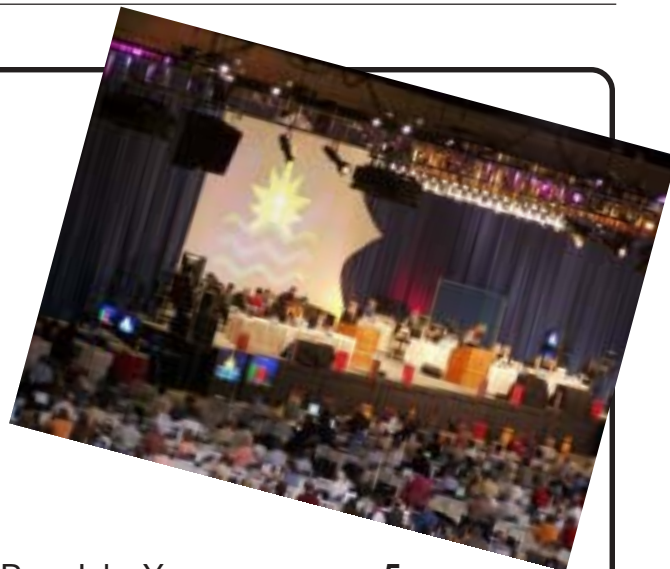


So how shall we offer “life in fullness”?



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The President's Corner

Let's get acquainted

by Ken Smith

The Witherspoon Society is an interesting organization. Although most readers of this issue know that I am the new President of Witherspoon, unless you regularly attend General Assembly you probably know very little else about me. My purpose in this initial column is to fill in that gap so that you will know the context out of which my leadership will be coming.

I was born and raised in Kansas City, MO. I grew up in the Congregational Church, which became part of the United Church of Christ while I was in college. I graduated from Carleton College in 1961 and enrolled in Chicago Theological Seminary. However, like our GA Moderator, I am a seminary dropout. I married Barbara Dreyer in 1962. We have two adult sons, one of whom is bisexual, and six grandchildren. We settled in Chicago and I began my pursuit of an actuarial career. This pursuit took us from Chicago to Cleveland and finally to Detroit, where we have lived since 1982.

I took early retirement in 1991, but my work for social justice didn't wait until I retired. Early involvements included marching with Dr. Martin Luther King in Selma in 1965 and being part of a congregation working on racial reconciliation in the Presbytery of the Western Reserve.

After I retired I became active at both presbytery and national levels. In the Presbytery of Detroit, I chaired both the Social Justice and Peacemaking and the Racial Ethnic Concerns Committees. I was part of a group that worked to create the Presbytery's Anti-Racism team, served as one of the initial co-chairs and continue as a member of the team today. I was

elected as a commissioner to the 1996 GA in Albuquerque. I was the Moderator of the Detroit Presbytery in 2003, which meant I was also a commissioner to the Denver GA that year.

My first involvement at the national level of the PC(USA) was using my actuarial skills to work on the issue of health care reform, working through the Interreligious Health Care Access Campaign and the Presbyterian Health Network, which I later moderated. This initial involvement got me to the 1993 GA in Orlando and suddenly the scope of my involvement dramatically broadened. I even got my picture in *The Layman* during a floor demonstration following the vote to make the 1978 Definitive Guidance an Authoritative Interpretation. I have attended every GA since, with the exception of 1995. I have served as the Moderator of Semper Reformanda and helped negotiate the merger of Semper and Witherspoon in 2001. I'm also a regular at the School of the Americas demonstration each November.

I hope this background information has been helpful. I'd love to hear from any of you who have thoughts about where we should be going as an organization. I'll



Ken Smith

end with a phrase that greets me as I shave each morning: *justice and compassion for all*.

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The Editor's Spot

Election and elections – a gracious gift or a privilege and a pain?

by Doug King

Election is one of those Basic Belief Groups for Calvinists, right? At the heart of that doctrine (which may still have more or less meaning for many of us today) is a radical notion of grace. But the elections we're facing this season are quite a different matter. Grace doesn't seem to play a big role. Love seems strangely lacking, unless it's the devotion some people seem to feel toward one candidate or another. Fear and resentment play a bigger part than the finer emotions, if we're to judge by the appeals being made by campaign speeches and ads.

We think of politics and government in terms of law (or lawlessness) and justice (or injustice). So what might grace have to do with it – and with our messy process of electing a president?

Three things occur to me.

First: In the Reformed understanding of "election," that act of divine grace frees us from bondage to self, and allows us to care for others. In this new freedom we are enabled to care for those beyond our immediate circle of family and friends – not just with some kind of mushy individualistic "compassion," but with practical, political efforts to make sure everyone in our global community gets a fair chance at a decent life. Or even, as our recent General Assembly motto reminded us, at a life of *fullness*. Or to be a little more modest, how about a life of *sufficiency*?

If the church is to bear witness at all in this election season, we must begin with a prophetic call for justice that grows out of love – a love that extends to all of God's creation, that never allows us to divide the world into "friends" and "enemies," into simple categories of good and evil.

Bill Coffin says it better than I can, in his recent book *Credo*: "What distortion of the gospel it is to have limited sympathies and unlimited certainties, when the very reverse – to have limited certainties and unlimited sympathies – is not only more tolerant but far more Christian."

Second: Our Calvinist forbears (at their best, anyway) never took their sense of election, of being "chosen," as a reason for any claims to superiority or privilege. Election was for service, not for rule. God's love gave them no grounds for exploiting the rest of the world. Well, in fact that sense of election often *was* taken to just all sorts of exploitation. But that doesn't justify our nation's following in the wrong paths of our predecessors, who should have known better.

And third: The theological notion of election is never simply a gift, but also and always a call. It's a call to care for God's world, and to do so with humility (for the world is a gift, not our possession), with appreciation and respect for what is basically good – not just good for what we can get out of it, but good in itself. Good to be enjoyed, and to be shared.

So as we slog through this campaign season, let's remember the good things that we can affirm. Let's recognize that voices on the progressive side of our church and our society need to offer a positive vision – and maybe even a program – for the future of our nation and the world. Our prophetic witness must both denounce the claims to certainty and to a right to rule the world. But we must also give voice to the divine mandate for humanity: to enjoy life, and to enable others to enjoy it as well.

In this issue of *Network News* we're including two other items for your reflection in this election season: A listing from the National Council of Churches of ten principles for use in reflecting on the candidates and their positions (next page); and an essay by theologian Doug Ottati on what he calls "utilitarian Christianity," which would use God as a guarantor of getting our way (p. 25). He warns, "Beware of political spiritualities that equate God's purposes with the cherished aims and objectives of one's own nation or people."

The Witherspoon Society Mission

We are a network of concerned Presbyterians responding to God's call to do justice, and to work with hope for healing and wholeness in a world increasingly broken.

Our mission is:

- to **listen** and **learn** from those who have been silenced;
- to **nurture** the prophetic voice of the church through reflection, discernment, and action;
- to **equip** Presbyterians for faithful participation in the church and the world;
- to **challenge** unjust relationships of power;
- to **advocate** for peace, justice, the integrity of creation, and the full inclusion of all God's people in church and society.

Through our witness, we seek to revitalize the church's proclamation and action, informed by the full witness of the Bible and the confessions, animated by our hope for the reign of God.

A Christian election year guide

“Christian Principles in an Election Year”

The National Council of Churches USA has released a list of ten principles for evaluating candidates that it hopes all Christians - from liberals to conservatives - will study and apply in this election year.

These “Christian Principles in an Election Year” apply well-established ecumenical principles to both domestic and foreign policy issues, and address issues of war, poverty, immigration, education, health care, racial justice, distress in U.S. inner cities and rural communities, the environment and the criminal justice system. They urge domestic policies that build “communities shaped by peace and cooperation” and a foreign policy “based on cooperation and global justice.”

Christian Principles in an Election Year

Our Christian faith compels us to address the world through the lens of our relationship to God and to one another. Public discourse is enhanced as we engage civic leaders on the values and ethics affirmed by our faith. At the same time, religious liberty and the integrity of our democracy will be protected as candidates refrain from using faith-based organizations and institutions for partisan gain. We offer these ten principles to those seeking to accept the responsibility that comes with holding public office.

1. War is contrary to the will of God. While the use of violent force may, at times, be a necessity of last resort, Christ pronounces his blessing on the peacemakers. We look for political leaders who will make peace with justice a top priority and who will actively seek nonviolent solutions to conflict.

2. God calls us to live in communities shaped by peace and cooperation. We reject policies that abandon large segments of our inner city and rural populations to hopelessness. We look for political leaders who will re-build our communities and bring an end to the cycles of violence and killing.

3. God created us for each other, and thus our security depends on the well-being of our global neighbors. We look for political leaders for whom a foreign policy based on cooperation and global justice is an urgent concern.

4. God calls us to be advocates for those who are most vulnerable in our society. We look for political leaders who

year for economic justice and who will seek to reduce the growing disparity between rich and poor.

5. Each human being is created in the image of God and is of infinite worth. We look for political leaders who actively promote racial justice and equal opportunity for everyone.

6. The earth belongs to God and is intrinsically good. We look for political leaders who recognize the earth’s goodness, champion environmental justice, and uphold our responsibility to be stewards of God’s creation.

7. Christians have a biblical mandate to welcome strangers. We look for political leaders who will pursue fair immigration policies and speak out against xenophobia.

8. Those who follow Christ are called to heal the sick. We look for political leaders who will support adequate, affordable and accessible health care for all.

9. Because of the transforming power of God’s grace, all humans are called to be in right relationship with each other. We look for political leaders who seek a restorative, not retributive, approach to the criminal justice system and the individuals within it.

10. Providing enriched learning environments for all of God’s children is a moral imperative. We look for political leaders who will advocate for equal educational opportunity and abundant funding for children’s services.

Finally, our religious tradition admonishes us not to bear false witness against our neighbor and to love our enemies. We ask that the campaigns of political candidates and the coverage of the media in this election season be conducted according to principles of fairness, honesty and integrity.

The ten principles plus a short study guide are available in pdf format at <http://www.nccusa.org/letjusticeroll/electionyearprinciplesguide.pdf>

The Witherspoon website has the text of the principles above, plus a National Council of Churches news release explaining more about them. Just go to http://witherspoonsociety.org/2004/election_guide.htm



Reflecting on the 216th General Assembly

You probably received Gene TeSelle's special report on the 216th Assembly sometime in mid-July. If you missed it, you can find it at http://witherspoonsociety.org/2004/witherspoon_report.htm, or in pdf format at <http://witherspoonsociety.org/GA%2004%20report2.pdf>

We don't need to repeat all that excellent reporting at this late date, but we do want to offer further reflections on the Assembly and some of its actions. That includes the debates that have gone on since the Assembly concerning charges that the Assembly actions on Israel were "anti-

Semitic," along with some efforts at the kind of dialogue that are being called for by the Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church.

First we offer a sermon preached by the Rev. Jake Young soon after the Assembly, in which he considered the significance of what the Assembly chose *not* to do. Jake is Associate Pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Springfield, Illinois. He has been the Membership Coordinator of the Witherspoon Society, and was recently elected as our Vice President.

When Inaction Is Unfaithful

A sermon preached at
First Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Illinois
July 11, 2004
Rev. Jake Young
Text: Luke 10:25-37

Meditation for use before worship:

Had I but one wish for the churches of America I think it would be that they come to see the difference between charity and justice. Charity is a matter of personal attributes; justice, a matter of public policy. Charity seeks to alleviate the effects of injustice; justice seeks to eliminate the causes of it. Charity in no way affects the status quo, while justice leads inevitably to political confrontation. Especially I would hope that Christians would see that the compassion that moved the Good Samaritan to act charitably—that same compassion prompted biblical prophets to confront injustice, to speak truth to power, as did Jesus, who, though more than a prophet, was certainly nothing less.

- William Sloane Coffin

Well, the 216th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) ended last Saturday. And you know what that means: It's the time of year when you have to listen to me talk about Gays and Lesbians in the church!

In many ways, it was a typical General Assembly (or GA). There was a beautifully inclusive theme chosen - this year it was "That all may have life in fullness" - which belied the church's ongoing exclusion of many persons. And there were non-stop meetings for nine days.

As with every national business meeting of the Presbyterian Church, there were both moments that made one very proud to be a member of this church and other moments of, well, embarrassment at some of the outcomes.

From where I stand, some of the best moments this year were related to decisions about international issues. By very large majorities, often as high as 85 - 95%, the Assembly approved a number of measures at odds with current US foreign policy and popular opinion. These measures included:

- support for the Geneva Accord and urging Israel and Palestine to implement it;
- a call to end construction by Israelis of the wall separating Palestinian and Israeli territory;
- consideration of divesting church funds from Israel and corporations selling equipment there;
- a resolution calling for peace in Colombia and the demilitarization of the US anti-drug war there;
- condemnation of the Central American Free Trade Agreement;
- advocating change in US immigration policy;



- a call to rescind new administration policies against Cuba;
- and perhaps most importantly, a condemnation of the invasion of Iraq as “unwise, immoral, and illegal.” Seventy-eight percent voted in favor of this. Some thought the majority was so large partly because of the witness of an ecumenical delegate to the Assembly from Iraq. When asked if he felt his nation was better or worse off now than before the invasion, he simply said, “Worse off,” and left the microphone.

In other business, the Assembly upheld the Church’s pro-choice position with regard to abortion. But they then refused to recommend that emergency contraception be made available over the counter. Commissioners apparently were influenced by claims that emergency contraception would encourage promiscuity and that it is really a form of abortion. I know, it’s inconsistent, isn’t it? You affirm a woman’s right to choose an abortion if necessary and then restrict access to drugs because you think they may in some way induce an abortion.

Some of the most frustrating decisions by any Presbyterian governing body are those that emerge as non-decisions. A good example this year was the Assembly’s decision not to make a decision about supporting the Federal Marriage Amendment that is being pushed by some of our national politicians. The problem here is that we, as Presbyterians, have not fully learned that our inaction sends just as much of a message as an action. Inactions express complacency and our sense of comfort with a typically unjust status quo. In fact, in this case, the Assembly was so happy with their ability to agree upon no action, that a savvy commissioner introduced a resolution that no official entity of the church should be involved with speaking out for or against the Federal Marriage Amendment. This prospect for ongoing inertia with regard to this issue was so appealing that a majority quickly approved it. Only later did it become clear that the Assembly had effectively passed a gag rule for the denomination’s Washington Office which was created to express opinions on US policies and pending legislation!

All this is just one more instance of the church managing to do nothing. And that’s embarrassing. And depressing. I wonder what Jesus would say in principle about decisions to take no action. Is it significant that our gospel text today is Jesus’ parable about the Good Samaritan?

This story describes how a priest and a Levite encounter a bloodied and bruised victim of theft on the road that runs from Jerusalem to Jericho. They each decide to take no action, crossing to the other side of the road and continuing on their way. Now, this parable format was familiar to first-century listeners, who would have immediately understood the priest’s and Levite’s actions as unsatisfactory. There were many stories circulating in those days that were critical of religious leaders. They typically involved a couple of religious leaders behaving less than scrupulously, juxtaposed with an Israelite who did the right thing. The interesting twist here is that Jesus’ third character is not a run-of-the-mill Jewish citizen, but a despised, unclean outsider, a Samaritan. And this Samaritan doesn’t just do the right thing, but

goes well beyond the call of duty to show great mercy to the victim, including paying for his care at a local inn.

We remember that Jesus tells this parable in response to a lawyer’s question about who is our neighbor. The questioner wants to know from Jesus what the limits of neighborliness are. In the first part of the passage, he has learned that in order to have eternal life, one must love God and neighbor. And that’s fine, but now he finds himself wondering, just how far does this commandment to love our neighbor extend? There must be some boundaries, right?

First century Jewish society was ordered by the multiple boundaries which defined people’s positions. There were boundaries of race, gender, religion and class that were virtually impermeable. So, when Jesus answers the question, “Who is my neighbor?” by introducing a neighborly Samaritan, he is calling into question ALL those boundaries. It is scandalous! It is revolutionary!

We recognize some of this story’s scandalousness, as well as its brilliance, when Jesus concludes the parable by asking the lawyer who he thought was a neighbor in the story. His response? He cannot even bring himself to say the word Samaritan, so he simply says, “The one who showed mercy.” It is scandalous that he cannot say Samaritan. It is brilliant that the initial effort to define the bounds of neighborliness has now resulted in a clear definition of the essential nature of neighborliness: “One who shows mercy!”

And Jesus’ response? “Go and do likewise.” Note that his earlier injunction, the one about following the great commandment included a reward. He said, “You have given the right answer, do this, and you will live.” But now there is no promise of eternal life, only that we should “go and do likewise,” “go and show mercy.” When we seek to show mercy, when we are a neighbor, we do so with no calculation of reward. If you expect a reward, then it is not “likewise,” it is not true mercy. Showing mercy with no thought for reward is, simply, what we do, and what we are to be, as followers of Christ!

Eternal life is not the reward for fulfilling religious duties. It is a quality of life characterized by showing mercy.

There is one other point to be made here. Mercy first must see need, then respond with compassion. This first step, recognizing need, is necessary. Walter Brueggemann refers to this as “noticing pain.” It is a difficult thing for people of privilege to do. That’s why Jesus chooses the outcast, the Samaritan to play this role. But this also indicates a revolutionary sensibility about the dominant social order. In Brueggemann’s words:

The Samaritan is Jesus’ peculiar articulation against the dominant culture, and so he stands as a radical threat. The Samaritan by his action judges the dominant way by disregard of the marginal. The ones who pass by, obviously carriers of the dominant tradition, are numbed, indifferent, and do not notice. The Samaritan expresses a new way that displaces the old arrangements in which

outcasts are simply out. The replacing of numbness with compassion, that is, the end of cynical indifference and the beginning of **noticed pain**, signals a social revolution.

Oh, I promised earlier to talk about gays and lesbians in the church. I must follow through. Well, it turns out that the General Assembly did not want to address in any way the current wording in the Constitution that excludes gays and lesbians from ordination as ministers and elders and deacons. But the Committee that deals with this issue did decide to recommend that the Assembly effectively remove the earlier Authoritative Interpretations that are exclusive. It would have been like a half-step in the right direction. When it came to the floor, before the more than 500 commissioners, it lost by four votes. The General

Assembly of the Presbyterian Church chose to cross the road and walk on by and, once again, ignore the pain of those who are categorically excluded from answering their call to serve the church.

After the vote, 350 people gathered outside the assembly hall to mourn together in prayer and song. My colleague Janie Spahr could be seen comforting a former Moderator of the General Assembly who was distressed by the decision. Janie was forced in 1991 to leave her position as pastor of a church in Rochester, New York, because she is a lesbian. In this church, some people become really good at noticing pain, and consequently at showing mercy.

Witherspoon at GA



Gloria Albrecht speaks at Semper Reformanda Conversation



Katie Cannon addresses Witherspoon Luncheon



Rev. Ulysses Payne of All Souls Presbyterian Church accepts Whole Gospel Congregation Award from Gene TeSelle (see p. 12)



Candidate Rick Ufford-Chase spoke at Witherspoon Commissioner Orientation

Photos by Jack Hartwein-Sanchez

Flying home from Richmond:

Reflections on highs and lows of the Assembly

by Matthew T. Robinson

We had come in on top of the storm, the pilot taking us north past the city, banking the small jetload of 50 or so passengers in a wide turn over Lake Michigan. Descending through a windy Chicago thunderstorm, everyone was quiet as flight 8049 touched down at O'Hare Airport. Not so astounding – but less than an hour earlier we had been having quite a cheerful time together on the tarmac of the South Bend, Indiana Airport, diverted there to wait for a clearing in the storm over Chicago. Not my first delayed flight, but this was a positive experience. Most of us on the flight were Presbyterian – not surprising since this was the day the 216th GA had adjourned. Most of us were heading home from Richmond, and I suppose everyone was still feeling the spiritual lift.

When the announcement came that we were landing in South Bend instead of Chicago, we all must have decided quietly to make the best of it. The experience of our church's most inclusive level of governing was positive enough that we weren't going to let a little delay get us down. During the nearly two hours on the ground, we joked with the flight crew, shared snacks, visited, and unanimously (without a vote) tried to make the time favorable. Once we were able to take off again the flight crew thanked us and said they had never experienced anything like our group's reaction to the delay. Oh yes, we also shared a nurturing concern for the young couple – some of the few non-Presbyterians aboard – with their 9-week-old baby. I do not know the individual stance of each passenger on all the issues that conflict the PC (USA), but I *do* know that the common covenant of our Presbyterianism was far more important.

I have attended a few GAs in the past, but Richmond was my first experience as a voting commissioner. It brought some unpleasant surprises. As soon as the

commissioner list was out, the mail began to arrive. This was new for me. Alongside the expected official communications from Louisville there came the partisan lobbying from our denomination's varied special interest groups and even a few concerned individuals. And a refreshing surprise – a letter from a session in Georgia whose only purpose was to inform me that I was in their prayers. Nice.

More striking was the stack of letters and pamphlets – more than an inch and a half of them – that were unabashedly seeking to influence my vote. Oh yes, they just wanted me to be well informed before casting my vote. By and large, liberal or conservative, progressive or traditional, they were tactful as they attempted to make their various pitches. Thus, the flood of material intended to invoke my conscience was tolerable.

But there was one big exception: a few mailings (or muckraking) surrounding the impending election of the Stated Clerk. The attack on the incumbent became downright vicious. One document, a 35-page transcript of a debate hosted by a decades-old Presbyterian antagonist organization, repeatedly called attention to the incumbent's absence while the three opposition candidates cast their blame in that direction for all that ails our denomination.

Things went no better during the week of the assembly. Daily the commissioners' mailboxes were assailed with more vitriol aimed at the incumbent. It appeared that all of this mean-spirited rhetoric was from just a few sources. A first ballot victory for Cliff only affirmed my feelings. I am pleased that, though the progressive voices of the church spoke loudly and clearly, they also spoke with compassion and restraint. I am saddened that, in many ways, our election within the church did not set a better example for what we are now see-

ing in the secular world.

That which unites us is stronger than that which divides us. This understanding of a covenant call is at the heart of our Reformed Tradition. We symbolize it at the table of the Lord's Supper.

Thus, nothing that may ever come between us can be more important than our covenant through Christ. If that is not so, then as Paul says, our faith is in vain.

When someone asked Jesus to judge between him and his brother (Luke 12:13-15), Jesus would have no part of it. Jesus won't always settle the social, political and moral issues for us. We often need to sort those out as best we can, all respecting that the other is also seeking Christ's guidance.

When the flight arrived at the gate it was still raining; all getting soaked, we made our way inside the terminal. Surrounded by the chaos of a "delayed" O'Hare Airport, we said quick goodbyes and went on our separate ways home. Everybody had missed flights, but it didn't matter. We'd all get where we needed to be, eventually.

We even deplaned in a decent and orderly, dare I say, even biblical fashion. Remember the couple with the baby? As we got to the gate and the lights came on and the door was opened, nobody rushed to stand and retrieve their carry-on and push to the exit. Everybody waited. We all waited until that little baby and parents could make their way to the front of the plane and be the first to be escorted to the terminal. And so, a little child shall lead them.

The author: The Rev. Matthew Robinson served as a Minister Commissioner from the Presbytery of Central Nebraska, at the 216th General Assembly.

Presbyterian anti-Semitism? Or a voice for peace and justice?

Unless you've really been taking the summer off, you're aware of the current debate about actions of the 216th General Assembly regarding Israel and Palestine. The lightning-rods for the criticism are the actions criticizing Israel's building of the wall, and the possibility of disinvesting from corporations that support the Israeli government.

Here is a variety of comments – mostly defending the GA actions – that you may find helpful. You'll find all of these notes and more (from the pro-Israeli side as well) at http://witherspoonsociety.org/2004/israel_actions.htm

If you have opinions, information, or resources to add to this discussion, please let us hear from you. We'll post what we can on our website, and if this goes on long enough, we may publish more in the Fall issue of *Network News*. Just send an e-mail to dougking2@aol.com, or a letter to Doug King, 1418 Clarendon Dr., Wayzata, MN 55391. Thanks!

GA Peacemaking Committee chair responds to charges of anti-Semitism

The Rev. Bruce Gillette, who chaired the Assembly's Committee on Peacemaking, which dealt with these proposed actions, sent a response to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, which had also published accusations of anti-Semitism.

Dear Editor,

Saturday's Philadelphia Inquirer article "Jewish-Presbyterian rift" contained a number of misleading statements concerning the recent actions by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA). I write now as a commissioner to that national church meeting who served as the moderator of the Assembly Committee on Peacemaking that dealt with the resolutions relating to Israel and the Middle East.

Several General Assembly actions have resulted in unfair accusations that Presbyterians are anti-Israel and anti-Semitic. This simply is not true.

Critics of the denomination's decisions need to consider the full context of the actions taken by the church. The actual resolutions and other helpful resources are available online at <http://www.pcusa.org/interfaith>

The Philadelphia Inquirer article begins with a condemnation by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), saying the Presbyterians' vote "supported divesting from companies that do business with Israel."

What the Presbyterian General Assembly actually authorized was the exploration of a selective divestment of church funds from those companies whose business in Israel is found to be directly or indirectly causing harm or suffering to innocent people, Palestinian or Israeli.

The church's top official, the Rev. Dr. Clifton Kirkpatrick, has written that the "focus of this action is to explore use of a proven tool of economic pressure to motivate real change in Israeli policies and movement toward peace." This action came in response to an overture from the Presbytery of St. Augustine [Florida]. Presbyterians there had visited Israelis and Palestinians for many years. They were grieved by the terrorist attacks against Israelis and frustrated with the continuing oppression experienced by Palestinians, including many who are Christians.

The Philadelphia Inquirer goes on to state "The denomination's General Assembly voted, 431-62, to direct its corporate-witness office to research withdrawing church investments from the Jewish state, modeling the action on

the divestment campaign against South African apartheid two decades ago."

Dr. Kirkpatrick wrote "although the decision to "initiate a process of phased, selective divestment in multinational corporations operating in Israel" may be presumed by some to invite comparison of Israeli policies with those of apartheid South Africa, the assembly has not asserted any moral equivalency between the two. The two situations are distinct."

Since 1948, Presbyterian General Assemblies have issued statements for peace with justice in the Middle East, but with little impact. Middle East Christians have made clear to American Christians that they would welcome less talk and more action. A Lutheran pastor in Bethlehem told assembly commissioners this year, "To have statements is not enough. They might be good for discussions within churches, but they're not much help to us on the ground." The Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem urged words and actions in support of Palestinians and Israelis working for peace and justice: "[Speaking out] is not anti-Semitic. It's not anti-Jewish. It is anti-Israel-government policy." The Sharon government's policies, such as the "security wall" that has resulted in great suffering among Palestinians, has been condemned not only by the Presbyterian Church (USA), but also by the International Court of Justice and the Israeli Supreme Court.

The Philadelphia Inquirer's story stated "the delegates also rejected a proposal that would have suspended funding to a Philadelphia "messianic" congregation, Avodat Israel, that uses Jewish rituals as part of its efforts to convert Jews to Christianity."

Many Presbyterians are troubled by the "messianic" congregation," Avodat Israel. The General Assembly mandated a study to "examine and strengthen the relationship between Christians and Jews and the implications of this relationship for our evangelism and new church development." The focus of this action is to re-examine our theological understanding of Christian-Jewish

relationships and to discern whether this particular form of outreach contradicts that understanding or violates our intention to do evangelism in a spirit of respect, openness, and honesty.

All of the assembly's actions this year are consistent with the commitment of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) made in 1987 in *A Theological Understanding of the Relationship between Christians and Jews*, "never again to participate in, to contribute to, or (insofar as we are able) to allow the persecution or denigration of Jews."

The Philadelphia Inquirer concludes that "Joel Kaplan, president of the international humanitarian group, demanded an apology for the 'absolutely horrifying' statements of the denomination, which he said ignored attacks against Israeli citizens."

The Presbyterian General Assembly condemned violence by all sides in the Middle East. They also approved a study paper titled *On Violence, Religion and Terrorism*, that looks at this global problem. Presbyterians approved a resolution that stated that the "security of Israel and the Israeli people is inexorably dependent on making peace with their Palestinian neighbors, by negotiating and reaching a just and equitable solution to the conflict that respects international law, human rights, the sanctity of life, and dignity of persons, land, property, safety of home, freedom of movement, the rights of refugees to return to their homeland, the right of a people to determine their political future, and to live in peace and prosperity." Presbyterians did not ignore "attacks against Israeli citizens," but were also concerned about Israeli attacks that have resulted in the suffering of Palestinians. We are all made in the image of God. We are all called to work for God's desired peace with justice for all in the world.

Grace and Peace,
Bruce Gillette
First Presbyterian Church, Pitman NJ

John McNeese says the charges of anti-Semitism are mostly "hyperbole," and offers helpful resources

There certainly has been a lot written about the disinvestment action of the General Assembly. Most all of it from an Israeli perspective and most of it hyperbole. Here are some very good resources on the conflict from the Palestinian perspective:

Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness, Rashid Khalidi, Columbia University Press, 1993

The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After, Edward Said, Vintage Books, 2001

The New Intifada: Resisting Israel's Apartheid, edited by Roane Carey, Verso, 2001

Websites:

Middle East Research and Information Project - <http://www.merip.org/>

Christian Peacemaker Teams - <http://www.cpt.org/hebron/hebron.php>

The Palestinian people have suffered greatly at the hands of the Israeli military and government and are ill served by a corrupt Palestinian Authority.

John McNeese

Gordon Shull says the real issue is the Israeli Settlements, and dealing with them is the only way to peace

Disagreements about the GA resolution on the Middle East boil down to one basic issue: How seriously must we take the Israeli Settlements in the West Bank and Gaza? Many ... feel that Israel has already made her share of the concessions, and the fault lies mainly with the Palestinians. Others believe, with Jewish Voice for Peace, Americans for Peace

Now, and the Tikkun Community, that deliberate, determined, steadfast withdrawal from ALL of the Settlements in Gaza and the West Bank - with a few agreed and compensated exceptions on the border - is the FIRST prerequisite of peace. They (we) are distressed by Arafat's failure to offer a hopeful counterproposal to Barak's final offer, as Clinton urged - but equally distressed that even during the Rabin-Barak years the number of Settlers was doubling (yes, DOUBLING! What message did this send to the despairing Palestinians?)

Those who see the settlements as the first and central problem believe that only a determined, steady withdrawal from both the West Bank and Gaza can overcome the agony that drives Palestinians to suicide; that such a withdrawal would do more than anything else to strengthen the moderates on the Palestinian side, and enable them to negotiate a decent two-state solution. They (we) see as the central tragedy of US policy the inability of our President and Congress to state this position strongly and repeatedly ever since the Egyptian-Israeli peace of 1974. They (we) would gladly support any international guarantees of the arrangement set forth in the recent Geneva Accord.

Alas, there are domestic political reasons why neither Rabin nor Barak could begin their terms in office with a freeze on development of Settlements, and why so few American leaders have been able to insist on one. Is it too much to hope that, once the smoke has cleared, the Presbyterian resolution (which, after all, reiterates traditional support of Israel; calls for exploration of SELECTIVE divestment, not the "economic strangulation" that some allege; and emphasizes that 90% of the Wall encroaches on Palestinian land) can draw attention at last to this bedrock issue?

Gordon L. Shull, Wooster, OH

The full text of the Stated Clerk's July 20 statement:

**A Statement from the Stated Clerk
of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA)
concerning actions of the 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (USA)
regarding Israel and Palestine and outreach to Jewish people**

One of the deep and abiding commitments of the Presbyterian Church (USA) is to reconciliation and good relationships with people of all faith communities. In light of this, some people have raised concern about certain actions taken by the 216th General Assembly, held June 26-July 3 in Richmond, Virginia, related to both outreach to Jewish people and Israeli and Palestinian relations. Therefore, I am sending this message to both Presbyterian leaders and to ecumenical partners and colleagues from other faith communities with the hope that it will clarify the actions of this Assembly and the ongoing commitments of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

As Christians, we experience the transforming power of God's love in Jesus Christ. Therefore, we do not hesitate to make joyful witness to the hope that is in us, and to work and pray for the restored and reconciled creation to which we and all people are called. We make every effort to discern God's presence in the world and to "let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream" (Amos 5:24). It is out of this faith and commitment, and with careful reflection, that the commissioners to the 216th General Assembly took a number of actions concerning our relations with the Jewish community, as well as the situation of Israel and Palestine.

1. Presbyterians' concerns about appropriate forms of Christian witness to Jewish people in general and to the new church development project, Avodat Yisrael, in Philadelphia in particular led to a two-part action.

- First, in response to overtures from four of our presbyteries — regional governing bodies — the General Assembly mandated a study to "examine and strengthen the relationship between Christians and Jews and the implications of this relationship for our evangelism and new church development." The focus of this action is to re-examine our theological understanding of Christian-Jewish relationships and to discern whether this particular form of outreach contradicts that understanding or violates our intention to do evangelism in a spirit of respect, openness, and honesty.

- Second, the Assembly did not adopt a proposal to suspend the availability of national funding for any other such projects. Here it is important to note that primary decisions regarding the funding of new church developments are made at the presbytery (regional) level of our denomination; in nearly all cases, national funding for such work is made only to complement funds already committed by presbyteries and synods with the understanding that presbyteries take the lead in determining the appropriate projects.

2. The Assembly declared that Christian Zionism is not consistent with the basic values of Reformed theology because it makes use of idiosyncratic interpretations of scripture to undergird a certain reading of current events, and to generate support for specific political goals that do not bolster work toward peace and potentially endanger Palestinian and Israeli people.

3. The assembly called for an end to Israel's construction of the "separation barrier."

- While fully aware of our interest in Israel's security, the major reason for this action was the Assembly's concern of the impact of the structure on the economic, social, and religious life of Palestinians.

- The Assembly action used the word "wall" because it has become a general reference for the physical structure being put in place.

- It raised legitimate questions, corroborated by Israel's Supreme Court and the International Court of Justice, regarding the route of the wall.

- In previous Assemblies, the church has called for an end to the occupation, as the principal cause of the conflict.

Presbyterians are calling for an end to this barrier in the belief "that the best hope for security for both Israelis and Palestinians may be found in laying down all forms of aggression on both sides, ending the Israeli occupation, and finding ways to build bridges of peace rather than walls of separation. Good neighborly relations, rather than mutual isolation and suspicion, are urgently needed between Israel and its neighbors in Palestine and the Middle East."

4. The Assembly authorized exploration of a selective divestment of church funds from those companies whose business in Israel is found to be directly or indirectly causing harm or suffering to innocent people, Palestinian or Israeli. It did not approve a blanket divestment from companies that do business in Israel, as is being reported in some places. This action was taken in response to an overture from the Presbytery of St. Augustine, representing the churches in northeast Florida.

- The Assembly asked the Mission Responsibility Through Investment Committee, the denomination's permanent committee that develops socially responsible investment guidelines, to

initiate a process to look into companies investing in Israel and to bring recommendations re: phasing in selective divestments to the General Assembly Council for action in March 2005.

- Although the decision to “initiate a process of phased, selective divestment in multinational corporations operating in Israel” may be presumed by some to invite comparison of Israeli policies with those of apartheid South Africa, the Assembly has not asserted any moral equivalency between the two. The two situations are distinct. The focus of this action is to explore use of a proven tool of economic pressure to motivate real change in Israeli policies and movement toward peace.

Again, the Assembly’s action calls for a *selective* divestment, and not a blanket economic boycott, keeping before us our interest in Israel’s economic and social well-being where these do not inflict suffering on Palestinian or Israeli people.

5. These actions are rooted in a longstanding commitment to the secure existence of Israel and the Israeli people, in a similar commitment to the security and existence of Palestinians in their own state, and in a passionate vision of negotiated peace as the only viable way forward. The Presbyterian Church (USA) has consistently supported the existence of Israel within legitimate and secure borders, and prayed for its security and well-being. It is, however, the conviction of the Presbyterian Church (USA) that “the security of Israel and the Israeli people is inexorably dependent on making peace with their Palestinian neighbors, by negotiating and reaching a just and equitable solution to the conflict that respects international law, human rights, the sanctity of life, and dignity of persons, land, property, safety of home, freedom of movement, the rights of refugees to return to their homeland, the right of a people to determine their political future, and to live in peace and prosperity.”

6. It should be noted that this action was taken as part of a larger commitment of the PC(USA) to human rights and social justice all around the world. It should be further noted that the Presbyterian Church (USA) is not singling out Israel and Palestine alone for observation and critique. The PC(USA) regularly publishes an annual report regarding human rights around the world, and has spoken specifically about issues of justice related to North and South Korea, Rwanda, Taiwan, Central American states, and many others, including the United States. Assembly actions regularly make comment on issues of religious liberty in many countries, including other Middle Eastern countries. The PC(USA) believes that, through such actions, important perspectives and informed glimpses of difficult situations are made available to the church and the wider community to inform responsible engagement with the world.

7. All of these actions are consistent with the commitment of the Presbyterian Church (USA) made in 1987 in *A Theological Understanding of the Relationship between Christians and Jews*, “never again to participate in, to contribute to, or (insofar as we are able) to allow the persecution or denigration of Jews.” That

document also reminds us “both Christians and Jews are called to wait and to hope in God. While we wait, Jews and Christians are called to the service of God in the world.” This calling includes “ceaseless activity in the cause of justice and peace.”

As I made clear in a statement of May 28, 2002, “Palestinians are called, once and for all, to cease striking terror in the hearts of Israeli Jews by stopping attacks on noncombatants while they are carrying out the activities of their daily lives or the celebrations of their peoplehood. Israelis are called, once and for all, to cease striking terror in the hearts of Palestinians by stopping military operations that assault harmless people and disable Palestinian infrastructures. It is time to stop activities that increase hatred and mutual recrimination and that destroy hope, security and trust. ... Acts of hate and terror inflicted on innocent children and youth, women and men of Israel and the larger Jewish community must be unequivocally condemned and vehemently abhorred. This is in no way inconsistent with speaking out about the political and military violence of the Israeli government or the militant activities of Israeli settlers.”

I encourage Presbyterians to maintain their relationships with people of other faiths, with sensitivity to the fragility of trust in the present climate of violence and terror. I also encourage all of us to seek opportunities for respectful conversation with Jewish neighbors about disagreements regarding Israeli policy and forms of public policy advocacy for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Text of the Whole Gospel Congregation Award, presented at the Witherspoon Luncheon, Richmond, VA, June 27, 2005

The Witherspoon Society
presents the

Whole Gospel
Congregation Award

to the

All Souls Presbyterian Church
Richmond, Virginia

in grateful recognition of
its commitment to

building bridges of reconciliation and
healing
among people of all races and ethnic
groups

June 27, 2004

**Litany of Celebration of the Church's Pro-Choice Commitment
Presbyterians Affirming Reproductive Options (PARO)
General Assembly, Richmond, VA, June 27, 2004**

For our Presbyterian Church and its commitment to full access to reproductive choice for women and girls,

Gracious God, we give thanks.

For women and men, husbands, partners, families, friends, and extended networks stand with and support women facing difficult decisions,

Gracious God, we give thanks.

For women of generations past who, leading the fight to protect women's lives and options, freed women to plan a future for themselves and their families,

Gracious God, we give thanks.

For volunteer escorts who guide women safely into clinics past hostile crowds,

Gracious God, we give thanks.

For physicians, nurses, and clinic staff who brave assaults and assassination threats in order to serve women in need,

Gracious God, we give thanks.

For safe medical procedures and advances in contraception and abortion technology that allow women to control and safeguard their reproductive capacity,

Gracious God, we give thanks.

For theologians and scholars who work through the moral complexities of Choice,

Gracious God, we give thanks.

For preachers and educators who deal forthrightly with faith issues surrounding and in support of Choice,

Gracious God, we give thanks.

For compassionate counselors who provide safe space for women to make hard decisions,

Gracious God, we give thanks.

For state and national leaders committed to safeguarding all reproductive options for women,

Gracious God, we give thanks.

For judges and courts that protect women's reproductive and civil rights,

Gracious God, we give thanks.

For women who place their trust in you, making faith-filled decisions when facing an unwanted or crisis pregnancy,

Gracious God, we give thanks.

For the Christ who affirms women and trusts them to make sound decisions about their lives,

Gracious God, we give thanks.

For the Holy Spirit who clarifies our vision and makes us strong in our commitment to justice for women and girls,

Gracious God, we give thanks.

For your steadying Presence, guiding, strengthening, and dwelling with us at all times and in all places,

Gracious God, we give thanks. Amen.

Written by the Rev. Dr. Judith E. Michaels

Dr. Michaels offers permission for anyone to use or alter this litany, asking only that it be attributed to her as the author.

Celebrating the churches' "Social Creed" – and considering a new one

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

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

This is obviously a project close to the heart of Witherspoon's values. As a first step toward supporting the study, Gene TeSelle offers a background paper on the Social Creed, and Chris Iosso explores some of the details of the 1908 statement, and what such a new statement might mean for us today.

Some Background on the Social Creed

by Gene TeSelle

The statement that came to be known as "the Social Creed of the churches" grew out of developments in the Methodist Church. The Methodist Federation for Social Service was organized in Washington, DC, in December of 1907 (it was a sign of the times that the organizers were later received in the White House by President Theodore Roosevelt). Looking ahead to the 1908 General Conference of the Methodist Church, they conceived the idea of a formal statement about the social problems of the time, and Harry F. Ward jotted down the first draft on a Western Union pad. The eleven principles were adopted by the 1908 General Conference.

A year later, in December of 1908, the Federal Council of Churches was founded in Philadelphia. This time the key person was Frank Mason North, a veteran of urban ministry and author of "Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life" (this hymn came to be known as "the hymn of the Federal Council of Churches"). North delivered a much-appreciated report on "The Church and Modern Industry." At its conclusion he presented a list of social

reforms — Ward's eleven, now expanded to fourteen. This statement was adopted enthusiastically and without dissent. (In 1912 it would be expanded to sixteen, and to more in 1919; various denominations adopted their own versions of the principles, especially the Presbyterians, who wanted to strengthen the doctrinal framework.)

The classic statement was adopted December 4, 1908. It reads as follows:

We deem it the duty of all Christian people to concern themselves directly with certain practical industrial problems. To us it seems that the churches must stand:

For equal rights and complete justice for all men in all stations of life.

For the right of all men to the opportunity for self-maintenance, a right ever to be wisely and strongly safeguarded against encroachments of every kind.

For the right of workers to some protection against the hardships often resulting from the swift crises of industrial change.

For the principle of conciliation and arbitration in industrial dissensions.

For the protection of the worker from dangerous machinery, occupational disease, injuries and mortality.

For the abolition of child labor.

For such regulation of the conditions of toil for women as shall safeguard the physical and moral health of the community.

For the suppression of the "sweating system."

For the gradual and reasonable reduction of the hours of labor to the lowest practicable point, and for that degree of leisure for all which is a condition of the highest human life.

For a release from employment one day in seven.

For a living wage as a minimum in every industry, and for the highest wage that each industry can afford.

For the most equitable division of the products of industry that can ultimately be devised.

For suitable provision for the old age of the workers and for those incapacitated by injury.

For the abatement of poverty.

To the toilers of America and to those who by organized effort are seeking to lift the crushing burdens of the poor, and to reduce the hardships and uphold the dignity of labor, this Council sends the greeting of human brotherhood and the pledge of sympathy and of help in a cause which belongs to all who follow Christ.

Continued on page 16

Celebrating the Social Creed of 1908, and Considering a new one for 2008

by Christian T. Iosso

The founders of the Federal Council of Churches did not pick a set number of planks for what became the “Social Creed of the Churches.” Rev. Charles Stelzle, head of the Presbyterian Department of Church and Labor, and founder of the Labor Temple in New York City, preached for an hour in support of the Creed at the first Federal Council meeting, before its unanimous approval. The planks had to be broad, morally compelling, and clearly tied to the ‘platform’ of Jesus: the Kingdom of God. This brief report suggests several considerations for the ecumenical and social ethical work to be undertaken by agencies of the General Assembly and our partner denominations.

We are now familiar with concise sets of social goals or policies, from arbitrary elements cobbled into a “Contract with America,” to elements in a Politics of Meaning, to “middle axiom” statements of direction in ecumenical and denominational statements. In public policy, we may even remember Wilson’s “14 Points,” or Roosevelt’s “4 Freedoms.” Some may also remember a double-handful of commandments, though the 1908 Social Creed echoed more the Beatitudes. The original Social Creed’s goals were partly fulfilled in the New Deal and the achievement of protection for unions, and even that partial fulfillment occurred, in part, because the churches wrestled with and added to that concise and concrete set of social goals.

The General Assembly overwhelmingly supported the dual recommendation of the Theology committee, to ask the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy and the Office of Ecumenical Relations to develop plans to celebrate the Centennial of the Social Creed and consider developing a new one. Advocates invoked Walter Rauschenbusch, perhaps the key theologian of the Social Gospel, and saw the Social Creed as one

of the Social Gospel’s most effective results.

Ecumenically, one would hope that the National Council of Churches of Christ, the Federal Council’s successor, could be strengthened by a celebration of one of its founding documents: a “bill of promises,” so to speak. Some communions dislike using the word “creed” for anything but the doctrinal product of a church council; other, “non-creedal” churches, try to avoid them altogether. Thus it may be best to have those denominations that were “present at creation” in 1908 develop the historical celebration and invite in the others.

It may be a mistake, however, to split the two words in “social creed.” The FCC founders knew they were doing “applied Christianity,” or what we now call, social ethics. They also knew the shared context of what historian Timothy L. Smith called “revivalism and social reform,” the widespread assumptions of Christian responsibility for society that drove Prohibition and other efforts to “Christianize” the social order. The Social Creed focused on the world of work, as decent employment was crucial to the moral development of each worker and (mainly) his family. Before specific planks were added about the right to organize, the Social Creed reflected a social ethos that valued cooperation over competition, partly on the family model.

Janet Fishburn’s 1981 book, *The Fatherhood of God and the Victorian Family*, illuminates the efforts to preserve and protect the family that were part of the Social Gospel. Talk about “family values!” Urbanization, industrialization, immigration, advances in communication, transportation, education and health care were changing life rapidly. The family and the Church needed to hold fast. The role of men and fathers is also stressed, from the manhood formed in industrious,

temperate and disciplined work to the altruism, loyalty and willing self-sacrifice of fatherhood. This generally conservative view of family distinguished the key Social Gospel thinkers from some of the early 20th Century Socialists, who wanted to reorganize domestic relations as well as property.

However liberal in spirit, the Social Gospel movement was evangelical in its effort to convert even Social Darwinist social determinism in God’s direction. The prophets in the “Brotherhood of the Kingdom” were out to prevent Christianity from becoming an otherworldly and individualized affectation of the middle and upper classes. With a nod to Thorstein Veblen, they were already very worried about materialism and “conspicuous consumption.” But how applicable is the Social Creed’s emphasis on labor now, when, as Andre Codrescu jokes, there is still an American working class, but it lives in Southeastern China?

If a new Social Creed would address globalization (actually continuing Rauschenbusch’s belief that the Kingdom of God included an international community of moral and social progress), the ethos side of such a Creed would be wise to look at the needs of families in our country. Already we are familiar (ha!) with the concepts of “family” and “living” wages. But the global and family poles of concern point to questions of shape and comprehensiveness in any contemporary statement. And wouldn’t it be essential to re-affirm progressive taxation, urge higher taxation of “unearned wealth” again, and address the epidemic of gambling...?

In a cross-cultural and inter-religious context, we can affirm (as Troeltsch and Tillich did years ago) that Christianity is inherently social in its congregations, schools, hospitals and even monasteries. We can trace the evolution of modern democracies to Reformation and conciliar roots, and ideas of tolerance and church/state separation especially to the Puritan and Presbyterian debates in the English Revolution—highly influential in our own. But a Social Creed can not provide a full political ethic. It should prompt



political creativity, greater democracy, more equitable social and environmental trade-offs. So much good thinking has been done on Just, Participatory and Sustainable ethics, earth ethics, and in-depth treatments of many social and economic questions. A necessarily concise Social Creed would bring together this thinking and seek to create new consensus.

A key question for a new Social Creed would not be how idealistic or how optimistic it would be, but how Christian. In keeping with the original phrase, “of the churches,” I would urge that its vision of fulfilled human life, however universal in aspiration, should be explicitly Christian in inspiration. The past century saw blistering attacks by the “Christian Realists” on the supposedly “optimistic” Social Gospel liberals (though Niebuhr never took on Rauschenbusch directly, and his was perhaps the strongest Christology). Realism, now shorn of its own form of “macho” Christianity, appears in neo-conservative form to bless the most militarist nationalism of our current administration. Where have all the bad flowers of original sin gone?

In very broad strokes, what was once derided as Anabaptist separatism (Church against World), has become through John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas and others, the “Church as a Social

Ethic.” That is, the church itself needs to be a “contrast model” to the larger society, illuminating the distinctiveness of the Christian message. Christianity itself can not be reduced to principles. Principles depend on lived creeds and ethos, which themselves reflect a story-based internal culture, language, and forms of character-forming community. What some advocates of this “contrast model” forget, though, is that doing social policy in a thoughtful, careful and prophetic way is part of our distinctive mainline Christian tradition and identity.

In an article in *Presbyterian Outlook*, I cautioned myself that too “politically correct” a Social Creed would be dead-on-arrival. So would be a too-academic exercise. But these are secondary considerations—why not be hot or cold? If God is in the effort to celebrate and renew the Social Creed, then we are praying that the life-changing power of Jesus Christ and the all-too-latent energy of the churches would have impact through yet more frail but truthful words. Can our many struggling congregations and presbyteries imagine thinking about the social implications of our faith—even if we point out how much our churches are themselves hammered by high unemployment, low benefits and a widening rich/poor gap. But that is the very point of raising up a “social creed” – to say that the shape of society is a matter of faith.

Continued from “Background,” page 14

The statement was never called a “creed” in the official actions of the Federal Council, but it soon came to be called that, since it was a brief statement of principles deserving immediate attention.

As we enter the 21st century we may feel that it is “*déjà vu* all over again.” In the U.S. we have seen the reforms of the Progressive Era, the New Deal, and the Great Society undone through court decisions, federal legislation, and lax enforcement by federal agencies in the face of the overwhelming power of the corporations to lobby and litigate. On the world scene we have seen protections for workers undermined in the name of “free trade” and “comparative advantage.” It is beyond question that we need a new social creed, and one that is worldwide in its scope. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches at its recent meeting declared the world-scale inequalities of wealth and power to be a major issue for the churches. It is time to get to work.



LGBT folks and friends offer a welcome to people arriving for Sunday morning GA worship
Photo by Jack Hartwein-Sanchez



Don Stroud (left) of That All May Freely serve talks with Paul Rolfe Jensen, the attorney who has filed complaints against so many loyal Presbyterians
Photo by Jack Hartwein-Sanchez

An invitation to dialogue ... and a modest beginning

On July 17 we received a note to our website from someone who requested anonymity as he/she invited us, representing the progressive side of the Presbyterian Church, to join in “a genuine dialogue.”

We don't normally post anonymous notes, but the Witherspoon executive committee decided that in this case there was some justification for anonymity, and that the invitation to dialogue was one which we should accept and pursue. It's been quite a chat!

This material was first posted on the Witherspoon Society website (<http://witherspoonsociety.org/2004/dialogue.htm>), beginning on July 17 and continuing into August. The exchange of thoughts on the web includes more notes that we don't have space for here. We hope you'll take a look – and join in! Just send a note, and unless you tell us otherwise, we'll post it on the web. You can send it to douging2@aol.com, or Doug King, 1418 Clarendon Drive, Wayzata, MN 55391.

So here's the initial note from “Keklamenos”:

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This point of this post is to enter into dialogue, by first providing some information about myself and then asking some questions. My struggle is that you proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, yet I cannot reconcile your stated positions with Scripture.

I am a sinner, saved by God's grace. I believe that Scripture is given by the inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life. I believe that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life; and that no one comes to the Father except through Him. I believe that life is sacred to God, and that God calls us to express our sexuality within the bounds of a marriage of one woman and one man.

Jesus calls on us to pray for not only our friends, but also those who persecute us. Shouldn't we also ask God to bless those people who are not our enemies (I hope) but with whom we disagree? Do you ask God to bless people like me — those members and leaders of the PC(USA) who disagree with the Witherspoon Society's stands on various issues?

If you do ask God to bless me, why is it so important to you to change our ordination standards, given the risk of fracturing our community?

Friends, I cannot support making our ordination standards more permissive without so modifying the role of scripture in my life as to break it. I am not alone in this. This is not a position I take up due to mean-spiritedness, or something due to how and when my diapers were changed as an infant. :-)

When I read about your goal of changing our ordination standards, what I feel is that this is more important to you than being in community with me or others like me who have a high view of Scripture. Is this true?

Please accept that I ask these questions in the spirit of trying to understand my brothers and sisters in Christ with whom I disagree. We all are a stiff-necked bunch, and if we were not disagreeing over issues such as ordination standards, we would be disagreeing over other things.

In Christ,
keklamenos

A first response from Witherspoon

Gene TeSelle, Witherspoon's Issues Analyst, responded with some comments which he has since elaborated as the conversation has progressed.

These remarks typify the problem the Theological Task Force faces – how to listen to, and in practice accommodate to, a variety of “sincere” and “convinced” perspectives. All parties claim to have Christian love for each other, but they also have their “Here I stand” moments, in which they refuse to change their views and want to change others for their own good.

There are several levels of problems:

- authority (and what commitment to it means),
- modes of encounter among those who disagree, and
- the kind of polity that can accommodate disagreement, even among those who think that others are wrong and disobedient.

First, how do we approach the issue of authority? The correspondent seems to be troubled by an apparent conflict between the need for mutual love and the demands of Scripture, as he/she interprets it, which are regarded as non-negotiable. At two points the correspondent seems to be saying that mutual love requires us in Witherspoon to stop trying to change the ordination standards, since any attempt to change those standards runs the risk of fracturing the community of the PC(USA). This, if I am not mistaken, is like saying, “If you love me, you will not try to change anything that I regard as unchangeable.”

What, indeed, are we to do about our absolute commitments, especially when we are convinced that they are divinely based? This is a major issue today, in both church and society. Conflict is exacerbated when we feel that our convictions are not being



respected or are even being violated. Especially when we have absolute commitments, we may feel that we are *ex-empt* from the usual rules of conversation and behavior; we may even feel that it confers the privilege of *defining* the rules of encounter. The difficulty, of course, is that many competing groups can claim the right to carry their “absolute commitments” into public discourse, and this encourages intolerance and eventually open religious warfare.

Oliver Cromwell wrote to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1650, “I beseech you in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken.” We, like Cromwell himself, would rather *say* than *hear* such a plea, and a General Assembly (or any other body of Presbyterians) may be especially unwilling to heed it. But it is something that we must always think to be possible.

Is there an alternative mode of encounter? In the Christian tradition, one of the most dramatic episodes revolves around Cyprian in North Africa. In dealing with clergy who had “lapsed” during the persecution under Decius (249-51), he judged that any baptisms and ordinations they performed were soiling, not sanctifying, the recipients. Stephen, the bishop of Rome, decided in the opposite way, arguing that the sacraments are Christ’s, not the minister’s.

The Donatist movement continued to hold Cyprian’s view of the sacraments and claimed to be the one true church, excluding all others, inside and outside North Africa.

But Augustine cited Cyprian against Cyprian himself. Even though Cyprian and his colleagues believed that their adversaries did not possess true baptism and were still under the power of sin, they nonetheless maintained communion with them, since the alternative would be separation from “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

Here community becomes more important than one’s own certitudes, and in a dramatic way—even in matters where

salvation was thought to be at issue. We can find all sorts of reasons *not* to maintain communion with others; but this dramatic episode is always food for reflection. One thing that made it possible was that the church was not yet a monolithic structure under ecumenical councils or the pope; it was a network of those willing to be in communion with each other despite their differences.

What kind of polity, then, is appropriate to this sense of community? My hope is that the Theological Task Force will find ways we can respect pluralism in the PC(USA), specifically on the ordination question, but on other issues as well.

Conflict has been exacerbated by the provision of the Book of Order (G-1.0400) that “a majority shall govern.” In practice this has meant that one can advocate change but in the meantime must act in accordance with the decision of the majority. If conscience says otherwise, then conscience must leave and go elsewhere. On the other hand, the ordination question might be one of those questions “with respect to which men [sic] of good characters and principles may differ” (G-1.0305).

This is not unthinkable. Our constitution already gives considerable freedom of movement to governing bodies in all matters that are not prescribed by the Book of Order. A presbytery or a session may have quite different views, for example, about issues of peace and justice than the General Assembly, and about statements made by the Washington Office, whose task is to carry out the General Assembly’s policies, whether some Presbyterians agree or not.

It is the judgment of many of us that G-6.0106b, added to the Book of Order in 1996-97, was a mistake. A narrow majority, by abandoning what had been “guidance” since 1978 and imposing a rule which all were obliged to follow, increased conflict and confusion throughout the church. It was one of those matters (and there may well be others) in which a narrow majority has limited both the conscience of individuals and the responsibility of governing

bodies to use discernment in gauging readiness for ordination. Since we have a representative rather than a top-down form of government, and since we state our faith in the mode of confessions rather than dogmas, it is always worth asking how we might achieve a more open-textured church that maintains mutual forbearance and respectful debate.

Now let me add a fourth, more positive point. *Diversity in the church is to be affirmed, not distrusted.* It is easy to quote Paul about the diversity of gifts and the same Spirit (1 Cor. 12: 4-11) and the value of all the members in the body (1 Cor. 12:12-31); it is another thing to put it into practice.

We have trouble affirming and celebrating what others are doing, for a variety of reasons: a sense that “this is just not my calling” or “my priorities are different”; envy at others’ accomplishments; resentment that we, in our situation, could not get away with what others, in their situation, can do; fear that others are using their accomplishments to build a power base in the church.

Why not feel grateful that we are not responsible for carrying out *every* task that is worth doing? When Paul wrote from prison he was probably the victim of internal Christian rivalries, and yet he rejoiced that in every way Christ was being proclaimed (Phil. 1:15-18).

One of the things that endeared Rick Ufford-Chase as a candidate for Moderator was his emphasis on “what unites us, not what divides us.” He represented youth and energy, of course, but also discipleship and mission. In our presbyteries there is often unity around the Hunger and Peacemaking Programs, bringing together people who often have conflicting ideas during floor debates over amendments to the constitution of the church. May that spirit grow among all of us.

This is just the beginning of the conversation. We hope you'll look at the rest at <http://witherspoonsociety.org/2004/dialogue.htm> — then send your comments!

Don Beisswenger shares reflections from prison

The Rev. Don Beisswenger was arrested last November for “crossing the line” in the annual vigil and protest against the School of the Americas. He was sentenced to six months in prison, and his serving his time at the Manchester, Kentucky, Federal Prison.

He sent this note on August 23, 2004.

CONFINEMENT AS GIFT

Manchester, KY, Federal Prison

I have been incarcerated over four months now. I await October 1 when I will be released and free to roam beyond the camp where I am now confined. I cannot leave the camp without serious consequences. They keep track of me with midnight counts, stand-up counts, “give your number” counts, etc. I am confined in every sense of the word. Confinement, separation, enclosure, withdrawal to a desert have all been disciplines in the life of faith. Confinement in prison adds another dimension.

Flannery O’Connor had lupus, a debilitating disease that sapped her energy, confining her to the farm in Georgia. Her affliction and confinement was permanent. It would not change. She named it “passive diminishment.” “From what I have to give out,” she said, “I observe more clearly. I can, with an eye squinted, take it all in as a blessing.” Confinement led her to use her energy attending to life at the farm and to the people about her.

I have wondered a lot about being more present to the time, the present time. What I pay attention to sharpens my life. If I pay attention to what’s in the future, I may miss something right before me. What about this day? This time? Much of the energy of inmates is focused outside the camp either on their appeals, family matters, or girlfriends. Mostly, the energy focuses on wanting to get out. Life is seen in the future. Often, this characterizes me also. For most, they also find ways to “pass the time.” Distractions become central. Playing cards, playing at sports, lifting weights become life giving. Religious faith becomes central for some.

As I reflect upon the time here, I have paid attention to my relationships with inmates, and to finding space for others in my heart. I have paid attention to me, to dispositions, tiredness, confusion. I cherish the support and give thanks to my friends, colleagues, family, and am especially grateful now for the women in my life. I ponder those in the Living Room [a regular discussion group with homeless people in Nashville], those caring for Penuel Ridge [a retreat center near Nashville, founded by Don and Joyce

Beisswenger], and those working for the people in Nashville. I continue my thoughts about the graduates of the School of the Americas and how they affect the children, women, men and communities in Latin America, and how the investigation into the SOA was rejected. I see how the atrocities by the US military took shape in Iraq and how this investigation is avoided, rejected and ignored, and I praise the people of God who gather in praise and service in their love and hope. I consider the beauty of flowers, the sky, running water and eating peaches for breakfast.

Confinement has provided me with an unwanted isolation, but confinement has also brought me the deeper meanings that lay quietly within each of those areas already mentioned. I listen better, and let events be my teacher.

And amidst all, I have found holy presence in my life, filling the space with life and sacredness. Such a gift! Van Gogh said, “I think that everything comes from God.” Even here in awareness this thought presents itself especially in the morning and at night when I retire. I realize that I am glad – grateful to be able to reflect theologically on the incredible life given to me, even here. There is a majesty in all of this.

Flannery O’Connor says that she “embraced life from the standpoints of the central Christian mystery: that it has, for all its horror, been found by God to be worth dying for.” Such a wondrous way to see!

And Paul, a prisoner, wrote to the people of God in Philippi and said, “I rejoice in the Lord greatly ... I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little. I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him that strengthens me. In any case it was kind of you to share my distress.” (Philippians 4:10-14, selected)

Thank you as well,
Don Beisswenger

Gene TeSelle has added a few notes [in brackets] to clarify some of the references in Don’s letter.

To contact Don’s support group in Nashville, send a note to donb.support@comcast.net

You can write to him directly at

Rev. Don Beisswenger
92091-020
Qtr 0B1
FCI
PO Box 4000
Manchester, KY 40962-4000

The Ghost Ranch seminar:

The Liberty Bell is still cracked, but there are steps we can take to make repairs.

A report by Jane Hanna

Again, the Ghost Ranch seminar (sponsored by the Witherspoon Society, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship and Presbyterians for Restoring Creation) compared current events with Scripture.

The Liberty Bell had a crack in it when the seminar began and the crack is still there. However, we gained a better understanding for identifying it, the causes, and what we can do to help repair the stress.

Three well-informed presenters addressed the global economy, corporate power and decisions, environmental impacts, our personal lifestyle, and public policy advocacy. These topics are so closely interconnected it's rather like pulling a thread in the personal, national or international arena to find it tangled in each of the others. We concluded that to be effective change agents, we must be simultaneously informed and pro-active at those points where unjust structures reinforce and perpetuate each other.

Elenora Giddings Ivory began our week together with an attentive reading of Matthew 25: 31-46. We noted that these passages about God's separating the sheep from the goats are often read as a mandate for local charity. When hearing them, usually we individually ponder in which of the categories God would place us. Elenora, Director of the Presbyterian Washington Office, pointed out that it is the *nations* that God gathers to judge their concern for the poor, the hungry and thirsty, the stranger, the naked and imprisoned. It is our *collective* role that concerns God.

In light of this scripture reading, she posed several questions. Can there be such a thing as an "illegal" or "undocumented" person? Will judgment be brought upon nations for a lack of

adequate health care for all? When we privatize prisons do we violate God's demands? Does the privatization of life's basic necessities draw our nation away from living by Matthew 25? Her biblical reading finds it clear that we need to both feed the hungry and write to our legislators when as a nation we fail to prevent poverty and overlook those in need.

In addition to the Bible, we looked at the Patriot Act, the Homeland Security Act, The Declaration of Independence, The Bill of Rights, and the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights—examining what civil rights and human rights mean in light of these varied documents. They all reflect the value of collective citizenry, the common good as the opposite of "rugged individualism." Matthew 25:32 reminds us of our collective role; it is our nation that will be judged by how it treats the poor. Privatization draws the nation away from our communal responsibility. Portions of the Patriot Act nullify some of our constitutional rights and democracy erodes as corporate money and power more strongly influence political decisions than do the voices of the people.

Elenora described how the Washington Office works in response to decisions made by General Assemblies. Unfortunately, some Presbyterians do not understand this process and are critical of the Washington Office when they disagree with an advocacy position. Several in our group urged financial and appreciative support for the Washington Office because the rhetoric against it seems to increase each year.



Seminar leaders Elenora Giddings Ivory, Andrew Kang Bartlett, and Peter Sawtell (and friend)

Peter Sawtell, Director of Eco-Justice Ministries, shared Zechariah 8:1-13 as a model for the wholeness of the community. He spoke of the biblical emphasis on shalom, God's model for the common good. We need to think of God's creation as the inclusion of all life, rather than as "nature" which tends to separate us from other living things. For example, our nation violates a commitment to shalom communities when people of color bear a disproportionate burden for living in polluted areas.

Peter shared four words for remembering ecological justice that pays close attention to the web of life. *Sufficiency* means all people's basic needs are met, that each has enough and none too much. *Participation* requires that everyone should have a say in decisions about things that affect him or her. *Sustainability* refers to one generation using only enough to meet its needs without diminishing resources for future generations. *Solidarity* describes the relationship we need to have with all creation, to act for the good of all for justice to exist.

When shalom becomes our guiding vision, it helps us make decisions about our everyday life. When this vision is rooted in our faith we judge public issues and policies by that standard. Environmental devastation, international conflicts and war, inequalities of wealth and power become important concerns because they deny the possibility for



justice.

Each of us filled in a lifestyle assessment sheet that revealed how we live from an environmental measurement. We were surprised and shocked that despite our impressions that we live fairly lightly on the environment, the class ranged from needing three to nine planets to support our lifestyles. An "Ecological Footprint Quiz" can be found on the web at www.MyFootprint.org. Try it! You may be surprised.

It became clear that the environment cannot sustain continued industrial expansion because the resources of the planet are not sufficient to support it. Nor is it possible for the world's people to live at the level of consumption we take for granted. God created a planet with enough for everyone's need, but as Gandhi said, "not enough for everyone's greed."

A video on global fisheries pointed out the radical depletion of life in the seas because massive sea-going factories are harvesting fish faster than they can reproduce, catching many other forms of sea life as well by the methods employed. The negative environmental impacts of plantation agriculture at sea and on land are also economic issues as corporations increasingly control more of the world's sources of food.

Andrew Kang Bartlett, Associate with the Presbyterian Hunger Program, began the discussion about the global economy with a brief but illuminating U.S. economic history beginning with colonialism and slavery. The economic model that has emerged over the years since World War II, sometimes referred to as neoliberal or free market, contains elements that work well for corporations but too often worsen conditions for the poor. International trade agreements, structural adjustment policies of the World Bank, excessive third world debts, multilateral agreements on investments, NAFTA, CAFTA, and proposed FTAA trade agreements are made by unelected elites, mostly from the rich north, with rare input from those most negatively affected by these policies.

Andrew arranged for each of us to receive a PowerPoint CD on Global Discipleship produced by the Presbyterian Hunger Program. The contents cover sweatshops, food and faith (in both Spanish and English), living wage, determining a living wage where one lives, a resource list, tables, articles, and maps. These free CDs may be obtained by calling 1-800-524-2612. PDS number is 74360-03-311. This is an excellent resource for relating our role as Christians to the negative consequences of economic globalization.

Congregations and individuals can make positive connections between environmental and economic issues by shopping for Fair Trade items, particularly coffee, tea and cocoa. Buying Fair Trade products provides a living wage for workers, export income for poor countries, and numerous environmental benefits. Small-scale family farms certified for Fair Trade use land more efficiently, use fewer chemical fertilizers and pesticides, support an environment for migratory birds and other wildlife. Plantation production, in contrast, has contributed to deforestation and erosion, overuse of poisonous agrochemicals, water pollution, and poverty level wages.

Our small group discussions were times to share our frustrations, things we'd seen work in our localities, and intentions for follow-up back in our communities. Our time together was informative, and challenging. We were given a notebook full of resources and action ideas and models. We practiced contacting our legislators using materials available from the Washington Office. As the week progressed, it became clear that there is a moral problem when some people have too much and others not enough whether we consider this reality from a global, environmental or public policy concern.

Plans are already being
made for our 2005
Ghost Ranch seminar!

Early details are on
page 27.

Your gift will make a difference!

As we face immense challenges in our church and our world, please consider a donation to the Witherspoon Society. As we approach the 2004 General Assembly, we hope you can consider a special contribution to support our work there and throughout the year. We've got a variety of ways you can help make a difference:

- *Direct donations:* Please send to : Witherspoon Society, 1418 Clarendon Drive, Wayzata, MN 55391
- *Endowment:* WS has set up an endowment fund with the Presbyterian Foundation. One option is the charitable gift annuity, which provides lifetime income to you and to Witherspoon.
- *Will:* Do you want to leave something to continue your progressive voice for future generations? You can mention the Witherspoon Society in your will.
- You can add to the Endowment through the Presbyterian Foundation or with a direct contribution earmarked to Witherspoon.

Want more information?

Contact our Treasurer:
David Zuverink
15860 Poppy Lane, Unit 5
Los Gatos, CA 95030
Phone (408) 395-0905
E-mail: zuverink@aol.com

The Society thanks you!



Peace and Justice conference offers resources, actions, and hope

Here are two reports and a list of things to do and to study

by **Suzan Ireland,**
interim pastor,
Peace Presbyterian Church,
St. Louis Park, MN

It's been a few weeks since I returned home from the PCUSA Peace and Justice Conference in Tacoma, Washington. I'm still humming some of the songs we sang in several different languages and hearing the wonderful sound of over 500 voices singing in parts to the beat of a drum.

This is the first year that the conference focused on the four areas of hunger, peacemaking, environment, and self development of people, so there were people from all over the country and several international guests who were working in many different areas of justice and peacemaking. Entire families attended and I counted at least six nursing babies. I ran into some friends from a small town in Illinois who had brought their three children, the oldest of whom is five. The father said even though it was hard to travel with little ones, he welcomed the opportunity to show them something different and have them hear something different than what surrounds them daily. There was programming for everyone from three-year-olds up.

What an antidote the conference was to this year's election politics, where we seem to be stuck back in Vietnam. We heard some dynamic preaching and impassioned preachers. Rick Ufford-Chase, who had accepted the invitation to speak long before he became moderator, gave a plenary address on the effects of globalization particularly on our neighbors to the south. He said that we need to be willing to "give our lives to the task of helping the world to become human."

It was good to know that so many people of all ages are working in so many different venues, both within and outside the church. It was good to have hope revived in a world and a culture where it's so easy to give way to despair. It was good to talk with staff in the Washington office who are dedicated to speaking truth to power on matters of peace and justice, and to know that they persevere even in a denominational climate that makes this difficult. I was reminded once again that even though I am specializing in interim ministry, I was called to ordained ministry to work for peace and to proclaim justice. The challenge this year particularly is to focus attention on these issues in public discourse and to make sure that candidates know there is a liberal Christian voice and vote, for whom hunger and peace and global community are the primary issues.

By **Christine Gibson, Elder for Peacemaking, Social Concerns, Maplewood Presbyterian Church**

The 2004 Peacemaking and Justice Conference held here in our Pacific Northwest at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, on August 3-7, was truly one of a kind! The traditional peacemaking conference was expanded to include not only Peacemaking, but Hunger, Environmental Justice, and Self Development of People programs of our Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Around 600 people attended, including young adults, youth, children and 45 international guests. The conference theme asked: What are our roles as Christ's disciples in a time of global poverty, environmental degradation and warfare? Are there enough resources? Is it possible to seek justice and peace? How does faith impact our choices as consumers?

The conference began each day after breakfast with a two-hour intergenerational gathering where we experienced community-building exercises, sang global music, and heard the Plenary speaker for the day. A highlight for me was hearing our newly elected Moderator of General Assembly Rick Ufford-Chase who spoke to us with energy and passion. He is 40 years old, a cradle Presbyterian who speaks fluent Spanish, and is co-founder and co-director of BorderLinks, a faith based, bi-national education project on the U.S. Mexican border. He gave moving examples of the effects of globalization and unfair trade on those who are poor. He called on us to let go of our comfort levels. People are changed not with words, but by direct experience with someone different.

We then went to our small affinity groups for an hour before lunch, for an opportunity to discuss the ideas presented during each plenary session, using a mutual invitation process where everyone felt safe and free to express themselves and listen carefully to others.

After lunch, there were issue briefings, one-hour speaker led sessions on hot topic issues. I was able to attend ones on Iraq, Israel and Palestine, and Fair Trade; hearing directly from people living in the country and/or working on the issue. Most moving to me was seeing David Young's pictures of the "Dividing Wall" that Israel is building and hearing directly from our guests its impact on the lives of the Palestinian people.

Also in the afternoon we had two-hour action group sessions designed to engage us in issues related to the conference theme. I was able to explore three topics:



1. Food and Faith – toward a more simple, sacramental and just way of life – our food choices can connect us to the land, to farm workers, and rural economies and can remind us of the sacredness of life – setting a table that is healthy, joyful and just.
2. Searching for Peace in the Midst of War – explored what is a Reformed Christian response to the conflicts that threaten national and global security. Can there be a just war? How do we talk about these issues with our congregation?
3. Think Globally, Worship Locally – explored ways we can become more globally conscious in our spiritual life through corporate worship. There were ideas using cloth, pictures, music, food, candles, baskets, crosses, and children’s stories from around the world.

After dinner, we gathered for intergenerational worship. We heard conference preachers and experienced worship that drew

on a variety of cultural traditions. Professional photos of suffering and hope around the world were used, as well as crayon drawings by the youngest children participating in the conference. A Witness for Peace and lighting of a Peace Candle also took place during the worship time. Extremely moving to me was the Iraqi pastor from the Assyrian Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Baghdad, who lit the Peace Candle and brought us greetings of peace.

Around meal times there were opportunities for public witness by writing letters to Congress people, and opportunities to look at the many resource tables.

There is no way to convey the thoughtfulness and energy of all people and leaders as we engaged the vital issues of the day in discussion and prayer, and the joy of community I felt at this gathering. It was wonderful to talk directly with our international guests about their pain and their hope. I feel privileged to have been able to attend.

Ideas for study and action from the Peacemaking Conference

SOCIAL CONCERNS, PEACE AND JUSTICE

Prepared by Dick Gibson, Synod Hunger Action Enabler, Presbytery Restoring Creation Enabler, and “all around peacemaker” Presbytery of North Puget Sound, based on ideas and issues from the Peace and Justice Conference. Lots of good things to try and to share!

2004 International Peacemakers are available and will be itinerating throughout the USA. Contact the Peacemaking office, Louisville, to schedule a person and arrange travel. Contact syoung@ctr.pcusa.org

PEACENOTES – You can order enough of this helpful newsletter to hand out at your Presbytery. Every church should receive one, and you might develop a broader mailing list for people to receive this newsletter.

Peacemaking Offering – October 3, World Communion Sunday, is the time for the Peacemaking Offering. Please publicize this widely, reminding churches they can keep 25% for local peace and justice outreach ministries. Offering packets have been mailed to each church.

Commitment to Peacemaking – Churches can still sign the Commitment; order copies from the Peacemaking office in Louisville. Please encourage churches that have not signed. This year might be a good time to study this important program and sign up. Even churches that have signed might find this a good time to review their commitment.

Plan an energy audit of your home and your church building. Saving electricity and heat are important as our earth continues to warm. Understanding carbon dioxide emissions and reducing the amount of electric usage can be very helpful. Resource material is available, contact Enough For Everyone, Louisville (ext 5811). Remember that church buildings are notorious for their inefficiency.

Crop Walk – walk against hunger. Find creative ways to fight hunger in your community through local food banks and feeding programs. Contact Church World Service through their website at <http://www.churchworldservice.org/CROP/> **Email:** info@churchworldservice.org **Phone:** 574-264-3102, or **Toll Free:** 1-800-297-1516

FOR CHRISTMAS – order *ALTERNATIVES* and their exciting programs: Carols For Justice, Whose Birthday Is It Anyway – daily devotions and study guide for Advent, and many, many other resources for simpler living and alternative life styles to the economic and frantic culture we live in. Alternatives@SimpleLiving.org (note capitals) 1-800-821-6153, 109 Gaul Dr. PO Box 340, Sergeant Bluff, IA 51054

Continued on page 26

CULTIVATE UNDERSTANDING – Sept 23-Oct 7, 2004. Participate in a Christian-Muslim dialogue in your area. Resources available from the Interfaith Listening Project, room 3204, Louisville. Contact Sherri Auld sauld@ctr.pcusa.org.

Ask the **Restoring Creation Enabler** from your Presbytery to lead a workshop or speak during the next Presbytery meeting.

Order a new video on the dividing wall that Israel is building through Palestinian land. It comes from the Mennonite Central Committee in Akron Ohio. Phone 1-888-563-4676.

Or go to www.mcc.org/catalogue and type in Dividing Wall. Posters are also available. \$20 includes a study guide.

Write Congress to continue the ban on Assault Weapons and to modify the new trade proposals called CAFTA. Information available from the Washington Office. 110 Maryland Ave NE #104, Washington, DC 20002 phone: 202-543-1126

Continue the Taco Bell Boycott. Ask “How can we help farm workers earn a fair wage?” “How can I be a good neighbor?” Information is available from the Hunger Program in Louisville. Encourage church members to study this issue and refrain from buying at Taco Bell. www.pcusa.org/boycott. To contact the Boycott office: Rev. Noelle Damico, 631-751-7076

Consider buying sweatshop-free tee shirts for your choir, preschool, youth group or congregation. Order from: Enough For Everyone 1-800-334-0434, Hunger Program, Louisville.

CENTS-ABILITY is a small first step in the battle against hunger and poverty. Order special cups for collections. Ask families to add two cents at each meal to help feed the hungry. Bring the cups to worship for dedication once a month, once a quarter, or on a special Sunday. Other resources are available from the Hunger Program – 1-800-334-0434.

Look for Communities of Need around your church: people and groups who could use “a hand up” from the Self Development of People program. Funds are available for groups who own and control their own ideas and projects from the Self Development Committee of the Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly. Contact cnunez@ctr.pcusa.org for information.

Discover the many ways your congregation and members are already helping the hungry – through a soup kitchen, food bank, or supporting a meals program in your community. Please publicize what your people are already doing, encourage church members to give money and food on a regular basis and to volunteer their time, driving, sorting, pick up, handing out, or keep records. There is much to do. More resources are available from the Hunger Program in Louisville: 1-800-334-0434.

Give generously to the One Great Hour of Sharing each Lenten Season. This special offering supports the work of the Hunger Program, Self Development and the Disaster Assistance program. Offering packets are mailed to the church each January.

Join Bread for the World – congregations and individuals can join this important lobbying group which helps to keep Congress informed about hunger issues. Material and resources are available from BREAD, 50 F St. NW #500, Washington, DC 20001. 1-800-82-BREAD

Climate change – study climate change and weather in your congregation. Order material from PRESBYTERIANS FOR THE STEWARDSHIP OF CREATION, Louisville ext 5810.

c-s@ctr.pcusa.org. A special publication is available: *Stormy Weather: 101 Solutions to Global Climate Change*, Dauncey and Mazza, New Society Publishers, Gabriola Island, British Columbia. We need to study why our weather is changing so dramatically!

Deal with the big issues of war and peace: With the prison scandal in Iraq, many Presbyterians want to know about the Geneva Conventions. When war comes, families want to know how to talk in a time of war. With the crisis in Sudan, information is available about Darfur and genocide. Nuclear weapons have not gone away, and we need to share our concerns. Resources and study material is available from the Peacemaking Program in Louisville.

Landmines continue to be lethal, long after the fighting stops. Resources for study and action available through Church World Service 1-800-297-1515 ext 222. Also contact CWS (1516) for study guides and resource material for International Justice and Human Rights in many countries around the world: Sudan, Colombia.

Souper Bowl Sunday in January/February gives you an opportunity to talk about hunger again. Order songs, posters, flyers, bulletin inserts and other material from brad@souperbowl.org or phone 1-800-358-7687. Get your youth group or men’s group involved collecting donations based on points scored, for local feeding programs/food banks, then report your total to the Souperbowl hot line 1-800-358-SOUP.

Domestic violence requires our peacemaking, and was one of the key workshops at the conference. Domestic violence is a learned behavior, and we need to stand with victims to help them tell their stories, and prosecute those who do the violence. Resources available from PHEWA at www.pcusa.org/phewa/padvn.

Oikocredit – invest your money in the development of people and communities. Oikocredit gives poor people the chance to create a better life for themselves and their families with micro loans. Given loans to start small businesses, people are able to build a better life for themselves and their families. *And they almost always repay* the loans in full. More information is available at usa.sa@oikocredit.org or www.oikocredit.org. It is a meaningful way to invest your savings, or a bequest to your church, to actually help others and improve life around the world.

The Rev. Richard K. Gibson
Lynnwood, WA
Presbytery of North Puget Sound

Theological musings

On Utilitarian Christianity and Radical Faith in Our Current Political Season

A regular column by Dr. Douglas F. Ottati, Professor of Theology, Union Seminary/PSCE

By way of editor's introduction:

Doug Ottati received this year's Andrew Murray Award at the Witherspoon Society luncheon. In presenting the award, Witherspoon secretary Trina's said of Ottati: "He has put the bounce back into Barth, the sizzle into Schleiermacher, and the capaciousness into Calvinism."

Now ... what will he put into Richard Niebuhr?

H. Richard Niebuhr once wrote a short article entitled "Utilitarian Christianity."¹ In it, he said that we often are tempted to reduce God and faith in God to a means to other things that we value. Niebuhr's immediate context was the war-torn 1940s, and so he discussed the then widespread idea that the spiritual power of Christianity will enable people to obtain peace, abundance, freedom, and a sense of dignity. But the utilitarian impulse takes many forms. It tempts Christians in every age and every place, and it also dogs human religion generally.

Do we seek individual happiness? Then a utilitarian spirit presents faith in God as a means of securing a sense of personal worth and contentment. Do we desire wealth and success? A utilitarian impulse emphasizes faith as a means for obtaining attitudes and virtues that make for economic achievement. Do we cherish our families in a age when familiar roles seem threatened? Then it may not be long before you read on a billboard near you that the family that prays together stays together. Do we value national unity and resolve at a time of crisis? Religion may be commended because it is

understood to engender the sense of common purpose and mission that we seek.

Despite its diverse expressions, however, the utilitarian spirit in religion often displays an underlying pattern or dynamic. (1) We take certain of our own purposes, aims, and objectives to be centrally important. We claim (2) that the purposes of God coincide with one or more of these. We then find (3) that faith in God increases our sense for the excellence and importance of these purposes, aims, and objectives, since they now are seen to be not merely our own but also God's. We conclude (4) that faith in God enables, equips, and empowers us to pursue these purposes, aims, and objectives with an increased sense of meaning as well as greater energy and resolve. We therefore (5) commend faith in God because it furthers these worthy purposes, aims, and objectives. The difficulty here, of course, is that the purported sense of religious confirmation is altogether untroubled and too convenient. No hint of mystery, judgment, and our need for repentance. Nary an inkling that faith in God might call even our cherished aims and values into question.

Certain types of utilitarian Christianity have been particularly prominent in modern America. Type A is a commercial spirituality that baptizes a recurrent American dream, and where the essential claim is that the purposes of God enhance and further our drive to financial achievement and success. During the 1920s, for example, Bruce Barton's classic book, *The Man Nobody Knows*, presented Jesus as the prototypical leader for business executives in an industrial age.² Jesus as Henry Ford. Laurie Beth Jones' strikingly



Doug Ottati received the Witherspoon Andrew Murray Award from Trina Zelle, "in grateful recognition of his capacious and eloquent advocacy of continuing confession and continuing reformation in our time."

titled *Jesus CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership* offered a series of short observations about Jesus' management style that met the challenges of post-industrial entrepreneurship in the 1990s³. Jesus as, well . . . Laurie Beth Jones. More recently, Larry Julian's *God is My CEO: Following God's Principles in a Bottom-Line World* assured readers that they can be successful in business and also honor God if only they will trust in God's principles. The true bottom line? "God loves you, has a purpose for your life, and wants you to succeed."⁴

Type B is a therapeutic spirituality. It addresses the feeling side of life in the midst of the chronic stresses, strains, and brokenness associated with the contemporary workplace and bureaucratized social systems, as well as with personally destructive communities, practices, and attitudes. The emphasis here falls on the church as a nurturing community of loving and trustful relationships that sponsors small groups, workshops, and retreats designed to support individuals and families. The essential theological authorization as stated by M. Scott Peck in his remarkably popular *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values, and Spiritual Growth* is as follows. "God's will is devoted to the spiritual growth of the individual."⁵



The lure of commercial and therapeutic spiritualities in America shows no sign of abating. Indeed, in recent years, these two types of utilitarian religion have tended to mix and merge – something that anyone can tell who scans the titles stocked by Borders, Barnes and Noble, and even Cokesbury bookstores in their business, self-help, and leadership sections. (A few weeks ago, I read a column in a northeastern city newspaper that counseled readers to keep focused on both their business and their personal goals, and to keep having faith that they can succeed. One choice line: “Victory in life is achieved by believing first.” Another: “Putting God first in our lives will always give us contentment. Everyone grows in the atmosphere of his presence.”⁶) Nevertheless, during our current political season, we do well to keep on the lookout for a third type of utilitarian religion whose consequences can be devastatingly destructive. *Beware of political spiritualities that equate God’s purposes with the cherished aims and objectives of one’s own nation or people.*

Does anyone seriously doubt that there are at least some Muslims from Najaf to Pakistan, from Saudi Arabia to Indonesia who have succumbed to a utilitarian religion that holds that God endorses their most cherished political ends? But the criticism cuts both ways. Because I live less than 100 miles from both Lynchburg, Virginia and Virginia Beach, I am only too aware of the claim that the spiritual power of (true) Christianity may enable the United States of America to triumph in its wars with (Muslim) terrorists and regimes. (Not to mention the claim that the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 were God’s judgment against secular America for tolerating deviant sexual practices as well as a decline of religious practice.) One notes, too, that Franklin Graham has been unable to keep from sharing with us his own (less than nuanced) estimate of Islam. Others have depicted America as a Christian nation and the war on terror as a battle against Satan. All this comes perilously close to the language of crusade and holy war – the Western equivalent of *jihad* – and (among other things) it just goes to show that American

evangelicals have a lot to answer for. Of course, so does President George W. Bush who said, on the Sunday following the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, “God is not neutral.”

What are those of us who remain uncomfortable with religious utility to do? (Here, I can only write as a Christian theologian, although I am confident that roughly equivalent resources also are available to devout Muslims.) We might start by recalling some underlying dynamics of a more radical faith that presses us to revise and reconstruct our thinking about ourselves and our cherished purposes and objectives. Radical faith demands (1) a sense of repentance. It commends an impulse to self-criticism borne of the recognition that all are sinners who fall short of divine righteousness. Such a faith therefore insinuates the idea that it is unlikely to be only our opponents whose interests and actions are ambiguous, corrupted, and skewed. In the present circumstance, given our gluttonous, automotively inspired dependence on Middle Eastern oil, as well as our willingness to support highly questionable regimes when they are congenial to our energy interests, this idea shouldn’t be too difficult to grasp. And, it ought to keep us from being too easily assured that God endorses *our* cherished aims. Radical faith also commends (2) an acknowledgment of the high mystery, independence, and even incomprehensibility of the only living God. God’s ways are not ours. And so, when it comes to divine purposes, we often “utter what [we] do not understand, things too wonderful for [us], which [we] do not know.” (Job 42:3) This, too, should make us hesitate to say that God clearly endorses one or another of our cherished aims and objectives. Indeed, it should make us hesitate to claim that we even know what God’s purposes are.⁷ Finally, and not before these critical moments have been confronted, radical faith encourages us (3) to ponder what we are called to be and to do. Alleviate suffering. Pursue greater approximations of justice. Exercise care. Be compassionate. Refuse to relinquish hope. Remember the integrity, dignity, and responsibility of all people in their political, economic, cultural, and environmental

relations – children of God who have their particular places and times in God’s world.

But you may say that, in an age of fragmentation and conflict, our efforts to be and to do these things cannot always succeed. Quite often, in fact, they will fail. This is certainly true. Moreover, we are also likely to find ourselves drawn into ambiguities, compromises, and rough balances of power. We therefore are unlikely to remain faithful without dirty hands and without additional sins to confess. Nevertheless, by the grace of a radical faith that centers on God rather than ourselves, we may at least recognize that we are called to be and to do these things, *whether or not we gain riches, find contentment, or guarantee the nation’s security.*

Notes

¹ “Utilitarian Christianity,” *Christianity and Crisis*, Vol. 6, No. 12 (July 8, 1946): 3-5.

² *The Man Nobody Knows: A Discovery of the Real Jesus* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1924, 1925).

³ *Jesus CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership* (New York: Hyperion, 1995).

⁴ *God is My CEO: Following God’s Principles in a Bottom-Line World* (Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2001), p. xxiv.

⁵ *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values, and Spiritual Growth* (New York: A Touchstone Book, Simon and Schuster, 1978), p. 311.

⁶ Catherine Galasso-Vigorito, “Positive Thinking Can Create Success,” *New Haven Register* (August 9, 2004): B1.

⁷ For a fuller discussion of this point, see James M. Gustafson, *An Examined Faith: The Grace of Self-Doubt* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), pp. 96-109.

Announcement from Covenant Network

Covenant Network offers new documentary:

***Turning Points:
Stories of Life and Change in the Church***

Turning Points: Stories of Life and Change in the Church is a documentary about Presbyterians struggling with the denomination's current ordination standards. This hour-long, four-part story with a study guide is suitable for use in adult education classes, pre-presbytery workshops, session meetings — wherever the church gathers for study and discernment of God's call to the church today.

Each section focuses on a particular story and is surrounded by thoughtful, Reformed theological comment. Groups may choose to view the whole video at once or choose which segments are most useful for their needs. Biblical scholars and theologians including Walter Brueggemann and Beverly Gaventa provide commentary and interpretation.

Turning Points opens with the poignant visit of Susie Smith, now a minister in the United Church of Christ, to her former Presbyterian congregation in South Carolina. Congregation members speak to the camera and to Susie about how their lives were changed by her presence and her departure. The choice between one's son and one's church is the focus of the Calhoun family's story in the second segment. The third story recounts a tragic moment of misunderstanding in the life of a young minister and a daring act of reconciliation twenty years later. The fourth segment considers how a thriving congregation in the Midwest welcomes and includes gay and lesbian members.

This video was designed to be viewed by those who are still trying to discern the role God calls those who are Christian and gay or lesbian to take in Christ's church. Christians of all theological viewpoints are invited to watch and discuss this thought-provoking documentary together.

For more information and an order form, go to
<http://www.covenantnetwork.org/TurningPoints/tpweb.pdf>

Early plans:

**Ghost Ranch Seminar — July 25-31
PATHS TO A JUST AND PEACEFUL WORLD**

In partnership with The Witherspoon Society, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship and Presbyterians for Restoring Creation

National and global events seem to be spiraling out of control, whether it is U.S. militarism/imperialism, the earth's environment, massive hunger and disease, millions of refugees and immigrants looking for survival, or the growing chasm between the rich and poor. The groups sponsoring the seminar feel it is essential that discernment and discussion take place in our congregations about a different future for our planet — concern for the common good of all created life, for just relations between peoples and nations. Should not the church be part of the growing international movement to outlaw war and abolish the development of increasingly lethal weapons? Looking at these issues from a biblical, theological and historical background we will be led by three knowledgeable and experienced presenters. Using Colombia as a case study, we will explore how alternatives to militarism could bring peace and justice to this war-ravaged nation. Our discussions will center on what is necessary to bring the vision of a just and healthy world to fruition?

Leaders will include:

Maria Arroyo de Kemmerle, Area coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean for the Worldwide Ministries Division of the PC(USA). She is responsible for nurturing and developing the PC(USA)'s relationships with Presbyterian and Reformed churches in the region, and she's a resource on the region for other GAC entities, presbyteries, and congregations. Born and raised in Mexico City, she has worked in Nicaragua (1986-87) and Chiapas (1988-89). She was a PC(USA) mission worker in Brazil from 1989 to 1995. She came to live in the U.S. in 1995. Married, she is the mother of two boys. In the Spring of 2004 she accompanied Moderator Susan Andrews to Colombia where they met with Colombian Presbyterians, a community of displaced people, and human rights workers to learn about the 40-year conflict the nation has suffered.

Mark Lewis Taylor, the Maxwell M. Upson Professor of Theology and Culture at Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ. Among his numerous books is *The Executed God: The Way of the Cross through Lockdown America* (2001). His essays and organizing focus are on U.S. policy in Mesoamerica, political prisoner and criminal justice movements in the U.S., anti-war peace work and prophetic resistance to empire. During 2003-2004, he was Research Fellow at the University of Helsinki Collegium of Advanced Studies, working on a project called "Postcolonial Theory and Liberation Theology." The research and writing for the year are reflected in a book he is now writing, *Prophetic Spirit: Beyond American Empire and Romance*. He has spent time in Guatemala, Chiapas and Haiti.

Coordinator: Jane Hanna
E-mail: mjhfos@aol.com

Kevin Phillips on Cycles in the Republican Party: A Non-Partisan Review

Gene TeSelle

Kevin Phillips was a strategist for the 1968 Nixon campaign and wrote an important book on *The Emerging Republican Majority* (1969). Now his loyalty to the Republican Party has faded. He has not, to my knowledge, said anything about the 2004 campaign. But it is clear that he mourns the loss of “liberal Republicanism.” Do you happen to remember the last liberal Republican in the Senate, Lowell Weicker? He was unseated by Joe Lieberman, who passed him on the right.

Earlier this year Phillips published *American Dynasty: Aristocracy, Fortune, and the Politics of Deceit in the House of Bush*. I won’t deal with that, since it has a rather narrow focus; but it is characterized by extensive research and analysis. Looking into this book did send me to Phillips’s book of a few years ago, *Wealth and Democracy: A Political History of the American Rich* (2002). It claims to be the first such history in many decades, and it is of interest for a number of reasons. Phillips points out, for example, that wealth has always played a larger role in American politics than in the European countries, perhaps because it is the chief form of aristocracy and non-governmental power in our society.

A leading thesis is that the Republican Party has gone through three cycles, starting with a strongly democratic impulse and then letting it erode. (He thinks the Democratic Party has usually followed the Republicans’ lead in these cycles; he cites Grover Cleveland, the losing candidates during the Twenties, and Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton.)

Concern for the middle classes, sympathy with working people, and caution about capital was typical of the Republicans, first under Lincoln, then under Mc Kinley and Theodore Roosevelt and Bob LaFollette, then under Nixon and Ford. Before long, he says, the Republican compass swung toward Wall Street, private gain, and the politics of money, which concretely leads to domination by interest groups and ideology (xv). One reason, he thinks, is that each time there was a crest of inflation that led toward over-enthusiasm for markets and grotesque concentration of wealth (300).

Phillips thinks that this spirit might be reviving in the campaign rhetoric of Bill Bradley and John McCain (the book is too early to consider John Edwards), with their expressions of concern about corporate ethics and the role of money in electoral campaigns. The bargaining away of national sovereignty that has occurred through NAFTA and the World Trade Organization leads him to hope for another Henry Demarest Lloyd who will write about “wealth versus commonwealth.” He hopes for another Teddy Roosevelt who will ring the bell on the

“unelected rulers” (417) who dominate policy making. And he hopes for a popular backlash against growing inequalities which will lead to “the emergence during the first third of the twenty-first century of a U.S. radicalism” (421).

As the PC(USA) looks ahead to observing the hundredth anniversary of the “Social Creed of the Churches” (1908) and asks what it is called to say to the twenty-first century, it is salutary to remember that the reforms of a hundred years ago were the joint product of many different political movements – the Populists and Socialists, yes, who started the ball rolling, but finally the Republicans and Democrats who passed legislation regulating the activities of corporations, offering some degree of security to workers, and taxing the incomes of the wealthy. They were encouraged by the middle-class radicalism of the mainstream Protestant denominations. And it was the Republicans Teddy Roosevelt and Robert La Follette who campaigned for President under the banner of the Progressive Party. Perhaps it could happen again.



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Witherspoon News

From Your Membership Coordinator

When I agreed to be nominated for the position of Membership Coordinator of the Witherspoon Society, I knew the task would not be an easy one. From my experience I had a hunch that trying to coordinate members of this group would be like trying to herd cats. As a non-hierarchical society of independently minded progressive Presbyterians, Witherspooners are not very likely to follow any coordinator in a lock-step fashion.

I first became aware of the work of the Society when I served as a Youth Advisory Delegate to the 1980 UPCUSA General Assembly in Detroit. Not long after, I officially joined while a student in Seminary. In the early 90's I became more active in the Society as I began attending the General Assembly on a semi-regular basis. During the past few years I have chaired the Nominating Committee, monitored GA Committees, helped analyze issues before the GA, assisted with the Witherspoon Booth in the GA Exhibit Hall, and helped develop a Witherspoon Chapter at one of our seminaries. This is my first term as the Membership Coordinator and member of the Executive Committee, however, and I have a lot to learn.

Our Bylaws state that the Membership Coordinator shall:

- Have primary responsibility for membership recruitment for the society

- Develop strategies and resources for the continual renewal of present membership and recruitment of new members
- Maintain a close relationship with those developing memberships in local chapters

No thanks to yours truly, I have already been in contact with some people in the greater Pittsburgh area who are interested in developing a local chapter in order to enjoy the fellowship of like-minded progressive Presbyterians in an otherwise barren land. I will drive to Pittsburgh in order to join them for their first meeting.

Lack of a travel budget prevents me from flying around the country to meet with similar groups. Other members and former members of the Executive Committee are willing, however, to assist with the formation of local groups in their areas. We hope you'll find ways to do just that!

Please contact me at membershipcoordinator@witherspoonsociety.org (or at my address and phone, listed on the back cover) if you want to know more about developing a local group or have any questions or suggestions related to coordinating our membership.

John E. Harris

Are you on our Witherspoon members e-list?

We've built a list of about 400 of our members, to whom we send occasional notices that we think are worth your time and attention.

If you haven't received any of these notes, we've somehow missed your e-mail address, or haven't updated it — and we apologize!

Please send your current e-mail address to douging2@aol.com

And add a note saying you want to be included on the Witherspoon Members e-list. Don't get left out!

Grace is a good thing – and your editor hopes you'll extend him a little grace for the late arrival of this issue of *Network News*. The hazy lazy days of summer (which are feeling more like October here in Minnesota this year) have gotten a little hectic, so I hope you'll be forgiving for our late arrival. It's not that we've forgotten you!

Doug King

Witherspoon annual meeting confirms new officers

At the close of the annual Witherspoon Society Awards Luncheon, Kent Winters-Hazelton convened the organization's annual meeting, with some 50 members present.

The chair of the Nominating Committee, Lynne Reade, reported the election by mail-in ballot of the slate that was presented by the committee.

The newly elected officers are:

President is Kenneth R. Smith, who has served as Vice President for the past four years. Before that, he was one of the officers of Semper Reformanda.

Vice President Jake Young has served as Member at Large and Membership Coordinator. He is an Associate Pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Springfield, IL.

Membership Coordinator John Harris currently serves as pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Buckhannon, WV, and Special Presbyter for Quadrant Minister – Quadrant 2 of West Virginia Presbytery.

New Members at Large are Vanessa Aja-Sigmon, a second-year student at McCormick Seminary, living with her husband in Chicago, **and Chuck McLain**, an Honorably Retired member of San Francisco Presbytery and a Commissioner at G.A. in Richmond.

The newly elected officers took office at the close of the General Assembly.

The full executive committee now consists of:

President - Kenneth R. Smith
 Vice President - Jake Young
 Treasurer - David Zuverink
 Secretary/Communicator - Trina Zelle
 Issues Analyst - Eugene TeSelle
 Membership Coordinator - John Harris
 Member at Large - Jennifer Stone
 Member at Large - Celeste Lasich
 Member at Large - Vanessa Aja-Sigmon
 Member at Large - Charles McLain
 Newsletter Editor and Membership Secretary - Doug King

To contact any of these officers, you can send an e-mail note to douging2@aol.com, or use the addresses and phone numbers published on the back cover of every issue of *Network News*.

Gene TeSelle expressed the appreciation of the whole group to outgoing president Kent Winters-Hazelton for his

service as president and in other roles before that. Gene recalled Kent's leading role in planning and carrying out a series of regional "mini-conferences" reflecting on the Confession of 1967, and the subsequent national conference held in the spring of 2003.

A new Nominating Committee was named for the coming year, including:

Heather Shortlidge, this year's Wareham Intern, who will serve as convener of the group

Donald Purkey

Jeanne Rodenbough

Bruce Tjaden

John Harris, Executive Committee liaison

The members present voted to allow the Executive Committee to suspend the By-Laws as needed, to make adjustments in the election process and terms of office, in light of the two year period between General Assemblies.

Thank you from the Witherspoon board

We greatly appreciate the generous support you've been giving in response to Dave Zuverink's appeal for special funds to support and expand Witherspoon's communications. We're nearing \$4,000 toward our goal of \$10,000.

That will help a great deal, but more support will enable us to reach out more effectively – distributing free copies of *Network News* to seminarians and others; offering someone a small stipend to help improve the appearance of our website and add to its content. If you haven't sent a contribution yet, we'll still graciously accept your gift! You can use the membership envelope in this issue – but be sure to mark your check or the envelope for "Communication Fund."

Thanks!!

The Next Network News

Our Fall issue will bring you a variety of news and views. We hope you'll add yours to the collection. You might offer your comments on conversations we've reported in this issue – on charges of anti-Semitism in recent Presbyterian Church actions, and on the possibilities of real dialogue in our church.

Or you may have observations on the presidential campaign which will (we hope!) be just concluded by the time our deadline arrives.

One question to ponder: What can progressive Christians offer in the way of a vision for this changing world of the 21st century? Please share your thoughts!

**Deadline for submissions
is
November 10, 2004**

Please let us hear from you!

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If you're *not* a member,
we invite you to join us!

And if you *are*, invite a
friend or two to join.

Time to renew your membership?

Check the date on your mailing label to know when your membership expires. You can send in your renewal a little early, and avoid our nagging letters!

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

John E. Harris
First Presbyterian Church
77 Boggess Street
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E-mail: JOHN.HARRIS1@ecunet.org

To receive regular e-mail
notes of additions to the
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(For other back issues, please call or send a note.)

I would like to recruit new members, so please send:

_____ copies of the Witherspoon Society membership brochure, or

_____ **one copy** of a master sheet so I can make my own copies.

(No charge for these!!)

TOTAL: \$ _____

My check to "Witherspoon Society" is enclosed

Name: _____

Address: _____

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