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The President's Corner

On "Transforming Families," formerly known as

Living Faithfully with Families in Transition

We need a healthy openness to shape a creative response

by Kent Winters-Hazelton, president

Does the church need yet another report to help us understand the values and theology of "traditional" families? The reality is that our churches are confronted with a wide variety of family models and our challenge is to share effectively the gospel's grace and compassion with those families that do not fit the mold. Where we need help is developing a theology and ministry toward those new partnerships, configurations and understandings of family that we find within our own church "family." We need a report that addresses what *is*, rather than what we wish or remember. The original intent of the Task Force on Changing Families was directed at such a mandate. The much-revised document that will be sent to this year's General Assembly, seen in this light, is disheartening.

Let me mention three examples:

I had just arrived as the new interim pastor. A member of the church made an appointment to meet with me. Linda was a beautiful young woman who sang in the choir. She was from Cameroon by way of England, with a graduate degree from the London School of Economics. She had recently been married in a relationship that had been arranged by her family – and that was her concern. She had not yet been married a year, and her husband had already returned to his pre-marriage relationship. She turned to her uncle who lived in Chicago and asked his advice. He said, "It's too soon for him to go back to back to the mistress." Before too long, Linda left the area to go live with her uncle.

Dan was serving as pastor of a suburban congregation. He had been struggling with his sexuality for several years and with the active participation of his wife, he acknowledged his homosexuality. His wife shared their struggle with a friend, who shared it with a friend, who called the Presbytery. Soon, Dan was no longer serving as a pastor of a congregation. Hurt, it took him a few years to find a church that would simply let him be. One of the highlights of my service at that congregation was participating in the baptism of his son-in-law and two grandchildren who had also become part of that congregation's life.

John was a deacon who came by one afternoon to introduce himself to his new interim pastor. In the course of our conversation he began to tell me his story. His wife of 30 years had been in a vegetative comma for the past 10 years. She was still in her early 50s, and doctors felt she might continue to live for 20 to 30 years with no possibility of recovery. Over time, John had formed a new relationship that had been accepted by the children of both families. He continued his emotional, financial and legal support of his wife. The church, however,



Kent Winters-Hazelton

did not know of any of this and assumed that he and his common law partner were husband and wife. On the next Sunday after our conversation, his partner had a big smile on her face as she sat in church, knowing that the pastor now knew her situation and accepted her.

Three different churches, three different "family" situations, each one challenging my already broad notion of family. Every one of us could tell multiple versions of the story.

There is no question that the nature of family has changed dramatically in the last generation. Some have responded to these changes with alarm, feeling that the traditional nuclear family itself is at stake; others have responded with understanding and are seeking ways the church can be supportive of those in differing circumstances. In light of these changing needs, the 209th General Assembly in 1997

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appointed a committee to look at the realities of changing families in America.

Changing Families Task Force

After several years' work, the committee was prepared to report at last year's Assembly. The process was sidetracked, however, when an alternative report surfaced within the Assembly committee. It was eventually revealed that it had been authored by Alan Wisdom, of Presbyterians in Faith and Action, an offshoot of the Institute for Religion and Democracy. This conservative critique of the report emphasized married heterosexual couples as the biblical norm for healthy families. The Assembly referred the majority and minority report back to the Changing Families Task Force to report again this year. After a year of review, editing and refinement, the report will come to this Assembly with an apparently moderate, "family-friendly" veneer. (The final draft of the report has not been released at the time of this article.)

Given the nature of our contemporary culture wars, the actions in the Massachusetts Supreme Court and the Ohio legislature, and recent statements by the President, we are hearing significant debate about the nature of the family, and loud defenses of "traditional" family structure. What we need is a theological and pastoral understanding of the variety of intimate relationships and commitments that don't fit the "traditional" model. That is what last year's report sought to provide. Simply restating a traditionally orthodox definition of the family ignores the challenge to face the social and cultural realities of our time. Biblical faith certainly does not require being blind to the world around us.

But at least, the new report does not suggest that traditional marriage exhausts what the church means by family. To that we can all say, "Thank God," because too many of us would have been excluded by such a simplistic response.

Changing the report to reflect traditional definitions, however, raises a different and a more troubling concern. Acknowledging the reality of the changing

structures of family is not a threat to traditional families. On the other hand, closing our eyes and minds to what "family" means in contemporary American culture threatens the church's ability to respond to those who lives and families fall into different categories. While the report acknowledges that "God works through all kinds of families," it does make a value judgment that "married people, are on the whole, happier, healthier, and better off financially . . . than are single people." (*Presbyterian Outlook*: Jan. 12-19, 2004)

Semper Reformanda Pre-assembly Conversation: about families

Sensing that the topic of families in transitions is a fundamental issue to our theology and mission, the Witherspoon Society will be sponsoring its 10th Annual Semper Reformanda Pre-Assembly Conversation on the "changing families" paper. We will have several members of the Task Force as part of our panel.

Realistically, we don't need help understanding the theology of "traditional" families. Where we really do need help is developing a theology and ministry toward those new partnerships, configurations and understandings of family that we find within our own church "family." We need a report that addresses what is, rather than what we wish or remember.

There is one more family story to tell. It involves a man who had a wife who was without a child but who brought another woman to her husband so that he could have a son. Later, the husband, in order to gain some security in the eyes of a local king, lied about his relationship to his wife and offered her to the king. It was only later that the wife, indeed, had a son of her own.

We must be careful when talking about "family" when our own religious tradition offers such a variety of family patterns – patterns through which, in all their variety, God has been at work.

The Witherspoon Society Mission

Revised October 2003

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.



The Editor's Spot

A time for truth

“You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”
 Jesus, as quoted in the Gospel of John 8:32

“There is nothing so powerful as truth – and often nothing so strange.”

Well, that may have been the sentiment of Daniel Webster, the great American statesman, lawyer, and orator of the 19th century. But these days it looks like it's the lies that hold power, and telling the truth can get you in trouble. Just ask Paul O'Neill, former Secretary of the Treasury, or some of the whistle-blowers in Washington. Just listen to the warnings from Washington that any criticism of U.S. policy may well be seen as disloyalty, even treason.

But maybe it's time for us – all of us – to start trying to tell the truth. It won't be easy. We're just not used to it.

We've gotten so used to lies that they are destroying the delicate social fabric that binds us together as a nation, as a global community ... and even as a church. It's time for a change.

The lies come from those famous “highest sources” in Washington, and from leaders of other nations as they cooperate (for reasons of their own) with our leaders. And the habit of untruthfulness seems to be part of what finally drove the Presbytery of Western North Carolina to withdraw its validation of the ministry of the Rev. Parker Williamson with the Presbyterian Lay Committee and the *Layman*. (But it seems we're so used to untruthfulness – and it's so hard to consider it an offense – that the stated reasons for not validating his ministry dealt with other things entirely.)

But wait a minute. Is it enough to fling charges of lying only against those with whom we disagree? If our current president has established an impressive

record for deception, let's remember that his predecessor was no champion truth-teller. (Though the things he worked hard to cover up were of considerably less consequence than the lies of the present administration. They didn't cost us taxpayers as much, either.)

If Parker Williamson has used untruthful statements and has distorted reality by his “interpretation” of events and issues, he's not alone. If anything is to be done toward the healing of our church, it might well begin with our joint confession that we all are guilty of concealing truth, distorting reality, and just plain making things up – almost always for what we consider very good reasons.

Why do we lie? Well, there's no end of reasons:

- Sometimes we tell untruths because we are mistaken. If you ask me what time it is and my watch is slow, I may tell you an untruth simply by mistake. Something to be avoided, certainly, but not a lie.
- Then sometimes we tell lies out of simple decency – those famous “white lies.” Whether it's telling someone they look just fine when they really don't, or telling a patient he or she will be OK when sometimes we know they won't – untruths like this maybe be necessary and appropriate, because they're motivated by concern for the other – compassion, if you will – rather than for our own self-interest.
- But then again there are the big juicy, heavy-duty lies we tell precisely for our own self-interest: distorting reality to convince people of the rightness of our point of view (making up evidence, as for invading a country), to conceal our own faults and failures (denying things we've

done with White House interns), or simply shaping the “facts” on a resumé to improve our chances of getting a job.

OK, we've *all* done it. My first memory of telling a lie is still vivid. I was in second grade, I think. When I got to school one morning my teacher asked for a paper I was supposed to bring from home, and I was appalled to realize I had forgotten to give it to my mother to fill out. (Certainly not the last time I forgot something!) I made up some excuse – something better than “My dog ate it,” I hope! But my teacher gently suggested that I walk home during lunch hour to get it. (This was long, long ago, when kids walked to school.) So I hurried home, found the paper, and give it to my mother, admitting what had happened. I trudged back to school weighed down with the awareness of having done something far more serious than forgetting a paper, when I lied about it.

I remember even more vividly a couple years later, when two boys in my neighborhood had been picking on me on the walk home from school. Then one day they invited to walk with them. We talked about this or that – and I felt *so* happy about being accepted. Then they stopped along the way. One of them kept talking, and suddenly he gave me a push so I fell backward over the other boy, who had quietly knelt down behind me. It hurt – on my butt, but even more in my heart, because my trust had been betrayed by that simple deception.

Lying is something we've all done, and we'll all had it done to us. We know it hurts us as individuals, and even more it tears the delicate threads of trust that keep us together in some kind of community. So maybe it's time to think seriously about telling the truth.

But to borrow a line from Pontius Pilate, “what is truth?”

The Mennonites, for whom truth-telling is very important because it is tied up with their refusal to take an oath, offer a profoundly simple definition: “In the biblical languages, truth is related to faithfulness – faithfulness to the facts (speaking truth) as well as faithfulness in

relationships (being true). Speaking the truth in love in the Christian community shows our commitment to right relationships as well as to accurate speech.” (Mennonite Confession of Faith, commentary on article 20.)

So we can understand truthfulness means being *faithful* – both to the facts and to our relationships in community. We will let our words be shaped by our best perception of what are the “real facts,” and by our commitments to one another (and compassion for one another) in community.

That’s very different from the idea that “speaking the truth” means declaring whatever doctrines or ideologies we hold to be true. Too often (as we are seeing in Washington and in our churches) people seem to feel they have told the truth when they have stated a few propositions that support the ideological commitments they have already made. “Facts be damned” seems to be the attitude, for the “facts” are simply tools to bolster whatever religious or political ideology needs to be realized. Lying seems justified when it is for the sake of “Truth” with a capital “T.”

But perhaps we (*all* of us) need to learn a little humility. We can learn from the sciences that it’s helpful to humble ourselves before the facts as best we can see them. And it’s wise to be humble, too, as we recognize that we never have a lock on all the facts, let alone the “truth” behind them.

Finally, our faith teaches us that there’s an element of mystery in all truth. As we learn to respect that mystery, we will grow in our truthfulness – and in our tolerance of others whose “truth” may be very different from our own.

In that humility, with truthfulness, we might again become a more whole and more healthy community of faith.



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Andrew Kang Bartlett, National Associate for the Presbyterian Hunger Program of the PC(USA), has a graduate degree in international relations. He has worked in the US, Central America and Asia addressing community development, rural poverty, environmental health, and human rights. He represented the PC(USA) at the WTO Ministerials and ecumenical consultations on economic globalization in Cancun.

Elenora Giddings Ivory, currently serving her 13th year as Director of the Washington Office of the Presbyterian Church (USA), the public policy information and advocacy office of the PCUSA. Reverend Ivory’s responsibilities include, among others, civil rights and religious liberties issues. She has been particularly concerned about the possible denial of religious and civil liberties in the name of homeland security.

Peter Sawtell, Executive Director of Eco-Justice Ministries, an ecumenical environmental/economic justice organization. He works with church leaders around issues of social justice and environmental sustainability. He is known to many PRC/Witherspoon members as the author of “Eco-Justice Notes.”

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Church and Empire — Probing Further into

by Bill Gibson

PAX AMERICANA

Rick Ufford-Chase addressed the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship breakfast at the 2003 General Assembly on “Church and Empire: Pitfalls and Priorities for the Presbyterian Church in a Time of Globalization.” [Ufford-Chase’s talk was published in *Network News*, Fall 2003, and in the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship newsletter, *Briefly*, Summer 2003. It is also on the Web at http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/03-may/empire_and_church.htm. – Ed.]

He spoke seriously and boldly to the discernment of God’s call to the church in our time and the monumental challenge to Christian discipleship and faithfulness today. Presbyterians, like most Americans, do not like to think of their country as empire; but I do not see how the evidence that the United States is an empire can honestly be denied. It is equally hard to deny that the values, priorities, policies, practices, and brutalities of empire contradict everything that Jesus taught and the lifestyles of authentic Christian spirituality and faithfulness.

Familiar as the story of the Geresene demoniac is, I had never really listened to it in the context of empire. Ufford-Chase’s insightful use of the story reminds us that the Roman Empire was the context within which the Christian narrative originated; and this dramatically heightens the relevance of the gospel accounts to the continuing story of God’s liberating work and word in the context of the present time.

Ufford-Chase shares firsthand witness to the destructive consequences for vulnerable people of the economic globalization backed by the military might of the empire. He offers the vision of a just, peaceful, secure economic order, where “a day’s wage will be enough to provide for the basic needs of one’s family, everywhere, period,” and “my lifestyle in the United States will be balanced and sane so that there can be no perception that my family’s well being has come at the expense of another family on the other side of the world.”

Ufford-Chase’s challenge to the Presbyterian Church “at the heart of the empire” is profound and extremely threatening. He asks what it would mean “to cast out the demon of empire backed by overwhelming military domination.” He answers his question with a challenge: “Get ready, for following Jesus down this path will call into question the foundation of everything that you and I, the children and the church of empire, have been taught to believe.”

Very specifically, it calls into question our assumptions about economics — and about the material standard of living that Americans prize and embrace in a world of degraded natural systems, still-relentless population growth, massive poverty, and gross inequality. “How we respond to economic empire building is going to be the defining moral challenge of our time.”

The church, he says, must stand for real economic security for all citizens of the world, and for non-violence in a time of terrorism. Yes. And this means more than simply espousing an ideal (enough for all). It means more than simply standing against the symptoms (terrorism, violence, and war) of that ideal’s remoteness from reality. We must do more to probe, expose, debate, and overcome the root causes of imperial globalization.

The causes are systemic. The empire with all its military might is in the service of the political-economic system. The system serves the privileged few, above all the gigantic corporations that determine the course of globalization,

Globalization as we have come to know it in the past decade or two constitutes a new stage in the centuries-long history of European-American political-economic expansion, the exploitation of vulnerable regions and vulnerable people backed by military force. To turn this trajectory around for the sake of justice, sufficiency for all, genuine security, and sustainability will be a herculean undertaking. It will indeed threaten deeply rooted assumptions about the good life in America, about Western technical and moral superiority, about progress and destiny.

We shall have to face the question of whether our task is to expunge the demon or make it behave, to dismantle the empire or somehow make it more humane, to replace the economic system with one based on a fundamentally different paradigm or keep on trying to reform capitalism.

The normative lifestyle will be frugal, cooperative, and community-based — simpler, in some ways harder, but more convivial, closer to the earth, meaningful, fulfilling, and sustainable.

Demonstrating in the streets against the World Trade Organization or NAFTA or the proposed Free Trade

Area of the Americas follows appropriately from our concern about the consequences of globalization. Are we demanding that these global agencies be improved and reformed, or rejecting their basic conceptual and moral validity as instruments of corporate power and domination? If we raise a voice of conscience and reason and even manage to have some influence in corporate board rooms, are we seeking to ameliorate harsh conditions here and there but losing sight of the need to break oppressive power?

Sufficiency in which all participate has to be the essential meaning of justice in our time. It means not only that people in poverty receive more, but also that middle class and rich people consume much less. The norm applies to all without exception. If we seriously intend a sustainable sufficiency for all the citizens of

the world, the American corporate command of the finite resources of the planet must be drastically cut down. U.S. production, import, and consumption of goods that exceed and violate the norm of sufficiency will have to be radically curtailed. The normative lifestyle will be frugal, cooperative, and community-based — simpler, in some ways harder, but more convivial, closer to the earth, meaningful, fulfilling, and sustainable.

The distinctive ethical norms for our time have the function of translating the abiding biblical norms of love, justice, peace, community, and humility into terms that speak directly to the momentous crisis to which the world has come. With many others, I see these four contemporary moral imperatives: material *sufficiency*; *participation* in decision making and in the common good of the community; ecological *sustainability*; and the *solidarity* of the human family within the whole community of life.

The question then becomes whether under the existing economic system it will be possible to achieve a sustainable sufficiency for all. This system in its basic, inherent features and the structures of power that maintain it have to be scrutinized and made obvious. If this reveals the necessity of its rejection and the creation of a radically new and different economy, then this becomes a task of peacemaking, to which the church is called to become relevant, and from which discipleship cannot escape.

I believe that honest scrutiny will show:

1. The existing system promotes and institutionalizes selfishness and greed. In theory and in practice economic decisions are to be based on “rationalized” self-interest, which does not take into account the common good. We should be able to see by now that justice will not be a by-product of selfishness.
2. Capitalism has to grow, to expand endlessly. Growth is not geared primarily to need but to market demand. The desperate needs of the poor are ineffective in the marketplace. Economic growth, however, depends upon unnecessary, wasteful, injurious over-consumption by a large minority, made possible by the exploitation of vulnerable people and the earth. It depends upon lifestyles beyond sufficiency for some, which cannot possibly be extended to all. Capitalism cannot accept a normative shift from affluence to sufficiency in the developed world, although it can tolerate impoverishment for most people in the two-thirds world.
3. The finite planet cannot tolerate endless economic expansion. The 21st century cannot be an extrapolation of the 20th, in which economic output multiplied 17 times, while the human population more than tripled. The economy is destroying the natural resource base of its own continuation, with devastating consequences for the future of human and other life.

4. Capitalism generates enormous concentrations of unaccountable corporate power, which place short-term profit and expansion through globalization ahead of long-term sustainability and justice. The corporations are at the core of a “ruling class,” which dominates government, the media, culture, and education, subverts democracy, and makes government incapable of restraining corporate greed and promoting the long-term general welfare. Great power always corrupts, and the powerful do not relinquish power voluntarily.

I do not believe that the demon of empire, globalization, and military supremacy can be tamed and made to behave. If we are serious about expunging it, we shall face and clarify the truth about the prevailing economic system and the political-economic-military power that maintains it. The long, arduous, dangerous way to a fundamentally different economy is far from clear. Certainly it will entail radical decentralization and democratization. It will depend upon persistent, courageous, non-violent organization and mobilization of democratic power. The first, essential step is to face, speak, and disseminate the truth. Then in God’s good time we may see how to proceed further. And in the meantime, do not discipleship and our own liberation from the demon require our participation in exposing the truth, as we search and pray for the next steps to take?

The Author:

William E. Gibson is Director Emeritus of the Eco-Justice Project, a program of the Center for Religion, Ethics and Social Policy in Ithaca, New York.

**Are you on our
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e-list?**

**Check on page 25
to learn more.**

The ^{PAX} AMERICANA in Latin America

by Witherspoon Issues Analyst Gene TeSelle

[posted on the Witherspoon website on 1-30-04]

Reflecting on the recent sentencing of fellow Nashvillian Don Beisswenger for his act of civil disobedience in protest against the School of the Americas (see. pp 9-10), Gene TeSelle ventured to summarize the significance of the “New American Empire” (which may not be so very new, really) in Latin American affairs. This new empire, he suggests, is part of the context within which SOA was created and which it serves.

In the Western Hemisphere an empire has been in the making since the Monroe Doctrine was enunciated in 1823. It was accelerated a decade ago by the Clinton-Gore administration, which advocated NAFTA; now the attempt is to make it hemispheric with the Free Trade Area of the Americas. We already know the results:

- oil and other resources continue to be extracted for the benefit of the industrialized countries;
- factories in the U.S. close, with jobs being exported to countries with few effect labor rights or environmental safeguards;
- landowners in Latin America devote increasingly more space to growing flowers, fruit, and vegetables for the export market, decreasing food supplies at home;
- cheap corn from the U.S. is shipped into Mexico, undercutting farm prices;
- farmers are driven off the land, requiring them to seek jobs in sweatshops in their own countries or come to the U.S., often as “undocumented workers”;
- governments are forced to privatize necessities like health care, education, and water, making them accessible only to those who can pay;
- corporations anywhere in the world

have freedom to bid on these and other services, with minimum accountability.

And that’s only the economic side of things.

The U.S. has always been concerned with the politics of Latin America, too, in the name of “U.S. interests.” Of course the most insistent “U.S. interests” are always the companies doing business in Latin American countries, and inevitably U.S. policy defends them and promotes their interests.

Direct intervention in Latin America is an old story. It became explicit in the early twentieth century, when several countries were occupied and controlled by the U.S. military for years or even decades. The Cold War gave an excuse for further, more subtle kinds of intervention. The U.S. sponsored coups in Guatemala, Brazil, and Chile, and established alliances with repressive governments all over Latin America. Anyone who sought justice could be accused of being a Communist or, more broadly, a “subversive.” Governments were condemned as dictatorships only when they were not solicitous about “U.S. interests.”

The School of the Americas for decades has trained military leaders from all countries in the Western Hemisphere except Cuba. Its purpose is to teach “counter-insurgency warfare” and “internal security,” which too often means nothing more than protecting governments against their own people. The means, which have been taught in the School of the Americas, include repression, torture, extra-judicial killings, and acts of terrorism calculated for maximum intimidation.

Policies of internal security, furthermore,

have not prevented the rise of armed “paramilitary” forces, usually in the employ of large landowners. The paramilitaries represent a “privatization” of the power to coerce. “Often they work in collusion with the military, doing the dirty work when the military needs to maintain appearances.

During the Cold War, when there was competition between the two super-powers, the U.S. had to compete with the Communist Bloc in promoting justice and reducing inequalities, not only abroad but in its own land (civil rights legislation was motivated in part by the need to look good to the rest of the world). Too often its programs of land reform and labor organizing were a cruel hoax. But there was at least the appearance of democracy and social concern, even when it was undercut by the same people who administered it.

With the end of the Cold War, the emphasis has shifted to the War on Terror (which has led to assaults on civil liberties even in the U.S.) and the War on Drugs, which is being made the excuse for counter-insurgency warfare in Colombia. And now that the U.S. has no competition on the world scene, the policy of the U.S. is governed with increasing shamelessness by the ideology of the free market—the untrammelled ability of the powerful to require the unpowerful to compete



We believe that no nation is responsible to itself alone, but the laws of political morality are universal, and that obedience to such laws is incumbent upon all nations who would sustain their own sovereignty and justify their sovereign relationship with other nations.

from the 1946 constitution of Japan (imposed, or at least sponsored, by the U.S. occupying forces)

against each other for small favors. The result is increased misery at home as well as abroad.

TeSelle adds this perspective on American empire:

Two sides of the interventionist picture, from George Kennan

George Kennan, scholar and advisor to presidents, expressed both sides of interventionism on the part of the U.S.

In his published writings, he said:

... a country which traces its political philosophy to the concept of the social compact has no business taking responsibility for people who have no place in that concept and who are supposed to appear on the scene in the role of subjects and not of citizens. Kings can have subjects; it is question whether a republic can. (George F. Kennan, *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950*, University of Chicago Press, 1951, pp. 17-18).

Confidentially, in his role of shaping policy for the State Department, what he said was rather different:

Furthermore, we have about 50% of the world's wealth but only 6.3% of its population. This disparity is particularly great as between ourselves and the peoples of Asia. In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationship which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security. To do so, we will have to dispense with all sentimentality and day-dreaming; and our attention will have to be concentrated everywhere on our immediate national objectives. We need not deceive ourselves that we can afford today the luxury of altruism and world-benefaction (Anna Kasten Nelson, *The State Department Policy Planning Staff Papers 1947-1949*, Garland, 1983, II:121-22).

Witherspooner Don Beisswenger arrested for trespassing at SOA

Retired minister is among 40 jailed during protest at Fort Benning

by Evan Silverstein, Presbyterian News Service

LOUISVILLE—November 26, 2003—A retired Presbyterian minister was among 40 demonstrators arrested during a Nov. 23 protest at a U.S. Army base in Georgia.

The Rev. Donald F. Beisswenger, 73, of Nashville, TN, was charged with trespassing after he crossed onto the property of Fort Benning in Columbus, GA, during an annual protest of a controversial U.S. Army facility that trains Latin American officers.

Beisswenger, a professor emeritus of church and community in the divinity school at Vanderbilt University, could be imprisoned for six months and fined \$5,000. His trial is scheduled for Jan. 26.

"I came down (to Fort Benning) with the understanding that I wanted to make a witness, and was willing to bear the consequences of that," Beisswenger said after being released from the Muscogee County Jail on a \$1,000 bond.

About 60 Presbyterians are believed to have taken part in the nonviolent protest, one of the largest gatherings in the 14-year history of the annual demonstrations demanding the closing of the combat school long known as the School of the Americas (SOA). It has been renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHISC).

The number of arrests was down by half from last year. The demonstrations are held to mark the anniversary of the Nov. 19, 1989, deaths of six Jesuit priests in El Salvador. Opponents of the school claim that some of the people responsible for the priests' killings had been trained at the Fort Benning institute, which in the past has offered instruction in practices such as extortion, execution and torture. The Department of Defense says the

curriculum no longer includes such training.

"I wanted to do it in solidarity with the people who have been victims for so long," Beisswenger said.

Police estimated the number of demonstrators at 7,500 to 8,000. School of the Americas Watch (SOAW), the group that organizes the protests, said about 10,000 people were involved. Last year, more than 6,000 people turned out and 88 were arrested.

Beisswenger said he was one of about 35 participants from the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship (PPF), which has long opposed WHISC. The protesters also included a number of students from Presbyterian-related Warren Wilson College in Asheville, NC.

Two Presbyterians arrested during the 2002 protest — Marilyn White, of suburban Houston, TX, and Ann Huntwork, of Portland, OR — served six-month prison sentences for trespassing and were released in October.

The Rev. Clifford W. Frasier, the United Church of Christ minister who is coordinator of Presbyterian Welcome, the New York City regional affiliate of That All May Freely Serve (TAMFS), also was arrested last year. He also got a six-month sentence. He was to be released on Nov. 25.

The *Ledger-Enquirer*, a Columbus (Georgia) newspaper, has reported that SOA Watch plans to sue Fort Benning officials for trying to "quell dissent" by playing patriotic music through speakers trained on the stage where demonstrators were speaking.

Brig. Gen. Benjamin Freakley, Fort Benning's commander, said the music



was played to boost the morale of those of his troops who were on duty instead of being at home with their families for Thanksgiving. He said the sound system was installed to ensure that would-be trespassers could hear authorities warning that they would be arrested if they came onto federal property.

The Rev. Leonard Bjorkman, of Owego, NY, a PPF co-moderator, said those who trespassed were “making a witness on behalf of justice in Central and South America, trying to live up to the highest ideals of American democracy ... (and) the highest of what Jesus talked about when he said, ‘Love your neighbor,’ and ... ‘Love your enemy.’”

The PPF is an affinity group of the PC(USA) that promotes peace and non-violence. It receives no funding from the Presbyterian Church (USA) but sometimes works with the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program.

The 1994 General Assembly called for the closing of WHISC.

Beisswinger taught at Vanderbilt from 1968 until his retirement in 1996. He also has served PC(USA) congregations in Arkansas, Ohio, Illinois and Iowa, and was involved in a Presbyterian business-and-industry ministry in Chicago. He is now a parish associate at Hillsboro Presbyterian Church in Nashville and a member of the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee.

He has taken part in the WHISC protests several times before, and once was banned from Fort Benning for five years.

The Army acknowledges that some graduates of the school – a few hundred, it says, out of more than 60,000 who have attended over more than 50 years – have been guilty of abuses. It says all WHISC students now receive instruction in human rights. And it claims that the institute is largely responsible for the spread of democracy in Latin America.

Statement to Judge Faircloth by the Rev. Don Beisswenger

January 26, 2004

Your Honor, thank you for this opportunity to address this Court.

I stand before you to state my plea. I carefully considered my action on Nov. 23rd. My actions were made possible, in part, by the death of my wife of 49 years on Dec. 7, 2002, which gave me freedom to act. My actions also resulted from my study and research into the political and economic dynamics of Latin America over the past 23 years. I started my study in earnest when I heard of the rape and murder of four missionaries in El Salvador. They, along with Archbishop Romero, challenged the 17 families who own most of the land and resented any ideas of land reform. Protecting their land led to security forces, [and] these became death squads. Upon further exploration, the relationship of those squads to military forces in these countries became evident. Finally it was revealed that the worst human rights abuses in many Central and South American nations were carried out by graduates of the SOA/WHISC.

Some years ago I began to witness in various ways, finally leading to crossing the line at Ft. Benning in 1999 and going around a concrete abutment last November. Some might say that my actions are a travesty for a Presbyterian Minister, and for an emeritus professor of Vanderbilt University. However I am a post Holocaust Christian who learned that Christian nations can too easily ignore brutality and atrocities done in their name. We must always seek to obey God rather than humans. My faith has also led me to be attentive to what I call a war against the poor. The shaping of policies which enrich the few and dishonor the poor, especially children, has become the tragedy of our time. The poor are losers in insurgency warfare carried out by the military forces in these nations. Those who seek land reform, speak up about sweat shops, or organize against violent acts of the military forces, are enemies and often victims. The SOA/WHISC must own up to its complicity [in the actions] of these graduates. Amnesty International has said “The US government should take immediate steps to establish an independent commission to investigate the past activities of the SOA and its graduates and to recommend appropriate reparations for any violations of human rights to which training at the SOA contributed, including criminal prosecution, redress for victims and their families and a public apology.” Should this kind of accountability be done, I could more easily, in the tradition of Martin Luther King and Ghandi, state my guilt. But we do not look carefully at what these graduates have done in our name nor our complicity in the terrorism. Yet I do honor the rule of law, law so easily transgressed by those in power. I honor the law, even with its many injustices. Thus I plead guilty, but reluctantly. I acknowledge that I trespassed onto the base at Ft. Benning, Ga. on Nov. 23. 2003, about 2:30PM. I also recognize that I did not abide by the ban and bar letter I was given in 1999.

This decision has been difficult since it is SOA/WHISC which has violated the norms of our nation by training these military leaders in Latin American countries, leaders who have been involved in so many atrocities. In my judgement, and many others’, the School of the Americas is guilty, and has a far greater guilt than my six steps around that concrete abutment. I stand before you, a 73 year old man who is guilty but proud to be able to make this witness.

Thank you, your honor.

How can we deal with our disputes and differences in the PC(USA)?

by Witherspoon Issues Analyst Gene TeSelle

One possibility, of course, is schism. Conservatives are talking about either leaving or finding some means of “gracious separation.” They are aware that they are only 15-30% of the vote at GA. The “broad middle” in the church is not likely to follow their intransigence, and even on the “ordination question” they will lose within a matter of years.

On the other hand, do we really want “gracious separation”? Congregations and individuals would be filled with conflict when they tried to decide which way to go. This sense of “being conflicted” would grow stronger the closer we got to actually implementing it.

Perhaps we can learn something from the Episcopalians, where a sizable majority of bishops voted in favor of recognizing Bishop Gene Robinson of New Hampshire. The conservatives in that church are talking about setting up an alternative network within the worldwide Anglican communion. This could lead to open schism within the Episcopal Church and between various national churches.

An alternative that has seriously been proposed is to form a network of conservative churches and dioceses, which would then affiliate with more conservative Anglican churches in Africa and in Southeast Asia. It would mean establishing “non-geographical” dioceses or entire communions, overlapping those that already exist.

The conservatives’ goal, we should add, is to get other Anglican bodies to declare that this network is the “authentic” Episcopal church in the U.S., enabling it to seize not only legitimacy but the legal name and the property of the church. But for the purpose of the present discussion, I want to leave this “replacement strategy” to one side and concentrate on the other part of it, the “non-geographical” approach.

A decade ago, it was liberals who were raising the possibility of non-geographical presbyteries willing to ordain GLBT persons even when most presbyteries would not. But it may in fact be the conservatives who take this proposal seriously. It’s what the Dutch church has done to “make a place” for conservatives in a church that permits GLBT ordination.

The PC(USA) abandoned the principle of geographical presbyteries in the early Nineties when it continued Dakota and Hanmi presbyteries, and since then it has approved at least one more Korean presbytery. It may be time to consider seriously whether the same thing might be done on theological as well as ethnic grounds.

When I raised the possibility of non-geographical presbyteries last December, I got people’s attention, and there were a number of thoughtful responses. One of them in particular got me reflecting further about possible courses of action.

Renee Guth of Tucson called attention to Lyle Schaller’s recent book, *From Geography to Affinity: How Congregations Can Learn From One Another*. His proposal was that congregations be allowed to choose their judicatory affiliations on the basis of affinity, not geography.

Some of her comments lead me to believe that she thinks of these not as presbyteries so much as voluntary associations with mutually agreed-upon purposes. In any case, she got me thinking further about various ways we might accommodate the diversity in our church.

To get a sense of the full range of possibilities, I have tried to sketch out several alternatives and add some editorial comments.

1. Non-geographical presbyteries are one possibility. They would certainly make people more comfortable, since they would be recognizably liberal or conservative. But that high comfort level is also a major reason to be suspicious about them. Since presbyteries control ordinations, installations, and the organizing of new churches, we would soon have what one minister in Middle Tennessee called “gated presbyteries.” This approach does not seem appropriate to the church’s mission to all sorts and conditions of people. At present, even those presbyteries that have a predominance of liberal or conservative votes are willing to receive ministers of the “other” persuasion, recognizing that congregations can be quite varied in their doctrinal perspectives and that their judgments in calling ministers ought to be respected.

2. A somewhat more realistic “non-geographical” approach would be to allow a kind of “extra-territoriality.” Members of a more liberal presbytery, for example, might labor within the bounds of a more conservative presbytery, being tolerated as “sojourners” in territory that is not their own. (Some of us remember the Sixties, when advocates of racial justice came into the South with authorization from the national offices in New York, raising some interesting jurisdictional disputes with bishops or presbyteries.) This seems to be more easily done with individual ministers than with congregations, but even the latter might be possible.

3. An even more realistic approach would be to reenact Chapter 9, which was removed from the Book of Order in 1989-90 (without adequate understanding, in my opinion, of the issues or the

consequences). If it were restored, we could once again give official recognition to “special organizations” (now usually called “affinity groups”), under clear provisions of accountability and transparency. A model for this might be found in the “validated mission organizations” that work with Global Ministries; in that connection we should note that the 2003 General Assembly, looking specifically at relations with these groups, adopted a policy statement entitled “Presbyterians Do Mission in Partnership”; its expectations are for mutuality, interdependence, respect, and transparency in all relationships. Another model might be the Roman Catholic religious orders — a comparison that was made explicitly by Matt Welde of Presbyterians United for Biblical Concerns several decades ago.

4. A quite different approach, although it would require a change in the Book of Order and might be contested on all sides, has been suggested from time to time: acknowledgment of the legitimacy of “conscientious objection” (advocated especially by progressives who would like the church to change faster) and/or “conscientious abstention” (advocated especially by conservatives who would like to retain some older practices).

In the Kenyon decision of 1975, the Permanent Judicial Commission denied ordination to a man who said he could not participate in the ordination of a woman, on the grounds that one can *advocate* changes in the constitution but must *obey* it in the meantime. The session of Bethany Collegiate Presbyterian Church recently proposed that the Presbytery of Philadelphia send an overture to the General Assembly, asking it to apologize to ministers who were removed because of their position on women’s ordination, since it has not enforced constitutional standards against those who, in the session’s view, are openly disobeying G-6.0106b (*Layman Online*, January 7, 2004).

If conservatives want “conscientious abstention,” progressives want some kind of “conscientious objection,” ordaining GLBT persons even when it is not the general practice of the church. Are there ways this could be done within our representative approach to church government? If so, we would need to resolve the ongoing tension between “God alone is Lord of the conscience” (C-6.109, G-1.0301) and the principle that “a majority shall govern” (G-1.0400), which has been interpreted to mean that those who cannot, in conscience, obey the majority have only the option of taking their conscience outside the church.

5. Most satisfactory is what I call the “open-textured” governing body, with mutual forbearance, understanding, and even affirmation. In some cases presbyteries already have a “be nice” ethos that encourages this. Witherspooner Jake Young has reminded us that in many presbyteries there is a “kitchen cabinet,” sometimes even an official “advisory body,” that tries to use its collective wisdom to warn against some courses of action and seek constructive policies. And we have all seen the way people who habitually oppose each other on the floor of presbytery work together for the unity of the presbytery and the healthy functioning of congregations. There are presbyteries in which the various factions agree on procedural rules of encounter, perhaps even on their range of toleration on substantive issues. However

this is done, it requires a cycle of mutual agreement and renegotiation. It might work.

When conflict rages and schism is threatened, we often say that “we are family.” This suggests basic unity and mutual loyalty, even when we do not like each other very much or have to tiptoe around each other at family gatherings, especially on issues of politics, sex, money, and religion. Does that sound like our church family?

Barbara Wheeler has championed the alternative imagery of strangers and sojourners. William Sloane Coffin in his new book *Credo* has suggested something similar: “. . . in joining a church you leave home and home town to join a larger world. . . . By joining a church you declare your individuality in the most radical way in order to affirm community on the widest possible scale” (142-43). Or again, “Church is where all hearts are one so that nothing else has to be one” (149).

Which reminds me that Origen in the early church had a fruitful misinterpretation of Rom. 9:19 = Deut. 32:21 (it’s in his Romans commentary, VIII,vi,6, for those who care to look it up). The church, he said, is made up of those who are “not a people,” aliens from Israel and its promises. In his century becoming a Christian also meant becoming an alien from one’s own people. In contrast to all the nations, it continues to be a “non-people,” never an ethnic group, perhaps more like the city with its diverse population of citizens and sojourners. Origen then threw his point away by calling Christians “a nation of all the nations.” That might be appropriate in describing the end point of the process. But in the meantime we would do well to think in terms of the church as a “non-people,” in which we all need to find better ways of relating to each other.



To receive regular e-mail notes of additions to the Witherspoon website, just send a note to

douging2@aol.com

Please put “web updates” in the subject line.

Looking toward the 216th General Assembly

Three candidates nominated for Moderator of 216th General Assembly

Rick Ufford-Chase was endorsed unanimously by the Presbytery de Cristo at its meeting on January 23, 2004, as a candidate for Moderator.

He is the co-founder and co-director of BorderLinks, a binational organization that provides experiential education on issues such as trade and globalization and the concerns of migrants on the border. Rick is sponsored in that work as a Mission Co-Worker in the Worldwide Ministries division of the Presbyterian Church (USA). He is also a co-moderator of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship.

His address to the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship at the 215th GA was published in the Fall 2003 issue of *Network News*, and is posted at http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/moment_to_decide.htm. It was entitled "Empire and Church: Pitfalls and Priorities for the Presbyterian Church in a time of Globalization."

His candidacy is represented on the web at www.rickuffordchase.com.

The Rev. K.C. Ptomey Jr., pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Nashville, has been endorsed by the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee as a candidate for moderator.

In nominating him, Rita Hood, Westminster's clerk of session, said, "This call has come at a time when K.C. can be a reconciler and peacemaker for our great Presbyterian Church. I urge you to confirm this resolution and pledge your prayers and support for K.C. and for the session and congregation of Westminster as we look toward this wonderful opportunity to share K.C. with the whole of the Presbyterian Church (USA)."

He is a member of the Board of the Covenant Network.

The Rev. David Garth McKechnie, pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church in Houston, TX, was the first person to be endorsed as a candidate for moderator.

The Presbytery of New Covenant voted unanimously to endorse his candidacy on Aug. 23. His presenter, the Rev. Gerald Hurst, pastor of Southminster Presbyterian Church in Missouri City, TX, called McKechnie "one who will work with both sides of the aisle toward the peace, unity and purity of the church ... (and) the healing and reconciliation of the church."

McKechnie became the pastor of 4,300-member Grace Church in Houston, a Confessing Church Movement congregation, in 1981.

Thanks to Presbyterian News Service for material in this report.



**Witherspoon events
planned for the 216th
General Assembly,
June 26 - July 3, 2004
Richmond, Virginia**

Friday afternoon, June 25

The Semper Reformanda Pre-Assembly Conversation will look at the document, "Living Faithfully with Families in Transition." A panel discussion will include invited guests: Barbara Gaddis (Chair of the GA Task Force), Gloria Albrecht (resource person to the Task Force), Charles Wiley (Staff from the Office of Theology and Worship), Jennifer Stone (Witherspoon board member and therapist).

Friday evening, June 25

Commissioner briefing, following Covenant Network dinner.

Sunday noon, June 27

Annual Witherspoon Awards Luncheon

Featured speaker: Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon, Annie Scales Rogers Professor of Christian Ethics at Union/PSCE.

Also: presentation of awards, and annual meeting.

Tuesday evening, June 29

Witherspoon Party and Dance!

Tickets can be ordered from the G.A. Ticket Service once the GA registration packets are available.

Some overtures to watch

by Doug King

As always, this year's General Assembly will deal with all sorts of business, but much of it will be shaped by the overtures now making their way to the Assembly.

Again this year a variety of overtures will offer different ways of dealing with "Amendment B," now lodged in our Book of Order as G-6.0106b, purporting to ban the ordination of anyone who persists in committing any of the multitudinous "sins" mentioned in our Book of Confessions.

Perhaps **the most comprehensive of the overtures** comes from the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area, and has received concurrence from the Presbytery of Hudson River. It would delete G-6.0106b from the Book of Order, and would add a sentence to G-6.0106a asserting that determinations of suitability for ordination should be made "by the governing body where the examination for ordination or installation takes place." It would also remove the existing Authoritative Interpretations that have been used to ban ordination of LGBT people.

The Presbytery of Baltimore (04-4) is offering a simpler overture, proposing the **deletion of 6.0106b** without dealing with the Authoritative Interpretations. The Presbyteries of Southern New England, Genesee Valley, and Des Moines have concurred with Baltimore's overture.

The Presbytery of the Western Reserve is sending an overture (04-18) calling for the **elimination of the Authoritative Interpretations** without dealing with 6.0106b. That would apparently have the advantage of making possible an action by the General Assembly which would not have to be ratified in the presbyteries. The Presbytery of Detroit is offering a similar overture, reflecting its affirmation that "within our denomination, people of good character and principle differ in their understanding of human sexuality, and in those differences we are called to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other."

Another - and different - overture is coming from the Presbytery of Western New York. It was actually approved by the presbytery in May, 2003, thereby earning the designation of "04-1."

This overture takes a new approach to the ban on ordination of LGBT people, by **affirming "a covenanted relationship between two persons** where a lifetime commitment is intended" as satisfying the demands for legitimate relationships as well as "marriage between a man and a woman." This is the first pro-LGBT overture from Western New York, and seems to reflect a way of dealing with G-6.0106b that may be more acceptable in some "moderate" presbyteries.

Reports (and in some cases the full texts) of these overtures can be found at http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/03-may/overtures_on_b.htm

There are important overtures dealing with other matters, too.

The Presbytery of Hudson River is sending an overture "**On Examining the Conscience of Candidates,**" which would provide guidance to ordaining bodies on what are and are not appropriate matters on which candidates for ordination may be examined, and how the freedom of Christian conscience is to be respected. According to the Rev. Dr. Chris Iosso, former Witherspoon Issues Analyst and head of the Faith and Order Committee and the Third Way Project of the Presbytery, "the Presbytery considers itself a welcoming presbytery, with a diversity of theological stances and ministry styles." It has proposed this overture out of an awareness of "controversies in other presbyteries that 'narrow the gate' for ministers, as well as a desire to affirm a diversity of perspectives on individual sessions and boards of deacons. It follows up the Presbytery's concern for the use of the Confession of 1967 and the whole Book of Confessions."

The Presbytery of Lackawanna has approved an overture which would call on the church, the government, and individuals to work toward **stabilizing and then reducing the global population,** as a vital means of stewardship of God's creation.

Washington Presbytery considered and then rejected (by 26 in favor to 76 opposed) **an overture to implement "gracious separation"** in the Presbyterian Church. It may, however, come again from some other source. The proposal for "gracious separation" was largely authored by attorney Bob Howard, a former chair and still a member of the Board of the Presbyterian Lay Committee. His proposal essentially called on conservatives and evangelicals to split from the PC(USA) and form a separate church. The proposal was one of the major points of discussion - and disagreement - during the October 2003 national conference of the Presbyterian Coalition.

Bethany Collegiate Church, in Havertown, PA, is proposing an overture to the Presbytery of Philadelphia which would **require the Stated Clerk to apologize to ministers removed for refusing to ordain women.** The rationale, of course, is the claim of many in the "Confessing Churches" movement that ministers are violating G-6.0106(b) without being sanctioned for their actions, so those who have refused to ordain women should be allowed the same freedom.

For details of these and other overtures dealing with matters other than sexuality and ordination, you can go to http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/2004/other_overtures.htm

It may not be too late for your presbytery to act to concur with some of these overtures. It will allow your presbytery to send an overture advocate to the Assembly, thereby adding your voice to others in support of a more progressive Presbyterian Church.

For continuing updates on the Assembly, we encourage you to keep checking at http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/2004_ga.htm

Stated Clerk's 'Top Ten' Assembly issues

Mission plan, family paper, sexuality overtures top agenda

by the Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick, Stated Clerk, General Assembly

LOUISVILLE — February 19, 2004 — **PNS Editor's note:** *Every winter, Kirkpatrick shares his predictions about which issues will spark the most interest during the upcoming General Assembly. The 216th Assembly convenes on June 26 in Richmond, VA. Kirkpatrick presented his "Top 10" list to the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly during a recent meeting.*

1. General Assembly Council's Mission Work Plan — The GAC will bring to the Assembly a major proposal to prioritize its mission programs into four areas: evangelism, justice, leadership and spiritual formation.

2. Final Report on Middle Governing Body Relations — At the conclusion of 115 consultations over three years with synods and presbyteries, the GAC and the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly will be bringing a joint report on how to strengthen partnership between our governing bodies.

3. Reviews — Review committees have completed their studies of the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program and National Council of Churches and will bring to the Assembly positive reports on those two bodies.

4. Transforming Families paper — The 215th General Assembly (2003) referred the paper now entitled "Transforming Families" back to the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) with a concern that there be stronger affirmations of the theological values of traditional patterns of family life. The revised report will be a major item before the 216th General Assembly.

5. Overtures on G-6.0106b — As in prior years, overtures to remove G-6.0106b from the Book of Order will be before the 216th General Assembly. This Assembly also will deal with additional overtures to remove all authoritative interpretations concerning homosexuality and ordination issued prior to the adoption of G-6.0106b in 1996.

6. Elections — As always, much attention will be given to the election of a moderator. In addition, this is the year for the election of a Stated Clerk and for the confirmation of the presidents of the Presbyterian Church (USA) Foundation and the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program.

7. Evangelism and Jewish-Christian Relations — Growing out of the new "messianic" congregation in Philadelphia Presbytery, Avodat Yisrael, a number of overtures are currently before presbyteries calling for a study and reevaluation of policies related to Jewish-Christian relations and evangelism.

8. Constitutional Amendments on Sexual Misconduct — Growing out of the work of the Independent Committee of Inquiry (into previous sexual abuse of missionary children in the Congo), the General Assembly Council will be bringing to the Assembly proposed constitutional amendments to prevent sexual misconduct by church workers and to protect children.

9. Overtures Relating to Abortion — Overtures have been received to modify the actions taken by the last two General Assemblies related to late-term abortions.

10. Issues Related to a Post-9/11 World — Both ACSWP and the General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations will be bringing proposals to the Assembly related to advocacy for justice in relation to peacemaking, immigration, response to terrorism, and Iraq.

Peacemaking Conference expands to embrace justice concerns

Hunger, environment, economic justice added to slate

by Jerry L. Van Marter,
Presbyterian News Service

LOUISVILLE — January 16, 2004 — Alleviation of hunger, environmental concerns and economic justice issues will be added to the mix of issues to be explored at this year's erstwhile Presbyterian Peacemaking Conference.

The 2004 Presbyterian Peace and Justice Conference will take place Aug. 3-7 on the campus of Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, WA.

The intergenerational conference is co-sponsored by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, the Presbyterian Hunger Program, the Environmental Justice Program and the Self-Development of People Program.

Questions posed in advance publicity for the conference include:

- What are our roles as Christ's disciples in a time of global poverty, environmental degradation, and warfare?
- Are there enough resources to fill every person's basic needs on a thriving earth?
- Is it possible to seek justice and peace for all people in our global economy?
- How does our faith impact our choices as consumers and residents of this earth?

Stated goals of the conference

—Continued on page 17

On the ministry of Parker Williamson

Gene TeSelle, as Issues Analyst of the Witherspoon Society, offers this perspective on the presbytery action to withdraw the validation of the ministry of Parker Williamson

[posted on the Witherspoon website on 2-3-04]

On January 31, validation of the ministry of the Rev. Parker Williamson was revoked by his own presbytery, the Presbytery of Western North Carolina.

The situation, as we know, has been building for several months. The story about the recommendation of the presbytery's Committee on Ministry has been told by the *Outlook*, the Presbyterian News Service, PresbyWeb, and the Lay Committee's own web site.

Witherspoon and other organizations that have been the target of Mr. Williamson's attacks in the past have not made any comments on the COM's recommendations, knowing that we might be depicted as part of a witch hunt by progressives in the church. In fact, a Baltimore group related to That All May Freely Serve took a public position in favor of continuing Mr. Williamson's validated ministry.

This has not been an organized attack directed by outside interests. It is an action by his own presbytery. We would note that we have often taken the position, in relation to questions about GLBT ordination and making judgments about the "essentials of the Reformed faith," that the members of the presbytery, those who actually know the person, are in the best position to decide about ordination, installation, and status in the presbytery.

As Marcia Casais pointed out some weeks ago, a revocation of Mr. Williamson's validated ministry "would not be the end of the world." He has not been removed from the ministry. On the contrary, he maintains his voting membership in his presbytery.

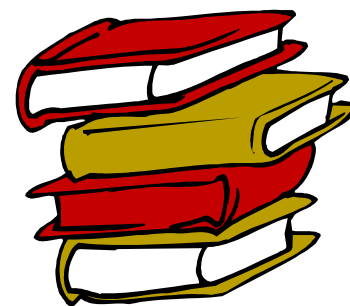
The question was whether his activities as CEO of the Presbyterian Lay Committee and editor in chief of its publications should be acknowledged as a validated ministry. Many people in the PC(USA) have been concerned about the half-truths and personal attacks that have become the trademark of the *Presbyterian Layman*. They have been even more dismayed at his characterization of a recent General Assembly as "an apostate Assembly" and his open advocacy of boycotting the budget of the General Assembly and withholding per capita assessments. He has asserted that other Presbyterians teach a "false gospel," claiming (like J. Gresham Machen) that we are "two faiths within one denomination."

Mr. Williamson's supporters have depicted him as a persecuted prophet. There are many in the church, however, who have characterized his strategy as one of "saving the church by destroying it." John Sniffen, in a recent editorial in the *Presbyterian Outlook*, suggested that Mr. Williamson has been carrying on a "ministry of fear."

The Book of Order holds each presbytery responsible for the actions of its members. It states the criteria by which ministries are to be validated (G-11.0402, G-11.0410, G-1.0411). And it declares that "the ministry shall be carried on in accountability for its character and conduct to the presbytery and to organizations, agencies, and institutions" (G-1.0403d).

Occasionally we have heard suggestions that Mr. Williamson's presbytery be called upon publicly to examine his activities in the light of these provisions. No call of that sort has been issued. Instead, the Presbytery of Western North Carolina, on its own initiative, has carried out its responsibilities under these provisions of the Book of Order. And it is an action, we should note, that was taken by a conservative presbytery, one that voted in favor of Amendment B (G-6.0106b) by a two-to-one majority.

If you want to look more deeply into the complex story of the *Layman* and its sponsors, you might check *A Moment to Decide*, a study of The Presbyterian Lay Committee and other groups on the Presbyterian Right, by Lew Daly. You can find on this book, and order it, at http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/moment_to_decide.htm



An easy way to order books

If you find books mentioned here or elsewhere that you want to get for yourself, try going to the Witherspoon website, to <http://www.witherspoon.society.org/books.htm>

From there you can search for what you want and order it – usually at a discount! – from Amazon.com. And Witherspoon will get a little percentage of the price of each book you order. So help yourself and help us all at the same time!

And when you see books mentioned on our website, you'll usually find a link to order them directly.

“A Polity Moment”

A stated clerk offers helpful information on the matter of the validation of ministries

From the Rev. Ray Kersting, Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Santa Fe, and former member of the Witherspoon Society executive committee

The Book of Order (G-11.0403) indicates that each presbytery shall have written criteria to guide the presbytery in determining whether a ministry is to be validated (and notice, it is the “ministry” not the “minister” who is validated). These written criteria are to be based upon the five standards which follow later in that same section of the Book of Order. The written criteria determine how the five standards will be applied in any given situation in making a judgment on whether a ministry is to be validated.

In order to be validated, a ministry must fulfill all five of the standards. More often than not, I suspect, where “ministries” beyond the jurisdiction of the church generate a lot of conversation in sections ‘c’ and ‘d.’

Section “c” indicates that to be validated a ministry ordinarily would require a Master of Divinity and completion of the requirements for ordination. Quite often clergy find employment or work at

Cont. from “Peacemaking,” page 15

are to help “inform and inspire reverence for God”’s sacred creation, passion for environmental and economic justice, commitment to sustainable communities and lifestyles and peacemaking in human communities and throughout God’s world.”

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something which could be done just as well by a lay person as a minister. An M.Div., however, is probably not required – it might be nice, but it is not required.

Section “d” raises the issues of accountability. It says, “The ministry shall be carried on in accountability for its character and conduct to the presbytery and to organizations, agencies, and institutions.” Is what a person is doing accountable to the presbytery in any way? Or to an agency, organization or institution? The written criteria of a presbytery may help define exactly what is meant here and what kind of agencies or organizations qualify.

A presbytery has the responsibility to assign the status of “member-at-large” to a minister whose position does not meet all five of the standards. The person still has voice and vote in the presbytery. Some presbyteries go further and say that if the minister who is member-at-large does not move to a validated ministry in two or maybe three years, the person will be moved to the status of inactive.

It is worth noting that the Book of Order (G-11.0406b) says that a member-at-large “shall be encouraged to become a parish associate in a congregation.”

And there is yet another step in this whole process. The Book of Order (G-11.0502) lists as the very first responsibility of a Committee on Ministry, to “visit regularly and consult with each minister of the presbytery. It shall report to the presbytery annually the type of work in which each minister of the presbytery is engaged. It shall require an annual report from every minister performing work which is not under the jurisdiction of the presbytery or a higher governing body of the church.”

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McCarthyism among the Presbyterians: Some Hard Questions for Parker Williamson

Paul E. Capetz

Dr. Capetz is Associate Professor of Historical Theology at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, in New Brighton, Minnesota. A graduate of U.C.L.A., Yale Divinity School (M.Div.), and the University of Chicago Divinity School (Ph.D.), he was ordained by Chicago Presbytery in 1991 and succeeded John Leith in the Reformed Theology Chair at Union Seminary (VA). He is the author of *Christian Faith as Religion: A Study in the Theologies of Calvin and Schleiermacher*, and more recently has published *A Short History of God*, which is reviewed briefly on page 24. Dr. Capetz, a gay man, voluntarily laid aside his ordination in 2000.

Karl Barth reports that Ulrich Zwingli, the first father of the Reformed tradition before Calvin, challenged the Zurich city council with these words: "For God's sake, do something brave!"¹ It was truly an act of bravery when, on January 31st of this year, the Presbytery of Western North Carolina voted not to validate the ministry of Parker Williamson, chief executive officer of the Presbyterian Lay Committee and editor-in-chief of the *Layman*. For decades now, Williamson has set himself up as the true champion of the authentic Reformed tradition, calling those who disagree with him "heretics." And he has been able to bully many people in the church into fear with his rhetoric. But there is no substance behind the rhetoric. It is, in fact, the sort of manipulation of traditional symbolism that allowed Senator Joseph McCarthy to frighten millions of Americans into believing our nation was in imminent danger of being taken over by Communists. But when McCarthy's bluff was finally called, it was too late to repair all the damage that had been done in the meantime under the banner of patriotism: lives were destroyed, careers were ruined, friendships were betrayed, and the nation as a whole was embittered. Webster's Dictionary defines "McCarthyism" as "the use of unsubstantiated accusations or unfair investigative techniques in an attempt to expose disloyalty or subversion." This is exactly what Williamson and his minions have been up to and it was a courageous act for his presbytery to call his bluff!

One of the Constitutional Questions asked of persons about to be ordained to

the ministry is: "Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry...?" (G-14.0207e). Has Williamson been a friend to his fellow presbyters? Or has he chosen, instead, to demonize those of his colleagues who disagree with his interpretation of the Reformed tradition? Clearly the latter is, in fact, the case. The root problem is that Williamson and his "Lay Committee" have claimed for their own positions the backing of both biblical and confessional authority, without acknowledging in the slightest degree that others could see themselves equally as beholden to these authoritative sources all the while coming to a different interpretation of their meaning. Furthermore, Williamson and his newspaper have repeatedly distorted what others, myself included, have said or written. I am reported to have said that "the atoning death of Jesus Christ is an outdated doctrine" (report by John H. Adams, November 11, 2002; if anyone is really interested in reading what I actually said, my address is posted on the internet by the Covenant Network, at <http://www.covenantnetwork.org/capetz.html>).

Also, the facts of my career have been distorted: "At one time, Capetz was considered to become the successor to evangelical titan John H. Leith at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Va. But he was not chosen because of his commitment to a homosexual lifestyle." The truth is that I was appointed to fill Leith's position and I served for one year at Union teaching Reformed theology. These examples can easily be multiplied, but these two suffice to underscore the point that

Williamson and company are not interested in the truth. They are only interested in discrediting those whom they



Paul Capetz

see as enemies. And they are willing to resort to lies and distortion of the facts to make their case!

Since Parker Williamson has allowed lies about me to be printed in his newspaper, I am going to relate a true story about the one and only time I ever met him in person. It was during my year in Richmond and I was invited by the seminary's president at the time, Hartley Hall, to have dinner with Williamson and his wife. I found both of them to be very pleasant people, and he certainly did not come across as the mean-spirited person his irresponsible brand of journalism had led me to expect. But then, after dinner and the usual small talk at such gatherings, we entered into a theological discussion. I wanted to understand why he took the particular view of confessional authority he did and so I asked him to explain how he interpreted a passage in the "Second Helvetic Confession" (5.111) where Heinrich Bullinger speaks of the potential conflict between what historical scholars have come to call "the material principle" (faith alone) and "the formal principle" (scripture alone) of the Reformation. There it is admitted that if any portion of scripture is found to teach a doctrine contrary to the Reformers' doctrine of justification by faith alone, then that portion of scripture is to be deemed non-canonical. This is what Luther had argued about the Letter of James since he couldn't reconcile its teaching about justification with that which he found in Paul's letters. This example demonstrates that the original leaders of the Protestant Reformation were neither biblicists nor fundamentalists. But Williamson had never heard of the distinction to which I referred, and, consequently, he did not grasp the significance



of this passage in our *Book of Confessions*. It was at that moment that I realized just how ignorant he really is, not at all well versed in the theological tradition he claims to defend. Indeed, I don't think he could pass an examination on Reformed theology in one of my seminary classes. Of course, ignorance in and of itself is not a sin, unless it is accompanied by an unwillingness to be instructed!

In order to call his bluff, it is necessary to challenge Williamson to answer some hard questions. I don't think he really does affirm some of the cardinal assumptions about what it means to carry on the Reformed tradition as this is understood in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). So here are my questions to him:

1. Does he sincerely affirm the pluralistic character of *The Book of Confessions* which entails that there are statements in this compendium which cannot be harmonized? To take just one example: ecclesiastical offices denied to women in the "Second Helvetic Confession" (5.191) are affirmed as belonging to women in the "Brief Statement of Faith" (10.4). How does Williamson resolve this obvious contradiction? If he affirms what the "Brief Statement" teaches, then he is compelled to admit that our confessional statements can be relativized or superseded, even if they are not actually removed from our *The Book of Confessions*. The best analogy here is with the Jewish purity codes in the Pentateuch; clearly, as we see from Paul's letters to the Galatians and the Romans, Christians are not expected to observe these distinctive hallmarks of Jewish identity, even though Christians did not remove those portions of the Old Testament from our biblical canon.
2. Does Williamson really affirm the ordination of women? And if he does, how does he square this innovation in our practice of ordination with the view of biblical authority he represents? This is an important question since those who advocate for the ordination of gay people today are making a similar hermeneutical move with respect to the Bible that the church has already
3. Does Williamson truly affirm the validity of the historical-critical method of studying the scriptures, as we find it unambiguously affirmed in the "Confession of 1967" (9.29) and which is taught in every Presbyterian seminary in this country? And if so, what implications for traditional Reformed doctrines does he see this method to imply? Surely the understanding of the Bible resulting from such historical-critical study is very different from that held by Calvin and the original Protestant Reformers. Does such study obligate us in any way to test whether our doctrinal heritage requires revision in the light of a new understanding of scripture?

endorsed in the case of women as leaders of the church.

We who have been demonized and vilified by Williamson and his followers deserve public answers to these questions before he causes yet more damage to the church. I would welcome his printed answers to these questions in a forthcoming issue of the Witherspoon Society's *Network News*.

Another question that we on the other side may have to answer is this: why has Williamson been so effective in taking the denomination captive with his rhetoric about the Reformed tradition, even though it so obviously lacks substance? Could it be that we as a church have not sufficiently attended to the theological tradition of our church? Is there something that we on the other side of this controversy can learn—in all humility and self-criticism—about the state of theological education at all levels of our church today? Are our seminarians and ministers steeped in the classical and modern resources of the Reformed tradition? Do ministers regularly instruct their elders and deacons as well as those preparing for confirmation in the teaching of the *The Book of Confessions*? Instead of vilifying and demonizing Williamson as he has done to others, perhaps our best response to the present crisis may be a return on our part to the sources of our tradition in order that it will no longer be possible for such a McCarthyism to grab hold of the allegiance of so many Presbyterians.

"For God's sake, do something brave." We have to stand up for the integrity of our church's tradition in the face of the bullying and name-calling which has dominated so much of our recent history. But we also have to be educated. "For God's sake, be intelligent." So whatever becomes of Williamson, the rest of us need to do some homework in order to make sure that false prophets may no longer deceive us. We have a wonderful theological tradition; let us not ignore it, for then others not steeped in it will be more than eager to manipulate its symbolism to the damage of the church. It's time to reclaim this tradition and put it to good use. Let us learn from this crisis and move forward in the authentic reforming spirit of our tradition.

Footnote

¹ Karl Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 77.

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Theological musings

A regular column by Dr. Douglas F. Ottati, Professor of Theology, Union Seminary/PSCE (and Witherspoon's first correspondent in space)

The News from Mars

As I write, this is the latest from the red planet. The Mars rover, Opportunity, has landed and begun transmitting pictures and other information. NASA has restored contact with its twin, Spirit, and an orbiter belonging to the European Union has found strong evidence of ice near the south pole.

Ice? On Mars? The news may not rock your worldview, but it's enough to make us think again about some implications of modern cosmologies. For one thing, where there's ice, there's water. And, where there's water . . .

Earlier Christians often envisioned themselves at the center of a comparatively cozy cosmos. Consider the ancient, three-layered picture: heaven above, earth in the middle, and hell below. Over the centuries, however, scientific theories and findings have contributed to a drastically different outlook. The Copernican, heliocentric theory of the universe displaced Earth and human beings from the center of the planetary system – a sufficiently disturbing prospect to have contributed to Galileo's later troubles with the church. What's more, our displacement seems only to have been radicalized by the stunning expansion in our picture of the cosmos courtesy of calculations concerning its expansion from a big bang, as well as findings by means of telescopes, satellites, space travel, and space probes. The distances are staggering, and the cosmos that we envision today no longer seems cozy so much as unimaginably vast.

There is also the matter of time. Our forebears may have found it plausible to figure the age of the Earth in handfuls of thousands of years. But today, our calculations need to take into account evolutionary biology and geology, not to mention theories and findings concerning the origins of matter, stars, and planets. One result is that we now speak of years in the billions. To help us picture this, my geologist friend, George Fisher, suggests that we convert the history of the cosmos and planet Earth into a more familiar distance. Suppose that we "locate" the big bang on a South Pacific Island near the eastern coast of Australia, and then travel toward Virginia. Human history would begin only a few yards away from where I am now sitting in Richmond.

Some interesting theological questions emerge in light of the vast expansion of our picture of the cosmos. For one thing, on the ancient three-layered picture, heaven and hell could be thought of as literal places or spaces, one above the clouds, the other below ground. But today, cosmologically speaking, we no longer seem able to say which way is up. Small wonder that the theologian, Hans Kung, says "the naïve anthropomorphic notion of a heaven

above the clouds is now impossible for us." So, how shall we think of it? Says Kung, "the heaven of faith is not a place but a mode of being" together with the infinite God who cannot be located in space or limited by time.¹

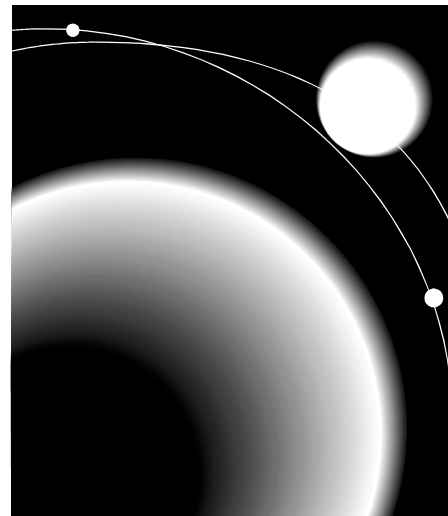
There is another, even more fundamental question. Suppose we assume

(as I expect we must) that the great God of glory is Lord of the entire cosmos. Thus the space that God orders and brings into being is the vast cosmic space of stars and planetary systems and galaxies and nebula. The time that God governs is the immense history of cosmos. Does it then make sense to insist that we humans, who inhabit a small planet in an obscure corner of a galaxy, are the crown of creation? Does it make sense to maintain that human beings and their fate comprise God's chief end?

The case against seems rather strong, and it is partly a matter of proportion. All the world may be a stage, but isn't God's cosmos, as we have now come to know it, a rather outsized stage for the drama of human life and history? On a stage so vast, might there not be other dramas, realities, and developments of equal or even greater importance that have taken place, are taking place, or have yet to take place? Again, aren't we saying that the cosmos and even planet Earth were around for billions of years before human beings appeared on the scene? Aren't we also saying that different species have emerged on Earth, survived and/or flourished, and then gone extinct? Isn't it possible or perhaps even likely that the human species also will come to an end well before the cosmos does?

Maybe so. Yet there has been at least one way that even the modern portrait of a vast cosmos allowed us to place ourselves at the center. "Yes," we might say, "the cosmos is indeed vast. But it appears to be mostly cold, dark, and inhospitable. When it comes to life and, most especially, to the conscious and comparatively intelligent life of our own species, we simply have no evidence that there is anything like it anywhere else. Moreover, precisely because we are intelligent, we are able to appreciate God's cosmos as no other creature can. We seem fashioned to appreciate it, and it seems fashioned to be appreciated by us. Indeed, the recent explorations of Mars seem a rather good example of our distinctive capacity for appreciation."

But this is where the evidence for ice comes in. Even in face of a vast and mysterious cosmos, it has seemed possible to maintain that Earth is the only known biosphere and also the only location of what we sometimes call "intelligent life." But where there's ice, there's water, and where there's water . . . there may indeed be a



biosphere. Of course, this need not mean that Mars either has or does support life in anything like the variety and developed forms present on Earth. But remember that, in cosmic terms anyway, Mars is incredibly near by. So, if there is another biosphere in our immediate neighborhood, might there be many others scattered near and far? And, if there are many others, is it possible or even somewhat likely that at least some have, do, or will support life in something like the variety and complexity that Earth does? But if this is true, then, the cosmos is not simply cold, dark, and inhospitable. If this is true, then, when it comes to life and perhaps even appropriately appreciative intelligent life, it's not all and only about us.

This can be an unsettling thought. We seem chronically to assume that we are at the center of things, and our assumption seems partly due to our finite perceptual equipment. (Stand up, open your eyes, turn around in a circle, and you will be at the center of all you see.) In addition, more than a few theologians have tended to picture "the world as the theatre of human history."² And, of course, one might read the biblical narrative as ineluctably human-centered. Within days of creating light, God makes humans. With the appearance of Adam and Eve, history becomes the story of human salvation, and humans are present on Earth right up to the apocalypse.

But there is another theological vision worth considering. John Calvin claimed that the world is the magnificent theatre, not of human history, but of God's glory. Indeed, said Calvin, "wherever you cast your eyes, there is no spot in the universe wherein you

cannot discern at least some sparks of his glory."³ Jonathan Edwards claimed, in rather typical Calvinist fashion but also in a distinctly creative fashion for a Calvinist, that God's chief end in creating the world is God's own glory, and that genuine piety hinges on a sense for the divine excellence. Both men thought that we are equipped to appreciate a world that is *not* centered on us. Both believed that the Bible supported them on this point. And, even if it no longer seems plausible to insist that we humans occupy center stage, even if it appears that the Lord of the cosmos has purposes beyond our imaginings, something like their God-centered vision remains a live theological option. God's own glory. Perhaps the recent news from Mars will help us to better appreciate it.

Notes

¹ Hans Kung, *Credo: The Apostles' Creed Explained for Today* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), p. 162.

² The quote comes from "*Gaudium et Spes*" ("The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World") in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, New Revised Edition, Austin Flannery, O.P., General Editor (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing Company, 1975), p. 904. However, the general idea is present in a good many modern theologians and Bible scholars.

³ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Translated by Ford Lewis Battles, Edited by John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.5.1 (p. 52).

In Defense of True Marriage

by Gordon L. Shull

Sooner or later it was bound to happen - a court decision in Massachusetts defending the right of a gay or lesbian couple to get married. A storm of controversy over this issue is just as inevitable. The air crackles with talk about "Defense of Marriage" laws or even constitutional amendments. How shall we think about people who find themselves physically attracted to people of the same gender, then fall in love and ask us to honor their lifetime commitment?

First (as they say) a moment of self-disclosure. I am straight - but not by choice. I cannot name the day or the hour when I decided to be attracted to people of the opposite sex. Can you?

I have two sons who are straight - but not by choice. They never thought the matter over carefully - as when choosing

a college or a car - and concluded that, all things considered, it would be better to fall in love with a woman than a man. Did you?

I have a third son who is gay - but not by choice. When he looks back at his own growth as a human being, he realizes that - early on - he was attracted to men. While his buddies admired the pretty girls on TV, he was admiring the handsome guys. When he dated wonderful young women, and dated them again, there just were no sparks. He hoped it was a passing phase, but it was not. And so - when he met a young man in seminary and the sparks flew - he accepted himself as nature had made him (as it makes some five percent of the animal kingdom, humans included.) Gay.

Dave and his partner, Peter, have been together now for seventeen years. We

four parents stood beside them in front of the sanctuary to celebrate their solemn vows. We visit them every year, worshipping in the church they serve as co-pastors in a four-pastor church. No question but that they have found the right vocation. They are strong preachers, wise counsellors. They are a blessing to their church and to each other - and to all who know them.

The words "marriage" and "wedding" were not used in the service for Dave and Peter. I think I was a bit relieved about that. But in my honest moments I wonder why. For Dave and Peter the vows, the commitment, the love were just as real as it was and is for their parents. No matter what we call it, a rose by any other name would smell as sweet. So why not call it a rose?

Be that as it may, I am more sure of two things. The first is that Dave and Peter deserve the same rights that Betty and I



enjoy. The right to visit one another in the hospital, no questions asked; to receive the same employee and insurance benefits, the same benefits before and after death, the same everything. I personally care much more about these rights than about a particular word - but I suspect that preoccupation with the word masks prejudice against the relationship. And heaven knows, gay couples long for a society that fully acknowledges their full devotion.

I am also sure that Dave and Peter are no threat to the institution of marriage. They joyfully celebrate heterosexual weddings. The youth appreciate their effective leadership, without regard to sexual orientation. What young and old alike see in their pastors is a committed, faithful, healthy relationship. Isn't that what marriage is all about?

What defends marriage? Not a label, but attitudes and deeds that sustain the relationship. Love. Faithfulness. Respect. Thoughtfulness. Wherever we find these in a couple, we find marriage defended - no matter the gender, and no matter what we call it.

And what threatens marriage? Again, not labels but attitudes and deeds. Disrespect. Insensitivity. Adultery. Cruelty. Neglect. Long live our defense of marriage against enemies such as these!

We have come slowly as human beings to our understanding of homosexuality. The writers of the compilation called Leviticus condemned it out of hand (even as they ordered their people not to wear clothing made from two kinds of fabric, nor to eat a whole long list of animals - and to put adulterers to death). Condemnation is voiced in three of Paul's letters (Romans, Corinthians, Timothy), but the Greek words used there refer to temple prostitution and the abuse of boys. Paul did not deal with sexual orientation, or with lifelong commitment. Had he ever met the likes of Peter and David? We do not know.

Jesus is not on record on this subject.

Continued on page 23

Posada – celebrating welcome for all God's people

From The Shower of Stoles Project
Martha G. Juillerat, National Program
Director

The Shower of Stoles is a collection of nearly a thousand liturgical stoles from lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons from twenty-three denominations in five countries. Each stole contains the story of a LGBT person who is active in the life and leadership of their faith community in some way: minister, elder, deacon, teacher, missionary, musician, administrator or active layperson. This extraordinary collection celebrates the gifts of LGBT persons who serve God in countless ways, while also lifting up those who have been excluded from service because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

In December the Shower of Stoles Project was invited to be a part of a Posada celebration at United University Church, a federated Presbyterian and United Methodist congregation in Los Angeles. Posada is an advent tradition from Hispanic culture: Mary and Joseph travel from site to site searching for a place to stay, only to be turned away. As they travel they are joined by others until the procession reaches its final stop – the church – where at last all are welcomed in. During Posada the travails of Mary and Joseph are used to help us focus on the poor, displaced and outcast in society.

Stories from the Shower of Stoles were used at U.U.C. to highlight the oppression of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people of faith, including two men who were murdered in hate crimes, one whose pet dogs had been butchered outside of his parsonage, and two closeted gay church professionals who had committed suicide. The irony presented in U.U.C.'s Posada was that the church could be either a place of welcome for the oppressed, or an agent of that same oppression. UMC District Superintendent Grant Hagiya and Executive Presbyter Linda Culbertson opened the door for Mary and Joseph but, with the devil encouraging them along from behind, waxed long and eloquent about budget cuts, institutional priorities and the church's fear of dividing before declaring that they would need to assign a task force to study the matter before allowing strangers into their home. And in the church itself fifty stoles surrounded the communion table representing LGBT people who had been turned away and vilified by their churches.

U.U.C. chose to make their church a place of welcome that day. As the procession was invited to the table to share in the "feast," the names or anonymous markings from the stoles were read, and each was welcomed to the table in spirit.

U.U.C.'s welcome extends far beyond the symbolism of this one Posada; they are actively engaged in the ongoing work of making this church – and this world – a place of welcome and peace for all of God's people. My prayer is that some day *all* of our churches will share this same spirit, and that no matter *who* knocks at the door our Presbyterian Church will welcome them in!

We invite you to visit our website at www.showerofstoles.org to find ways that your congregation might use the stoles to work for full inclusion of LGBT – and all people of faith – in our church.



Martha Juillerat

Cont. from "Marriage," page 22

But when asked what is required of us, he answered: love God with both heart and mind, and your neighbor as yourself. On these, he said, hang all the law and the prophets. So our job as children of the Judeo-Christian tradition is to act with goodwill toward all human beings, fully respecting what we learn from science and experience. This combination of love, science and experience must inform or even trump everything else.

James Russell Lowell had it right. "New occasions teach new duties; time makes ancient good uncouth. We must upward still, and onward, who would keep abreast of truth." Is this a bit scary? Not if we hang on to the basic anchor: love of the One who gave us minds as well as hearts, love of neighbors as ourselves, and respect for the gifts of wisdom that science and experience bring. With this as the starting as well as the ending point for our thinking about marriage, we cannot go far wrong.

The author:

Gordon Shull, a seminary-trained political scientist, is a Presbyterian Elder.

This essay was published as an op-ed piece in the Wooster (Ohio) *Daily Record* on Nov. 30 2003. The author has graciously shared it with us for publication here.

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A brief review by Doug King:

***A Brief History of God*, by Paul E. Capetz**

(Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003. List price \$9.00)

“Theology matters” became a slogan in the Presbyterian Church just a few years ago, and was quickly seized by conservatives as a banner to lead their parade. In fact theology *does* matter. If progressives are to hold up their end of any serious conversation in our church, they need some theological material to work with. I hear from many lay people a wish that they “knew enough theology” to engage in serious conversation with their friends – especially those with whom they disagree! Here’s one way you might help people meet that need.

Paul Capetz, a Presbyterian teaching at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, has joined an impressive list of authors of the “Facets” series being published by Fortress, aimed at lay people who want to venture into some serious theological study, either individually or in groups. (That list includes Walter Wink, Martin Luther King Jr., Rosemary Radford Ruether, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Karl Barth. For starters.)

If you or people in your congregation are interested in venturing into some serious theological thinking, and want to cover some 3000 years’ worth in 130 small pages, this is for you!

Each chapter traces theological thinking about God through one major period of history, beginning with “Judaism and the development of monotheism” up through the twentieth century. Because so much is covered, of course the exposition of Jewish and Christian thought is condensed and very selective. But one advantage of this is that many points are simply mentioned without much exposition, which (especially with a skilled leader) could tempt a study group to explore all sorts of interesting questions.

So, for example, in chapter 3 Capetz gives a quick tour of the development of early Christian doctrine, including the forma-

tion of the canon and the Apostles’ Creed. He interprets that process as a response to the early challenges of dualism – Marcionism and Gnosticism – within the Christian community. To me this suggests all sorts of possible discussions of the dualisms of our own time: our “culture wars” about sexuality; America’s “war against evil” and drive toward empire; efforts to evangelize the Jews – and lots more.

Even a well-trained minister (or seminarian) might find this book a helpful way to see the forest, without getting tangled up in too many trees. Each chapter deals with just one or two major developments in our understanding of God, which are always seen as emerging in response to stimuli from the surrounding culture, or from changing conditions within the faith community. This is an organic understanding of Christian thinking about God; Capetz sees theology as a dynamic process, always developing in conversation with its environment. This offers a helpful alternative to those who see Christian belief as established once and for all, containing all truth, eternal and immutable. Theology here looks like a very human work, and it gains interest and meaning in that perspective.

Capetz offers some creative approaches to what might seem obvious theological subjects. To lead us into the Protestant Reformation he begins not with Martin Luther, but with Julian of Norwich. He suggests that Julian, a mystic of the 14th century, points us to the shift that the Reformers confirmed. People were suffering a growing despair caused by an endless need to prove their own righteousness, to earn salvation. Julian responded to this need by seeing faith not as some kind of new knowledge, but as a *shift in perspective*. Luther and Calvin followed her path, offering new ways of looking at the reality of God and the realities of human life.

Chapter 8 covers a mere one century – the 20th – with quick looks at Karl Barth’s Christocentrism, Paul Tillich’s focus on “ultimate concern,” and H. Richard Niebuhr’s exploration of “radical monotheism.” Then a couple pages are devoted to each of a number of more recent developments in our understandings of God: Process theology (the one point at which the exposition and vocabulary become fairly opaque – but hey, it’s process theology!); liberation, black, and feminist theologies ... and a few more.

In a brief concluding chapter, Capetz ties together his main themes in a way that invites further reflection: This historical look at our changing understandings of God is shaped inevitably by our present situation, and aims to help us think about God in our present time. It has shown us the dynamic nature of our understandings of God, and the complexity of the many different strands. It can help us appreciate the diversity of views of God, which reflect not only changing situations but also the “diversity of theologies in the Bible.” Thus, he says, “it doesn’t make sense to ask, ‘Which of these traditions has correctly interpreted the Bible?’ since the Bible itself is not a simple, univocal source containing a single systematic theology.”

Acknowledging that much of our theology includes elements shared with the other monotheistic traditions of Judaism and Islam, Capetz goes further to say the “the crucial issue today is ... Christianity and its relations to non-Christian religions.” He closes with the hope that “if Christians approach one another as well as adherents of other religious traditions with respect and humility, then perhaps something new and hopeful will emerge in the future that cannot be anticipating by merely looking to the past.” *Yes!* But he has provided us a look to the past that may help some of us move toward that future.

Note: You can order this book from Amazon.com, by going to <http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/books.htm>. Scroll down the page a bit and you’ll find the link to Amazon.

Witherspoon News

We're planning for General Assembly

Plans are well under way for the Witherspoon events slated for the 216th General Assembly, which will be June 26 through July 3, 2004, in Richmond, Virginia.

You'll find details of these events listed on page 14, above. We hope very much that if you're coming to the Assembly you'll get to as many of these as you can!

If you're attending GA as a commissioner, please let us know you'll be there, so we can stay in touch during the Assembly. Just contact Membership Coordinator Jake Young or Editor Doug King – both listed on the back cover.

If you'll be there with a little spare time (that means you're *not* a commissioner!) we'd be very grateful to have your help – staffing our booth, helping our Editor/WebWeaver gathering news and photos, welcoming guests at our public events, and whatever else might turn up.

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!

Electing officers

One major item on the agenda of Witherspoon's annual meeting, which will be held immediately following the Witherspoon Luncheon on Sunday, June 27 at General Assembly, will be to confirm the election of new members of the Executive Committee.

According to our by-laws, officers are elected by ballot, not at the Annual Meeting itself. The reason for this is simply to be sure that all members of the organization can vote, whether or not they attend the Assembly.

A list of the nominees for the coming year, and a mail-in ballot, are on the other side of this page.

We hope you'll pay attention, cast your ballot thoughtfully, suggesting alternate names if you feel that's necessary, and offering suggestions for future years.

Thanks to Kate Van Brocklin

The Witherspoon executive committee has accepted regretfully the resignation of Kate Van Brocklin as a member at large of the board. We appreciate deeply the vitality and insight she has shared with us. And we wish we well in her ministry in Alma, Michigan.

Check out the Peacemaking Conference — see page 16



Vote for Witherspoon officers!

Please write in the name of anyone you would like to vote for in preference to the nominee.

President (for 2004-2006):

_____ Kenneth R. Smith

.....

Vice President (for 2004-2005)

_____ Jake Young

.....

Membership Coordinator (2004-2006):

_____ (Pending)

.....

At-Large members (2004-2006):

(two to be elected; vote for as many as two)

_____ Vanessa Aja-Sigmon

_____ Chuck McLain

.....

And if you'd like to suggest any Witherspoon member (including yourself!) for consideration for next year's officer election, please write their names and contact information here:

Members of the Nominating Committee:

Lynne Reade, chair, José Olagues, Donald L. Smith, and Jake Young (liaison)

Please cast your vote!!

Send your ballot by June 15 to

Lynne Reade

3610 Dunbar Court

Fremont, CA 94536

or e-mail to lynnereade@comcast.net

Nominations for Executive Committee

The following people have been nominated for open positions on Witherspoon Society's Executive Committee. Election will be held at the Annual Meeting held during General Assembly in June, 2004. In accordance with our Bylaws, these are for two-year terms beginning at the conclusion of the Fall Executive Committee meeting in 2004.

President - **Kenneth R. Smith**

Vice President - **Jake Young**

Membership Coordinator - (Pending)

Member at Large - **Vanessa Aja-Sigmon**

Member at Large - **Charles McLain**

Ken Smith and Jake Young are currently serving on the Executive Committee in other capacities.

About the candidates:

- **Ken Smith** has served as Vice President for the past four years. Before that, he was one of the officers of Semper Reformanda.
- **Jake Young** has served as Member at Large and Membership Coordinator. He is an Associate Pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Springfield, IL.
- **Vanessa Aja-Sigmon** is a second-year student at McCormick Seminary, living with her husband in Chicago.
- **Chuck McLain** is an Honorably Retired member of San Francisco Presbytery and will be a Commissioner at G.A. in Richmond.

At the time this issue of *Network News* goes to print, we do not have final confirmation of our nominee for Membership Coordinator. This name will be posted on the Witherspoon website along with the others when confirmed.

The ballot that accompanies this notice allows members to write in the name of anyone you would like to vote for in preference to a particular nominee. Please make good use of those empty lines at the bottom of the ballot; tell us about people who might make good candidates next time around! (Don't be modest about suggesting yourself.)

If the Nominating Committee selections are approved, this would constitute the new Executive Committee serving in 2005:

President - **Kenneth R. Smith**

Vice President - **Jake Young**

Treasurer - David Zuverink

Secretary/Communicator - Trina Zelle

Issues Analyst - Eugene TeSelle

Membership Coordinator - (Pending)

Member at Large - Jennifer Stone

Member at Large - Celeste Lasich

Member at Large - **Vanessa Aja-Sigmon**

Member at Large - **Charles McLain**

(Doug King does not require election since it is our good fortune that he continues as Staff.)

Respectfully submitted by the Nominating Committee

Lynne Reade, Chair; José Olagues, Donald Smith, Jake Young (liaison)

The
Next
Network
News

The Spring issue of *Network News* will be sent to all commissioners and advisory delegates to the 216th General Assembly, offering them information, analysis, and a taste of Witherspoon.

If you know of business going to the Assembly and can share information or analysis of it, please let us know!

If you have ideas about other issues that you'd like to share with commissioners and others, send it along.

We want to do all we can to help commissioners gain a progressive perspective on their work as they prepare.

**Deadline for submissions
is
May 1, 2004**

Please let us hear from you!

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good word!**

Please share this
with a friend ...
or give a membership
as a gift.

Or encourage your
congregation to become a
"group member" of
Witherspoon, and get 10
copies of *Network News* to
spread around.

Or form a Witherspoon
group in your presbytery!

Or, hey, why not all of the
above!

Membership coordinator
Jake Young can help.

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_____ copies of this issue
_____ copies of the Winter 2003 issue on the New American Empire
_____ copies of the Summer 2003 issue, reporting on the 215th General Assembly
_____ copies of the Winter, 2002 issue, with material from the Stony Point Conference on the Confession of 1967
_____ copies of the special Fall '99 issue on **Working for Economic Justice**

(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: _____

City: _____ **State** _____ **ZIP** _____

Phone: _____
(in case of questions)

Return this form to:

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