aliens is looking in our own mirror. We must ask ourselves why these people are coming to our country. Part of the answer is political – they are fleeing

the persecution of their homelands and seeking the liberty and freedom that the United States offers. This compels us to address the question of how we can foster human rights and freedoms in other lands. Another major part of the answer – our own desire for cheap produce and products. We demand inexpensive food in our grocery stores, and those prices are kept low due the use of illegal or migrant workers.

Immigration is not just a question of securing borders; it is a question of economics. Until we are willing to acknowledge this, the problems will go unresolved.

To receive regular
e-mail notices of
additions to the
Voices for Justice
website,
just send a note to
dougking2@aol.com

Please put "web updates"
in the subject line.

Receiving the PVJ Whole Gospel Congregation Award: Kwanzaa Community Church, Minneapolis

Though the adversity and afflictions of its members and the neighborhood may seem grim to some, the ministry of Kwanzaa Community Church stands as a beacon of hope and transformation in the community. While intentionally celebrating African American culture, Kwanzaa practices an ethic of radical inclusion both as a worshipping community and through its community engagement efforts. The basic philosophy of the congregation is to merge the church and the community, or as co-pastor the Rev. Alika Galloway puts it, “to get them in, raise them up, and send them out.”

Kwanzaa Community Church, PC (USA), grew out of a declining, aging white congregation in north Minneapolis. This new church was chartered in 2002 by the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area, partly in response to demographic changes in the neighborhood of Highland Presbyterian Church, whose leadership wanted to provide for a continued Presbyterian presence that could relate to those changes. As the only African American Presbyterian congregation in Minnesota, it was designed to serve as a model for church development. Its aim has been to provide ministry to a poor, urban, transient community that was increasingly populated by unchurched African Americans. Kwanzaa’s Hawthorne/Jordan community has one of the highest murder, addiction, and single-parent family rates in Minneapolis and the highest teen pregnancy and



Kwanzaa Community Church

HIV/AIDS infection rates in the entire nation.

Theologically the church might be called genuinely evangelical: they are open and inclusive, value relationships, and their outreach is in a style of “merging into the community.” As Alika Galloway puts it, this church doesn’t *choose* mission projects, they *are* a mission project. Their goal is to be out working with and engaged with the people in their community, many who are poor, disadvantaged, oppressed. In the words of the Brief Confession of Faith, they seek “to hear the voices of people long silent,” and follow the style of liberation theology, with the Exodus serving as the core narrative of their life and mission. All Kwanzaa’s work is based on the belief that every life is significant and that every life has meaning and value; the Kwanzaa community is therefore called to take action; they live the words of Dr. Gwendolyn Brooks, that “we are each other’s business.”

This style began to take on form in the early years of the 21st century, with the opening of the **Freedom School**, which is now in its ninth year. It follows the model developed by the national Children's Defense Fund, as a five-week, intergenerational summer program designed to teach the love and power of learning through reading and other activities. It targets African American children ages 6 – 18 who are at risk for failing in school. It is the only congregation-based Freedom School in the Twin Cities, and only one of two in the nation that goes through Senior High.

The school uses both of the congregation's church buildings, as well as one public school building and the local technical college. It offers a reading enrichment program using the model developed during the time of the Civil Rights campaign in the South, and employs a number of adults and high school youth as staff. It also provides a feeding program, which is especially important during the summer, since the students are not getting meals through their school lunch programs. As growing hunger problems have become apparent, the program has been expanded so that siblings and parents are able to get food as well.

Kwanzaa's newest project is the **Northside Women's Space**, a drop-in space that is scheduled to open in May, which is designed to provide women and teens who trade sex, or who are "in prostitution," a safe and holistic space based on the values of empowerment, respect, dignity, integrity, community and hope. This space was birthed out of research conducted in 2007 by Dr. Lauren Martin. Dr. Martin began working with Rev. Alike Galloway and Kwanzaa two years ago,

when their paths crossed at a women's health conference. Both had been working toward sustained and lasting capacity-building and trauma healing with African-American women in north Minneapolis – Kwanzaa focusing on HIV/AIDS and Dr. Martin focusing on sexual exploitation. The two identified a common cause and began visioning for the drop-in space. This program will be housed at Kwanzaa, and is designed for short-term engagement that will lead to and solidify long-term inter-generational impact and change. The cycles of poverty and prostitution are inter-generational; lasting change requires that we address the immediate concerns associated with those 'in prostitution' and implement a long term and comprehensive strategy that will change longer-term cycles and destructive patterns of behavior.

Women caught in the cycle of prostitution are among of the most vulnerable members of our community. According to research conducted by Dr. Martin, the population of people trading sex in north Minneapolis is 87% female, 90% unemployed, and 82% African-American. They have experienced a startlingly high rate of multiple traumatic events (80%), such as child abuse, rape, domestic abuse and more. Most are precariously housed or homeless and less than half completed high school. When asked about trading sex, about half first traded sex before the age of 18, at least 33% knew a close family member who also was involved in prostitution. Most had children (75%) and said they traded sex to "make ends meet". One woman who was interviewed said: "I don't want to do this. I have kids, no job, no pampers and the 'frigerator is empty. What else am I supposed to do?" Women who trade sex have multiple unmet needs, yet they are completely disconnected from systems of

care in our society, networks of support, and their own self-worth as human beings.

In the short term, the drop-in space will begin to build trust with people who trade sex and work to meet immediate needs through a vetted network of referrals. These immediate needs include: food, a place to sit, personal hygiene supplies, safer sex items, testing and support for sexual health, and a kind ear. Once trust and confidence is built with individual women and collectively, staff will begin the intensive work of reducing poverty by connecting women with the resources and supports they need to build their own capacity to get themselves out of poverty/prostitution. These long-term goals include employment, chemical dependency, healing from trauma, primary care (rather than just sexual health), transitional and permanent housing, and a shift in self-perception.

One of the latest additions to the list of programs is a **community garden**, aimed at helping people get food when their financial situations are more precarious than ever. The city of Minneapolis had donated half a vacant lot for this project to create a garden which anyone in the community could use. However, somehow the lot was given to Habitat for Humanity. Having lost that valuable plot of land, the congregation has decided to tear up the front yard of the church, and all other available land around the building. As Alika Galloway puts it, “We don’t need

grass, but we do need sweet potatoes.”

In 2008, Kwanzaa launched a comprehensive HIV/AIDS public health campaign – **Sidewalks Saving Lives** – that utilizes professional artists and intergenerational community members to create and paint HIV/AIDS prevention messages on the sidewalks of our urban neighborhood.



Freedom School in action

The initiative trains youth ages 13-22 in basic community organizing techniques and engages the community to paint sidewalks utilizing the ABC’S of HIV/AIDS prevention. Be Abstemious – Be Faithful – Use Condoms. In September of 2008, youth from Kwanzaa Community Church and other community partners, mentored by ten professional artists, painted the first ten of twenty sidewalks across North Minneapolis with artworks reinforcing HIV/AIDS prevention messages; ten communities

were engaged and invited to participate in the event. On September 26, 2009 ten additional sidewalks were painted.

The Sidewalks are painted all on one day in order to create energy, enthusiasm, and public and media awareness. Each site is constructed by a team of one professional artist and ten intergenerational community members who received an extensive HIV/AIDS education prior to the event. Each site is assigned a community organizer who promotes and encourages community participation. Every location has an HIV/AIDS expert who educates, shares information and encourages testing. Test sites

are located throughout the community and are available throughout the event. Transportation and food are also provided.

The **Nia-Imani Center** has been part of Kwanzaa since the early days. It engages children and youth who are involved in the street culture, as well as their parents, in year-round programs of tutoring, crafts, and a youth development program which helps them develop as whole persons.

One program has a distinctly international focus: **Peace Jam** sent kids two years ago to Colorado, and in 2011 will be sending a group to Peace Jam in South Africa. A group from the Peace Jam program met with Desmond Tutu when he visited the Twin Cities a couple years ago.

The forms of engagement with their community continue to multiply. A few more samples:

Every fourth Sunday a **special worship service** is held for people in recovery, with co-pastor Ralph Galloway arranging and leading it. Out of that group, some 40 men gathered for breakfast at the church one morning in April.

A **parenting program for parents of teens**, with some five to twenty people involved each week, is held every Saturday morning. It is funded by a \$50,000 grant from the City of Minneapolis.

The Lydia Project began within Kwanzaa Church, but is now semi-independent. It provides another group of women with empowerment and entrepreneurial skills, as they engage in such varied activities as sewing stoles, meeting with legislators for lobbying and door-knocking to do surveys in their community. One person commented, "It's amazing how lives have

been changed" by the kinds of sharing this very close (but not closed!) group does: telling and working on their life stories, clarifying their goals, and becoming whole persons.

One obvious question: How does one congregation do all this? The first answer is that many of the church members are very actively engaged, giving time and talent in many of these projects. But also Alika Galloway and others are very intentional about involving community agencies and organizations, as well as volunteers from Presbyterian and other churches, to do a lot of the work and provide substantial support. Westminster Presbyterian Church in downtown Minneapolis has been a major supporter, along with many other congregations, large and small, conservative and liberal. The Freedom School dinners, for example, are provided almost entirely by other congregations.

As one friend put it, "Alika and Paula [the Rev. Paula Sanders, a member of the church staff, currently staffing the Local Arrangements Committee for General Assembly] do the fund-raising, grant writing, diplomacy, and lots of speaking." Kwanzaa also gets help through a task force with people from partner churches, including Westminster, Stillwater, Christ Church, Church of the Way, Church of the Apostles, St. Luke, and North Como.

Here is a congregation engaging deeply in the life of its wider community, and sharing with them in confronting many of the most pressing issues of our day. We celebrate their witness for the Good News, and their action for justice.



Ann and Manley Olson to receive Andrew Murray Award for outstanding leadership

by Doug King

As we celebrate at the Voices for Justice luncheon the union of two progressive Presbyterian organizations – Voices of Sophia and the Witherspoon Society – we feel it is very appropriate to celebrate the contributions of two people who have played important roles in both groups, and have helped to bring us together.

Ann and Manley Olson, of Falcon Heights, Minnesota, were both present at the meeting called to create Voices of Sophia, in response to the hostility that arose after the Re-Imagining Conference. Ann served on the VOS Central Team, and as Treasurer of the group, for ten years. It was the two of them who raised the possibility of a merger with Witherspoon, and Ann was honored as VOS Sister of the Year in 2002.

Both of them have been active for many years at all levels of the PC(USA). In their congregation North Como Presbyterian Church, both have served as elders, and have been active in many different committees. Manley has been Clerk of Session and an occasional preacher and worship leader for the congregation. Ann is a member of the choir and Global Harmony Chorus.

In the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area, Ann has been an enabler for Presbyterian Women, as well as moderator and chair of

their Scholarship Committee. She has also been a commissioner or alternate for 19 years, as well as serving on and chairing various other Presbytery committees. Manley has been a commissioner to the Presbytery for 25 years, as well as being Moderator of the Presbytery, serving on the Council and chairing other committees.

Both have been frequent attenders of General Assemblies as observers and volunteers; Manley has been a Commissioner twice, and Ann has served once in that vital role. This year Manley is serving as co-chair of the Committee on Local Arrangements, while Ann serves on the COLA Executive Committee. Manley served on General Assembly Council for seven years.



Manley and Ann Olson

Manley has been a member of the Witherspoon Society for 25 years, a charter member, with Ann, of Voices of Sophia, and of Semper Reformanda and of Presbyterians for Restoring Creation. He is also a member of the Covenant Network, More Light Presbyterians, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, PHEWA, and the Presbyterian Historical Society. Ann has been on the Leadership Team and editor of the newsletter for the Presbyterian AIDS Network, and active in various roles for Presbyterian Women, including Presbytery and Synod Moderator and the Churchwide PW Search Team.

In short, these two people have committed their time, energy and leadership in many ways to the church and its mission for peace and justice, from the congregation to the national level. Voices for Justice is happy to honor their patient service to our group, and to the church as a whole.



Continued from “Jin Kim,” page 37

Question 4: On U.S. immigration policy:

I would first address the underlying mentality that has shaped our approach to immigration policy as a nation. The anti-immigrant sentiment in this country reflects our profound amnesia concerning our history. We need to remember that, with the exception of Native Americans, we are *all* immigrants.

In the congregation I serve, the Church of All Nations, we address this issue through reflecting together on the theological, historical and sociological factors that shape who we are – especially regarding race in America. If we don’t confront, rehearse, and confess our history as a nation, we end up with a wrong mentality that leads to abusive policy.

There is a powerful myth at work in America – the myth of the white man as the good guy, the righteous sheriff, the cowboy protecting the pioneers from the “naked savages,” the homesteader who pulls himself up by his bootstraps – never mind that he did this on land stripped from someone else and labor stolen from someone else. The need in America to maintain a myth of the white man as the hero prevents white people from speaking honestly about the past, and therefore taking responsibility for the present.

I speak as a Korean American, recognizing that Korean people are also culpable in this great American tragedy. Like all immigrants before us, we have used the same strategy to “get ahead” and join the melting pot of whiteness. How do we talk about immigration without first acknowledging the deep racism that frames the entire issue, along with the distorted

myths about white innocence, goodness, and chosenness?

To deal with the continuing influx of immigrants into many of our communities, we need to be transformed by the “renewing of our minds” through the corporate confession and repentance that will one day lead to reconciliation. Speaking hard truths about ourselves will create a hospitable space where *all* people are able to connect at the deepest part of their humanity by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Are you a Voices for Justice member?

Let’s keep in touch!

Join our members’ e-mail list to receive occasional notes on matters that the Board considers truly important to be shared.

We may send just 8 or 10 messages in a year, so this won’t clog up your overflowing e-mail in-box.

Just send an note to
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Please put “Voices elist”
in the subject line.

Plan now for late July!



Photo courtesy of Ghost Ranch

GHOST RANCH SEMINAR

July 26-August 1, 2010

WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER: CONFRONTING THE STRUCTURES OF INJUSTICE

In partnership with Presbyterian Voices for Justice
and The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship.
Jane Hanna, Coordinator

If it seems there are many critical issues confronting us, it is because there are. How do we respond to the biblical call for justice in a world facing deepening global inequality, environmental challenges, and the escalation of violence in human relationships? We are fortunate to have three eminently qualified people prepared to address these questions. We will use *A Social Creed for the 21st Century* to discern a moral, ethical and spiritual response to the many challenges humankind must meet. In presentations and discussions we will search for the prophetic spirit to guide our efforts toward a more just and humane world.

Gary Dorrien, Reinhold Niebuhr Professor of Social Ethics at Union Theological Seminary and Professor of Religion at Columbia University. An Episcopal priest, he was previously the Parfet Distinguished Profes-

sor at Kalamazoo College, where he taught for 18 years and also served as Dean of Stetson Chapel. He is the author of 14 books and approximately 225 articles that range across the fields of ethics, social theory, theology, philosophy, politics and history. Prof. Dorrien has a long record of involvement in social justice and anti-war organizations. His most recent books are *The Making of American Liberal Theology* and *Social Ethics in the Making*. His next book, due in 2010, is *Economy, Difference, and Empire*. (www.utsnyc.edu/garydorrien)

Grace Yia-Hei Kao is an Associate Professor of Ethics at the Claremont School of Theology, where she teaches and researches issues related to human rights, religion in the public sphere, feminism, environmental ethics, and Asian American Christianity. She was previously Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and Women's Studies at Virginia Tech. Dr. Kao has published chapters and articles on a variety of topics, including ecofeminism, the relationship between religion and violence, and the prospects and challenges for interreligious cooperation and peace. Georgetown University Press will soon publish her first book, *Grounding Human Rights in a Pluralist World*, in their Advancing Human Rights series. (www.cst.edu/academic-resources/-faculty.kao.php)

Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty is Associate Professor of Theology at Bellarmine University in Louisville, KY, where she teaches a broad range of courses including *Theology from the Margins* for which she was recently awarded a Kentuckiana Metroversity Instructional Development Award. She is also a Minister of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (USA). Much of her work has bridged the gap between church and academy. Dr. Hinson-Hasty currently serves as an elected member of the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (ACWC) and was part of the PC(USA) committee that drafted the Social Creed for the 21st Century. She is the author of *Beyond the Social Maze: Exploring Vida Dutton Scudder's Theological Ethics* and co-editor of *Prayers for the New Social Awakening*, with Christian Iosso and *To Do Justice: A Guide for Progressive Christians* with Rebecca Todd Peters. (www.bellarmino.edu/cas/theology)

Note: Just follow the links after the speakers' bio sketches for more about them.

News of Voices for Justice

Membership meeting planned for Sunday, July 4, immediately following PVJ luncheon

Our biennial membership meeting will give us all a chance to celebrate about the “holy union” of Voices and Sophia and The Witherspoon Society for our first face-to-face gathering.

The Board will report to our members on our activities, plans, and concerns, and will invite all of those present to express their own hopes and suggestions.

One major item of business will be the nomination and election of new officers.

If you want to suggest someone (including yourself!) for consideration as a Board member, please contact Co-Moderator Bill Dummer and tell him all about it. You can email him at gardenerdummer@yahoo.com, or phone him at (414) 475-0076.

Even if you can't be at the luncheon (and we certainly hope you can), please come around 1:45 or 2:00 for the meeting.

The next issue of *Network News*

will bring you our reports and analysis on the 219th General Assembly, along with commentary on issues, and reflections on the future for our church and our shared mission “to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.”

We welcome your reflections on the Assembly and its actions, and your own thoughts on what we should be doing to help shape the future as co-workers with God.

Just send your contributions – either news and comments, to:

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Deadline for the Summer 2010 issue is August 15.

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Network News

from Presbyterian Voices for Justice
a union of The Witherspoon Society and Voices of Sophia

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