
Network News



Summer 2010

Volume XXX, No.3

www.presbyvoicesforjustice.org



The Church gathers ...
deliberates ...
moves forward (cautiously) ...
and sometimes we celebrate!



Members of Kwanzaa Community Church (Presbyterian), in Minneapolis,
join their co-pastor, Rev. Alika Galloway, to celebrate receiving
PVJ's Whole Gospel Church Award at the PVJ Luncheon

Photo by Willem Bodisco Massink



The Editor's Spot

Here's your chance to help be a voice for justice in the PC(USA).

A letter from the Editor

We're asking for help!! After almost twenty years of editing this newsletter, and then managing our website, and then, just for fun, also taking care of our membership database and correspondence, I have come to the sense that it's time for a change. PVJ needs someone new (or better yet, two or three someones) in these various jobs, who can engage us more effectively in online social networking, put together a livelier newsletter, and keep us more closely in touch with our membership.

So the PVJ Coordinating Team would like YOU to consider seriously taking on one or more of these responsibilities, beginning by January 2011 at the latest.

You wouldn't have to do it all! In fact what we would really like is one person to do the newsletter, another to manage the website and other on-line communications, and another to take care of our membership connections. If you're interested, or even willing to talk about it, please let me know. I'll tell you all I can, work with you in transferring everything, and then I'll fade quietly away and let you have all the fun.

I have to say that my involvement in these various activities has been immensely rewarding and satisfying – above all for the wealth of personal connections, many of them real friendships, that I have enjoyed over the years. But now – it's your turn! Let's see what we can work out.

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Voices for Justice Awards Luncheon offers moments for meditation, celebration

With over a hundred people present, the new Presbyterian Voices for Justice (PVJ) gathered on Sunday, July Fourth, just after the Assembly worship service.

The Rev. Bill Dummer, PVJ co-moderator, welcomed everyone to the luncheon, and then introduced the Rev. Landon Whitsitt, the newly elected Vice Moderator of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Whitsitt greeted the group on behalf of Moderator Cynthia Bolbach, and expressed appreciation for the work of both the predecessor groups now in PVJ, the Witherspoon Society and Voices of Sophia, in the cause of justice.

The invocation was given by the Rev.

Catherine Snyder.

Sylvia Thorson-Smith, a member of the PVJ

board, then introduced the speaker, the Rev. Mary Elva Smith. Smith served as Director of Women's Ministries in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) from 2001-2006, and is now the Acting General Presbyter for the Sierra Mission Partnership.

Mary Elva began by describing what she had in mind for our time together: "We are going on a mini-retreat," she said, "to take time to listen for the voice



Mary Elva Smith

Photo by Doug King

We invite you to join us!

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

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

**http://www.presbyvoicesforjustice.org/membership_form_2.htm
(and you can pay online, too!)**

or contact our Communications Coordinator:

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of Godde and to allow the movement of the Spirit space to work.”

She then invited the group to join in reading together PVJ’s Mission Statement (see page 8). Then, continuing, she said:

We’re going to open this moment in time together by listening: not to me or to you but ... to GOD!

The psalmist admonishes: Be still and know that I am God...
Psalms 46:10

(pause...silence)

What a time to call for silence, in the midst of the opening days of a General Assembly...

In the psalm, she explained, God speaks to us out of the chaos of that time, offering a promise of stability and change.

Smith went on to invite us into this silence, to attend to our own breathing and to images and words from Scripture and from our own deep consciousness.

She then asked us to focus on a few questions for reflection – Questions for Conversation and Questions for Clarity – which she offered for our reflection in our few minutes together, and in the days to come.

[These are on our website, along with the full text of her meditation, at <http://presbyvoicesforjustice.org/2010/219%20GA%20PVJ%20luncheon.htm#outline>]

[/presbyvoicesforjustice.org/2010/219%20GA%20PVJ%20luncheon.htm#outline](http://presbyvoicesforjustice.org/2010/219%20GA%20PVJ%20luncheon.htm#outline)]

She closed with an invitation to listening:

Take time to listen, first for the still small voice of God, then to each other, that the Spirit may move within you to breathe new life and direction into the call you hear to do justice, to love kindness and walk humbly with your God.

We encourage you to join in on the very brief “mini-retreat” on which Mary Elva Smith led us, by reading through and reflecting on the prepared material she has generously shared with us.

Are you overdue??

Has your membership in PVJ run out?

Or is it almost up?

You can check by looking on the address label on the cover of this *Network News*.

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

presbyvoicesforjustice.org/membership_form_2.htm

Thanks!

Awards presented to Kwanzaa Community Church, and to Ann and Manley Olson

The recipient of this year's Whole Gospel Congregation Award, Kwanzaa Community Church (Presbyterian) in Minneapolis, was introduced by the Rev. Bebe Baldwin. She described vividly some of the many ways in which Kwanzaa's commitment to its community has changed lives and made a difference in the quality of life in its community. To see more about the congregation, please visit >>
http://presbyvoicesforjustice.org/2010/219th_GA%20PVJ%20events.htm#kwanzaa

The award was presented "in grateful recognition for 'bringing saving freedom to body, mind & soul' through the Good News of Jesus to all the people of the community." The Rev. Alika Galloway, who is co-pastor of the congregation with her husband, the Rev. Ralph Galloway, accepted the award on behalf of the congregation, which was represented by some 20 of its members.



The Rev. Alika Galloway

Photo by Willem Bodisco Massink

Continued on next page

Tell your friends about Presbyterian Voices for Justice -- and invite them to join us!

Our new brochure is available on our website in PDF format, so you can print copies to share with others -- in your congregation, your presbytery, wherever you go!

Or if you'd like a stack of them to share with others, just contact Doug King, our communications coordinator. Please be sure to include your name, mailing address, and the quantity you need. Send an e-mail to douging2@aol.com, or phone 608-782-5275.

Continued from "Awards," page 5

PVJ Acting Co-Moderator Colleen Bowers presented the Andrew Murray Award to Ann and Manley Olson, long-time active Presbyterian leaders at congregational, presbytery, and national levels. The award was presented "in grateful recognition of their commitment and passion to social justice for all of God's people in their service to the entire Church."

More about the Olsons >>

http://presbyvoicesforjustice.org/2010/219th_GA%20PVJ%20events.htm#olsons



Colleen Bowers (right) presents Andrew Murray Award to Ann and Manley Olson

Photo by Willem Bodisco Massink

The Reverend Sylvia Carlson, another member of the PVJ Coordinating Team, offered the benediction, using the words of a blessing the comes out of the Franciscan tradition. We've been asked by a number of people for the words of that blessing, so here it is:

A Franciscan Blessing

May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half truths, and superficial relationships, so that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world, so that you can do what others claim cannot be done. Amen.

PVJ/Voices of Sophia speaker Chris Smith reflects on de-centering privilege

'Perhaps it's time we move to the margins.'

GA219 Communication Center, by Sandy Sweep

Minneapolis, July 8, 2010

More than 100 people gathered early Tuesday for the Presbyterian Voices of Justice (PVJ)/Voices of Sophia breakfast as part of the 219th General Assembly (2010). The Rev. Christine Smith, professor of preaching at United Theological Seminary, Twin Cities, spoke to those gathered on "Reimagining Church: De-Centering Privilege as an Act of Global Citizenship."



Rev. Dr. Chris Smith

Photo by Doug King

"This notion of de-centering privilege requires reimagining what it means to be human from those who are not privileged," began Smith. "Then the definition of (who are) God's people needs to reflect the more than three-fourths of God's people who are not so privileged."

"As I walk into my furnished house and eat the food I have – like this breakfast – and realize that I spend more on my dogs than most people earn to support a family, I realize where I am in all this and that I am not like most of God's people, and that's painful for me," Smith said.

She concluded by challenging attendees to examine the center-to-margin concept. "We are guilty of creating a pseudo-reality where we put ourselves in the center," Smith said. "Perhaps it's time we moved to the margins."

EDITOR'S NOTE: We hope to publish the full text of Dr. Smith's presentation before too long, at least on our website, and perhaps in the next issue of *Network News*.

Voices sings a blessing to the new Moderator

Moderator Cindy Bolbach arrived early for the PVJ/Voices of Sophia breakfast, and we were delighted that she chose to stay for the meal. Many of the women present, who have been active in the Voices of Sophia organization, stood and joined in singing their traditional blessing for the new Moderator. Given the history of years of conservative attacks on the group, its leaders, and numerous women members of the national staff, it was a rich and resonant moment.



Moderator Cindy Bolbach receives the traditional Voices of Sophia blessing.

Photo by Danny Bolin, PNS

The Mission of Presbyterian Voices for Justice

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

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

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

A progressive review of the 219th General Assembly

Moving forward - with caution

by Doug King, PVJ Communications Coordinator

The 219th General Assembly celebrated with fireworks for the Fourth of July, but those seemed to be pretty much all the fireworks we saw during the week. That's not a complaint.

Clearly the process of committee work during the first days of the Assembly was designed to smooth over some of the sharp edges of disagreement, by the use of exercises in discernment that sought communication rather than confrontation. That meant that in some cases where genuine differences were being articulated, especially in the dealing with the Israel/Palestine issue, ways were found to avoid the sharpest conflicts.

Some saw this as “watering down” a few of the bolder statements and actions that had been proposed, while others welcomed it as finding middle ground. But clearly the Assembly was not in a mood to engage in the kinds of confrontation that some of the overtures, and a couple of the candidates for moderator, seemed to want: rolling back the modest steps that have been taken toward full equality in the church for glbt members, rejecting any actions that would seek justice for the Palestinian people, or requiring a special Board of Oversight to patrol all events sponsored by affinity groups to ensure that none of them



Moderator Cindy Bolbach is installed, while John Calvin (or his posterboard facsimile) stands with her.

Photo by Willem Bodisco Massink

allow any activities contrary to the church's rules and regulations.

Where proposals were made in overtures or committee reports for steps forward in the church's social witness, or in shaping our own denominational life to reflect God's call to do justice, to act mercifully, and to walk in humility with God (and with one another), the Assembly seemed willing to take steps, but with some caution. That seemed true especially in dealing with the much-debated Israel/Palestine issue, with same-sex marriage, and with a call to look seriously at our own institutional life as a denomination, by considering the salary structure of the General Assembly offices and agencies.



EDITOR'S NOTE: This summary report on the actions taken by the Assembly has been, well, *assembled* from many sources and reports, including various reports issued by the Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian News Service, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, More Light Presbyterians, Covenant Network, Presbyterians Affirming Reproductive Options, and others. We are deeply grateful to all of those groups, and the people who did the work to make these reports possible.

Electing a new Moderator

The Assembly began by electing a remarkable Moderator, the only Ruling Elder among the six candidates for the office.

Cynthia Bolbach, an elder from National Capital Presbytery, was elected moderator on Saturday evening, July 3, on the fourth ballot. Bolbach employed brief answers and a winsome sense of humor to gain ground steadily, rising from 149 votes (30%) of the votes on the first ballot to 325 votes (53%) on the decisive fourth ballot. None of the other five candidates – the Rev. Julia Leeth of Santa Barbara Presbytery, the Rev. James Belle of Philadelphia Presbytery, the Rev. Maggie Lauterer of Western North Carolina Presbytery, the Rev. Eric Nielsen of Northern Waters Presbytery, and the Rev. Jin S. Kim of host Twin Cities Area Presbytery – exceeded 23%

of the vote on any ballot.

Bolbach's running mate for vice-moderator, the Rev. Landon Whitsitt, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Liberty, MO (Heartland Presbytery) was installed later in the week.

Bolbach and Whitsitt were both praised by many commissioners for their cool and orderly way of leading the Assembly through its huge (and sometimes controversial) stack of business – often with touches of humor that helped mightily.

We in Voices for Justice were delighted to see the new Moderator at our Tuesday morning breakfast – not just for a quick appearance, but to sit down and eat with us. (See page 8, above.) She also came to our dance on Tuesday evening, stayed for a while ... and danced!

Israel/Palestine and the Middle East

The Middle East, and especially Israel/Palestine, were the most hotly argued topics as the Assembly gathered. Among the various pre-Assembly hearing sessions, the one on the Israel/Palestine report was probably the busiest, with lobbyists for various positions, and especially for Israel, working diligently to get their views heard.

In the end, the Middle East Study Committee report, "**Breaking Down the Walls,**" was approved by the full Assembly with a strong margin of 558 to 119. It had been amended at some points to deal with what some viewed as a "lack

of balance.”

Among other points, the final action calls for:

- an immediate cessation of all violence, whether perpetrated by Israelis or Palestinians;
- the reaffirmation of Israel’s right to exist as a sovereign nation within secure and internationally recognized borders;
- the end of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories;
- an immediate freeze on the establishment and expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, and on the Israeli acquisition of Palestinian land and buildings in East Jerusalem;
- resumption of peace negotiations with help from the U.S.;
- an end of the Israeli blockade of non-military items into and out of Gaza.

What may be the strongest recommendation in the report was also approved, calling for the suspension of U.S. aid to Israel’s conservative government as long as the settlements are continued. This seemed to indicate an understanding among many Commissioners that the two-state solution is simply not working in the current climate, largely because of the Israeli military occupation.

In addition, a Monitoring Group for the Middle East will be formed to assist the appropriate General Assembly Mission Council offices and the Middle East staff team in monitoring progress and guiding actions to ensure adequate implementation of policy directions that were approved by the Assembly.

The General Assembly also approved the report of the Mission Responsibility through Investment (MRTI) committee,

which stopped short of calling for **divestment from church holdings of Caterpillar stock**, because of the company’s continued sale of heavy equipment to Israel, which is used in the demolition of Palestinian homes, and the continued expansion of Israeli walls around Palestinian neighborhoods. The Assembly voted to “denounce” those actions, but not to engage in actual divestment of stock in the company. An effort in the plenary session to initiate divestment did gain support from about one third of the commissioners, which seems to indicate the possibility of stronger action in the future unless there are changes in the behavior of either Israel or Caterpillar.

Leading up to the Assembly, there had been considerable debate about **two theological papers dealing with Christian-Jewish and Christian-Muslim relations**. By a vote of 529 to 135, the Christian-Jewish paper was referred back to the offices of Interfaith Relations, and Theology and Worship, for further work, primarily because Palestinian Christians were not consulted more fully in the development of the paper. The paper on Christian-Muslim relations, which calls for more dialogue, understanding and cooperation between the two religious groups, was adopted by 548 to 29.

On some other proposals, which went a bit further, the Assembly was more reluctant to act. Item 14-04, from the Presbytery of San Francisco, which would have named the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories as **“apartheid,”** was not recommended to the plenary by the committee – not because it was deemed untrue, but

because it was feared it would not be helpful in reaching a mutual solution.

On the **Kairos Palestine document** ('A Moment of Truth'), written by Palestinian Christians, the Assembly endorsed "the document's emphases on hope for liberation, nonviolence, love of enemy, and reconciliation." They commended it for study in the church, and called on the Middle East monitoring group to prepare a study guide.

By voice votes, the Assembly took two other potentially far-reaching actions.

They passed the Baltimore overture (14-10), which lifted up **the Goldstone report**, calling for Israel and Palestine to create independent investigations of Israel's attack on Gaza in late 2008-2009. As Jan Orr-Harter notes in her report for the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, "The Goldstone conclusions lay the ground work for international sanctions on Israel due to human rights violations. That passed on a simple voice vote – but it's not so simple!"

Also approved by voice vote was Item 14-09, from Chicago Presbytery, which calls for universal enforcement of **U.S. law regarding military sales** to foreign nations with regard to human rights abuse. In theory, the United States does not approve arms transfers and sales to nations with very bad human rights records. If this were applied in the case of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories, it would require an end to U.S. military funding and sales going to Israel. That may seem a bit unlikely, but the PC(USA) was at least able to make that statement!

And then there's **Iraq**. The assembly voted down an effort to derail Item 14-07, and then voted overwhelmingly (525 to 80) to support U.S. withdrawal on the stated schedule for troops and contractors and to oppose the establishment of permanent U.S. bases after our withdrawal.

Peacemaking and International Issues

Afghanistan

The PC(USA) General Assembly took the vital step of stating clearly – for the first time since the war began – that the PC(USA) opposes the war in Afghanistan, and calling for a shift to only non-military actions and accelerated, internationally-guided reconstruction efforts, to increase chances of some social progress after the inevitable U.S. withdrawal. This gives to the new director of the Washington Office, J. Herbert Nelson, a clear mandate from the church for opposing this longest war in U.S. history.

George Lynch of Pacific Presbytery, moderator of the Assembly's Peacemaking and International Issues Committee, said: "There is no more appropriate time for the church to proclaim the peace of the gospel and pursue its mandates than when the country is at war." And Jillian Oberg, young adult advisory delegate from Beaver-Butler Presbytery, said that before the Assembly she told a friend who had served in Afghanistan that the Assembly would consider issuing a statement calling for peace in that

country. “He said this is one of the best things we could do as a Presbyterian Church to support our soldiers.”

Other issues

Actions were taken by voice vote on a number of other matters, no less important for the lack of debate. Calls from church partners were heard through commissioners’ resolutions on the impacts of “coups” or illegitimate government take-overs in **Madagascar and Honduras**, and the disappointing acceptance of those coups by the U.S. government. The Assembly stood by its traditional concern for **human rights**, and for the rights of **religious minorities**. There were calls for prayer and advocacy to end the violence in **Sudan**; for the peaceful reunification of **North and South Korea**; for the restoration of sustainable agriculture in **Haiti**, and for the restoration of democracy in **Madagascar**.

Colombia

Then came Colombia. Item 13-08 from Chicago Presbytery called for the U.S. to reverse its plan for establishing seven new military bases in Colombia, and called for the U.S. to help create peace negotiations to end the conflict. This would seek reversal of the U.S. investment in a military known for human rights violations and population displacement. Again, it passed by consensus – and indeed, as the Peace Fellowship commented, there seems to be a consensus on this in the church now.

Nonviolent Witness and the PC(USA) as a “peace church”?

In some ways the major action in the work of Committee 13 was a matter of a three-way marriage: Pittsburgh Presbytery’s Overture 13-11, calling for a review of the Peacemaking Program; Overture 13-06 from National Capitol Presbytery, calling for a “Six-Year Term of Discernment to Seek Clarity on Whether God Is Calling the Church to Embrace Nonviolence,” and Overture 13-07 from Susquehanna Valley Presbytery, which calls on the GAMC to engage seminaries and colleges, along with a number of GAMC units, in “instituting comprehensive study and education programs dealing with peacemaking.” Given the broad scope of the action, including the call for a church-wide process of discernment as to whether and how the PC(USA) might become in some meaningful way a “peace church,” it passed with surprising ease – by an overwhelming voice vote, with no debate.

Ordination standards

By a 50-vote margin (373-323-4), the Assembly again, as in 2008, approved an overture that would amend the so-called “fidelity and chastity clause” of the Book of Order (G-6.0106b). Some observers were surprised at the relatively narrow margin of the vote, since the Church Orders and Ministry committee had approved the change by a vote of 36-16-1 – with 67% supporting, compared to just 53% voting for the change in the plenary session. This difference may reflect the fact that committee members had devoted much more study and

reflection to the issue, and so were more able to come to a position that was more open to change.

According to the overture, candidates are to be examined by presbyteries (for ministers) or sessions (for elders and deacons) based on calling, gifts, preparation and suitability. Governing bodies, guided by Scripture and the confessions, would also determine candidates' ability and commitment to fulfilling requirements stated in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation.

Speaking in favor of the overture, the Rev. John Vest (Presbytery of Chicago) said the PC(USA) must change its Constitution to move forward. The overture does more than just remove language – it adds language that is just and constitutional, he said. Ordination examinations should be “vigorous and robust.”

The Rev. William Reid Dalton III (Salem Presbytery), among others, opposed the overture, saying that with the GA's approval of the Belhar Confession and the new Form of Government, presbyteries already have much to discuss.

The assembly rejected a minority report from the Church Orders and Ministry Committee, which called for a pastoral letter to be sent to sessions and for the reversal of the authoritative interpretation issued at the 218th GA (2008).

At a press conference following the assembly's vote, committee moderator elder Theresa Denton said she'd like conversations about ordination standards to be about trust rather than fear or

anxiety. She said she doesn't see the proposed amendment as a move toward lowered standards, but toward increasingly higher ones that look at the totality of a candidate's life.

Michael Adee, executive director of More Light Presbyterians, commented that in striking down the celibacy requirement, the Assembly adopted “one standard for all.” “Instead of looking at one's marital status or sexual orientation or gender identity, it's about a person's life, faith, and character,” he said.

Heather Grantham, a seminarian at San Francisco Theological Seminary, considers the new ordination standard “a better and higher standard,” adding, “It's a step forward on all fronts, whether gay or straight,” so now, “it's not all about sex.” Grantham, who attended General Assembly both as a young adult advisory delegate and as a theological student advisory delegate, also serves as family ministry director for the Noe Valley Ministry Presbyterian Church in San Francisco, which is a More Light congregation.

Now as in 2008, groups that have long advocated for equality in ordination will need to carry on educational efforts in the presbyteries to help them move toward approving this change in the Book of Order. Presbyterian Voices for Justice will join with More Light Presbyterians, That All May Freely Serve, and Covenant Network in this effort.

Lisa Larges, the minister coordinator for That All May Freely Serve, said that approval by the presbyteries can't be taken for granted. “One of the things

we've talked about is that the presbyteries won't talk about it if they are not forced to. So this forces us to have the conversation [about ordination equality] one more time."

The Covenant Network of Presbyterians issued a statement saying it "is grateful that the 219th General Assembly voted to continue the progress made by the last two General Assemblies toward a more gracious and welcoming church." They added, "We have seen steady movement toward acceptance of God-given gifts for congregational leadership and service. We will work to help presbyteries continue this progress."

In dealing with other proposals from the Committee on Church Orders and Ministry, the Assembly approved an overture affirming the role of certified Christian educators. The action directs presbyteries to give certified Christian educators and certified associate Christian educators voice only, and certified Christian educators who are also ordained elders voice and vote, while they serve under the jurisdiction of the presbytery.

Civil Union and Marriage Issues

On Thursday night, July 8, the Assembly dealt with one of the "hottest" issues facing it: what to do about marriage, and whether to change **the current definition of marriage** in the Book of Order and Book of Worship from "between one man and one woman" to "between two people."

The Assembly Committee on Civil Union

and Marriage Issues had dealt at length with a report presented to it by a special Study Committee on the subject. That report did not recommend any change in the definition, partly because that option was ruled out as part of its assignment from the 2008 General Assembly. The report did, however, set forth ways of understanding the marriage relationship that might leave the possibility open for an eventual change to allow for same-sex marriage.

The committee's report was accompanied by a **minority report**, Item 12-13, which basically reasserted the "traditional" view of marriage, arguing that only such relationships are "biblical" and faithful to the demands of God. It concludes: "Let us boldly proclaim that God has a place for sex: It is within marriage between a man and woman and that commitment is for life. Let us work to support, encourage, and nurture those who are not married and help them know that God's plan for them is just as important as God's plan for married people. Let us honor celibacy and those who practice it as engaging in a profitable spiritual discipline that may be lifelong or for a season of life."

Ultimately the Assembly refused to approve the minority report (by 311 Yes to 358 No votes), but then voted (by 439 to 208) to include it with the majority report so that both will be sent to the churches for study. That was one of those moves apparently seeking to minimize conflict and keep everybody, if not happy, at least willing to stay with the process.

Then came what for many of us was one of the most disappointing actions of the

Assembly: by a parliamentary maneuver the Assembly voted to let their approval of the special committee report “answer all pending items” on the remaining list of items from the Civil Union and Marriage committee. This meant that the Assembly essentially rejected the numerous **overtures to change the definition of marriage** to “two people,” giving pastors and sessions discretion in deciding who may marry and whether they may use church property for the ceremony.

The vote was 348-324, with six commissioners abstaining.

Audible gasps were heard on the floor of the Assembly, and many commissioners and observers burst into applause as the result of the close vote (51%-49%) flashed on overhead screens at the Minneapolis Convention Center. So the overtures to change the definition of marriage, which had passed the Assembly Committee on Civil Union and Marriage Issues by approximately 2-to-1 margins, were never even considered by the full Assembly.

“The church was not yet ready to make a decision,” said Moderator Cindy Bolbach during a press conference following adjournment. “This kind of thing happens at every assembly.” While many people will see the vote simply as winning or losing – “that’s human nature,” Bolbach said – she added that more helpful thinking involves “trying to figure out where God is leading the church. Women’s ordination took us years and years to decide.”

The close vote to avoid the question of marriage equality took many commis-

sioners by surprise. Earlier in the week, responding to numerous presbytery overtures, the Committee on Civil Union and Marriage Issues had voted 38-18 to change the Book of Order wording on marriage to call it a covenant between “two people” rather than “a man and a woman.”

Michael Adee, executive director of More Light Presbyterians, commented: “This vote was certainly a disappointing response by not even bringing to the floor for discussion: (1) the reality of faithful, same-gender loving relationships in our Church, (2) the reality of legal same-sex civil marriages in states where Presbyterian pastors serve and the Authoritative Interpretation offering pastoral discretion to perform civil marriages in states where they are legal, and (3) widening the Church’s understanding of marriage to ‘two persons’ in a faithful, loving relationship rather than the restriction of marriage between ‘a man and woman.’ ”

The Reverend Shawna Bowman, who serves as a chaplain at Rush University City Hospital in Chicago, commented: “I am disappointed. Change is inevitable. The longer we drag our feet, the less relevant we’re going to be to communities that already minister to LGBTQ individuals.”

Bowman, who attended the assembly and is also affiliated with That All May Freely Serve, added: “I think we made a conscious decision to bury our heads in the sand and operate out of fear. We’re afraid of this and are not going to go there,” leaving “LGBT individuals out to dry,” as well as “pastors who are having to make difficult decisions every day”

about “how to navigate pastoral care and these [same-sex] relationships without any guidance.”

[Bowman is quoted by *The Bay Area Reporter* >>

<http://www.ebar.com/news/article.php?sec=news&article=4926>]

Adee also noted that “marriage equality was introduced to our General Assembly only two years ago. At the 218th General Assembly in 2008, there was one marriage equality overture from Baltimore Presbytery with a concurrence from Hudson River Presbytery. In 2010, historic levels of support for marriage equality were achieved with 14 overtures and concurrences sent to this Assembly.”

In many of the discussions, it was impressive how often ministers urged a change in the definition of marriage so that they could meet the pastoral needs of church members who want to enter into same-sex marriages – a need they may feel called to meet, but are now forbidden from fulfilling.

Yet the Assembly did take one small step, at least, toward recognizing and respecting same-sex couples. On Friday, July 9, they approved a measure, proposed by the Board of Pensions, Foundation, and Presbyterian Publishing Committee, to extend **health care benefits to same-sex partners and spouses**, including dependent children. The motion to approve passed by 366-287, with nine abstentions.

Internal church issues

A new Form of Government

The General Assembly voted to recommend a revised Form of Government to the presbyteries by a vote of 468 in favor, 204 against, and 6 abstentions — a 70%-30% margin. The new Form of Government includes:

- Foundations of Presbyterian Polity — the principles that are foundational to government, worship, and discipline for the PC(USA) — preserves the vast majority of the material in the first four chapters of the current Form of Government.
- Form of Government — in six chapters, which spells out the constitutional framework for government of the PC(USA) as it seeks to respond to God’s call to life in mission.
- Advisory Handbook for Councils for the Development of Policies and Procedures — required by the Form of Government as an aid to councils (governing bodies) of the church for developing the policies and procedures to carry out their mission.

Nothing will actually be changed until a majority of presbyteries vote to approve this new Form of Government. Voting must be completed by July 10, 2011, and if affirmative, the new Book of Order would take effect the next day.

The proposed Foundations of Presbyterian Polity and Form of Government are intended to help the church better meet the needs of mission in the 21st century. The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity gathers together in three succinct chapters the historical and theological provisions that have defined, and

continue to define, our church life together. Placing this bedrock material into a separate section of the Book of Order will provide a teaching tool to explain who and what we are.

The current Form of Government has evolved over the years from a Constitution into a regulatory manual that attempts to provide a “one size fits all” answer to every situation faced by congregations and presbyteries. The problem with this regulatory approach is that the diverse, multicultural environment in which we do mission no longer permits a “one size fits all” approach if we are to do mission effectively. The proposed new Form of Government lifts up the constitutional standards that are essential to our life together, while at the same time empowering councils (governing bodies) at all levels to respond more effectively to the ministry and mission needs that each faces.

Middle Governing Body Commission

The Assembly voted 566–104 to create a 21-member middle governing body commission with authority to act on the Assembly’s behalf in responding to realignment requests from synods and presbyteries. In response to concerns that the commission might be able to act unilaterally to change synod and presbytery structures, the Assembly adopted an amendment that makes explicit that the commission can only act “upon a majority affirmative vote of the affected presbytery or presbyteries or a majority affirmative vote of the presbyteries in the affected synod or synods.” The Assembly’s action also requires that all decisions of the

commission be approved by a two-thirds majority.

In other middle governing body-related actions, the Assembly:

- rejected an overture to eliminate synods;
- rejected an overture to create a new synod based on theological affinity rather than geography;
- rejected an overture seeking to give congregations “flexibility” to join presbyteries outside their geographical area based on theological affinity;
- rejected creation of a Korean-language presbytery within the Synod of South Atlantic.

Just compensation policies within the Church?

Among the actions recommended by the Assembly Committee on Social Justice Issues A: The Promotion of Social Righteousness, was that the study document on “Neither Poverty nor Riches: Compensation, Equity, and the Unity of the Church,” be received by the assembly, posted in digital form, and printed in limited quantity.

Only one recommendation became a matter of controversy, and that, interestingly enough, was the one which most clearly called on the leadership of the PC(USA) to reflect our commitment to justice within the life of our own denomination. It was a call for all units of the church to adopt a principle that some years ago was generally observed: that no salary range in the national offices of the denomination (including the General Assembly Mission Council, the Presbyterian Foundation, the Board of Pensions, and so on) should be more

than five times higher than the lowest range of salaries.

In the committee hearings on this item, or in statements to the committee, all the agencies except the Office of the General Assembly opposed this proposal, on the grounds that the church must offer competitive salaries to get people with the skills needed to fund the church. Appeals to Christian solidarity, a common commitment to the church's mission, and Jesus' commitment to compassion and respect for the poor, apparently carried little weight.

The result of the debate, first in committee and then in the plenary, was that the General Assembly Mission Council (GAMC) leadership was directed by the Assembly "to convene the leadership of all six agencies related to the General Assembly to review together the fourteen current principles of compensation in the 'Report from the General Assembly Advisory Committee on Churchwide Compensation' (213th General Assembly (2001); Minutes, 2001, Part I, pp. 558–59) and to explore the possibility of setting ratios for compensation [in light of the 5:1 ratio recommended in 2.c.(2) (above)] in order to promote greater covenantal unity within our one church and in our mission together." They are to report back to the 220th General Assembly.

If you are concerned about this, you might find it helpful to look at the listing of all GA agency and governing body salaries in Part II of the Minutes of the Assembly.

Issues of faith

The Assembly voted 525–150 to send the **Belhar Confession** to the presbyteries for their votes to include it as the 12th doctrinal statement in the denomination's Book of Confessions. The Belhar Confession was developed in the mid-1980s by the South African churches as their theological response to the racism of apartheid. That confession is valuable, proponents say, because it seeks to address issues of racial justice and reconciliation that are still relevant today. One overture opposed this based on the fear that Belhar's affirmation of justice might be cited to oppose the exclusion of LGBT people from full participation in the life of the church, just as apartheid excluded people in South Africa on the basis of their race.

In the plenary discussion, minister commissioner Wanda Lawry Hughes of Long Island Presbytery reminded commissioners of the countless peoples, over the centuries, that have lost their voices due to racism and oppression, including the Native American members of her own family. "Now is the time to speak up and out against racism, oppression and fear; now is the time to rise up for justice, reconciliation and unity!" she urged.

"Today we took on our own denominational history of racism. By offering this affirmative vote, the Assembly accepted the challenge to work against racism and for reconciliation and justice throughout our church and country," said the Rev. Sharon Stanley, who moderated the Assembly committee.

"Eighty-five million Reformed Chris-

tians live in the world today; 80 percent of them live in the global south,” said Stated Clerk Grady Parsons. “Through this first step, we will be able to hear all these voices and engage in rich theological discourse. This is the good part of globalization.”

The action also directs the Office of Theology and Worship to generate an inclusive-language version of the Confession for the Web, similar to the inclusive language of the Confession of 1967.

The Assembly voted to continue the work of the **Heidelberg Confession** special committee to correct translation problems that appear to condemn same-sex relationships. In cooperation with the Christian Reformed Church in North America and the Reformed Church of America, this joint project will be completed by the 220th General Assembly (2012).

Social justice issues – living out our love in society

So many social issues were presented to this Assembly through overtures and reports that two committees were created to deal with them all.

Committee on Social Justice Issues A: The Promotion of Social Righteousness dealt most notably with the current economic crisis, and the report entitled “**Neither Poverty Nor Riches: Compensation, Equity, and the Unity of the Church.**”

That report presented the Assembly with an interesting challenge: to consider its

own institutional life in light of God’s call to do justice, and to be an authentic covenant community. That challenge we’ve reported above in reporting on actions relating to the internal denominational issues considered by the Assembly. (See page 18, on just compensation policies.) No clear action was taken, but a process was put in place for further study and deliberation before the next Assembly in 2012.

To provide guidance for the church, its people, and the wider society in facing **the current economic crisis**, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP), the Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns, and the Advisory Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns are called on to prepare a study for the 220th General Assembly (2012) that “assesses the long-term implications of our current economic trends and practices,” dealing with “the role of fairness and justice in our economy, with particular attention to growing inequality, the decline of the middle class, the tax structure, the shifting makeup of the labor force and its effects on employee rights, the role of regulatory agencies in protecting the public interest, and access to environmental resources that is equitable and sustainable.” A fairly awesome agenda, and one that could provide vital information and stimulus for action for justice!

The Assembly also approved a report calling for greater **public support for public education**, especially in light of declining academic achievement in comparison to other developed nations.

They also called for the promotion of the 100th anniversary of the passage of the

first social creed of the PC(USA) with preparation of a booklet, and a celebration during the Big Tent event in 2011.

The Assembly also approved actions that called for efforts to end **violence against women** along the U.S. - Mexico border, as well as in the United States, and to support government ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Committee on Social Justice Issues B: the Exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the World, spent significant time on possible responses to the new Arizona immigration law, which many people believe will unfairly target Hispanic Americans. A commissioners' resolution, "Regarding a Call to Stand with Immigrant Presbyterians in Their Hour of Need," called on the church to "refrain from holding national meetings in those states where travel by immigrant Presbyterians or Presbyterians of color or Hispanic ancestry might subject them to harassment due to legislation similar to Arizona Law SB 1070/HB2162." Since the 220th General Assembly is set to be held in Pittsburgh, and Pennsylvania has immigration laws similar to Arizona's, questions were raised about what that might mean for GA plans, contracts, and so on.

Former Moderator John Fife (1992), who currently lives in Arizona, said that "racism must be confronted with action." And former Moderator Rick Ufford-Chase (2004), former director of Borderlinks, a Presbyterian study center in Tucson, reminded the assembly of the PC(USA)'s "historic concern for those

who stand on the fringe of our society." Those opposing the recommendation argued that the wording was "too vague" and that the church "did not need to impose such harsh restraint." But after nearly two hours of debate on Thursday evening, July 8, the action was approved by 420 to 205.

The Assembly also approved, with little debate, a report on **gun violence** which would provide resources to help the church at every level become informed and active in preventing gun violence. The report summarizes much good research, while noting some of the still-unanswered questions of violence in the culture, such as video games, movies, and war experience. It mentions the public health approach supported by the Johns Hopkins, and other gun violence research.

The Assembly also called for an immediate moratorium on all **executions** in the United States.

Responding to the disastrous **BP oil spill** in the Gulf of Mexico, the Assembly approved an overture from South Louisiana Presbytery to develop educational materials for churches in the area, to help them reflect on and respond to the continuing destruction of coastal wetlands as a "loss for God's creation and God's community."

In addition, a resolution was approved expressing sympathy for the victims of the disaster, and "outrage ... at the enduring tragedy unfolding in the Gulf of Mexico region today. While the long-term socioeconomic and spiritual effects of the Deep Water Horizon oil disaster are yet to be determined, urgent action by

the PC(USA) is our Christian responsibility.” And actions are called for, both locally and through national legislation.

The 2010 Human Rights Update report was received and recommended for study. It focuses on three issues: trafficking and modern slavery, immigrant detention, and the continuing struggle against torture.

The Assembly also took actions:

- to continue to support the work of the Climate for Change Task Force in anticipation of their report to the 220th General Assembly (2012);
- to appoint a committee of nine persons to study the Nature of the Church for the 21st Century;
- to bring to the attention of the church significant trends and developments in human rights, particularly in the areas of trafficking, detention of immigrants and the continuing problem of torture;
- to affirm the Charter of Compassion;
- to lift up the “Call to Restore the Creation,” originally adopted as part of Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice by the 202nd General Assembly (1990) in recognition of its continuing importance.

Health Issues

The Assembly called on the PC(USA) to become “an **HIV and AIDS** competent church,” in part by encouraging all Presbyterians, especially ministers, to be tested to help eliminate the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS testing. During the debate, a theological student

advisory delegate polled the Assembly with a show of hands to see who had been tested at this Assembly. After seeing the lack of raised hands, he said he saw why this action was needed.

Also approved was a second HIV/AIDS-related overture that directs the Stated Clerk to send a letter to the President of the United States and the state governors, urging them to implement HIV testing and prevention awareness in prisons and correctional facilities.

Two overtures had been submitted, by the presbyteries of Boise and Prospect Hill, which were apparently intended to oppose **abortion**, not in terms of the usual argument about “rights of the fetus,” but specifically when women are pressured to have abortions, through threats of violence or coercion. The Health Issues committee broadened the concern to include women who are pressured *not* to end their pregnancies, so both actions were approved by the Assembly, but were now transformed into affirmations of women’s rights and abilities to make their own decisions.

Another action of the Assembly calls for the designation each year of “**a day of prayer for healing and wholeness**,” and suggested that this be done in conjunction with the day currently designated on the Presbyterian Planning Calendar as Health Awareness Sunday.

Visiting with the YAADs (Young Adult Advisory Delegates)

A bright light of hope!

by Sylvia Thorson-Smith, PVJ Issues Analyst

It was Wednesday of General Assembly week – midway through a long series of events, committee sessions, and plenary deliberations. My request to speak to the Young Adult Advisory Delegates (YAADs) about Presbyterian Voices for Justice (PVJ) had been approved, and I had been given 5 minutes during their evening gathering. They convene after the Assembly concludes, about 9:30, so I sat at the back of the room and waited until they were ready for this part of their program. Besides me, they were hearing from representatives of three other groups: Presbyterians Pro-Life, That All May Freely Serve (TAMFS), and The Presbyterian Coalition.

Lisa Larges of TAMFS, and her group of young people, the Welcoming Revolution, did a very clever presentation à la David Letterman’s Top Ten lists, which was enthusiastically received by the YAADs. I didn’t really know what I was going to say about our group as I sat listening to the other three – but then an idea came to me.

When I got up to the front of the large group (there were 161 YAADs this year), I immediately felt a warm response when they introduced me and the name of the group I represent. Even though it was almost 11:00 p.m. (and old folks like me were ready to call it a day), I was totally energized by their enthusiasm. After sharing a bit of humor with them – that maybe they too would get the GA “bug” and attend 27 of them as I have, and maybe they’d even honeymoon at GA as Mike and I did (they laughed hysterically at this prospect!) – I began to tell them about PVJ.

I told about the merger between the Witherspoon Society and Voices of Sophia, two groups advocating justice in church and society on the whole spectrum of contemporary social issues. Then I lined out our mission statement in this fashion:

“I’ll bet most of you care about the things we care about – like sustained gender equality! (huge cheers from the group) And racial reconciliation! (bigger cheers from the group) Full human rights for LGBT persons! (the room went wild with cheers) Economic justice...environmental wholeness...an end to war and all forms of violence...and a justice-loving shalom over all the earth!”

With each issue, these young Presbyterians cheered their support for all of the goals that inspire the work of PVJ.

I’m one who often wonders about the future of the Presbyterian Church, and particularly, about the future of advocacy and justice work in our denomination. Having spent a short time with these young GA delegates, I have more hope than ever that the future is bright *if the church can unshackle its institutional mindset and let the Spirit move freely among its members – especially the ones who will be the church long after we old-timers are gone.* I also came away thinking that PVJ needs to be so much more creative in connecting with young people in the PCUSA. They need us as much as we need them!



Celebrating the Youth Triennium – and a call to look ahead

by the Rev. Sue Trigger, co-pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Rockaway, N.J.

It had been a while since I've been to the Presbyterian Youth Triennium, so I decided this was the year to round up a Presbytery delegation and head to Indiana. This was my fourth Triennium experience. It was at Triennium that I answered the call to ministry; and it was at Triennium 15 years later that I felt a powerful reaffirmation of that call.

There were many things about this Triennium that were fantastic: 5010 participants from all 50 states, a well organized event, great worship planning and keynote speakers, and more. It is far more than a great conference; it is an event that helps shape lives. It is an event that helps people encounter Christ in a bold, powerful way through Bible study, reflection, and a call to consider how God is working in their lives. It is able to reach people with an impact that few, if any, of our congregations are able to do.

Triennium is an important link between our youth and the PCUSA. For most of the youth, this is their first opportunity to experience the connectional denomination. They eagerly seek out at least one person from all 50 states to exchange pins, and in the process learn a little bit about Presbyterians in other regions. In small groups they have an opportunity to develop a deeper connection that, in this age of social media, can continue into the future. It is an opportunity to learn about who we are and what we of the PC(USA) are doing in the world. It motivates participants to get more involved in the life of the church back home and on a larger scale.

The PC(USA) has an incredible evangelical tool that changes lives and inspires young people to faithful discipleship in Christ. So why would we jeopardize such a program? Since my first Triennium more than 20 years ago, the denomination has repeatedly cut financial resources and the ability to staff the event. In order to keep the program going we have had to increase the cost of the event for those who participate. This year's event cost \$409 per person without transportation. We are dangerously close to making Triennium available only to wealthier youth. Those who live in low income homes and attend smaller churches with limited resources are likely to be denied the opportunity to attend.

People – especially young people – are seeing the church as increasingly irrelevant to their lives and therefore are leaving organized religion. We currently offer one event that connects with youth and helps them see the church as relevant and even inspiring. Maintaining this event should be a priority, and yet its very survival is at risk.

If we believe the church is a valuable tool for carrying out Christ's mission in the world, we should be investing in Triennium and other ministries that reach out to our young people. One way to do that is through the Pentecost Offering, part of which goes to the Triennium – so generous support of that offering is one way of investing in the future of our youth, and of our church. To do otherwise seems like institutional suicide.



Some of our Coordinating Team members offer brief comments on the Assembly

Sylvia Carlson

I was delighted to see Cindy Bolbach elected moderator and to see her effectively guide the assembly through their mountain of business. I was pleased that the assembly is sending yet another attempt to remove G-6.0106b back to the presbyteries, but was very disappointed that the actions regarding pastors performing marriages for GLBT persons were not passed.

Darcy Hawk

The GA was over managed. This reduced overt tension, but created an illusion of peace and understanding. Overall the wisdom of the moderate center has us moving in the right direction but the glacial slowness of change means a lot of pain is still being inflicted on those who seek justice but have yet to find it.

Bill Dummer

I sense a pretty good spirit in this year's GA. However, the only plenary session for which I was present was the election of the Moderator.

Sylvia Thorson-Smith

About the recent General Assembly, I say Thumbs Up for sending "Delete B" back to the presbyteries, but Thumbs Down for copping out on same-gender marriage with only a study. Kudos to our new Moderator, Cynthia Bolbach, for her skill and humor – and for being the first Moderator ever to buy a ticket ahead of time to the PVJ (formerly VOS) breakfast and stay for the whole event!

Diane Monger

As a Minister Commissioner to 219th GA I was thrilled that we passed so many important items – FOG; replacement language for G-6.0106b; the Middle East Report with changes. I was troubled by the lack of inclusive language in opening daily plenary worship experiences.

News of Voices for Justice

Membership meeting at GA elects new Coordinating Team members

Elected as Membership Coordinator:

Jeremiah Rosario has been until recently Executive Assistant to the Pastor at Rutgers Presbyterian Church, New York City, and lives in Manhattan.

New at-large members:

Pamela Szurek is pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Levittown, NY, on Long Island.

Diane Monger, Minister-at-Large from Southern Kansas presbytery, is now living back in her hometown of Wichita, KS. Most recently she was on staff at Inter-Faith Ministries in Wichita, working with the interfaith community to fight poverty & injustice.

Lorelei Hillman is the Interim Associate Pastor for University PC in Tempe, Arizona, where she has been for almost 3 years. She is also on the executive board of the Interfaith Alliance for Worker Justice, and chairs Grand Canyon Presbytery's Theology and Worship Committee. Two primary social justice interests are Immigration and GLBT inclusivity.

The next issue of *Network News*

will bring you ... well, whatever turns up. We hope that will include further reflections on the work of the 219th General Assembly, along with a report on the PVJ seminar at Ghost Ranch in early August, and much more.

As always, we welcome your news, comments, ideas about the future of our church, and more.

Just send your contributions to:

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Network News

from Presbyterian Voices for Justice

Summer 2010 Reports from General Assembly

A letter from the Editor	2
PVJ Awards Luncheon	3
Voices Breakfast	7
Assembly Actions	9 - 22
Moderator election	10
Israel/Palestine and Middle East	10
Peacemaking and international issues	12
Ordination standards	13
Civil unions and marriage	15
Internal church issues	17
Issues of faith	19
Social justice	20
Health issues	22
Two hopeful encounters with youth and young adults	23
Comments on the Assembly	25

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