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The Co-Moderator's Column

Working for justice with a local focus

By Bill Dummer

A little over a year ago, I wrote an article in *Network News* about my involvements here in Milwaukee with issues having to do with poverty or economic justice. Because that is the justice issue I choose to focus on, I think I balance out other members of the Presbyterian Voices for Justice Board (yes, that's our new name), whose concerns for justice are focused elsewhere. In addition to being coordinator of Milwaukee Presbytery's Ghana Partnership, and a member of the Board of the Washington Heights Neighborhood Association, I am also a foot soldier for Southeast Wisconsin Common Ground, which is a relatively new "franchise" of the Industrial Areas Foundation (Barak Obama's one-time employer/organizing trainer).

So, the other day I was on a bus to the state capital to lobby for a bill being introduced into the legislature, which would prohibit the State of Wisconsin from doing business with any bank that is holding 100 or more foreclosed homes, and not selling them to buyers who want to purchase them as their home. A Common Ground research team discovered that three banks each have over 1100

foreclosed homes on their books. For the most part, they are not taking care of the properties and prefer to do mass sales to speculators, rather than sell them to individual buyers. In Milwaukee, it is causing a decline in our property values, as some of the abandoned homes have become drug houses and others have been so stripped of everything that they need to be demolished.

So Common Ground (an organization of 50 groups, mostly churches) has voted to launch a campaign to get these three banks to do three things. Deutsche Bank, US Bank, and Wells Fargo Bank are being challenged to do the following:

1. Stop selling the foreclosed properties to "speculators" through auctions or mass sales and work with Common Ground and its partners to develop a plan to sell these to responsible owners.
2. Pay for the demolition of the properties that are beyond rehabilitation, and donate the land to a community land trust for future residential construction.



3. Contribute \$25 million from each bank toward a \$75 million fund, which will be used to rehabilitate and sell these properties.

Last month Common Ground threw down the gauntlet at a Delegate Assembly of 350 members. It was at that meeting that we heard that these three banks (and there are more) took a total of \$42.6 billion in bailout money from the government. We also heard from the State Representative from Milwaukee who was introducing the aforementioned legislation. Last Tuesday, about 60 of us went to Madison to lobby for the bill among those representatives from the four counties in Southeast Wisconsin represented by Common Ground. We asked those whom we visited to co-sponsor the legislation and also to

write a letter to each of the three banks asking them to enter into negotiations with Common Ground on the three demands.

Interestingly, Wells Fargo (the biggest bank) has agreed to a meeting in March to discuss the demands. Common Ground has other steps it will take in ratcheting up the pressure on these banks to do the right thing.

In a week we will be having a briefing meeting for our church members on the campaign. At that meeting, those attending will be asked to fill out forms listing where they and other family members do their banking. The Common Ground chapter at Marquette University is planning a separate action, where if the negotiations become stalled, they

We invite you to join us!

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

**Just use the membership form on our website at
http://www.presbyvoicesforjusticec.org/membership_form_2.htm
(and you can pay online, too!)**

or contact our Communications Coordinator:

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will on a certain day, withdraw their checking accounts from two of these banks and march down the street to another bank. It will be interesting to see how this campaign plays out over the next year.

Well, that's the news from Milwaukee, where a lot of families have lost their jobs and homes, and their children go to school in a struggling urban district. In this issue of *Network News* (some names we have not changed) you can read articles on other points of focus, as we give voice to a variety of justice concerns in our church and in our world.

The Mission of Presbyterian Voices for Justice

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

We are a spirited and passionate community of women and men in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) who are called to proclaim the Gospel vision of God's extravagant love and justice in church and society. We seek the wisdom of the Spirit for following Christ's example and for living into the hope of sustained gender equality, racial reconciliation, full human rights for LGBT persons, economic justice, environmental wholeness, an end to war and all forms of violence, and a justice-loving shalom over all the earth. We commit to risking the transformation of our own selves and our organization to live into this vision, even as we invite both church and society to meet this challenge.

About using this on-line version of *Network News*

A note on the URL links

Because many of you will be reading this issue of *Network News* on-line, we are trying to provide working versions of all the URL links included here. The problem is that when some links are too long to fit on one line, they get broken into two or more lines, and then they won't work. So we've tried to shrink them to fit on one line of type, which means they may get really really small.

Sorry if this creates problems for you, but we hope it will be helpful!

If you print this issue for yourself, you get to choose the page size!

To print it in the size intended for publication (6 by 8 inches), when you click on "Print" in the Adobe Reader software, look at the choices on the "Print" screen, and set the "Page Scaling" choice at "None."

To print it in full 8 1/2 by 11 inch pages (with larger type!) set the Page Scaling choice at "Fit to printable area."

For a better quality print version, please download a higher-resolution file at <http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/NN%20fall%2009%20lg.pdf> .

We have a new name!

We are delighted to announce the new name of the merged organization of Witherspoon Society and Voices of Sophia: Presbyterian Voices for Justice. We offer our thanks and congratulations to Anne Barstow for offering the winning entry in our contest to find a new name — and our thanks to all the others who have offered very good ideas as well.

We believe it is clear about who we are as a merged organization, maintaining both the "Voices" aspect of the former Voices of Sophia and the broad-reaching "Justice" concerns of the former Witherspoon Society. And it makes clear that we are Presbyterian in membership and outlook. Also, it has a short and easy acronym! We look forward to continuing our discernment of God's "voice" for justice in church and society.

We're working on a new logo that will reflect this new united existence. We'll share it with you as soon as we have it.

Voices for Justice events at the 219th General Assembly

*You're
invited!*

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

Presbyterian Voices for Justice Commissioner Orientation

(continuing the Witherspoon Society Commissioner Orientation)

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

Hilton Hotel. Tickets: \$27.00

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

Presbyterian Voices for Justice Awards Luncheon

(continuing the Witherspoon Society Awards Luncheon)

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

Mary Elva says of herself: I am a risk taker, love adventures and avoid getting up early! I have been involved in the church all my life and called by the church for 40 years. I love God and still have more questions about my faith than answers. I am an administrator with ‘an attitude’ of faithful hope. Having studied the Art of Spiritual Direction at SFTS, I found myself nourished and nurtured by the experience. It is out of my own journey of faith and the learning in that venue that I now delight in listening, paying attention and wondering with others as they seek to focus their experiences with God. Happily retired, I delight in being freer to explore the world and to serve as retreat leader, spiritual director and staff member for the SFTS Diploma in the Art of Spiritual Direction.

Our two awards will be presented: The Andrew Murray Award to an outstanding leader of the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the Whole Gospel Congregation Award to a congregation in the Twin Cities area that exemplifies the commitments of Presbyterian Voices for Justice, to living out the radical, liberating Good News in our society and the wider world.

NOTE: Our Membership Business Meeting (and our first meeting as a newly merged organization!) will be held immediately after our Luncheon program.

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

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

Voices of Sophia Breakfast

(sponsored by Presbyterian Voices for Justice)

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

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

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

Hyatt Regency Hotel. Tickets \$27.00

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

Witherspoon Dance

sponsored by Presbyterian Voices for Justice

Time for a break! This is a great chance to relax and enjoy great music, dancing, and conversation – and an informal place to meet and mingle with others at the Assembly.

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

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

You can register now for GA!

The General Assembly website now has things set up for you to register both for the Assembly itself, as well as for hotel rooms and the many events that you may want to attend.

The first official Assembly events are on Saturday morning, July 3, and adjournment is scheduled for around noon on Saturday, July 10. You may want to arrive early for things like the Voices for Justice Commissioner Orientation, which will be an early breakfast on Saturday morning.

Please note that in listing of events, you'll find our Commissioner Orientation on Saturday morning listed as "Presbyterian Voice [oops, just one voice?] for Justice Commissioner Orientation/Breakfast." And on the order form for event tickets, our commissioner orientation and luncheon are abbreviated to "PVJ Oreintation" and "PVJ Awards."

What once was the Witherspoon Awards Luncheon is now the Presbyterian Voices (we got our other voice back) for Justice Luncheon – Sunday noon.

Yes, the hotels are fairly costly, but Voices for Justice has a block of rooms reserved at a relatively good rate at the Best Western Normandy Inn, just about 5 blocks from the Convention Center. We'd be happy to have you join us there! For more information, get in touch with Doug King, by e-mail at douging2@aol.com, or by phone at (608) 782-5275.

To register for the Assembly, you may want to begin by printing out the schedule of events and the official docket. (See links at the bottom of this page.)

In filling in the registration form online, you'll find there are 5 pages. Click on <continue> at the bottom of one page to go on to the next. Try to get them filled in correctly, because if you try to go back you may have to start over.

In ordering tickets, you won't get an itemized list of the tickets you've ordered, even when you are asked for your credit card. So, be sure to make you're ordered what you want.

Some GA links:

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

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

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

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

The overtures are coming! The overtures are coming!!

by Doug King, Communications Coordinator of Voices for Justice

As of this writing, the Office of the General Assembly has received nearly 100 overtures to be presented to the 219th General Assembly for action when it meets in Minneapolis, July 3 - 10.

I have tried to list, describe and sometimes comment briefly on some of the overtures that have been received so far by the Office of the General Assembly. I have simply chosen those that seem to deal with topics or issues of particular interest to our members and friends.

You can find my earlier attempt at summarizing them on our website, at <http://presbyvoicesforjustice.org/2010/219%20GA%20overtures.htm>

I hope to update that soon, so check back now and then if you're interested. Also, in the online version of this article you'll find that each overture mentioned has a link directly to the text, if it has been posted.

First, how to find the overture texts:

To access material posted on the General Assembly's website, PC-Biz, you may need to go to the entry page. Then click on "Explorer." Then enter "OVT" in the search box, and click on Search. That should take you to a list of

Some of the main issues being addressed in overtures:

Ordination	(see page 10)
Marriage	(13)
Peacemaking and international issues	
• "On strengthening the Peacemaking Program"	(15)
• Afghanistan	(16)
• Israel/Palestine	(16)
• Divestment from Caterpillar, Inc.	(17)
• Sudan	(17)
• Christians in the Muslim world	(17)
Abortion	(18)
Proposed new Form of Government	(18)
Creating a new synod for conservatives	(18)
Belhar Confession	(19)
On the right of Christian educators to a role in presbyteries	(20)
Social Witness Policy	(20)
The Call to Restore Creation	(20)
Charter for Compassion	(20)
Call to nonviolence	(21)

all the overtures posted thus far – through OVT 77, as of this writing). You’ll see a note on the top of some of them that they have not yet been edited by the Office of the Stated Clerk, but are posted as received from the submitting body.

Finally, please be aware that this is presented here (and in more detail online) as a personal effort, and is *not* intended as a commentary or statement of the organization.

This is a work in process, and I would greatly appreciate comments, corrections, and suggestions, either to be posted with credit to the author, or simply to be considered in my own next revision. If you would like to offer your own analysis of one or more overtures, with your arguments for or against them, I’ll be delighted to post it on our website. Please send a note to dougking2@aol.com with “overture comments” in the subject line, and tell me whether to post it, or just to think about it.

One more resource:

More Light Presbyterians is providing a helpful blog listing overtures and reports relating to ordination and marriage, some of them not yet posted on the official GA website.

Here’s a quick survey of some of the overtures received so far, to help you find any in which you may have a particular interest, either to support them, or take into account the

arguments advanced in the rationale for the recommended action, or to develop actions of your own in support or in opposition to a particular recommendation.

Ordination

It’s no surprise that there are lots of overtures on this topic, but some of them offer new approaches to the issue – some for further steps toward fair and inclusive ordination policies, others calling for a reinstatement of the more complete ban on LGBT ordination, and still others calling for delay, in one way or another, of any further action.

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

To restore the ban:

Overture 001, from the Presbytery of San Diego, would reinstate the various interpretive statements, thus restoring the absolute ban on ordination.

The Presbytery of Beaver-Butler has

sent Overture 046, which would replace the current G-6.0106b with a longer and more intricate statement, which claims that “foremost” among the standards for ordination are “the New Testament Epistolary ethical requirements for ordained officers of ministry, which include but are not limited to chastity in singleness and fidelity in monogamous heterosexual marriage.” On first reading, this seems to elevate the letters of the New Testament over the Gospels and the life and teaching of Jesus – perhaps because the latter were never quite specific enough in condemning certain groups or actions.

The lengthy rationale for this proposal includes a quotation from H. Richard Niebuhr’s well-known critique of mid-20th century liberal Protestantism. They got the words right, but moved Niebuhr from his place at Yale Divinity School to Union Theological Seminary in New York, apparently to take the place of his brother Reinhold.

Overture 090, from the Presbytery of Shenandoah, would enact an authoritative interpretation reinforcing G-6.0106b so that “those engaged in unrepentant homosexual practice *or those who affirm their freedom to be so engaged*, may not be ordained as ministers of the Word and Sacrament, elders, or deacons.” [Italics mine. DK.]

Overture 094, from the Presbytery of Central Washington, acknowledges the right of conscience, but says that does

not trump the ban in G-6.0108b. In essence, people are perfectly free to disagree with the rule, but cannot be ordained if they do.

To end the ban:

But more overtures have been submitted aimed at removing the ban. Overture 018 from the Presbytery of Hudson River does the job most directly, simply calling for the deletion of G-6.0106b entirely, arguing that “G-6.0106b is superfluous.”

Overture 017, from the Presbytery of Detroit, would replace G-6.0106b with an affirmation of the moral commitment being undertaken by a candidate for ordination, but with the emphasis on candidates’ pledge “to live lives obedient to Jesus Christ the Head of the Church, as revealed in Holy Scripture, striving to follow where He leads through the authoritative witness of the Scriptures, and to understand the Scriptures through the instruction of the Confessions.” There is no specific mention of sexuality or marriage.

Hudson River Presbytery, along with its simple call for deleting G-6.0106b, has offered another option in Overture 019, which would substitute for that narrow ban on certain sexual relationships a much broader and positive call “to proclaim the Gospel to all peoples, to love neighbor and enemy, and to express the love of Christ in faithful relationships with others.”

Overture 030, from Western Reserve

Presbytery, would also replace G-6.0106b with an affirmation that ordained service should “reflect the church’s desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (G-1.0000).” The proposed statement also affirms the responsibility of the examining body to “be guided by scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.”

Overture 041, from the Presbytery of Southern New England, affirms that “Jesus, the Head of the Church, has established standards for church officers.” Scripture, the Confessions, and the Constitution of the church are all seen as reflecting Jesus’ own standards, and are to be used as the examining body considers each candidate’s “calling, gifts and preparation and their willingness to adhere to

church standards. Those seeking office shall demonstrate their understanding of and affirm their willingness to adhere to church standards.”

Other overtures have also been submitted which generally follow one or another of those mentioned. Overtures 052 from the Presbytery of Albany, 047 from New York City, 078 from National Capitol, 061 from Chicago, 065 from Des Moines, and 067 from Heartland all offer amended versions of G-6.0108b, but with some variations in the suggested text and in the rationales.

Or – to stop talking about it

On the other hand, some presbyteries seem to be proposing steps that would simply postpone any action – for eternity, perhaps? The Presbytery of

Help others get to know us!

Especially at this time as our two progressive Presbyterian groups merge to form one strong new voice, we need to let people know about us. *And you can help!*

If you'd like to spread the word about Witherspoon/Voices, we can provide you with membership brochures and copies of previous copies of *Network News*.

If you want to form a local chapter, we can provide you with multiple copies of our newsletter, and perhaps even find an active Witherspoon/Voices member in your area who could pay you a visit.

For help in forming a group, contact Doug King, our Communications Coordinator, at douging2@ol.com

For brochures and newsletters, you can contact Doug King, too.

New Harmony, in Overture 007, would amend Standing Rule A.3. of the General Assembly by adding a new section, stating that any amendment to the Constitution that has been considered in either of the two previous Assemblies can be considered only by an affirmative vote of 75% of the commissioners.

Overture 011, from the Presbytery of Prospect Hill, is more straightforward, calling for “a moratorium until the 220th General Assembly (2012) on motions and overtures that would change, alter, or remove the current standards of ordination for the offices of deacon, elder, and minister of Word and Sacrament.”

And then the Presbytery of the Foothills, in Overture 009, goes even further, calling for the holding of General Assemblies only once every six years.

Marriage

Toward an inclusive affirmation of marriage

Once again the question of marriage will come before the Assembly. Baltimore Presbytery has submitted Overture 015, with the simple title, “On Amending W-4.900 Regarding Marriage.” As with past suggestions, it would change the definition of marriage from “a civil contract between a woman and a man” to “a covenant between two people [which] according

to the laws of the state also constitutes a civil contract.”

The rationale for this change is headed, “Marriage: Sharing God’s Gift Equitably in the Church.” It offers powerful arguments for change, including the idea that marriage as “an act of pastoral care” should not be forbidden to any couple seeking to form a loving, faithful union. It also refutes the notion of a single “biblical form of marriage,” and concludes by presenting Jesus’ command to love God and neighbor as the basis for all discussions of marriage – and affirming that love as Jesus spoke of it, and lived it, is never limited by questions of gender or sexual orientation.

The Presbytery of Hudson River has sent Overture 020, which proposes essentially the same changes in the Directory of Worship. The rationale opens with a fine statement of what marriage is all about.

The Presbytery of Boston, in Overture 027, proposes to amend Book of Order provisions W-4.9000-9006 and D-14.0200 to change all references to marriage between a man and woman to marriage between “two people” or “couple.” In support of these changes, the rationale reminds us that the PC(USA) has urged “state legislatures and the federal government to apply the principle of equal protection to same gender couples and their children.” Given this action, and our concern to provide pastoral care to all couples, and the slow trend among the states to

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

Similar overtures include 079 from National Capitol Presbytery, 057 from East Iowa, and 068 from Heartland. Two themes woven through their rationales are the changing state laws to allow same-sex marriage, and the responsibilities of pastors and congregations to support marriages.

Opposing any change in the understanding of marriage

But there are those who reject these modest steps toward an inclusive notion of marriage. New Covenant Presbytery has submitted Overture 010, “On Affirming the Biblical Teaching on the Topic of Marriage.”

The Presbytery of Prospect Hill has submitted Overture 042, which urges the Assembly to “[d]eclare ... that no sexual union outside the bonds of marriage, such as in co-habitation, adulterous affairs, domestic partnerships, or same-sex unions, is within the will of God or approved by this body.” [We humbly note that this list does not seem to follow Jesus’ apparently negative views of marriage of divorced persons.]

Overture 094, from the Presbytery of Central Washington, would have us

“Joyfully reaffirm the historic, biblical and Christological teaching of the Church on the topic of marriage as a gift from God to bless humankind. As God created man and woman, so does God call some men and women to live together as husband and wife, while others are called to live a life of celibacy. God’s very order and design defines the institution of marriage.”

And here’s a creative twist:

The Presbytery of Santa Barbara has sent Overture 037, with the catchy title, “On Accountability for Presbyterian Organizations at General Assembly Sponsored Meetings and Events.” This calls on the Assembly to “require events sponsored by PC(USA) aligned groups taking place at General Assembly or other G.A. sponsored gatherings to be evaluated by the Office of the General Assembly in advance of all General Assemblies or other G.A. sponsored events to assure that the activities of all PC(USA) aligned groups are conducted in a manner that honor the constitutional standards of the church.” To be sure that this is done, the overture further calls for the establishment of a “Board of Oversight and Review” to monitor Presbyterian-related organizations and events – and advises that this board should “be available to receive complaints from Commissioners at G.A.” *A GA morals squad!*

Just in case anyone might wonder what inspired this interesting idea, the Presbytery offers this explanation:

On June 21, 2008, during the General Assembly that took place in San Jose, More Light Presbyterians held their traditional reception and dinner, advertised to all G.A. attendees. At that gathering a planned “wedding” took place between two gay men officiated by an ordained Presbyterian pastor.

Well, “never again,” if Santa Barbara Presbytery has its way. Click here for our report of that celebration at the 2008 GA.

Peacemaking and international issues

On Strengthening the Peacemaking Program

The Presbytery of Pittsburgh has sent Overture 013, calling on the 219th General Assembly to strengthen the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, celebrating the 30th anniversary of the important document, Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling, and the establishment of the Peacemaking Program. It would do this by the creation of a nine-member task force to review the document from 1980, and to present suggestions to the 220th GA for updating the church’s peacemaking efforts in light of more recent developments such as the emergence of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the recovery by the U.S., after Viet Nam, of its status as a respected “superpower,” the end of the “cold war,” new wars, globalization and

the current global financial crisis, the role of religions in wars and in peacemaking, and “the rise of Muslim influence and militancy.”

Three personal observations:

- I note here the focus of concern on “weapons of mass destruction,” which is a term used largely in accusations against those accused of terrorism, without any reference to the nuclear arsenal and other forms of warfare such as drone aircraft, which are primarily a part of the arsenals of U.S. and other “Western” nations. And I wonder.
- The overture calls for the creation of “an advisory committee of six expert persons to meet quarterly to counsel the Peacemaking Program on issues regarding weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and other emerging issues.” It is unclear to me why the standing committee for the Peacemaking Program would need to be supplemented with such an “advisory” body.
- There is a very interesting call for “a seminary and college-wide review of peace studies and peacemaking opportunities appropriate to the major shifts in the approach of the United States international relations ...” Its goal would be to “engage students in active peacemaking and to share the wisdom of faculty among our church-related educational institutions.” [See also a possible overture drafted by the Rev. Len Bjorkman, which pursues this possibility in more detail. >> <http://presbyvoicesforjustice.org/2010/219%20GA%202.htm#peacemaking%20ovt>]



Afghanistan

The Presbytery of Hudson River has sent Overture 022, “On the War in Afghanistan,” which calls on the 219th General Assembly to “declare itself in opposition to further military operations by the United States in Afghanistan.” The overture notes that General Assemblies have not offered any response to the war in Afghanistan, which has gone on for more than eight years. The implication is that it’s about time we said something.

Also, like the Pittsburgh overture, this one calls for specific review of peace studies programs in our seminaries and colleges. And in a fairly daring step, it calls for “the Federal Government to make a public report on the Spoils of War asking to make transparent the contracts, figures, and contract duration involving American companies participating in the war efforts and its aftermath.”

The rationale closes with this summary of the whole thing: “It is not the province of a church to devise a template of government strategies; we are not a political party. But it is our responsibility to call the nation and the world to the way of peace and to resist the logic of war. That is at the heart of the biblical vision and the gospel of Christ. For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength. (1 Corinthians 1:25, NRSV)”

Greater Atlanta Presbytery has also

sent a similar overture (086) opposing the Afghanistan war, as has the Presbytery of San Francisco.

Israel / Palestine

Overture 084, from the Presbytery of San Francisco, calls for a recognition that “Israel’s laws, policies, and practices constitute apartheid against the Palestinian people,” and for action to educate members of the church on this reality.

Overture 085, also from San Francisco, lifts up the Kairos statement issued by Palestinian Christians in 2009 under the title “A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith and Hope from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering.” It suggests the use of this document as an advocacy tool, “asking us to help them get rid of the occupation through concrete acts: theological debates on occupation as sin, and Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions campaigns.” It also would ask for discussions of the document with American Jewish and Muslim groups.

On the other hand, Overture 091, from the Presbytery of San Joaquin, calls essentially for no action on all matters relating to “Middle East Peacemaking,” because the issues are just too complex. Thus the PC(USA) would

- Offer our prayers to God for the success of all peaceful efforts;
- Support peacemakers who encourage tolerance and reconciliation;

- Advocate for the process of establishing a step-by-step, negotiated two-state Israel/Palestine solution;
- Condemn all acts of terrorism and unwarranted violence;
- Provide humanitarian assistance to innocent victims of the conflict.

And other than that, according to this proposal, “we will defer from taking actions or making statements that align the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) with unilateral support for any of the specific parties involved in the struggle.”

Divestment from Caterpillar

The Presbytery of Newark has sent Overture 039, “On Divestment from Caterpillar, Inc.,” renewing a call considered at each Assembly since 2004, for the PC(USA) to divest its stock holdings in Caterpillar, Inc., as a witness against the company’s continuing “selling of equipment to Israel that is used to build illegal Israeli settlements, construct walls that illegally encroach upon Palestinian lands cutting Palestinians off from their own property and natural resources, destroy Palestinian life and property, and otherwise continue to support the occupation of Palestinian territories.” Overture 083 from San Francisco also calls for divestment from Caterpillar, Inc.

Sudan

The Presbytery of Trinity has sent what has now been designated as Overture 008, “On Partnering for Peace in

Sudan.”

The overture calls upon the Assembly “to show that working toward a just and lasting peace for all of Sudan is a high priority in keeping with the Great Ends of the Church (Book of Order, G-1.0200)” by approving a number of objectives in relation to the on-going conflict in Sudan, including the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005; (b) increased private investment for economic development; (c) increased development assistance by the United States government; and (d) renewed efforts by all parties to end hostilities in Darfur and elsewhere in Sudan.

Christians in the Muslim World

Eastern Virginia Presbytery has submitted Overture 025, “On Protecting Christians in the Muslim World,” which would call on the PC(USA) to urge the UN to “exhort the religious and political leaders of Muslim Nations” to reduce the “extreme behavior” against Christians which has been reported through partner church leaders in Pakistan, specifically, as well as in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Abortion

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

are pregnant.

Overture 040, from the Presbytery of Boise, calls on the 219th Assembly to “condemn assaults, attempts, and actual acts of pressure, force, violence, and coercion upon a pregnant female, especially where the activity inflicts mental or physical injury or death on the pregnant female.” Women are depicted in the overture as weak, often victimized, and powerless to make choices of their own.

In a similar vein, Overture 043, from Prospect Hill Presbytery, calls on the Assembly “to declare that we stand with all women against the injustice of any forced or coerced abortions.”

Proposed new Form of Government

Two overtures have been submitted in response to the report and recommendation of the Form of Government Task Force.

Overture 044, from the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee, asks the Assembly to receive the report with thanks, and to refer it to the church “for an additional period of study and discernment.”

Similar proposals to receive the report of the “FOG Task Force” report with thanks, for further study, but with limited or no approval, have come from the Presbyteries of Mississippi (Overture 098) and Central Washington (095).

Overture 029, from the Presbytery of Western Reserve, would amend 3.0109 of the proposed Form of Government “to Allow Flexibility in the Composition of Committees,” specifically in balancing the ratio of minister members and others on various committees. Overture 087 from San Fernando Presbytery would amend the G-3.0103 and G-3.0111 to make clear the role of a committee on representation.

Creating a new synod for conservatives

Overture 036, from the Presbytery of Santa Barbara, calls for the creation of a new, non-geographical synod, upon the decision of three presbyteries to join such a body, which would “maintain the standards for ordination and continuing ministry,” which mean, of course, such doctrinal affirmations as “the singular saving work of Jesus Christ, [and] the unique and authoritative witness of Scripture,” along with “the standard that its officers will live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness.” The synod would also provide to its presbyteries and congregations some statement such as the “Essential Tenets and Reformed Distinctives” statement which was adopted by the Presbytery of San Diego in 2003. And of course the synod “will celebrate marriages only between a man and woman.”

Click here to read a thoughtful analysis of this proposal, which has been prepared by the Rev. Margaret Thomas >> <http://presbyvoicesforjustice.org/2010/219%20GA%202.htm#thomas%20on%20synod>

And click here for a report on an action of the Presbytery of the Pacific, which rejected a similar overture proposal >> <http://presbyvoicesforjustice.org/2010/219%20GA%202.htm#Pby%20of%20Pacific%20action>

And non-geographical presbyteries as well —

Along the same lines, Beaver-Butler Presbytery has submitted Overture 045, which aims to “provide flexibility in presbytery membership,” by replacing the current definition of the presbytery as consisting of churches and ministers within a defined geographical area, so that it would instead include those “who have chosen to affiliate based on geographic, theological, missional or other considerations of importance to those congregations.”

The rationale for this proposal includes the basic affirmation that “Jesus Christ alone is head of the church. Jesus alone is the source of the church’s unity.” And there is also the familiar affirmation of G-1.0301(1)(a), that “God alone is Lord of the conscience ...” Further, the rationale includes the affirmation in G-3.0401d that the church today is called “to a new openness to God’s continuing reformation of the Church ecumenical ...”

These are all affirmations which most of us on the “liberal” side of the church would certainly affirm heartily, so the debate on this may be interesting.

To leave Belhar Confession out of the Book of Confessions

Overture 014, from the Presbytery of Sacramento, would reverse the action of the 2008 Assembly by discontinuing the effort to include the Belhar Confession in the Book of Confessions. While written and adopted in the church of South Africa, and reflecting the particular challenges faced by the church in that formerly white-dominated African nation, its inclusion in the PC(USA) Book of Confessions has been seen as a way of affirming explicitly God’s call to shape church and society in ways that transcend racial divisions.

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

The call to reject the Belhar Confession is couched, then, in a pious affirmation

to “uphold the oneness of all believers,” as long as LGBT believers are not included. A confessional rejection of racism is fine, apparently. But not a similar rejection of gender discrimination.

On the right of Christian Educators to a role in presbyteries

Mission Presbytery’s Overture 026 proposes two amendments to the Book of Order (G-11.0407 and G-14.0730), to make clear that Certified Christian Educators are “entitled” to play an active role in their presbyteries. And those who are ordained elders have both voice and vote, whether or not they are currently serving in a ministry under the jurisdiction of the presbytery.

On social witness policy

Overture 062, from the Presbytery of Chicago, calls for the 2010 General Assembly “to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the passage of the first social pronouncement of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. at the 1910 General Assembly,” by promoting study of the new Social Creed for the Twenty-First Century, which was approved by the 2008 Assembly.

Grand Canyon Presbytery’s Overture 059 would require that “all social witness policy and resolutions shall be sent to all presbyteries for study, discussion, and comment back to the

Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy prior to the General Assembly,” so that presbyteries could give feedback on all statements before they can go to an Assembly for action.

The Call to Restore the Creation

The Presbytery of Charlotte has submitted Overture 069, which would lift up the “Call to Restore the Creation,” originally adopted as part of Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice by the 202nd General Assembly (1990) “in recognition of its continuing importance, and the crucial work remaining on its 20th anniversary.”

Charter for Compassion

The Presbytery of National Capital has sent Overture 080, calling on the Assembly to endorse the Charter of Compassion, which has been drafted by Jews, Christians and Muslims from over 180 countries and endorsed by the National Council of Churches USA. The text of the Charter is included in the overture, or you can find it at www.charterofcompassion.org .

For a term of discernment on the call to nonviolence

Overture 081, from the Presbytery of National Capitol, would lead the church into “a six-year ‘time of discernment’

seeking clarity on whether God is calling us, at this historic moment, to embrace nonviolence as our fundamental response to war and terror. During this season of discernment, the entire church will be invited to study scripture and the history of the Christian Church's response to violence, to engage in faithful direct action against violence, and to pray and labor with one another faithfully to develop a theology of nonviolence to guide us as we respond to the challenges of violence, terror and war in the 21st century."

Looking for a place to stay at GA?

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

Random Thoughts for the Day

1. I think part of a best friend's job should be to immediately clear your computer history if you die.
2. Nothing sucks more than that moment during an argument when you realize you're wrong.
3. I totally take back all those times I didn't want to nap when I was younger.
4. There is great need for a sarcasm font.
5. How the hell are you supposed to fold a fitted sheet?
6. Was learning cursive really necessary?
7. Map Quest really needs to start their directions on #5. I'm pretty sure I know how to get out of my neighborhood.
8. Obituaries would be a lot more interesting if they told you how the person died.
9. I can't remember the last time I wasn't at least kind of tired.
10. Bad decisions make good stories.

*Thanks to John Jackson's
Everything Is Connected*

Middle East study is being released – and is met with charges of anti-Semitism before it's even published

Middle East study team releases its final report

'Time for action is now,' nine-member panel urges

In a Presbyterian News Service report dated Feb. 2, 2010, Jerry Van Marter wrote that “finding consensus on how to solve the seemingly intractable conflict in the Middle East is as difficult for Presbyterians as it is for the world’s leaders.” But he said that the PC(USA)’s Special Committee to Prepare a Comprehensive Study Focused on Israel/Palestine came close as it concluded its fourth and final meeting in Louisville on Jan. 30.

For his full report >>

<http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2010/10099.htm>

The news story summarizes the report’s recommendations:

The report affirms historic PC(USA) positions — an immediate cessation of violence by both sides, an immediate freeze on the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements on occupied territory, the relocation of Israel’s “separation barrier” to the internationally recognized 1967 border, a shared status for Jerusalem, equal rights for Palestinian citizens of Israel, and immediate resumption of negotiations toward a two-state solution.

The recommendations also address other contributing factors to the continued conflict throughout the Middle East, such as calling for the U.S. government, among other things, to:

- repent of its “sinful behavior” throughout the Middle East, including the war in Iraq, its “continuing support of non-democratic regimes,” and its “acquiescence” in the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands;
- eliminate tax loopholes that permit U.S. citizens to make donations “to organizations that support human rights violations and breaches of international law and U.N. resolutions”;
- account for the percentage of U.S. foreign aid that supports such activities and redirect that aid toward the rebuilding of Gaza and the “dismantling of remaining settlement infrastructure”; and
- “employ the strategic use of influence and the withholding of financial and military aid in order to enforce Israel’s compliance with international law and peacemaking efforts.”

Other recommendations address other governments in the region. Among others, they call for:

- the main Palestinian political parties — Fatah and Hamas — to work toward immediate reconciliation;
- all parties in the Middle East, including Iran and Israel, to refrain from

all nuclear arms proliferation;

- Egypt and Israel to end their blockades of Gaza;
- all parties in the Middle East to “cease rhetoric and actions that demonize others, including Iranian leaders’ holocaust denials, threats by Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas against Israel, and threats by Israel to transfer masses of Palestinians to Jordan”;
- the Iranian government to “cease its repression of democratic and religious freedoms”;
- Lebanon to address the plight of Palestinian refugees living within its borders;
- Syria and Israel to resume negotiations about the status of the Golan Heights;
- the government of Iraq to “provide for and strengthen the protection of its minority communities, especially its Christian community”; and
- creation of an international council for Jerusalem, which is a spiritual center for all three Abrahamic faiths — Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

So in response to this report, once again Presbyterians are accused of being enemies of Israel

The Simon Wiesenthal Center accuses Presbyterians of declaring war on Israel

Leslie Scanlon, reporting for *The Presbyterian Outlook*, begins her Feb. 23 story:

“Once again, relations between the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and

American Jewish leaders have hit a rough spot – with criticism emerging of a not-yet-finished report on the Middle East that’s headed to next summer’s General Assembly.”

On February 22, less than a month after the Presbyterian News Service reported on the still uncompleted work of the study committee on Israel/Palestine, the Simon Wiesenthal Center posted an alert to its supporters, with the headline: “Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Ready to Declare War Against Israel: Take Action Now.”

The Wiesenthal Center describes itself as “An international Jewish human rights organization dedicated to generating change through the Snider Social Action Institute and education by confronting antisemitism, hate and terrorism, promoting human rights and dignity, standing with Israel, defending the safety of Jews worldwide, and teaching the lessons of the Holocaust for future generations.”

Warning that “adoption of this poisonous document by the Presbyterian Church will be nothing short of a declaration of war on Israel and her supporters,” it urges supporters to “protest directly to the top leadership of the PCUSA,” and to ask Presbyterian friends to “speak out against this potential rewriting of PCUSA’s policy towards Israel that will destroy the era of good will that has been fostered with the Jewish community for decades.”



**CONSULTATION AND
ENCOUNTER:
THE PRESBYTERIANS OF
IRAQ, SYRIA AND
LEBANON
NOVEMBER 5 – 19, 2010**

Received from the Rev. Len Bjorkman, for the Syria-Lebanon Network of the PC(USA)

You are invited to travel on a mission trip to Lebanon and Syria this fall to meet fellow-Presbyterians from Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. This venture is organized through the Iraq Partnership Network and the Syria-Lebanon Network of the PC(USA) and is sponsored and facilitated by The Outreach Foundation. The church governing bodies in the region, namely the Assembly of Presbyterian Churches in Iraq and the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon have worked closely with the networks to finalize and bless these plans.

For details on this mission/learning trip >>
http://presbyvoicesforjustice.org/2010/israel_palestine_2010.htm#consultn%20and%20encounter

The *Outlook* report noted that the Wiesenthal Center's call to action got results. During a number of Presbyterian meetings held in Louisville at the end of February, "top Presbyterian leaders ... were flooded by more than 2,700 e-mails of protest." We can expect lots of attention to this issue, and other reports and overtures relating to Israel/Palestine, during the coming General Assembly in Minneapolis. Presbyterians, especially those committed to justice for the Palestinian people, will once again be attacked as "anti-Semitic," and who knows what else.

One Presbyterian conservative charges we're anti-Semitic

For example, conservative Presbyterian activist (in Voices of Orthodox Women and other groups) Viola Larson has posted on her blog a warning that "Two anti-Semitic Overtures [are] coming to the Presbyterian (U.S.A.) General Assembly from San Francisco Presbytery." She is referring to Overture 085, which commends for study and action the Kairos document which was drafted by Palestinian Christians, and which the overture describes as "asking us to help them get rid of the occupation through concrete acts: theological debates on occupation as sin, and Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions campaigns." The other overture that she labels "anti-Semitic" is 084, which calls for a recognition "that Israel's laws, policies, and practices constitute apartheid against the Palestinian

Other calls for action – or no action

At least two other overtures – 039 from Newark, and 083 from San Francisco – call for action such as divestment to press Caterpillar, Inc., to stop providing heavy equipment to Israel that is being used for the destruction of houses in the occupied territories of the Palestinian people.

In addition, Overture 091, from the Presbytery of San Joaquin, calls essentially for no action on all matters relating to “Middle East Peacemaking,” because the issues are just too complex.

More on these overtures on pages 16 - 17.

To read the report:

The report, “Breaking Down Walls,” has been released in three parts.

The first part of the report contains the introduction and a series of letters to multiple audiences, along with scriptural and personal reflections. Part two presents policy recommendations, while part three offers study materials and appendices. Go to <http://www.pcusa.org/middleeastpeace/> to download all or just parts of the report, in PDF format.

The Israel Palestine Mission Network calls upon PC(USA) leadership to stand firm

In response to the statement by the Simon Wiesenthal Center which called on Jews to protest to the PC(USA) about the yet unpublished report of the Middle East Study Group, the Steering Committee of the Israel Palestine Mission Network prepared this article:

In 2008 at its 218th General Assembly meeting in San Jose, California, the Presbyterian Church (USA) affirmed the obligation of the Church to speak to U.S. and foreign governments when it sees those governments violating the commandments of

God; endorsed the Amman Call created in 2007 by the Christian Churches in the Middle East which then called upon our denomination to take significant actions in our policies for seeking a just Israeli-Palestinian peace, assuring that we remain active partners in this effort; called for Presbyterians to travel and take pilgrimages to Israel/Palestine in a manner that offers a full view of life conditions for both Israelis and Palestinians; and strengthened its resolve to monitor closely U.S. corporations that support or profit

from the Israeli occupation of Palestine. In addition to these justice issues affecting all Palestinians, the Assembly was very concerned that intensified Israeli control of Jerusalem and the West Bank was accelerating the shrinkage of the Christian population in the Holy Land—a matter of real urgency at this point. Thus the Assembly voted to create a Middle East Study Group (MESG), appointed by the present PC (USA) moderator and the two most recent past moderators, that would report to the 219th meeting of the General Assembly in 2010.

Since that meeting, the Middle East Study Group has met several times, traveled to Israel/Palestine, visited with both Israeli and Palestinian religious leaders and others, and spent time on both sides of the system of walls, fences and checkpoints that separate Palestinians from lives of freedom, human rights, access to life-preserving and life-saving medical care and treatment, as well as the ability to lead full lives that have access to livelihoods and the amenities of just societal living that most of us take for granted. As is true with most who travel to the West Bank, many in this study group returned to their task with eyes wide open. This does not mean, however, that all members of the study group were of one mind about how Presbyterians should respond to the injustice they could not deny is taking place in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT).

The report of the MESG has not yet been made public. It will be released soon and formally presented and discussed at the General Assembly meeting of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in Minneapolis July 3-10 of this year. Without the benefit of having seen or read the report, the Simon Wiesenthal Center, under the direction of Rabbi Abraham Cooper, has now begun a disinformation campaign regarding the Middle East Study Group and its findings. The organization's website has sounded an alert calling upon its constituency as well as rank-and-file Presbyterians to flood the PC (USA) offices in Louisville with e-mails in opposition to MESG's yet-to-be published findings.

This action seeks to do exactly what groups like the Simon Wiesenthal Center often rail against when the same is done to the Jewish community: take an entity endowed with diverse opinion and many different gifts and turn it into a monolith for the purpose of demonization. It hopes to distract the public from the fact that the Jewish Community not only comprises those who hold these views but also involves such groups and organizations as Jewish Voice for Peace, B'Tselem, and the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD) that stand unafraid to engage in debate about the serious violations of human rights being committed in Occupied Palestine.

Many on the forefront of the human rights struggle in Occupied Palestine

know that in Israel itself there is a healthier debate going on throughout Israeli society about these issues than is taking place in the American Jewish Community. One only needs to read Israeli dailies like The Jerusalem Post and Ha'aretz to know there are significant Israeli voices calling for an end to injustice in Palestine; voices of people who believe their beloved homeland has become an oppressor nation. Their motives in calling for immediate change in government policies are not only for the sake of Palestinian human rights, but also for the future security of Israel itself.

World opinion is turning against Israeli policies in the OPT and, as this occurred in regard to South Africa just a few decades ago, nothing will change that. This is the reason for the great angst, hyperbolic attacks and disinformation campaign emerging from such organizations as the Simon Wiesenthal Center; an organization once known for its pursuit of justice has now appointed itself to be a mouthpiece for a colonial enterprise and segregated political system. It is important to note that the Wiesenthal Center, which Presbyterians could once count on to express the best of the Biblical prophetic tradition, is presently trying to build a "Museum of Tolerance" on an ancient Muslim graveyard in Jerusalem. In the name of the tolerance and understanding this organization seeks, it would be important for its leadership to clarify whether or not it believes there

should be a Christian presence left in Jerusalem and Palestine and, if so, explain how that presence can be maintained under the constant pressure of an apartheid system. The Israel Palestine Mission Network, along with many Presbyterians who are committed to seeing their church make a stand for justice and human rights wherever these values may be violated, calls upon Presbyterian leadership in Louisville and elsewhere to stand firm in the face of this deceptive attack by the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

For further information on the current publicity and disinformation campaigns of the Israeli government, please consult:

- <http://www.wiesenthal.com/site/apps/s/content.asp?c=lsKWLbPJLnF&b=4442915&ct=8021695>
- <http://www.muzzlewatch.com/2010/02/19/think-tank-tells-israeli-government-to-declare-war-on-peace-groups/>
- <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article11080.shtml>
- <http://sfjcf.wordpress.com/2010/02/18/policy/>
- http://www.democracynow.org/2010/2/10/palestinian_families_appeal_to_un_over [This URL may look strange, but it works.]

Thank you for your consideration,

Jeffrey DeYoe, Sr. Pastor
Worthington Presbyterian Church
Worthington, Ohio

Querying Queer Sexuality: Leading a Course to Broaden Awareness

by Sylvia Thorson-Smith

I have the very good fortune of belonging to a More Light Church in Tucson, Arizona (St. Mark's Presbyterian). Since I chair the More Light Ministry Team and regularly teach adult ed courses, I think it's important to provide regular opportunities for our members to study issues of human sexuality, especially as they pertain to our work for LGBT justice.

In January and February, I coordinated a 6-week course called "Querying Queer Sexuality." The reason I used the term "Queer" is to familiarize our congregation with the changing meaning and context of this term. For many, it still feels like a negative label (weird, odd, abnormal), while within the LGBT and academic communities, it's been recast as a broadly inclusive term and one that reflects new scholarly thinking (as in queer theory). There is much to discuss about this new terminology, as well as other changing attitudes toward the politics of sexual and gender identity.

I've been asked to give an overview of this series in *Network News*, with the hope that others may be encouraged to do something similar. Following is an outline of the course with comments about the content and process of each session.

Session 1: *Body and Soul*

This lesson was primarily instructional, providing an overview of recent debates on human sexuality in church and society. It included an introduction to the complex language of sex, gender, and sexual orientation; an analysis of the paradigm shift around sexuality issues that's occurring in contemporary Christianity; a historical summary of attitudes toward homosexuality, along with the emerging gay rights movement and self-definitions of LGBT persons; and an overview of more than three decades of policy debates on homosexuality in the PCUSA.

Session 2: *Male, Female, and Sexual*

We were most fortunate to have Dr. James B. Nelson, author of many books on sexual ethics, speak to this class, since he's retired and living in Tucson. However, there are other ways to address the content of his presentation: connections between traditional gender roles, homophobia, and heterosexism (heterosexual privilege and normativity). The point is to examine how society enforces gender roles (men and women are fundamentally different, men dominate women, only male-female sex is normal), and to see how any variation is met with fear and scorn (homophobia) and efforts to reinforce heterosexual norms (marriage and other privileges for heterosexuals only while insisting that non-

heterosexuals remain invisible and outcast).

Session 3: LGBTQIA=Queer

To demonstrate the diversity of views on sexual identity and changing issues of language, three guests spoke to the class: a lesbian, her bisexual partner, and a gay man. They helped the class discuss meanings of and attitudes toward QUEER terminology and shared their diverse perspectives on identity politics, labeling, and the increasing discomfort of fitting into fixed categories of difference.

Session 4: Queer Theology

I taught this class, beginning with small group discussion of two biblical texts (Esther and Luke). Participants were asked to “read these texts through queer eyes” and identify how the texts might be interpreted from the experience of LGBT persons. I then introduced brief highlights of books by leading queer writers: Carter Heyward, Chris Glaser, Robert Goss, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, Gary Comstock, and Marvin Ellison.

Session 5: The T in LGBT

On this day, guest speakers – a female-to-male transsexual and the mother of a transsexual daughter, now son -- helped us better understand the range of transgender experiences and issues. This was an immensely informative, truth-telling session, one that stretched

our minds far beyond our limited perspectives about sexual and gender variance.

Session 6: (Valentine’s Day) All We Need is Love...and Justice

For the conclusion of the series, we talked about the importance of connecting justice work to our feelings of love and compassion for all of those who are marginalized, excluded, ignorantly misunderstood, and judged through the lens of our own privileged experience. Lastly, the class worked in small groups to discuss a “To Do” list for More Light churches, prepared by More Light Presbyterians, and a list of steps that the session of St. Mark’s adopted on becoming a More Light church. We evaluated how we were doing and what more we need to be doing to live into our mission as a welcoming, activist congregation.

Being a member of a More Light church is empowering, liberating, and challenging. It is delightfully freeing, in the sense that the congregation’s commitment has been proclaimed with a boldness that invites public advocacy without hesitation. St. Mark’s advertises in LGBT event programs, staffs a booth at the annual OUToberfest, invites the gay men’s and LGBTA(ally) choruses to sing in our More Light Sunday services, celebrates Coming Out Day with cake and rainbow sherbet, routinely announces church activities in publications and emails of LGBT

groups, and is looking to find other ways to strengthen our witness and our welcome. I offer this educational model with the hope that it will stimulate *Network News* readers to shed More Light in your congregations and communities. Much help is available on the MLP website (www.mlp.org), and you can email me for more information about this course at sylviats@cox.net.

We've probably all heard the chant "we're here, we're queer." May we who are all kinds of queer – LGBTI(intersex)Q(questioning)A(ally) – pray and work tirelessly for the full measure of justice in the Presbyterian church and throughout society!

The author:

Sylvia Thorson-Smith is a member of the Voices for Justice board, and was a founding member of Voices of Sophia. She is retired from teaching sociology, religious studies, and gender/women's studies at Grinnell College and lives in Tucson, AZ.

**Are you a
Voices for Justice
member?**

Let's keep in touch!

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

This will probably not be more than half a dozen during a year – so we won't overload your already bursting email box.

Just send an email to dougking2@aol.com

Please put
"Voices elist"
in the subject line.

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

Please put "web updates" in the subject line.

Empowering Women to Claim the Fullness of Their Humanity as Created by God

Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty

The year 2010 marks the 50th anniversary of the publication of Valerie Saiving's article on "The Human Situation: A Feminine View." Mark Douglas, Associate Professor of Christian Ethics at Columbia Theological Seminary, reminded me of this fact at a recent meeting of theological educators. For Reformed theologians, ethicists and activists, Saiving's article should be of particular importance because Saiving added a timely perspective to the centuries-long Christian debate about one of our favorite subjects—sin! As you may recall, Saiving argued that theologians too often assumed that a male perspective and experience was normative for all human beings. Reinhold Niebuhr's arguments regarding sin served as an example. Sin, Niebuhr held, was the product of human anxieties created by living in the tension between freedom and finitude. "Men" were prone to claim and use power for their own self-promotion, failed to recognize their dependence upon God, and were tempted to believe that they could usurp the place of God. The theological prescription for this ailment was a dose of humility and sacrifice for the sake of others. Saiving asserted that this was a truth about "men's" experiences, not a universal truth relevant to women. Women's identities had been forged and shaped within a culture that assumed their inferiority and emphasized self-sacrifice as a virtue. Women's freedom had been limited and determined by

male norms. Anxiety was created for women by their inability to determine for themselves their own identities. I am not going to rehearse the theological responses to Saiving or to Niebuhr since then, although I think there is tremendous value in those discussions. Honoring the anniversary of Saiving's article is significant to me for another reason.

I have been contemplating Saiving's work while reading *Half the Sky: Turning Women's Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn (Knoph-Random House 2009). The experiences of women around the globe described in *Half the Sky* underscore the significance of Saiving's arguments. Let me offer a quote to pique your interest, "... far more women and girls are shipped into brothels each year in the early 21st century than African slaves were shipped into slave plantations each year in the 18th or 19th centuries – although the overall population was of course smaller then" (*Half the Sky*, 11). Sex slavery, AIDS, illiteracy, poverty, and lack of access to prenatal care name just a few of the overwhelming problems that need to be addressed to save the lives of many women around the globe. Kristof and WuDunn also point toward the means to solving these problems: "Empowerment is a cliché in the aid community but it is truly what is needed. The first step toward greater justice is to transform that culture of female docility

and subservience, so that women themselves become more assertive and demanding" (*Half the Sky*, 53).

Like many theologians and religious activists I am growing impatient with the sluggish pace at which the churches often respond to urgent social issues. I am even more impatient with the outright refusal of some Christian communities to deal with the realities women face, particularly those that are victims of human trafficking, abuse, rape, incest, and other forms of violence. Kristof and WuDunn invite us to join a movement empowering women worldwide to see themselves as fully human. Empowering women will not be a quick fix to the gargantuan problems that we are facing as a global community, but it sets us on the course toward social transformation. We have seen the power of the churches to heal and bring about reconciliation particularly in response to recent natural disasters. We have even done a great deal in the PC(USA) through our mission and advocacy work. But how often are the experiences of women that I have mentioned characterized as true emergencies in need of the immediate attention of our communities of faith?

We can do much to create spaces and places that will empower all women to name and to claim the fullness of their own humanity as created by God. In my own congregation, we are offering a study series on social justice issues, reading ecumenical social creeds, and working collaboratively as a community to compose our own social creed using a web-based document. There are efforts being made across the denomination

including a new study on the status of women in our church now being planned by the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns. Women's empowerment will be a key theme in any discussion. We, as a community of faith, must consider more carefully and intentionally how assertiveness and self-determination can be incorporated more clearly into Reformed understandings of human nature, God's sovereignty, redemption, and faithful action. These conversations are likely to challenge us to the core of our Reformed theological being, but they are of tremendous importance. The theological statements that we make and the priorities that we set for our work are the ways we name and claim God's continual creativity and responsiveness to women and men living in a wide variety of – sometimes quite desperate – situations.

The author:

Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty is an elected member of Advocacy for Women's Concerns, and is Associate Professor of Theology at Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky. She will be one of the main presenters for the Ghost Ranch seminar this summer on "We're All In This Together: Confronting the Structures of Injustice." Co-sponsored by Voices for Justice and the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, it will take place from July 26-August 1, 2010.

You'll find more information about this important event on pages 48-49. We hope you can join us!

The Debt Squeeze: Who Should Take the Fall?

by Gene TeSelle

Gene TeSelle, formerly president and long-time Issues Analyst of the Witherspoon Society, has written this as a sequel to his article “Taking Responsibility for the Future” in the Spring 2009 issue of *Network News*, pp. 16-19. He explains that it is an attempt to understand, and that he would welcome corrections and additional perspectives. Just send a note to teselle@bellsouth.net

A headline in early February, 2010, said that health care expenditures had risen last year to a record 17.3 percent of the Gross Domestic Product, double what they were a decade ago, and that the percentage could rise to 20 percent ten years from now.

The Rising Bill for Health Care

People are living longer because of improved health care, and the older they get the more health care they need. Those who are over 65 are eligible for Medicare, which has been a bonanza for medical specialists, hospitals, and equipment manufacturers — and, in the last several years, for the pharmaceutical companies, which have received about \$40 billion a year from Medicare’s Part D, the Prescription Drug Plan.

Bills to Medicare keep rising as medical procedures and equipment become more and more sophisticated. The chief beneficiaries are the major medical centers, most of them linked with universities, and the for-profit chains like HCA, invented by the Frists in 1968. But even the major medical centers are squeezed as Medicare reimbursements are reduced and states try to cap what they will pay per patient.

Not so fortunate are the community hospitals, the last refuge of patients without public or private insurance. It should also be noted, however, that the community health care centers, which offer primary care in poor neighborhoods, have continued to be funded even during Republican administrations, as a safety net that no one wanted to pull away entirely. But they, too, need more adequate funding.

All of these institutions, as well as the private insurance companies that insure people under 65 and offer supplements to Medicare, have a stake in the outcome of the current Congressional debates about a new health care plan. So do the citizens who are over 65, and all who expect to pass that marker in the near or more distant future.



What About That Looming Debt?

My purpose here is not to solve the Congressional debate. This latest news about medical costs is more like a “news handle” for resuming discussion of a broader issue – that of the future obligations of Social Security and especially of Medicare. “Deficit hawks” have raised fears that, as the Baby Boom generation begins drawing on these entitlements, these funds could go broke, if not sooner than later. Others point out that the squeeze is building up slowly and that it could be avoided by making adjustments in retirement age or removing the “cap” on Social Security taxes (\$106,800 in 2010).

More broadly, it is pointed out that deficit spending may be a necessary and productive approach during a downturn in the economy by lowering unemployment, investing in energy conservation, and developing the alternative sources of energy that we know we will need.

But the issue is bigger, of course, than Social Security and Medicare. The deficit hawks are focusing their attention on the total federal debt, which is now over \$12 trillion. When you look further into this, you find that the federal budget, and thus the national debt, is of two different kinds.

(Please note that I am writing this in an attempt to understand, not as an expert. If my presentation should be incomplete or inaccurate, I beg your

indulgence — and your suggestions. These are complex matters. It is difficult to get the whole picture. And even the economists, accountants, and lawyers vary in the ways they calculate and evaluate them.)

One part consists of what is called “mandatory” spending, including Social Security and Medicare. This is drawn from funds held in trust by the federal government in the form of “special obligation bonds,” not Treasury bills (for the complex details see the official history at www.socialsecurity.gov/history/BudgetTreatment.html). These bonds are backed by the “full faith and credit” of the United States, and thus they do constitute a part of the national debt.

The other is “discretionary” spending, approved annually by Congress. This is of several different kinds. The Iraq and Afghanistan wars, for example, are funded by “supplemental” bills and thus do not appear in the annual budget. Total military and Homeland Security spending has been over half of discretionary spending in the past decade. One summary for FY 2010 puts total “security” expenditures at \$844 billion, non-security at \$553 billion (<http://useconomy.about.com/od/usfederalbudget/p/Discretionary.htm>). The cost of current wars and power-projection throughout the world may well be the most unsustainable part of our economy.

Discretionary expenditures are funded either from taxes or from Treasury bills

and other such instruments. There was a balanced budget in 2000. Because of the Bush-era tax cuts these obligations have accumulated in recent years, leading to an increased deficit in the annual budget and a rising national debt.

The two sets of obligations have been combined since 1968 in a “unified budget” (it helped make the costs of the Vietnam War somewhat more palatable by counting Social Security and other trust funds in the assets column). The total is now over \$12 trillion, though as a percentage of the Gross Domestic Product it is roughly comparable with past debts. And of course one part of the mandatory budget is interest on the federal debt, now over 8 percent and steadily rising.

These are the technical details in broad outline. If the deficit is a growing problem, what are we to do about it, and whose recommendations should be followed?

Who Should Decide?

One solution that we have heard for several years is to appoint a federal commission to examine the total debt and make the “tough decisions” that Congress has tried to avoid. The Peterson and Pew Foundations formed a Commission on Budget Reform which issued its report last December, with the title *Red Ink Rising: A Call to Action to Stem the Mounting Federal Debt*. It does not make specific recommendations; instead it calls for a multi-decade program to “stabilize” the

debt and save future generations from bankruptcy. Its Conclusion notes the need to “raise certain taxes” and “reduce certain benefits.” But specifics would be dealt with by the blue-ribbon commission.

President Obama, influenced especially by Wall Street billionaire Pete Peterson (whose public career began, ironically, in the Nixon cabinet), has favored this approach to “fiscal responsibility.” He asked Congress to appoint a commission to deal with the issue, but the Senate voted down one version of the proposal, the Conrad-Gregg bill, which would have formed a commission composed chiefly of members of Congress. In his state-of-the-union address he announced his intention to appoint a commission anyway, with a membership far broader than Congress.

There has not been much coverage of the issue, other than echoing the alarm about the rising national debt. But the matter deserves careful reflection.

Opinions about the commission proposal are varied. Some insist that Congress has the constitutional responsibility of adopting an annual budget and should not palm it off on a panel of professionals (most of whom participated in the debates leading up to the current situation) deliberating in secret. Others point out that any proposal would still have to come before Congress, perhaps for an up-or-down vote, perhaps amendable by some super-majority. Republicans fear that it

would co-opt them in a plan to raise taxes; Democrats, in a plan to cut entitlements. The official name would probably be “budget commission,” but many commentators are already calling it an “entitlements commission.” Although the commission idea is attractive because it seems “non-political,” it cannot help being political from first to last.

Who Should Benefit?

The Treasury has borrowed from the various trust funds, chiefly Social Security, over the years — with interest-free loans, we should note, thus easing the total national debt. When you check the Internet to see what this “intragovernmental debt” comes to, it’s hard to find the information. The best source is the official Treasury web site (www.treasurydirect.gov), which says that the total is now \$4.5 trillion. That means that a third of the national debt is not held “publicly” by investors of many sorts (individuals who have bought T-bills, pensions funds, investment banks — and foreign governments, chief among which is the People’s Republic of China), and thus is not vulnerable to the ups and downs of the international financial market.

This “intragovernmental debt” is money that the government “owes itself.” And when you are in financial trouble, the easiest solution may seem to be to write off what you owe yourself. That idea has been a “subtext” in the recent discussion of the national debt. So let’s ask what would

be involved.

William Greider, a seasoned watchdog on many financial issues, points out that Social Security is far from broke (“Looting Social Security,” *The Nation*, January 25, 2010). It has a surplus of around \$3 trillion (“trillion, not billion,” Greider notes). Because of decreased employment and smaller paychecks, FICA taxes have shrunk drastically since mid-2008. The Social Security Administration says that expenditures may outpace receipts as early as 2018, though the total fund would not be exhausted for several more decades.

Social Security is a trust fund, paid for by citizens’ FICA taxes. In this sense it belongs not to the government but to all the participants in this retirement insurance program. Some of them are drawing on it now. Our children hope to be drawing on it in the future.

Since politicians love to draw analogies with a family’s budget, this is like having a trust fund for one’s children but borrowing against it — by credit cards — to meet current expenses. In the case of a legally registered trust, there is only a limited range for discretion. It’s like a contract, and we love to say that a contract is “sacred.”

But there’s a difference. The government has sovereign freedom to change the terms of the trust fund and the way its debts will be paid. Its relationship to us is more like those “suzerainty treaties” that we read about in the history of Israel. Congress could indeed

change the Social Security system. That's why we need to be worried. In order to avoid bankruptcy in its publicly traded debt, it could put us far down in the list of priorities.

Probably Social Security has become the target of the deficit hawks because it is solvent. A more serious debate concerns Medicare, whose expenditures, according to the Social Security Administration (see www.socialsecurity.gov/OACT/TRSUM/index.html), are expected to begin outrunning assets in 2014. In addition, health care costs are steadily rising, as my opening "news story" indicates. That's why there are increasing calls for cost-containment. And that's why passing a health care bill is so important — and so controversial, since cost-containment could seriously affect specialists, medical centers, equipment manufacturers, and insurance companies.

The projections about the future of Medicare are a motivator to "do something." So is the more general debate about deficit financing — and about what should be financed. The basic question, of course, is who would benefit.

In the eyes of many political consultants, this is largely a question of what will get the votes, and what kind of financial backing will be needed to get those votes. But it is also a question of public ethics and what ought to take priority in our public spending.

The money is there in the economy — or at least was, before it was frittered away in derivatives, credit default swaps, and all the other practices that fed the bubble and then the bust. The Bush tax cuts that put billions of dollars of assets into the hands of the top few percent of the population were "deficit-financed" through an inverse kind of Keynesianism. However one totals the amount of the Bush tax cuts (and there is much controversy, if not obfuscation, about this), this money could have kept Medicare and other federal expenditures on a sound financial basis.

One problem is that the gain from these tax cuts is now held as assets, not income. Instead of being recycled into the economy through spending, loans, or new investment, much is being stashed away, "capitalized," in stocks, real estate, offshore tax havens — and, ironically, in Federal Reserve deposits and government securities, currently regarded as the safest place to store one's money. While some states tax "wealth," the federal government does not, except through inheritance taxes and gift taxes (designed to catch intergenerational transfers prior to death). The inheritance tax is now technically void, although everyone expects it to be reenacted (and made retroactive to the beginning of 2010) as part of a legislative package. The debate will concern the amount excluded (\$3.5 million? \$5 million?) and the rate (a maximum of 35%? or of 55%?).

Perhaps the chief reason for the

current furor over the national debt is that the Bush-era tax cuts were not permanent, despite several attempts to make them so. (The 2001 and 2003 cuts were made using the now-controversial “reconciliation” process, without requiring 60 votes for cloture.) They are scheduled to expire in 2010; then we would revert to the previous tax provisions. These would add to the tax burden of middle-class families, as we have been told so often. President Obama has promised that taxes will not be raised on families with incomes under \$250,000. Conservative commentators deride this, claiming either that it would not collect enough, or that it would be unjust to the Wall Street traders who deserve all of their hard-earned wealth, or that it would hurt “small business.”

As we head into the 2010 elections, we may be facing the “perfect storm.” How candidates and voters respond to the various factors will be important, in fact fateful, for the future.

- Health care costs are rising.
- Medicare is spending at a rate that could develop into a net loss.
- The annual “discretionary” budget has borrowed against Social Security and other trust funds, shifting the burden of taxation from the present to future generations in what looks to many like a Ponzi scheme.
- The policy of deficit financing, although it seemed to be the height of wisdom a few years ago, has now become controversial. Blame for the growth of the deficit can be attached to many different targets: the Bush tax

cuts, spending on social programs, porkbarrel projects, an overgrown military and questionable wars.

- Similarly there are conflicting recommendations on how to deal with it. Will we (or Congress, or the lobbyists, or a special commission) raise taxes or decrease entitlements? Or (what is most likely), what combination of the two will be negotiated — first in back rooms with the participation of Washington’s 17,000 lobbyists, but finally in public, on the floor of Congress, and during an election year?

- And if election-year pressures should lead to some kind of responsible legislation, will those who voted for it be savaged by corporate assaults and Tea Party protests?

- Rising health care costs and the coming squeeze on Medicare make some kind of legislation almost inevitable. Because of pressure from the White House a year ago we are no longer talking about a single-payer plan, a kind of “Medicare for all.” We may be talking about the current Senate bill. We may be talking about some kind of bipartisan compromise.

The key question is what to do when the Bush tax cuts expire. Will we return to a more progressive tax structure, or will we be inclined to identify with the wealthy? In any case, tax legislation will not stand on its own. It will be linked with the two other issues of deficit financing and health care costs.

How we respond to that three-cornered problem – no, make it four-

cornered, a tetrahedron with the military budget probably at the top of the pyramid, since some deficits are more equal than others – will say much about our character as a nation and what kind of future we envisage for ourselves. And to be quite specific, are the churches ready to ask what our public priorities are or should be, and whether we are ready to call upon citizens to bear their fair share of the tax burden for the sake of our common good?

“Pay taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due” (Rom. 13:7, RSV). In a democracy all of these terms have a broader meaning than they did in Paul’s day. We know from Paul’s own situation that the governing authorities may not always have the right understanding of good and evil conduct. But we also know from Paul what their proper task is, and we are told to support it, not only because of the wrath that might come upon us (from God, from the media, from corporations, from political parties, or from populist anger, all of which can seem to be the voice of God) but for conscience’ sake (Rom. 13:5 KJV).

If you have comments or suggestions for improving this survey of a huge topic, please just send a note to teselle@bellsouth.net

Presbyterians urged to register for ...

Ecumenical Advocacy Days

March 19-22, 2010

Washington DC

The eighth annual Ecumenical Advocacy Days gathering will take place in Washington DC, March 19-22, 2010. Presbyterians attending Advocacy Days will have several opportunities for denominational networking and community-building, including a lunchtime meeting on Saturday and a dinner on Saturday night.

The theme for this year’s conference is “A Place to Call Home: Immigrants, Refugees, and Displaced Peoples.” Policy makers, expert speakers and representatives from global regions will join church leaders and grassroots activists in reflecting on this theme, while a variety of workshops and training sessions will focus on shaping U.S. immigration and refugee policies and doing advocacy at home on these topics. The program will also include visits to Capitol Hill and meetings with Members of Congress and their staffs.

Registration and more information about Ecumenical Advocacy Days is at <http://www.advocacydays.org> on the Web. You may also contact Mary Cooper at the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office, Mary.Cooper@pcusa.org, if you have specific questions.

Engaging Conversations: Social Media and Justice Networks

by the Rev. Melissa Lynn DeRosia

In January the board and network leadership teams of Presbyterian Health, Education and Welfare Association (PHEWA) met in Louisville, KY, and invited me to engage in conversation about my experiences with social media. They were particularly interested in how I utilize it in my local ministry as a pastor and connect with others across the denomination, as I serve as moderator of the Presbytery of Lake Huron and an elected member of the General Assembly Mission Council (GAMC).

For those who have finally gotten the hang of email, it can be overwhelming to think about learning how to use interactive technologies like Facebook and Twitter, or starting a blog. For others there is a downright resistance to acknowledging social media as a practical means of communication between individuals and communities. People fear that it is attempting to replace all of our face-to-face contact.

Nothing replaces face-to-face conversations. For the networks and members of PHEWA – a community of ministries working for justice alongside persons who are often marginalized by the church and

society – face to face interactions are essential. As those networks seek to connect with one another to share information and engage in conversation with networks that span across the country, face to face contact is not always possible. Social media offer additional tools for conversation and advocacy. They provide places to give voice to our stories, our views, our prayers and our joys in creative ways.

It was thrilling to talk with PHEWA about these tools and watch as the board and networks began to envision how their ministries might be enhanced by connecting to people in new ways. The Presbyterian AIDS Network immediately put together a Facebook page that shares who they are and brings people together through discussion boards around topics like “Know your Status: HIV Testing and the Church” and “World AIDs Day/Advent Resources 2010.” They also see this as a way to invite new voices of leadership for the network and Leadership Team. Presbyterians Affirming Reproductive Options (PARO) also recognized that there are Presbyterians talking about overtures concerning reproductive health on Twitter. PARO wondered how they might use the 140 character maximum on Twitter to educate

people about the PC(USA) social witness policies.

There are websites that can help answer some basic questions about different social networking tools. The Rev. Bruce Reyes-Chow, Moderator of the 218th General Assembly, also has helpful posts. You can search his blog, www.reyes-chow.com, which covers “Tweetable Tips for Beginners,” “101 Blog Posting Ideas for Pastors and Other Church Geeks,” and “Two Tips for Dealing with Facebook Apps.” Here are a few helpful hints that I have found useful in using social media to engage in social justice ministry:

Jump In and Stay In: The best way to get started in social media is to jump in. Give it a try. See if there are conversations already happening and if the vision of Presbyterian Voices for Justice (formerly the Witherspoon Society and Voices of Sophia) can be enhanced by these community building tools. It is true that Twitter isn’t for everyone, but if there is a desire to build relationships and gain the attention of others then you’ve got to stay in. Like any community-building efforts, to be viably competent on a network takes time and commitment to become part of the growing, changing, expanding group of participants.

Be More than a Follower: Building community and raising awareness happens in the context of interact-

ing with that community in a meaningful way. “Following” someone on Twitter or “friend-ing” someone through an organization on Facebook means that you find ways to contribute in conversation and invite others to interact further by sharing their experiences.

Open It Up: A major shift from traditional means of communication (via newsletters and press releases that convey information from sender to recipient) to interactive forms of communication (Facebook discussions and blogs) opens up the dialogue and encourages the community to create, administrate, comment, and criticize. Leaders of justice networks need to spend as much time asking questions, soliciting ideas and creating avenues for an open exchange of ideas as they do sending out information.

Over the past few years we have witnessed how social media are empowering voices to connect ideas and voices in new ways. There is no denying the impact it is having! The challenging question is: do you or do you not want to participate in these conversations? It really doesn’t matter whether or not we think that social media have a purpose, what that purpose is, or if we can attain measurable outcomes from it. Social media are already creating the virtual space for hundreds and thousands of people to come together around an idea or cause in a

Vanderbilt Divinity School will offer special programs for LGBT seminary students

The Human Rights Campaign and Vanderbilt's Carpenter Program in Religion, Gender and Sexuality have announced two joint initiatives: a summer institute for seminary students and a dissertation fellowship for Ph.D. students.

This summer, Vanderbilt will co-host a week-long intensive seminar/workshop on LGBTQI issues and religion aimed at seminary students interested in working on these issues as activists and/or as academics. They are directing their recruitment efforts particularly toward students whose seminaries do not offer them particularly rich resources in this area of study.

A Ph.D. dissertation fellowship will also be offered to doctoral students advancing research on LGBT issues in religious and theological studies.

For more information, go to <http://www.hrc.org/seminaryscholarship/index.asp>

matter of minutes. They are signing petitions, raising money, mobilizing community action groups, and praying for those who care about injustices they experience in their day-to-day lives.

It was an amazing experience to spend a few days with the community that has mentored me in ministry from my time in seminary to my first years in ministry. Even though our time in Louisville came to an end, it is exciting to know that our continued conversations are only a Facebook message, blog post, and even *gasp* – a Tweet away!

Follow me on Twitter @melissalynn24 or on my blog www.sacredscreaming.blogspot.com

The author:

The Rev. Melissa Lynn DeRosia is Pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Caro, Michigan. She is currently serving as Moderator of the Presbytery of Lake Huron, and is an elected Member of the General Assembly Mission Council, as well as a former board member and Network Co-Moderator of Presbyterian Health Education and Welfare Association (PHEWA).

Networking??

Try it out!

Presbyterian Voices for Justice – or at least its predecessors, voices of Sophia and the Witherspoon Society – have ventured into this new world in small ways, at least. We encourage you, in Melissa's words, to jump in and stay in.

Voices of Sophia blog

Heather Reichgott, who has created this new blog for Voices of Sophia, introduces it:

After fifteen years of scholarship and activism, Voices of Sophia presents a blog. Here, we present the voices of feminist theologians of all stripes: scholars, clergy, students, exiles, missionaries, workers, thinkers, artists, lovers and devotees, from many parts of the world, all children of the God in whose image women are made. This blog seeks to glorify God through prayer, work, art, and intellectual reflection. Through articles and ensuing discussion we hope to become an active and thoughtful community.

<http://voicesof sophia.wordpress.com/>

Witherspoon's Facebook page

Mitch Trigger, Witherspoon's Secretary/Communicator, has created a Facebook page where Witherspoon members and others can gather to exchange news and views. Mitch and a few others have posted bits of news, both personal and organiza-

tional. But there's room for more! You can post your own news and views, or initiate a conversation about a topic of interest to you.

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=50517709365>

John Harris' Summit to Shore blogspot

Theological and philosophical reflections on everything between summit to shore, including kayaking, climbing, religion, spirituality, philosophy, theology, politics, culture, travel, The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), New York City and the Queens neighborhood of Ridgewood by a progressive New York City Presbyterian Pastor. John is a former member of the Witherspoon board, and is designated pastor of North Presbyterian Church in Flushing, NY.

<http://summittoshore.blogspot.com/>

John Shuck's Shuck and Jive

A Presbyterian minister, currently serving as pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Elizabethton, Tenn., blogs about spirituality, culture, religion (both organized and disorganized), life, evolution, literature, Jesus, and lightening up.

<http://www.shuckandjive.org/>

J. Herbert Nelson named director of public witness, Presbyterian Washington Office

News release from General Assembly Mission Council, Presbyterian Church (USA)

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — March 9, 2010 — The Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson II, a third-generation Presbyterian pastor, has been named the new director of public witness for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office. Nelson has 25 years of experience in congregational ministry. The past several years, he has worked in a new church development at Liberation Community Presbyterian Church, a ministry with the urban poor of Memphis, Tenn. Nelson also often preaches and serves as a keynote leader at Presbyterian youth and adult conferences.

The Presbyterian Washington Office is the public policy information and advocacy office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The office advocates, and helps the church at large to live out the social witness perspectives and policies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The church has a long history of applying these biblically and theologically-based insights to issues that affect the public — maintaining a public policy ministry in the nation's capital since 1946.

“I see this new call as something of an ‘occu-passion’,” said Nelson. “I am grateful for the opportunity to devote my work to something about which I feel so deeply passionate. I am both humbled and excited to think about new ways of addressing public policy.”

Nelson recognizes that many Presbyterians, especially young people, have a keen interest in living out the values of their faith in ways that impact the public arena. Yet, they do not make the connection with the Presbyterian Church and its historic role in shaping public policy. His hope is to help individuals, networks and congregations work together as they seek to bear witness to Christ's love and justice in ways that transform the world.

“I am impressed by his sense of passion and calling as pastor and prophet — to give voice to the church's calling to demonstrate God's intention for the world, especially in regard to justice,” said Sara Lisherness, director of Compassion Peace and Justice for the General Assembly Mission Council. “He has a real track record of speaking to and inspiring a younger generation to live out the reign of God in the context of our world.”

The director of public witness provides a point of focus as the PC(USA) gives expression of its faith in the public square. As the primary

liaison with the Office of the Stated Clerk, the wider church, ecumenical and interfaith partners, and the general public, this position provides leadership to a holistic vision of public witness in the Reformed tradition. Reverend Nelson's call as the director marks an exciting new step following the recent review of the church's ministry out of the nation's capital. That study, led by the Rev. Dr. Eileen Lindner, defined the mission of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office as implementing the guidance of the General Assembly and the General Assembly Mission Council concerning public affairs by:

- Extending the evangelical mission of the church by witnessing to the sovereignty of God and the grace of Christ.
- Urging the nation to promote mercy and justice.
- Speaking truth in love to power among our national leaders.
- Helping Presbyterians respond to God's call to witness to that same faith in their congregations, communities, states, the nation and the world.

Scott Anderson approved for ordination by John Knox Presbytery

By a vote of 81-25, the Presbytery of John Knox approved Scott D. Anderson for ordination to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament on February 20, 2010.

Anderson served two Presbyterian congregations as an ordained minister in the 1980s, but he set aside his ordination in 1990, after he was "outed" by two church members as a gay man. Since then he has served in ecumenical roles in California and Wisconsin, and served as the only gay member of the Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church.

In November 2008, he put forward a "declaration of conscience" against provision G-6.0106b of the Book of Order, which effectively bans LGBT persons from consideration for ordination in the Presbyterian Church. The Presbytery accepted his declaration, and thereby approved him as a candidate for ordination.

This action caps Anderson's years of struggle to fulfill his sense of calling to ministry. Scott wrote in his note about the Presbytery action: "It was a great experience, with fine leadership on the part of the Presbytery, and a grace-filled debate that proved



Continued from Scott Anderson, page 45

once again that Presbyterians can disagree without being disagreeable.”

Appeal filed against approval of Scott Anderson for ordination

A few days later, Peter Smith of the *Louisville Courier-Journal* reported that Caledonia Presbyterian Church of Portage, Wis., had filed a challenge of the vote by John Knox Presbytery to ordain Scott Anderson, who is openly gay, living in a long-term committed relationship.

Smith’s blog page invited comments. This was the first one posted:

And then the Presbyterians wonder why everyone is leaving the church.

What more can we say? Other than that we rejoice for Scott and for the Presbyterian Church, and pray that he and our church will come through the next round of challenges to justice relatively sane and healthy.

More on our web site, at http://presbyvoicesforjustice.org/2007/ordination_&_exclusion.htm

PC(USA) stated clerk issues statement on Supreme Court’s election finance decision

Parsons: Unlimited spending by corporations ‘challenges democratic ethos’

by Jerry L. Van Marter, Presbyterian News Service

LOUISVILLE — Feb. 3, 2010 – The Rev. Grady Parsons, General Assembly stated clerk of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), issued a statement today decrying the January 21st U.S. Supreme Court decision to lift virtually all restrictions on corporate contributions to election campaigns.

The full text of Parsons’ statement, dated Feb. 3:

Statement by Stated Clerk on Unlimited Corporate Financing of Elections

The January 21, 2010, decision of the Supreme Court to reject 35 years of legislation to limit campaign spending by corporations challenges the democratic ethos of the United States and threatens to magnify the already-powerful role of special interests in US politics. In light of historic Presbyterian wisdom about the dangers of corruption by special interests, I am concerned about the pressures this decision puts on individual candidates and office holders and on the integrity of the election system as a whole.

Without addressing the legal status of corporations, now determined to be legal persons with “free speech,” able to use unlimited corporate (or union) funds for political purposes, this decision shows an innocence about human power and sin that Reformed Christians must question. Because this decision is likely to reshape the political process in profound ways, and to reduce the voice of citizens, churches and other groups without unlimited money, it is important to re-

state the position of many General Assemblies.

In 2000, recognizing the already skyrocketing costs of campaigns in the United States, the General Assembly Resolution on Campaign Finance Reform “Direct(ed) the Office of the General Assembly and the Washington Office to communicate the General Assembly’s strong support for ... campaign finance reforms, in order to increase public participation in elections and fairness in allocating the benefits and burdens of society” (Minutes, 2000, Part 1, pp. 424).

In 2008, in the resolution Lift Every Voice: Democracy, Voting Rights, and Electoral Reform, the Assembly recommended a set of measures for greater accountability and responsibility, including: “legislation and appropriate support for judicial cases that distinguish between campaign contributions and “free speech,” allowing meaningful regulation of special interest groups and individuals who are ... expected to spend approximately \$400 million of the \$1.5 billion 2008 election cycle.”

Well before Presbyterian minister John Witherspoon signed the Declaration of Independence, Presbyterians stood for the reform of both church and society in the direction of greater equal rights and democratic-representative processes. We have insisted on laws that protect individual rights and insure equitable communal decision-making. Elections for us are, in a sense, civic sacraments, as they carry a great moral responsibility to point to the common good. Unelected powers are unaccountable powers, unless governed by fair laws.

The Reformed theologian Reinhold

Niebuhr expressed our mixture of realism and hope for making our political processes as participatory, just, and accountable as possible in his famous aphorism: “man’s (human) capacity for justice makes democracy possible but man’s (human) capacity for injustice makes democracy necessary.” The Supreme Court’s decision promises to expand the capacity for the injustice of unlimited political influence, and to compromise the capacity of citizens and legislatures to fulfill the promise of self-government.

Along with the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, I call upon Presbyterians to express to their own legislators concern over this egregious decision and ask our Washington Office to share this statement with legislators, the members of the Supreme Court, and the President of the United States.

The Rev. Gradye Parsons
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

More on the Supreme Court decision allowing corporations free rein in political contributions – on our website:

[http://
www.presbyvoicesforjustice.org/2010/
big_money_and_democracy.htm](http://www.presbyvoicesforjustice.org/2010/big_money_and_democracy.htm)

Plan now for next summer!



Photo courtesy of Ghost Ranch

GHOST RANCH SEMINAR

July 26-August 1, 2010

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

In partnership with The Witherspoon Society/Voices of Sophia
and The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship.
Jane Hanna, Coordinator

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

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

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

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

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

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

News of Voices for Justice

Gusti Newquist resigns from Board

Gusti Newquist was elected to the Witherspoon Society Board in 2008, and has played a vital role in the group ever since.

Gusti received her Master of Divinity degree from Harvard Divinity School in 2009, having previously served the national church as Associate for the National Network of Presbyterian College Women (1997-2005).

She began her first pastoral ministry as co-pastor at St. Mark's Presbyterian Church in Tucson, Arizona. She was ordained by the Presbytery of Mid-

Kentucky in May, 2009, and began service in that church the same month.

She recently came to a sense that this new call was taking enough of her time and energy that she could no longer carry on the various roles she has played on the Board – first as member at large, and now as Membership Coordinator. So she asked to be allowed to resign from the Board.

The Board, during its conference call on Feb. 24, accepted her resignation with regret, “noting the deep appreciation of the board for the creativity and enthusiasm that she has given to the board during her term of office.”

About money ...

Many of you have responded generously to Co-Moderator Bill Dummer's appeal for special funds for our GA activities, but we still need more help, especially to fund the printing and mailing of our special issue of *Network News*, which goes to all commissioners and advisory delegates, plus a letter to all the commissioners and delegates which simply tries to help them make sense of the process of the Assembly, so they can work more effectively in that high-pressure atmosphere.

If you can give extra help to cover the costs of this mailing and our activities at the Assembly, we'll be grateful beyond measure.

You can use your credit card to send your contribution online by going to: http://www.presbyvoicesforjustice.org/2008/contribution_form2.htm

Or just mail a check to
Doug King
2805 Lakeshore Drive # 9
La Crosse, WI 54603

Thanks!

Help Haiti's recovery

from Melanie Hardison, Presbyterian Hunger Program

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has been working closely with partners in Haiti since the earthquake on January 12. Recently one of our partner networks has identified a need and asked for our assistance. The need is funding to purchase seeds local to Haiti that farmers can plant now for harvesting within the next few months.

The earthquake has prompted the migration of thousands of people to rural areas of Haiti from the devastated areas around and in Port-au-Prince. This influx of citizens into rural areas now threatens the security and sovereignty of rural food systems.

PC(USA)'s partner FONDAMA is prioritizing the urgent need for an increase in rural food production. FONDAMA's goal is to purchase 400 tons of local seeds for immediate distribution to 30,000 farmers nationwide. The local cost is estimated at roughly one million dollars. In many places hunger has been so great that people have been forced to eat the seeds they had intended to plant this season, which is why seed reserves are so depleted.

If you have already given to Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, we thank you. Please also consider giving in this special way. Make your donation to PHP account for Haiti directly (H000014) or through the PHP Web site >>

<http://www.pcusa.org/hunger/>

The next issue of *Network News*

will bring you news and analysis of issues, reports and other business coming to the 219th General Assembly, meeting in Minneapolis July 3 - 10, 2010.

We welcome your news and comments to go in that important issue!

And we *will* be printing that issue and mailing it to all GA commissioners and advisory delegates.

Just send your contributions – either news and comments, or an extra gift of money to help us print and mail this special issue – to:

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**Deadline for the Spring
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