

## Living in the World and the Church *with fear or with faith?*

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## The President's Corner

# Politics and Spirituality

by Ken Smith

In January, I attended a conference with more than 1,790 of my closest friends on "Politics and Spirituality: Seeking a Public Integrity" in Washington DC. The group overflowed the hotel ballroom and many had to watch the talks on a video feed. Forty-nine states and six foreign countries were represented. In addition to the geographical diversity, I was struck by the number of younger persons in attendance, particularly given the triple digit hotel room rates.

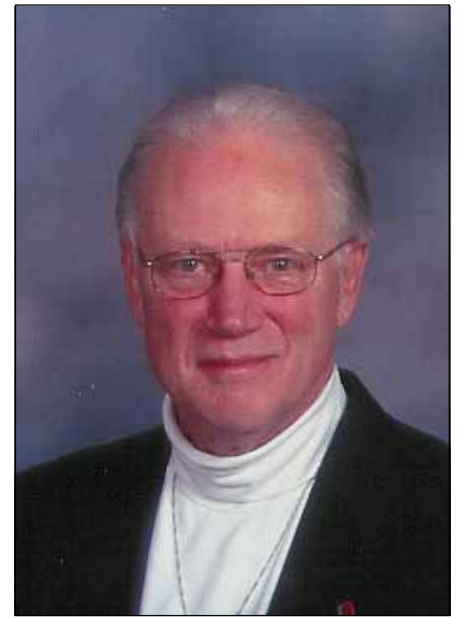
One of those younger persons was our daughter-in-law. In fact, she was the reason my wife and I were there. When our son told us that she wanted the conference registration as a birthday present, we decided to join her. Our daughter-in-law comes out of an evangelical faith tradition with which we are not always comfortable. So finding this common ground we could share together was particularly meaningful. She is working on her PhD in Rhetoric and plans to do her thesis on the rhetoric used by religious groups to advocate for social justice.

The speakers were Presbyterian author Anne Lamott, Franciscan Richard Rohr and Evangelical Jim Wallis. Richard Rohr spoke out of his religious, spiritual tradition, and about how we move from contemplation to action. He hit strongly on the lie of individualism/private salvation rather than being part of the body of Christ, some-

thing bigger. He commented in response to Jim Wallis' remarks that a major division in Christianity is between those who believe the Kingdom of God is both now and later and those who only believe it is later.


Jim Wallis came at us from the action side. He said there are two hungers of humankind, the hunger for spiritual integrity and the hunger for social justice. Many of his remarks come out of his recent book, *God's Politics*, and the speaking tour he has been on. For example, he calls for the end of global poverty – we can produce enough food for everyone, but we lack the moral and political will. Hope is not a mood but a choice we make based on faith. Hope is believing in spite of the evidence and watching the evidence change.

Anne Lamott is not a theologian and speaks out of her own personal journey as a "progressive activist and a crabby Christian." Those of you who have read her books are acquainted with her candor and her humor, both of which came through in her talk. She



Ken Smith

also made a number of serious points. Her world view is not based on anger, hostility or superiority and does not involve excluding anyone. God calls us to pursue difficult questions in good company. Not a bad picture of what Witherspoon is all about.

There were a number of worship experiences, including a Thomas Mass. Named for "doubting Thomas", the table is open to searchers and believers alike. And of course we are really all searchers, looking to position our lives with integrity as we seek to find where we are called to be involved in politics and spirituality. 

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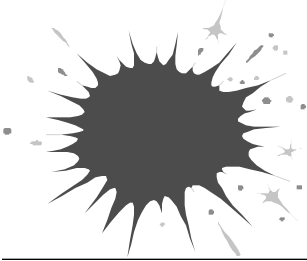
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The Editor's Spot

## Facing the issues of the world – and the church – with faith instead of fear

by Doug King

**A**s I write this, our Presbyterian General Assembly is still about four months away, and there's already too much going on to fit into this little newsletter. Our Spring issue, which will also be sent to all Commissioners, will bring you more about the Assembly, and we will again be sending a special letter to GA commissioners, with more analysis of the issues.

But there's so much in the air already that we need to be thinking about. All those "issues" boil down to a few simple questions: What do we do about ordination, as we stand with the LGBT Presbyterians for whom that continues to be a huge matter of exclusion? Which matters more: unity or justice? How do we deal with threats to split the church? How do we resist the rising cycles of war and violence and torture, so much of it the responsibility of our own nation? What can we learn from our responses – as Christians, as a church, as a nation – to the devastation of Katrina and Rita?

And underlying all of these Big Issues lies the question that faces each of us from childhood through the end of life: Do we live in fear or in faith? Shall our lives be rooted in confidence that the universe and its Creator can basically be trusted? Or must we live in a perpetual stance of self-defense, seeing enemies all around us, and believing that the best way to defend ourselves against them is to get them before they get us?

We can look at all those Big Issues through these two very different lenses.

**The threat of a split:** This is the question that hovers over the approaching Assembly like a dark cloud, carrying threats of trouble and pain for all of us: the much-discussed (and indeed planned-for) threat of a separation of a significant number of people and congregations from the Presbyterian Church (USA).

The presentation of the report on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church will be a major focus for this fear. We respect and appreciate the faithful efforts of many people – both evangelicals and progressives as well as "moderates" – to

find ways through the tensions in our church. But here above all, perhaps, we must hold fast to our faith, and not give in to fear.

Beaver-Butler presbytery is seeking a new system of non-geographic presbyteries, which would presumably allow conservative congregations to affiliate with like-minded congregations. The New Wineskins group is clearly discussing ways of moving toward a separate denomination.

We need to remember the "Protestant Principle" that Paul Tillich articulated so well as a core teaching of the Reformation: Only God is holy. Only God is the true foundation for faith. And corollary is that no human enterprise or institution must be the object of our ultimate faith. No church, no creed, no human enterprise is worthy of

### "Let Justice Roll Down"

#### The Witherspoon Society Mission

We are a network of concerned Presbyterians responding to God's call to let justice roll down, and to work for healing in a wounded world.

Our mission is:

- To listen and learn from those who have been silenced as we seek solidarity with them.
- To nurture the prophetic voice of the church.
- To equip Presbyterians for faithful participation in the church and world;
- To challenge unjust relationships of power;
- To advocate for peace, justice, the integrity of creation, and the full inclusion of all God's people in church and society.

We seek to revitalize the church's proclamation and action, informed by the whole gospel, and living into the promise of God's reign.

our total trust and loyalty. We have a higher calling than the preservation of human institutions and doctrines, perhaps best delivered to us by the prophet Micah: to act justly, to treat other persons kindly, and to walk with God in an attitude of humility.

**Ordination and sexuality:** Jesus spent much of his ministry relating to – and even *touching* – people whom most good Jews feared as unclean by virtue of their status, their work, their diseases, their behavior, their religion or their nationality. We can certainly understand people’s fears of those who are “different.” After all, if we’re honest we find that fear deep within ourselves in the form of racism or suspicion of strangers or (could it ever be?) a smug sense of safe distance from “fundamentalists.”

This Assembly will be dealing with more than 20 overtures calling for the deletion of G-6.0106b and the related authoritative interpretations banning the ordination of lgbt people. It will also be confronted with a number of overtures on the other side – the mildest of them following the recommendation of the Theological Task Force in calling for no action for another period, now for “discernment” rather than “dialogue.” Central Washington presbytery goes farther, calling for a “Decade of Peace” during which there would be no possibility of changing the “fidelity and chastity” requirement of G-6.0106b.

**War and torture:** The present Administration in Washington has succeeded brilliantly in defining our world as a fearsome place, in which our only hope for safety lies in hitting “them” before they hit us. By defining our “enemies” as nothing but enemies, of course we make it easy to treat them in any way we choose. Human rights don’t apply to them, because they have lost their humanity – at least in our eyes.

One overture from the Presbytery of San Francisco seeks to reaffirm the Presbyterian Church’s solid opposition to the United States’ use of torture. Clearly that issue will receive much attention, although there may be less disagreement on this one than on some others. (It might be a tough job defending torture in the face of the question “Who would Jesus torture?”)

The continuing struggle between Palestinians and Israelis will also receive attention. Numerous overtures call for steps to rescind the call by the 2004 Assembly for possible divestment from companies doing business in ways that support either the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the oppression of her people, or the Palestinian use of violence against Israelis. Others will call for positive investments that

will promote peace in both nations, rather than divestment from violence-related enterprises.

**Hurricanes and other assaults by nature:** Katrina and the other disasters of the past months have made it easy – almost necessary, it seems – for many of us, including people in high office, to define people as victims, and thereby to make them objects of our fear and loathing. After all, say many very loyal Americans, if “those people” couldn’t help themselves, there must be something wrong with them, and we’d better not weaken them even further by helping them too much. Behind that lies our nation’s general fear of the poor, which is reflected in our refusal to give them “too much help.”

This fear will surface at the Assembly in various ways, for example when we try once again to deal with the disastrous state of our nation’s health care system. (If “system” isn’t too grand a name for it.)

As we ponder all these heavy Big Issues, it might be helpful to recognize just how much our fear makes things worse. Because some Muslims fear modernism, they feel compelled to take desperate measures to resist it. And because we now fear them, we do the same. And because we – the U.S., and the “modern world” – have more military and economic power, our fear-fed reactions make the Muslims, quite reasonably, even more afraid. And so the cycle continues.

It’s time for someone to start proclaiming something new and radical: *faith* in a world that is *all* God’s beloved handiwork, where we may learn, like Jesus, to see no one as a stranger. Yes, there are very real conflicts in our world – not to mention our church. But the most helpful answer to those conflicts is not more fear, but faith – faith that sees no person as a complete stranger, or a total enemy.

So we will gather in Birmingham – site of some fairly fearsome events itself in the not too distant past, events in which some people of great faith really did “overcome.” Will we gather in fear or in faith? In anxiety or in hope?

We know the right answer. Let’s follow it – and *encourage* our sisters and brothers in faith to do likewise.

# Looking toward the 217<sup>th</sup> General Assembly

June 15 - 22, 2006  
Birmingham, Alabama

## Witherspoon Society GA Events

**Wednesday, June 14, 1:00 to 4:00 pm**  
**Semper Reformanda Pre-GA Conversation**  
(sponsored by the Witherspoon Society)

**Speaker: Dr. Mark Lewis Taylor, Professor of Theology and Culture, Princeton Theological Seminary**

This conversation will look at the United States as empire. This will be addressed in Dr. Taylor's remarks and in looking at the document, "Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth," adopted by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Accra, Ghana in 2004. Dr Taylor is author of the recent book, *Religion, Politics, and the Christian Right: Post-9/11 Powers and American Empire*. (See page 27 below.)

First Presbyterian Church, 2100 4th Avenue North, about 5 blocks from the Convention Center.

Ticket price: \$15.00

**Wednesday, June 14, 8:30 to 10:30 pm** (immediately following Covenant Network dinner)  
**Witherspoon GA Issues Briefing**

**Speaker: Eugene Teselle, Witherspoon Society Issues Analyst, and Friends.**

This regular Witherspoon Society event for commissioners and others provides a progressive look at the Assembly and the issues, ideas on how to be an effective participant, and a chance to meet other progressives.

To be announced

Ticket price: \$15.00

**Saturday, June 17, 9:00 pm to 1:00 am**  
**Witherspoon Party and Dance**

Time for a break! This is a great chance to relax and enjoy great music, dancing and conversation and also a good time to meet others at the Assembly.

Sheraton Ballroom XII

Ticket price: \$20.00

**Sunday, June 18, 12:30 to 2:30 pm**  
**Witherspoon Society Awards Luncheon**

**Speaker: Rev. Eugenia A. Gamble, Writer in Residence, Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley**

Rev. Gamble's featured address is entitled "Embodying Love." (See page 6.) The Andrew Murray and Whole Gospel Congregation Awards will be presented and the Witherspoon business meeting will follow the luncheon.

Sheraton Ballroom I

Ticket price: \$35.00

**Witherspoon Luncheon speaker:****The Rev. Eugenia A. Gamble,  
on “Embodying Love”**

We first invited the Rev. Eugenia Gamble as our major speaker for the Witherspoon Luncheon at General Assembly, because we had heard so much about her exciting and creative ministry from 1996 to 2005 as Senior Pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, where the Assembly will be convening.

While in Birmingham she provided leadership in the development and implementation of the vision of First Light, Inc., a center for homeless women and children. First Light provides emergency shelter, long term shelter for the disabled homeless, day programming, and on site psychiatric services. It was just such work that earned her the Outstanding Woman of the Year award for 2004, presented by the Women’s Center of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

But there is much more in her experience and varieties of ministry that promises an interesting and challenging luncheon address for all of us, as she talks of ways the church does indeed “embody love.”



Rev. Eugenia Gamble

Since her ordination in 1984, she has served congregations in Colorado, as Staff Associate for Leader Development of Women under the General Assembly Mission Council, and Associate Executive Presbyter for the Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley, before being called by the Birmingham congregation. Along the way she has participated in various regional and national committees, including the Committee of 15 to draft “A Brief Statement of Faith.”

She has been the keynote speaker at numerous conferences, schools and colleges, presbyteries and synods, including Montreat Conference Center, Mo-Ranch Conference Center, Presbyterian Women national meetings, Epworth by the Sea Conference Center, and the dedication of the Third World Church Leaders Center in Seoul, Korea. She has also been the featured preacher on the Protestant Hour international radio broadcast, and the “30 Good Minutes” television broadcast.

She doesn’t just talk, though. She writes, having authored a number of study and worship resources for women, including

*Glimpses of Home: Images of the Realm of God in Scripture*, the annual Bible Study for Presbyterian Women, which won the Associated Church Press First Place Award for Excellence, for Bible Study, in 1995.

**The PARO Luncheon at General Assembly  
Saturday, June 17th, Birmingham Art Museum****“The Religious and Justice Foundations of Choice”**

The Rev. Dr. Tom Davis will address religious and justice foundations of the pro-Choice movement and the need for clergy to understand their role in the changing legal and political environment. He will also sign copies of his book, *Sacred Work: Planned Parenthood and Its Clergy Alliances*.

Dr. Davis holds his MDiv from Union Theological Seminary in New York (1960) and his PhD from Duke University (1966). He served as a chaplain at the University of North Carolina, and following his doctoral studies he was Associate Professor of Religion and College Chaplain at Skidmore College until his retirement in 1996.

Dr. Davis has been active in the pro-Choice movement for 39 years, beginning in 1967, when he became a member of the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion. He served on the national board of Planned Parenthood Federation of America from 1992 - 1998 and organized the Clergy Advisory Board of PPFA in 1993, serving as its Chair from that date to the present.

In 2005 he published *Sacred Work: Planned Parenthood and Its Clergy Alliances* (Rutgers Press). This book was written from a justice and religious perspective to help two groups of people: those who work in the clinics where abortions are performed and who are under constant attack, to understand the religious foundation of Choice; and younger clergy who have (understandably) no experience in a nation where abortion is illegal.

## Not Justice, Not Progress, Just the Same Second-Class Status: An Evaluation of the Theological Task Force Report

John Shuck, Pastor  
First Presbyterian Church  
Elizabethton, Tennessee  
Valentine's Day, 2006

It is good for the soul to be reminded of one's privilege. It doesn't feel good but it is good for you. I was reminded of my privilege recently. I attended the More Light Regional gathering at Vanderbilt Divinity School in Nashville. Nontumbi "Naomi" Tutu was the keynote speaker. She invited us to recover the true inclusive love that was the mark of the early church. We heard powerful preaching by Ted Smith, professor of preaching and ethics at Vanderbilt. He preached on Revelation and he reminded us that this document provided a powerful critique of Empire. This critique is more relevant than ever to our church and to our nation.

My spirit was fed. I enjoyed connecting with some folks I have known for a while and meeting new friends in my new location. It is humbling for me, a straight person, to attend a More Light conference. They always make sure to welcome straight people. If only our church could return the favor.

Near the end of the conference, we gathered to talk about the upcoming General Assembly. This is the point at which I remembered my heterosexual privilege. I had been thinking that maybe the Task Force Report wasn't so bad. I had read somewhere that it wasn't justice, but it was progress. Some conservative groups had been threatening to break away from the denomination if the report was passed without amendment. It must be a good report if the loyal opposition doesn't like it, I reasoned. While there is much in the report that is good, its final recommendation shatters any good that can come from it. Recommendation number six will allow for neither justice nor progress for LGBT people in our denomination. It requests that we make no change to an unjust, untruthful, and discriminatory policy.<sup>1</sup>

The gist of the report as far as LGBT people are concerned is this: our discriminatory policy (G-6.0106b and the Authoritative Interpretation) stays the same.<sup>2</sup> The bone tossed out to LGBT people is that ordaining and installing bodies could allow candidates to declare a "scruple."<sup>3</sup> A

candidate could admit that s/he is in a same-sex relationship and be ordained if the ordaining body decides that our denomination's policies regarding same-sex relationships are not essential. There is no guarantee. The rules stay the same, but if you play your cards right and get really lucky, you might be able to break them. If this report were to pass, the Church would say, in effect, the following to LGBT people: "Know your place. Your sexuality does not meet Presbyterian standards, and it is only by our gracious bending of the rules that you might be allowed to be ordained."

In my inquiry and candidacy phase, and in my fourteen years of ordained service, I have never been asked about my sexuality. My theology is all over the place, but committees on ministry apparently are satisfied that at least I am not gay. Because of this privilege I can get a call almost anywhere I want. I bounce around the country, do ministry, collect a salary, and dream of one day spending my pension with my heterosexual wife. I don't even need to care about all of this justice business for LGBT people. And I tend to think pretty highly of myself that I do care. That is the beauty of privilege. Privilege allows me to say to my LGBT sisters and brothers, "Hey, don't be upset. It is progress. We inclusive straight folks love you. Look what we have done. We have elevated your status from *abomination* to *scruple*. You should be grateful. Now go play nice."

Our position of privilege deludes us into thinking that we can have it all: peace, unity, purity, and the one word noticeably absent from the Task Force's title, justice. If the Task Force report is passed in its entirety as recommended, justice will not be served. Neither will progress be made. I know that the members of the Task Force felt that their job was to keep the denomination together. However Jesus said, "If you seek to keep your life you will lose it. If you lose your life for my sake and the gospel, you will gain it."<sup>4</sup> As I read Jesus, our first concern should not be to keep everything, including the denomination, together. Our first concern should be to proclaim and to live into the justice of the gospel. We only make progress when we lose our lives.

It is interesting that people are concerned that the denomination will split. The LGBT people I know are not interested in splitting the denomination. They simply want to serve it. They are not threatening to take their vast financial treasury and form their own denomination. They want to be recognized by the PCUSA as God recognizes them, as beloved children of God. No one can keep the denomination from splitting. We have no control over what others will do. We all have choices to make. Those who hope

for a more inclusive church must choose. With whom will we stand? If we start with justice, we may get unity. But if we start with unity, we will never get justice. Justice precedes unity. We have a choice. Will we seek justice and invite others to unite with us, or will we seek unity and accept injustice indefinitely?

The Task Force recommends that we make no changes to our policy. What does this mean? What is our policy? Thanks to the Presbytery of Cincinnati<sup>5</sup> and to those who worked to pass an overture that will go to General Assembly, we have been reminded of our policy. I include it here in the form of an affirmation of faith.<sup>6</sup> In worship, we affirm what we believe. The following seven affirmations of faith are found in the paper that has reached the status of Authoritative Interpretation regarding homosexual persons. The following seven affirmations are what the PCUSA believes. If you are a member of a congregation or presbytery that is part of the PCUSA, this is what you are supposed to believe. These seven statements form the theological basis of our policy regarding lgbt people.

I invite you to say the following affirmations of faith aloud. Make your mouth form the words. Force your vocal chords to utter the sounds. Demand that your ears hear this language. This is what lgbt people hear from our church. You owe it to them to hear yourself say it. Let us affirm our faith, the faith of the Presbyterian Church (USA), together:

*We believe...*

*"...that homosexuality is not God's wish for humanity. This we affirm, despite the fact that some of its forms may be deeply rooted in an individual's personality structure."*<sup>7</sup>

*We believe...*

*"In many cases homosexuality is more a sign of the brokenness of God's world than of willful rebellion. In other cases homosexual behavior is freely chosen or learned in environments where normal development is thwarted."*<sup>8</sup>

*We believe...*

*"Even where the homosexual orientation has not been consciously sought or chosen, it is neither a gift from God nor a state nor a condition like race; it is a result of our living in a fallen world."*<sup>9</sup>

*We believe...*

*"As we examine the whole framework of teaching bearing upon our sexuality from Genesis onward, we find that homosexuality is a contradiction of God's wise and beautiful pattern for human sexual relationships revealed in Scripture and affirmed in God's ongoing will for our life in the Spirit of Christ."*<sup>10</sup>

*We believe...*

*"Homosexual persons who will strive toward God's revealed will in this area of their lives, and make use of all the resources of grace, can receive God's power to transform their desires or arrest their active expression."*<sup>11</sup>

*We believe...*

*"...the New Testament declares that all homosexual practice is incompatible with Christian faith and life."*<sup>12</sup>

*We believe...*

*"On the basis of our understanding that the practice of homosexuality is sin, we are concerned that homosexual believers and the observing world should not be left in doubt about the church's mind on this issue during any further period of study."*<sup>13</sup>

Let there be no confusion. This is what Presbyterians believe about gays. When your gay son asks you if the Presbyterian Church will accept him, respect him, and honor his gifts, you can tell him that he is "incompatible with Christian faith and life." When your lesbian sister comes out to you, seeking guidance and compassion from the church, you can tell her that with God's help she can "...arrest [her] desire or transform [her] active expression." You may say that you don't believe that. Yet you support the Task Force report that says make no change?

For all of its nice talk about discernment, mutual forbearance, listening to one another, making friends with those on the other side and so forth, the Task Force Report fails to address the real issue. The Presbyterian Church (USA) is not a level playing field. This is not about two equal sides fighting for control. This is not about folks on equal footing who disagree. This is about the oppressed seeking liberation from an oppressive church. Our beloved yet oppressive denomination will never grant justice without being forced to do so. It is that simple. I am of-

ten guilty of not seeing this.

Privilege blinds us to truth.

I cannot support recommendation number six of the Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church because I cannot in good conscience agree not to change a hurtful, unjust, and untruthful policy. I cannot build bridges of unity with my conservative sisters and brothers until the discriminatory policies are removed. Only then will all people be welcome to build these bridges together.

Twenty-one presbyteries have sent overtures to change our policy. It is time for change.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Recommendation number six “strongly encourages... the 217th General Assembly (2006) to approve no additional authoritative interpretations, to remove no existing authoritative interpretations, and to send to the presbyteries no proposed constitutional amendments that would have the effect of changing denominational policy on any of the major issues in the task force’s report, including Christology, biblical interpretation, essential tenets, and sexuality and ordination.” *Peace, Unity, Purity*. P. 43, lines 1305-1312.

<sup>2</sup> Removing G-6.0106b will not be enough to remove the barriers to ordination. We must also remove or modify the Authoritative Interpretation. It provides the theological basis for acts of discrimination in our denomination.

<sup>3</sup> *Peace, Unity, Purity*. Pp. 35-36, 1048-1072.

<sup>4</sup> Mark 8:35

<sup>5</sup> The Presbytery of Cincinnati has sent an overture to the General Assembly to remove these seven statements from the 1978 Definitive Guidance which in 1993 became the Authoritative Interpretation.

<sup>6</sup> Hal Porter, pastor emeritus of Mount Auburn Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati, led us through this litany at the MLP gathering in Nashville, February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Minutes, UPCUSA, 1979, Part I, p. 262; Minutes, PCUS, 1979, Part I, p. 203, lines 108-110.

<sup>8</sup> Minutes, UPCUSA, p. 262; Minutes, PCUS, p. 203, lines 111-114.

<sup>9</sup> Minutes, UPCUSA, p. 262; Minutes, PUCS, p. 203, lines 114-116.

<sup>10</sup> Minutes, UPCUSA, p. 262; Minutes, PCUS, p. 204, lines 174-178.

<sup>11</sup> Minutes, UPCUSA, p. 263; Minutes, PCUS, p. 205, lines 197-200.

<sup>12</sup> Minutes, UPCUSA, p. 263; Minutes, PCUS, p. 206, lines 239-240.

<sup>13</sup> Minutes, UPCUSA, p. 264; Minutes, PCUS, p. 207, lines 324-328.

**Note:** For the full text of the Task Force report, go to <http://pcusa.org/peaceunitypurity/resources/finalreport.pdf>

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You can assist workers and institutions in countries where books are in short supply! Share your books by sending them to Readers' Service, an agency of the PC(USA). It's a great way to help!



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## Policy documents for GA approved by ACSWP

by Evan Silverstein, Presbyterian News Service

Louisville — Jan. 30, 2006 – The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) will send nearly a dozen documents to this summer's 217<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

The papers, covering issues ranging from globalization to ministering to the disabled, were approved during a regular committee meeting at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

Also approved during the Jan. 18-21 meeting — pending a conference call — was a resolution asking the Assembly to affirm its opposition to any U.S. government policy that sanctions the use of torture or inhumane treatment of detainees held in connection with the war on terrorism.

Meanwhile, ACSWP, which develops social-justice policies for GA consideration, rejected a staff recommendation to approve a paper on energy policy developed for this year's Assembly.

That document was returned to ACSWP's coordinating committee for further work and possible presentation to the 2008 GA.

ACSWP did not release copies of its documents to reporters during the session, but later reviewed the papers with the *Presbyterian News Service*.

"The committee respects the Open Meeting Policy of the General Assembly, while also seeking to preserve the confidentiality of draft documents that are still being worked on," said the Rev. Christian "Chris" Iosso, ACSWP's coordinator.

### Globalization

ACSWP tentatively approved an amendment to a policy paper on "Just Globalization: Justice, Ownership and Accountability," pending an ACSWP conference call scheduled for Feb. 3.

The document, which will go to this summer's Assembly for approval, deals with issues related to globalization, international trade and fair-trade issues.

Among its recommendations: that church officers and congregations oppose the exploitation of children and women through forced labor, inhumane working conditions, drug trafficking and prostitution; that congregations engage in

cross-cultural dialogue in their communities about the impact of changing global economic structures, particularly in the world's poorer countries; and that the PC(USA)'s stated clerk communicate to Congress and the President the denomination's concern about inequities in the current U.S. tax system.

### Disabilities

ACSWP approved a policy on the treatment of people with disabilities titled "Living Into the Body of Christ: Toward Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities."

The paper challenges the church to prophetic witness on issues relating to people with disabilities, recognizing that many such concerns are matters of social justice, and urges church and society to advocate for people with disabilities.

The report was prepared in response to a referral from the 211<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in 1999. An earlier draft was presented to the committee during meetings in July and October.

### Human rights

The committee tentatively approved its biennial *Human Rights Update* for 2005-2006.

The document, which incorporates brief overviews of human rights conditions around the globe, is expected to be approved during the Feb. 3 conference call.

The United States is prominent in this year's update because of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and other U.S. military detention facilities from Afghanistan to Guantanamo, Cuba.

The document recommends approval of an ACSWP resolution, "Human Rights in a Time of Terrorism and Torture," and calls on the General Assembly to affirm its opposition to the use of torture and abusive treatment of detainees.

The measure supports the Geneva Conventions and due process and emphasizes the importance of U.S. judicial review and congressional oversight of the executive branch, including the Office of Homeland Security and the intelligence agencies.

The paper encourages church members, sessions, presbyteries and synods to pray for victims of abuse and for their persecutors, especially in anticipation of Human Rights Day next Dec. 10.

### Iraq

ACSWP also reviewed a background document on Iraq

outlining America's responsibility to bring about a peaceful transition from occupation to democracy.

The paper is meant to provide "advice and counsel" — one of ACSWP's primary responsibilities — to commissioners who will be considering overtures on the war in Iraq.

"It is in fact not a simple 'U.S. withdrawal' kind of position," Iosso said. "It is more, 'How do you try to assure an orderly transition?'"

### **Lending and social insurance**

The committee reaffirmed two previously approved documents — one examining state and federal lending laws, the other focusing on financial security for older adults.

"A Reformed Understanding of Usury for the Twenty-First Century" advocates stricter interest limits and enforcement of laws protecting borrowers from excessive credit costs. It proposes ethical criteria for evaluating lending laws on payday loans, sub-prime loans, predatory lending practices and cash-back tax-preparation arrangements.

"Economic Security For Older Adults," produced in response to an overture from the 216th Assembly in 2004, reaffirms the importance of the nation's social insurance systems, specifically Social Security and Medicare.

The committee and the PC(USA)'s Office of Health Ministries were asked to review and update a 22-year-old church position paper on "Economic Security for Older Persons" in light of changes relating to mandatory retirement and pension reductions.

The 2004 Assembly, noting the imminent retirement of millions of "baby boomers," warned against "radical ideas" that would damage Social Security.

The draft says Social Security needs adjustments to accommodate the boomers, the largest generation in American history. It notes that the ranks of Americans older than 65 will swell to 75 million from the current 35 million by the year 2030.

### **Social creed**

ACSWP approved an interim report chronicling the work of ACSWP and the Office of the General Assembly in pursuing ecumenical talks in advance of the centennial of the Social Creed of the Federal Council of Churches, now called the National Council of Churches (NCC).

The 1908 creed is a statement of principles from a number of Protestant denominations that helped end child labor and

incorporate Christian values in U.S. workplaces. Over the years, churches acting on its 14 principles have worked for improved wages, regulation of sweatshops, Sabbath rest, abatement of poverty and old-age pensions.

The GA asked ACSWP to survey key Christian principles to guide 21st-century Presbyterians in addressing major social-justice concerns, such as lack of health care coverage, outsourcing of jobs to countries without human rights or environmental safeguards, and growing economic inequities.

The committee is also proposing ways to commemorate the original social creed and is preparing to recommend to the 2008 Assembly a new creed for this century.

During the meeting, the committee heard from the Rev. Gene TeSelle, a consultant and retired historical theology professor from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN, who has analyzed several versions of the Social Creed that the Presbyterian church has adopted over the years. He said the church has not updated its version since the 1930s.

### **Energy**

The committee referred a report titled "A Christian Witness on Energy" to its coordinating committee for revision. It would be the first document to address the PC(USA)'s position on U.S. energy policy since 1981, when a paper titled "The Power to Speak Truth to Power" was approved jointly by the former Presbyterian Church in the United States and United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

That statement was prompted by energy shortages in the 1970s, and ecumenical discussions of energy sufficiency. The 2002 Assembly ordered an update in light of current national and international concerns about production, consumption, cost, distribution and energy security.

### **Value of life**

ACSWP referred an update of a paper titled "The Nature and Value of Human Life" to an editing team, with the intention of submitting it to the 2008 Assembly. The 212th Assembly (2000) called for updating the paper, originally adopted by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1981. It says that human life is a value of the first order, and that humans are God's representatives in the care of creation.

Iosso said the committee is exploring a more Biblical/theological approach than that of the earlier paper.



## Dealing with the realities of our time: Torture and violence

### Princeton conference on torture was both disturbing and energizing

Carol Wickersham, who initiated the No2Torture group within the Presbyterian Church, offered a report on the conference held January 13-15, 2006, at Princeton Seminary. She wrote this shortly after the event, primarily to the No2Torture group.

Dear Friends,

It has been almost a week since I returned from the conference on "International Law, Theology and Torture" held at Princeton Seminary. This conference was first envisioned by George Hunsinger and organized by an amazing coalition. ...

The conference was almost overwhelming in its diversity: Islamic, Jewish, Unitarian and Christian leaders and scholars, as well as experts in international and constitutional law, retired military leaders and national staff from NGO's, most notably Amnesty International and Human Rights First. Not surprisingly, people came at the issue from many angles, as one speaker said, "from the deep richness of our traditions" to make connections with one another about this issue that is at the heart of our humanity. ...

Often the words were not easy to hear. Sr. Dianna Ortiz, torture survivor and organizer of TASSC (Torture Abolition and Survivor Support Coalition) set the tone, reminding us what is at stake. Some of the presentations were quite technical reminding us of the political, legal, his-

torical and theological complexities involved, yet clarity was never sacrificed.

I have one full legal pad of notes, so obviously I am not going to do justice to the conference, but I want to lift up three things that deeply impressed me and trust that others will add their insights to my limited ones.

First, I was not only gratified by the interfaith diversity, but maybe even more by the diversity of the Christian presenters. Not just the usual suspects! There were prominent speakers from Catholic, mainline Protestant, Evangelical and historic Peace Churches. At a time when the media portray us as deeply divided, I was heartened by a unity that was more than show.

Second, I was disturbed and shaken again and again as speakers pointed out the patterns that show torture as one horrific symptom of a deeper malaise. In particular, authors Mark Danner (Torture and Truth...) and William Cavanaugh (Torture and Eucharist...) who unpacked the historical precedents. Fortunately, there is a plan to publish the proceedings of the conference, since I cannot do them justice.

And third, as grim as the subject matter was, I found myself strangely energized! Why? With both the Miami and Princeton gatherings my sense of solitary outrage has been turned into a sense of solidarity. There are a lot of us working on this, more each day.

One last note: I was honored to be

able to present our efforts with No2Torture as one to begin to organize on this issue at the grassroots. My remarks (which are really your efforts) were very well received. And so, I thank you and I will share my reflections once I have a chance to work them up from my outline.

There will be lots to do in the days ahead, but I have a sense that we are moving forward on all fronts. Again, I ask that you share with us what is going on in your community. We gather strength from each other's stories, which bear witness to the story of the One who was tortured yet triumphed for our sake.

Shalom, Carol

**Learn more about this group at**  
**<http://www.no2torture.org/>**

The Princeton conference on International Law, Theology and Torture led to the formation of the National Religious Coalition Against Torture, which has drafted and is circulating the Declaration on the next page.

**We encourage you to add your name to the list of signers, which has now grown to more than 1000 people from all over the U.S. and from others countries as well – including a fair sprinkling of Witherspooners.**

**Just go to**  
**<http://www.nrcat.org/>**

## A declaration from the Conference on Human Rights and Torture

### Torture Is A Moral Issue

#### A Statement of the National Religious Campaign against Torture

**T**orture violates the basic dignity of the human person that all religions hold dear. It degrades everyone involved — policy-makers, perpetrators and victims. It contradicts our nation's most cherished ideals. Any policies that permit torture and inhumane treatment are shocking and morally intolerable.

Torture and inhumane treatment have long been banned by U.S. treaty obligations, and are punishable by criminal statute. Recent developments, however, have created new uncertainties. By reaffirming the ban on cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment as well as torture, the McCain amendment, now signed into law, is a step in the right direction. Yet its implementation remains unclear.

The President's signing statement, which he issued when he signed the McCain Amendment into law, implies that the President does not believe he is bound by the amendment in his role as commander in chief. The possibility remains open that inhumane methods of interrogation will continue.

Furthermore, in a related development, for the first time in our nation's history, legislation has now been signed into law that effectively permits evidence obtained by torture to be used in a court of law. The military tribunals that are trying some terrorist suspects are now expressly permitted to consider information obtained under coercive interrogation techniques, including degrading and inhumane techniques and torture.

We urge Congress and the President to remove all ambiguities by prohibiting:

- Exemptions from the human rights standards of international law for any arm of our government.
- The practice of extraordinary rendition, whereby suspects are apprehended and flown to countries that use torture as a means of interrogation.
- Any disconnection of "cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment" from the ban against "torture" so as to permit inhumane interrogation.

- The existence of secret U.S. prisons around the world.
- Any denial of Red Cross access to detainees held by our government overseas.

We also call for an independent investigation of the severe human rights abuses at U.S. installations like Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, and Bagram Air Force Base in Afghanistan.

Nothing less is at stake in the torture abuse crisis than the soul of our nation. What does it signify if torture is condemned in word but allowed in deed? Let America abolish torture now — without exceptions.

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#### Initial Endorsers (a partial list) (institutions listed for identification purposes only)

- Abdullahi Amhed An-Na'im, Emory Law School  
 Fr. William Byron, Loyola College in Maryland  
 Tony Campolo, Eastern Baptist University  
 Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB  
 Fr. Drew Christiansen, SJ, editor, America magazine  
 Richard Cizek, vice president, National Association of Evangelicals  
 William Sloane Coffin, Jr., senior minister, Riverside Church (NYC) (ret.)  
 Robert Edgar, general secretary, National Council of the Churches of Christ  
 Rabbi Amy Eilberg, Morei Derekh Training Program  
 Mohamed Elsanousi, Islamic Society of North America  
 Rabbi Edward Feld, Jewish Theological Seminary  
 Barbara Green, director, Churches' Center for Theology and Public Policy  
 Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, Pax Christi  
 Stanley Hauerwas, Duke University  
 Fr. David Hollenbach, SJ, director, Center for Human Rights and International Justice, Boston College  
 Sr. Dianna Ortiz, director, Torture and Survivors Support Coalition International  
 Peter Paris, Princeton Theological Seminary  
 Rabbi David Saperstein, director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism  
 Hozan Alan Senauke, Buddhist Peace Fellowship  
 Ron Sider, president, Evangelicals for Social Action



## Declaration signers, from page 13

John Thomas, president, United Church of Christ  
 Glen Stassen, Fuller Theological Seminary  
 Tarunjit Singh, secretary general, World Sikh Council  
 Kathryn Tanner, University of Chicago  
 Rick Ufford-Chase, moderator, Presbyterian Church (USA)  
 Joe Volk, executive secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation  
 Rabbi Brian Walt, executive director, Rabbis for Human Rights  
 Rabbi Arthur Waskow, director, Shalom Institute  
 Jim Wallis, Sojourners  
 Nicholas Wolterstorff, Yale University  
 Coordinator: George Hunsinger, Princeton Theological Seminary

## 5 Reasons Torture is always Wrong

**And why there should be no exceptions.**

*Christianity Today* magazine has published a lengthy article by David P. Gushee, professor of moral philosophy at Union University in Jackson, TN. He considers carefully the US administration's efforts since 9/11 to justify its interrogation techniques as something other than torture. (Perhaps "torture lite"??)

But he concludes that for five very basic reasons, Christians must say No to torture – lite or regular:

- Torture violates the dignity of the human being.
- Torture mistreats the vulnerable and violates the demands of justice.
- Authorizing torture trusts government too much.
- Torture dehumanizes the torturer.
- Torture erodes the character of the nation that tortures.

You can find the article at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/002/23.32.html>

## The Church Can Help Survivors of Torture

by Andrew J. Weaver and Carolyn L. Stapleton

Originally published in *United Methodist Reporter*, and published here by permission of the authors.

Andrew J. Weaver and Carolyn L. Stapleton, two United Methodist ministers, one of whom is also a clinical psychologist and the other an attorney, describe briefly the psychological symptoms experienced of survivors of torture, and suggest ways that churches can help them deal with those effects. They also provide an excellent list of resources – both publications and organizations.

Torture is a crime against humanity, often used as a mechanism of repression against people who are seeking political freedom. Its purpose is to control populations by destroying individual leaders and terrorizing entire communities. Amnesty International reports that systematic torture and other forms of maltreatment are practiced in 121 of the 205 nations of the world. Torture inflicts spiritual as well as physical and psychological injury, therefore many individuals who survive torture and other forms of psychological trauma seek help in our churches.

The breakdown of civil order has led to large-scale displacement and maltreatment of whole groups of peoples in several parts of the world. Many of the refugees from war-torn countries who seek asylum in the United States are victims of torture. The Center for Victims of Torture in Minneapolis estimates that 500,000 survivors of torture now reside in our country.

Caught in the middle of a war zone, civilian refugees often experience greater brutality than combatants. In addition, war zones allow little opportunity to deal with emotional pain. Both child and adult refugees are at risk for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other severe mental health problems as a direct result of their experience of war-trauma, torture, and displacement

from their homes. A study involving a diverse group of refugees residing in the U.S. from the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Asia found that almost 80 percent had PTSD.

Typically, torture survivors display symptoms of PTSD that are similar to those of others who endure systematic and extended episodes of abuse (such as rape victims, prisoners of war, spouse abuse survivors). The syndrome represents the struggle that torture victims have in adequately managing the terrible memories of their abuse. It is as if their minds and bodies are alarm clocks waking them up to the reality of their experiences and preventing them from forgetting their hell on earth.

Torture-related PTSD symptoms include intrusive memories of the traumatic event that take the form of nightmares, night terrors, flashbacks (sudden recalling of the event during the day with or without volition), and other "wake-up" signals. In reaction to these stimuli are another set of symptoms. They include heightened arousal following reminders of the torture and related memories which take the form of increased heart and respiration rates, sweating, excessive behaviors associated with distress, and other symptoms of distress.

Most frequently, torture victims

believe they are losing their minds. They develop elaborate ways of avoiding reminders and managing the consequent torture-related distress. The torture victims will eventually need to address and answer five questions, the answers to which enable them to learn from their experiences and move on in their lives: What happened to me during and following the torture experience? Why did it happen to me? Why did I behave as I did during and following the torture? And what if I am captured and tortured again? Will I be able to cope?

Religious faith can be of help to torture survivors who suffer from psychological trauma. A recent study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* examined the impact of torture on Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. Torture survivors who were practicing Buddhists were less likely to be depressed or anxious. A separate study of refugee Buddhist nuns and students who had been tortured in Tibet revealed that their spiritual practice provided protective coping mechanisms for these Tibetans suffering the trauma of torture.

Churches can play an important role in the fight against this form of inhumanity by becoming advocates against torture. Amnesty International is one example of a worldwide organization that works to promote human rights. It campaigns to free prisoners of conscience; ensure fair and prompt trials for political prisoners; abolish the death penalty, torture, and other cruel treatment of prisoners; end political killings and “disappearances”; and it opposes human rights abuses by opposition groups. It is one of several organizations that advocate for humane treatment and human rights that people of conscience can join (see resources).

Torture often cuts off survivors from

the rest of society, exacerbating their problems. The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (see resources) helps concerned persons provide support to survivors through its Volunteer Friendship Program. Each volunteer is trained in the effects of torture and the needs of survivors and then linked with a survivor in a one-on-one relationship. A volunteer acts as a friend, as well as being a connection with the new community. These volunteers form part of a social network of personal support, helping survivors to function well within their new home. Churches can use such a friendship model to train their members to offer support to survivors of torture.

## RESOURCES

—**Advocates for Survivors of Torture and Trauma**; 431 East Belvedere, Baltimore, MD 21212; (410) 464-9006; [www.astt.org](http://www.astt.org); is a non-profit group of physicians, psychologists, social workers, ancillary health care providers, and human rights advocates who work together to help survivors of torture and trauma.

—**Amnesty International**, 5 Penn Plaza, 14th floor New York, NY 10001; (212) 807-8400; [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org); is a worldwide movement that works to promote all the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It has more than a million members and supporters in 162 countries and territories.

—**Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture**; 194 Jarvis Street, 2nd Floor, Toronto, Ontario, M5B 2B7, Canada; (416) 363-1066; [www.ccvvt.org](http://www.ccvvt.org); is a nonprofit organization founded in 1983 by medical doctors, lawyers, and

social service professionals associated with Amnesty International.

—**Center for Victims of Torture**; 717 East River Road, Minneapolis, MN 55455; (612) 436-4800; [www.cvt.org](http://www.cvt.org); is a private, nonprofit organization founded in 1985 to provide direct care to survivors of politically-motivated torture and members of their families. It was the first organization of its kind in the United States, pioneering a comprehensive assessment and care program.

—**Human Rights Watch**; 350 Fifth Avenue, 34th floor, New York, NY 10118-3299; (212) 290-4700; [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org); is an independent, nongovernmental organization dedicated to protecting the human rights of people around the world. It seeks to prevent discrimination, to uphold political freedom, to protect people from inhumane conduct in wartime, and to bring offenders to justice.

—**Program for Torture Victims**; 3655 South Grand Avenue, Suite 290, Los Angeles, CA 90007; (213) 747-4944; [www.irct.org/](http://www.irct.org/); was founded in 1980 to provide medical and psychological treatment for victims of torture and other human rights abuses.

—**Survivors International**; 703 Market Street, Suite 301, San Francisco, CA 94103; (415) 546-2080; [www.survivorsintl.org](http://www.survivorsintl.org); is a non-profit organization made up of a multidisciplinary network of professionals dedicated to the treatment and support of survivors of torture.

—**World Organization for Human Rights USA**; 1725 K Street, NW, Suite 610, Washington, DC 20006; (202) 296-5702; [www.humanrightsupusa.org](http://www.humanrightsupusa.org); is an international coalition of groups fighting against torture, summary executions, forced disappearances, and all other forms of cruel,

inhuman, and degrading treatment in order to preserve human rights.

## HELPFUL BOOKS

*Unspeakable Acts, Ordinary People: The Dynamics of Torture* (John Conroy, New York: Knopf, 2000).

*Caring for Victims of Torture* (James Jarason and Michael Popkin, Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1998).

*Torture and Its Consequences: Current Treatment Approaches* (Metin Basoglu, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

*The Mental Health Consequences of Torture* (Ellen Gerrity, Terence Keane and Farris Tuma, New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2001).

## The authors

Andrew J. Weaver, M.Th., Ph.D., is a United Methodist pastor and a clinical psychologist living in New York City. He has co-authored 11 books including *Reflections on Marriage and the Spiritual Journey* (Abingdon, 2003), *Counseling Survivors of Traumatic Events* (Abingdon, 2003), *Reflections on Grief and the Spiritual Journey* (Abingdon, 2005) and *Wells of Wisdom; Grandparents and Spiritual Journeys* (Pilgrim, 2005).

Carolyn L. Stapleton, D.Min., J.D., is a United Methodist minister and an attorney. She is Associate Pastor of Chinese United Methodist Church in New York City and the co-author of *Marriage and the Spiritual Journey* (Abingdon, 2003) and *Wells of Wisdom; Grandparents and Spiritual Journeys* (Pilgrim, 2005).

## San Francisco overture calls for Presbyterian Initiative Against Torture

At its January 10<sup>th</sup> meeting the Presbytery of San Francisco approved an overture which calls for “investigation and creation of a public record of what we have done and accountability wherever the law has been broken.”

Specifically, it would have the PC(USA) call upon Congress to create an investigating committee to investigate “whether any official or officer of the United States Government bears direct or command responsibility for having ordered or participated in violations of law in the mistreatment of persons detained by the Government of the United States at Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib Prison, or elsewhere or in transporting persons into detention in nations with known records of brutality and torture; to publish its findings and, if appropriate, to recommend the appointment of a special prosecutor if one has not been previously appointed.”

It would further call upon the Attorney General of the United States to appoint a special counsel to investigate and prosecute any official who bears responsibility for mistreatment of detainees.

Finally it calls for the Stated Clerk to coordinate study and action in PC(USA) congregations and cooperation with other churches and groups to seek information and to act against U.S. policies of torture.

It adds the confessional statement:

As citizens of the United States, members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), we openly admit our shame at allegations and disclosures of these acts and condemn such acts as a repudiation of the high standards of decency and morality to which our nation has historically held itself, its officials, officers, and armed forces.

## Thought for the day — or the decade

A tyrant must put on the appearance of uncommon devotion to religion. Subjects are less apprehensive of illegal treatment from a ruler whom they consider godfearing and pious. On the other hand, they do less easily move against him, believing he has the gods on his side.

Aristotle, *Politics*

## A Palestinian Christian on the Hamas victory:

### “We should not be afraid.”

Mark Peifer, who is a member of the Global Outreach Committee at University Presbyterian Church in Chapel Hill, NC, has been active in an Internet e-mail list dealing with Israel and Palestine. He recently shared with the list a message he received from Father Iyad Twal, who is the parish priest in Zababdeh, in the Northern West Bank, and is also the principal of the Latin Patriarchate School there. The school has about 550 Christian and Moslem students in grades K-12 from the surrounding region. Peifer adds:

My church ... has had a partnership with the school for about 4 years, beginning when Marthame and Elizabeth Sanders were teaching there. I had a chance to visit the school myself in 2004, and came away very impressed by the work for peace that is being done there. You can learn more about the school and our partnership by going to [www.upcch.org](http://www.upcch.org) and following the links to Outreach and Global Outreach. I found Abouna Iyad's words very instructive, as I consider how the Hamas' victory will affect life on the West Bank. I hope you also find them instructive.

Your editor found them indeed instructive and helpful. With the permission of Mark Peifer and Father Iyad Twal, we are happy to share them here.

Father Iyad Twal writes:

Dear all,

Hamas' stunning victory in the PLC elections was a shock to us all. For many Palestinian Christians the results have triggered many serious worries and questions about the future. Here's my personal analysis and answers to my parishioners and friends outside Palestine:

First of all, we should not be afraid. We should always have faith and trust in God's providence and His will for our lives. The Christians in Palestine are the "living stones" of the Holy Land, living our mission by being the salt and light in this country and in the

world.

The election results revealed that the Palestinian population is tired of their continual life under occupation; they are depressed by the stalled peace process, and are looking for a serious change. Palestinians desire freedom, justice, and dignity as a nation. Palestinians hope for a government that will work to: create jobs, stop the separation wall, halt settlement construction, stop land confiscation and house demolitions, and decrease our alarming poverty rate.



A kindergarten class in the Latin Patriarchate School

Hamas does not represent the total Palestinian population. There are more than six million Palestinians scattered around the globe, but less than a million were allowed to cast ballots for this election. The current election results represent less than twenty percent of Palestinians, and only the population living under the boot of occupation; therefore it is impossible to generalize attitudes for all Palestinians based on this election as they are becoming fanatic Muslims. However, the low number of Palestinians eligible to vote does raise serious issues. In the recent Iraqi elections, Iraqis living abroad were not only allowed to vote, but an aggressive ad campaign pushed their involvement. Why was this same opportunity and effort not offered to the global Palestinian community?

The Palestinians are one of the most educated people in the Middle East. I guess Hamas leaders differ from other Islamic leaders in Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia or Iraq. In contrast to these countries, I

don't see the Palestinian Islamic movement becoming as conservative or fanatical. I think Hamas is smart enough to push the morality, justice, and human rights of our cause to gain more sympathy from the international community, rather than pushing extremism creating more fear and distrust around the globe. Hamas knows the challenges to building and fighting for a free and independent Palestine state.



One of the third grade classes

We need the support of the international community and surrounding Arab states, all whom have accepted the UN resolutions about the existence of Israel. I think Hamas is too smart to alienate this support. Elections are full of slogans and propaganda, and Hamas used them effectively to capture the hearts and minds of Palestinian voters.

However, Hamas faces serious issues in governing Palestine and will have to change some of these ideas to effectively build a strong country. The critical question is how fast Hamas can change and build a strong government to work on our most urgent need: Peace based on international rights and resolutions. The result was shocking to us all, even Hamas, who did not desire to be the majority government so quickly. Tens of thousands of people (even Fatah members) voted against Fatah as punishment for the corruption and misadministration in the Palestinian authority. However, Hamas must be given time to change and adjust, and not be isolated and shunned from Palestinians or the international community.

Any anger or fear the international community feels toward the results of this election should not be directed at Hamas, nor the voters who gave them

power. Hamas's victory can be traced to the dismal U.S. negotiated peace process with Israel. For over a decade this peace process has brought no freedom or life to Palestine; in fact conditions in Palestine have seriously worsened over this time. For ten years the Palestinians waited on the peace process, while Israel dramatically increased their settlement building in Palestinian territory, built a separation wall deep into the West Bank, isolating towns, confiscating land, destroying homes and farms. Ten years after the peace process began we have almost nothing. However, we have a democracy and we were able to vote for change. If Hamas gains our freedom and we are able to build a state, we will support them in the next election; if not we will change again.

Attacking Hamas for being a fanatical movement is unfair in the context of the Israeli/Palestinian struggle. The Knesset has produced very fanatical movements that did not draw nearly the international condemnation Hamas's victory created. However, a fanatical movement in power does not automatically produce chaos in the peace process. In fact, often these fanatical movements produce some of the most dramatic achievement towards peace. The Israeli Likud party at one point publicly declared that Palestinians don't exist, but they started peace talks in Madrid with many Arab countries. In 1979 Begin, a militia chief famous for massacring hundreds of Palestinians, was elected Israeli prime minister and later signed the peace treaty with Egypt. We hope that Hamas's time in government will produce similar results in the peace process.

In conclusion, the points above do not minimize the dramatic changes in our lives as Hamas takes power in Palestine. Our history is full of pain and our situation is not easy to govern. We ask our brothers and sisters in Christ to continue praying for the "living stones" Christian communities among their Muslim and Jewish neighbors. We hope that the future brings peace, prosperity, and freedom, and that any fears we have about the future never become reality. Yesterday all the Christian Patriarchs and bishops in Jerusalem have sent a public letter of greeting to Hamas where they expressed their hopes for better future and that this election won't worsen the current crisis, and quoting the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God!"

Abouna Iyad Twal  
Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem

## In the aftermath of Katrina ...

Considering the violence of nature, catastrophic human failure – and effective human compassion

### From Long Island to the Gulf Coast – One congregation joins in Katrina relief

The Rev. Kent Winters-Hazelton, former president of the Witherspoon Society and Interim Pastor at First Presbyterian Church in East Hampton, NY, is just back from a week's stay in Mississippi with a group from his congregation. Here's his report:



Damaged houses

Eleven of us from the East Hampton Church returned last night from a week's stay in Gautier (pronounced Go-ché), Mississippi. We were part of the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance team which has been on the ground since September, helping people put their lives and homes back together. It was a remarkable experience for all of us on this team.

With a wide variety of skills (or in my case non skills) we were assigned varying ranges of tasks, from cooking, to office management, to roofing. Together, we shingled and insulated one home for a woman with disabilities who has been living in Memphis since the storm, and

mucked out (taking the debris, wall-board, rugs - everything - out of the house); repaired poorly constructed boards, insulated and wall boarded another home. In the meantime, we erected the camp tent, did camp clean up duties, and purchased supplies for the work teams that would follow us. (There were three other groups in camp when we left yesterday.) We had a great sense of accomplishment as we saw tasks being completed.

But our work leaves such a small imprint on such an overwhelming canvas. The devastation is beyond description and beyond belief. As we drove toward the coast from the airport in Jackson, we began to point out trees that had fallen, neon signs that had been blown away in Hattiesburg, some 60 miles away.

Throughout the week we would see little pockets of the damage: homes with blue tarped roofs, FEMA trailers on the front yards, and debris piled up near the curb. But as we left yesterday, we drove on Highway 90 along the coast in Biloxi and Gulfport, and we began to see the enormous task that lies ahead. Blocks and blocks are still waiting for the rubble to be removed. There are areas that look like they have been bombed, Businesses are gone – there is the foundation, but nothing else. These are most likely the mom-and-pop variety of stores that populate beach communities, and there is little chance that they will come back. There is construction being done on the casinos in Biloxi – one is already open for business – and

some of the larger hotels and homes, but everything else is piecemeal.

There is no economy outside of the service industries – the fast food chains are up and running and feeding the construction workers – and Lowe's, Home Depot and Wal-Mart were running at full-speed. Workers are hard to find for these establishments; they advertise \$7.00 an hour wages, but there is no place for people to live.

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance will be on site for two to three years. Groups are strongly encouraged to plan work camps and mission trips; there is so much work to do! We are thankful for the nearly \$5,000 that was raised in the East Hampton Community for this trip.



Roof repair crew

One final word of encouragement. On Sunday we worshiped at the Gautier Presbyterian Church, a small church with about 70 members. The church sustained some damage as did many of its members. But we were all struck by the powerful spirit of hope that was present in worship that morning. There were several visiting groups to join the congrega-

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## Administration Stays 'On Message' in Dealing With Katrina and Rita

by Gene TeSelle, Witherspoon Society Issues analyst

With all the public concern about hurricane damage on the Gulf Coast, especially in the area of New Orleans, Biloxi, and Mobile, it became necessary for the Bush administration to respond, although it did take a few days. (White House staffers even had to use video images to prove to the President that there was a crisis.)

Then there were promises of federal aid to rebuild. In typical style, all these promises were "framed" by the same set of assumptions. Some people may be so grateful for the help that is offered that they scarcely pay attention to the conditions and assumptions on which it is offered.

As early as September 13 the House Republican Study Committee, with more than a hundred conservative legislators, met at the Heritage Foundation and drew up a list of 32 "pro-free-market" ideas for responding to the crisis. They ranged from school vouchers to drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and relaxing environmental regulations.

The first three items on the conservative shopping list were especially revealing. They were (a) to suspend Davis-Bacon requirements that federally-funded projects pay the prevailing wage, (b) to declare the area a tax-free "enterprise zone," and (c) to declare it a "competitiveness zone" with tax incentives and waiving of regulations. (These became part of President Bush's executive orders and his proposals for rebuilding the Gulf Coast. Because of public outrage, including more than 350,000 messages to Congress and the White House, the President reversed course on construction wages a month later.)

At an even more basic policy level, it was made clear that the Gulf Coast

crisis would not make any difference to the administration's plan for a permanent repeal of estate taxes on the rich. To avoid increasing the national debt, post-hurricane aid would have to be funded by cutting \$50 billion from other federal programs, most of which had already received drastic cuts in order to pay for the Iraq war.

On October 6, the Coalition on Human Needs, with more than 350 organizations, sent a letter to all Senators and Representatives. It noted that Congress had postponed tax cuts for wealthy Americans, along with intended cuts in basic services such as Medicaid and food stamps. But it called on Congress not merely to postpone these measures but to abandon them.

The Coalition enunciated these basic principles:

- Increased need requires increased funding. Necessary services must not be paid for by cutting already scarce resources utilized by other low-income people.
- We are one nation and must share the responsibility of rebuilding. Congress must reject cuts in services that vulnerable people now need more than ever; and it must reject tax cuts for those who already have the most, since this would deprive the nation of resources needed to save people and rebuild communities.
- Survivors of disaster need simple, streamlined access to essential services, with as little red tape as possible.
- All of Katrina's victims, like all of America's needy people, deserve to be assisted with dignity. Even those who may be ineligible for current federal services (because they are not caring for children, or are immigrants, or were

homeless before the storm) must also be helped, because it would be unconscionable to ignore their desperate situation.

When people could not imagine how the administration's policies could get more outrageous, both houses of Congress decreed on October 7 that the \$750 million in federal loans for rebuilding must be repaid in full by states and municipal governments. (This vote went largely along party lines in both houses.) In the past, the federal government has often forgiven such loans under the provisions of the 1974 Stafford Act. Governor Kathleen Blanco of Louisiana called the policy "discriminatory," singling out hurricane victims for unfair treatment.

But Governor Blanco has also done her part to advance an ideological program. She issued an executive order lifting all restrictions on the number of charter schools in New Orleans; President Bush then offered \$2000 more per student for charter schools than for regular public schools. New Orleans, and the Gulf Coast area in general, are becoming victims of a massive enterprise of ideologically-driven "social engineering."

Gene TeSelle has also analyzed some of the possibilities and questions for the future – such as who should have a voice in the decision-making, what sort of reconstruction would be best, and much more.

You'll find it at [http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/2005/katrina\\_3\\_months\\_later.htm#rebuilding](http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/2005/katrina_3_months_later.htm#rebuilding)

## Theological musings

# The Union's Interesting State

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

Last month, George W. Bush said that the state of the union is strong. That's debatable. What with a questionably just and clearly unwise war in Iraq, the botched response to Hurricane Katrina, a possibly illegal surveillance program, burgeoning deficits, the probability that steep tax cuts will weaken the government's ability to furnish important services, and proposed budget cuts in Medicaid, Medicare, and student loans, one might argue that, actually, we're going to hell in a handcart. But here's the thing. It looks as if there may be an opportunity here, particularly if you are a liberal Protestant with an interest in domestic social policies. In the middle of all the bad news there may be the start of something good. Let me say what I mean.

Since the days of Walter Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel, many liberal Protestants in America have been concerned to mitigate some of the social effects of *laissez faire* capitalism. They generally have admitted that free markets produce wealth, but they have also tried to nudge the nation in the direction of social democracy, looking toward places like present day Canada and / or some Western European countries where educational opportunities and social services seem more broadly distributed. Reinhold Niebuhr and others taught a number of liberal Protestants to be realistic, to realize that social changes do not come about by the application of moral ideas apart from actual social, political, and economic interests. He also taught them to recognize that social democratic systems also suffer from characteristic perils to be mitigated and avoided, e.g., bureaucratic inertia, and undue concentrations of power in the hands of government. Even so, the sense remains that, on balance, American society tilts too far toward *laissez faire*, that it both can and should do a better job of looking after basic social opportunities and human needs, and that its failure to do so lies behind more than a few serious injustices.

The more fully developed cases made for this social democratic bent can be varied and complex, but two clusters of reasons stand out.

- One is theological. Liberal Protestants believe that Christian faith points to God the *Creator* in relation to whom all persons have worth. Those liberals of a realistic cast also

affirm that, as *Judge*, God requires justice, and that history shows that chronic human corruption calls for social restraints, checks, and balances. At the same time, they refuse to relinquish hope for significant improvements, trusting that God the *Redeemer* brings renewed possibilities for life and also equips and encourages us to care for neighbors.

- Another cluster is empirical and experiential. Liberal Protestants observe that some of the social effects of entirely unregulated market economies are negative and unfair, e.g., grossly unbalanced accumulations of wealth, poor distribution of health care, lack of provision for retirement. Indeed, where powerful corporate and financial institutions remain unchecked, they often pursue their objectives at the expense of labor, e.g., low wages, long hours, poor working conditions. They sometimes compromise important community interests in tolerably fair political and judicial institutions that remain responsive to all. Frequently, they despoil residential, wilderness, and marine environments. (These, in fact, were among the reasons given by both Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr for regulating some aspects of business and for supporting the labor movement.)

Now from this perspective, when W. was re-elected, the prospects for progress seemed dim. We might hope to slow and, at points, derail the President's domestic agenda – his cuts in taxes and services, the proposal to “reform” Social Security by replacing it with “personal accounts.” With luck, I thought, we might also press troubling questions about Iraq, perhaps contribute to a shortening of the American military presence there as well as to a curtailment of further ill-conceived ventures.

But it may now be time for us to upgrade our sense of possibilities. During the past year, Mr. Bush's popularity has plummeted. Combined with the typical political limitations of a second term, this has eroded his administration's ability to set a national agenda. Recently, it is true, the President has shown signs of political life, i.e., two Supreme Court justices confirmed, a drive to make his tax cuts permanent, and the continued political strength of his focus on national security (especially in the absence of a creditable Democratic

alternative). Nevertheless, consider the confusing beginning of the (positively Byzantine) prescription drug benefit program, as well as unease over recent cuts in Medicaid, Medicare, and education loans. Consider the bad news at General Motors and at Ford, and also the fact that some corporations want to unload on the government costly pension plans and health-care benefits. Not a pretty picture, I know, but also one that appears to have raised some fundamental questions about how American society goes about addressing important social and human needs.

Just how sharply these questions will be raised remains to be seen. On the positive side, an article appeared in the *New York Times* for January 29 by Clifford J. Levy, entitled "The New Corporate Outsourcing." Levy notes that in the 1930s, "the titans of industry tried to smother Social Security." When Medicare and Medicaid were being considered, they warned of "the doomsday of socialized medicine." But today, he says, pressure from foreign competitors to lower costs has led a number of companies to pare away at workers' health care and pensions, thus "abandoning an informal social contract that existed for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century." Indeed, "from pensions to health care, businesses want the government to take over."<sup>1</sup> What's more, following decades of resistance, the A.F.L. - C.I.O. recently also has endorsed the idea of national health care.

Is the time right for socially democratic leaning Protestants to help raise the visibility of some alternatives to the *status quo*? As a professor whose portable pension with TIAA-CREF is my own, I confess that I have never really understood the virtues of having one's employer manage and oversee a pension that you can't even take with you if you go. (Sooner or later, it also seems that the corporate temptation either to access the pot of gold or else shed the liability will simply be too great.) So, here's an idea thrown out just to provoke discussion. What about maintaining Social Security and also substituting for employer-managed pension funds portable, personally owned pensions lodged with companies something like TIAA-CREF? Maybe the current social contract should be revised to include the expectation that one's employer will pay into one's own portable pension plan.

Another idea. It has been widely reported that General Motors pays about "\$1,500 in health care costs for each car it makes, while some competitors pay as little as \$200." From a somewhat socially democratic perspective, might this, too, indicate an opportunity? "The big irony in the health care area is that actually American business would be better off if there were a national health insurance system like Canada's," said Theda Skocpol, a Harvard dean who was an informal advisor on social policy to the Clinton

administration." Indeed, she said, "Costs would be easier to keep down and there would be more flexibility. Workers wouldn't be keeping their jobs to keep their health benefits."<sup>2</sup>

Pressing ideas such as these won't lead to changes overnight, and there is the chance that doing so will make little difference. (History and providence, after all, teach the virtues of patience and persistence as well as the discipline of disappointed hopes.) There is also a good deal more to do and to be concerned about. (For example, poverty and homelessness, gross deficiencies in the distribution of educational opportunities, the war in Iraq, and the need to formulate a positive, realistic, and appropriately restrained understanding of an international role for the U.S.A. as the sole remaining superpower.) But focusing attention on some alternative ideas for pensions and health care might be a positive step. That the current state of the union should be such that this might be done with the support of a significant segment of corporate America, as well as with the support of American labor, qualifies as genuinely interesting.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Clifford J. Levy, "The New Corporate Outsourcing," *The New York Times* (Sunday, January 29, 2006): Section 4, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

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Continued from "Katrina," page 19

tion in worship. Every seat was taken (and they were new, of course, since the old pews were found floating in a couple feet of water when the doors were opened after the storm.) They sang with enthusiasm along with the new piano, hymnal and bibles. In the service there was a service of ordination and installation of one elder, and when the call came out for all elders to come forward, there were people representing churches from South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Virginia, Ohio, New York and other states, forming again, an unbreakable bond of the Body of Christ.

## More Light conference affirms the gifts glbt people bring to the church ... and faces the challenges

Naomi Tutu offers keynote address

A special report by Gene TeSelle, Witherspoon Issues Analyst

More Light Presbyterians held a regional conference in Nashville, February 10-12, with about forty or fifty in attendance. Much of the planning was done by the local MLP chapter, with participation from members, elders, and ministers in at least seven different congregations.

The dynamics of the conference were best expressed during one of the closing meetings. A straight person expressed gratitude for being made to feel welcome. In response a few glbt participants said they had been surprised to find straight people there. This led to a statement that glbt people are a gift from God, often with more than the usual amount of talent and grace.

For the final service, members of the conference joined the congregation of the Woodland Presbyterian Church in urban East Nashville, where the session has discussed the issues of sexuality and championed the removal of G-6.0106b from the Book of Order.

The keynote speaker was Naomi Tutu, now a Nashville resident (formerly Program Coordinator for the Race Relations Institute at Fisk University, and now Associate Director of the office of International Programs at Tennessee State University). She was calm, reflective, and convincing as she asked how we can pay attention to what people can give — and receive. We are called to “the true fundamentalism,” she said, not the gospel of prosperity, which makes the rich and powerful the model (“How did that work for Jesus?” she asked). She recalled having heard, from an

Episcopal pulpit in Nashville after the consecration of Bishop Gene Robinson, prejudice and hate expressed in “such beautiful words.” “We have been given a great gift, a great opportunity,” she said, to show that there are none whom God does not love.

There were several parallel workshops, most of them conducted in both morning and afternoon.

Perhaps the most vivid was an audio-visual series on the theme “Telling Our Stories/Sharing Our Faith,” presented by Janet Edwards of Pittsburgh Presbytery’s Taskforce on Ministry with Sexual Minorities, and the Community House Presbyterian Church. GLBT Presbyterians, their family members, and friends share their lives, their faith journeys, and their desires for the church in several modes. The video stories are in two volumes. There are also audio stories. And a booklet briefly summarizes a number of them. These can be secured from the Digital Storytelling Director, (412) 321-3900, ext. 216, or by contacting Janet Edwards, revjmephd@worldnet.att.net.

Erin Swenson, who is accustomed to introducing herself as “the famous transgender minister in Atlanta,” and is also the outgoing co-moderator of More Light Presbyterians, was an active participant in the conference and led a session on “Transgender Issues: Where and How does the T in glbt fit in the Church?”

She and Michael Adee, National Field Organizer for More Light Presbyteri-

ans, summed up many of these issues in a workshop on “Caring for All God’s Children: Pastoral Care for GLBT Persons and Families.”

Adee quoted the statement by Judy Shepard, mother of Matthew Shepard, that “the worst kind of hurt is church hurt.” He noted that Bishop John Shelby Spong, in his book *The Sins of Scripture: Exposing the Bible’s Texts of Hate to Reveal the God of Love* (HarperCollins, 2005, 336 pp., \$19.95), speaks of “killer texts.” The program of most congregations, Adeed pointed out, still assumes a Fifties profile of intact heterosexual families. “Fidelity and chastity” (G-6.0106b) continues to be an expectation not only of ordained officers (not always observed!) but implicitly of all members. But congregations are learning that they have to consider the “special needs” of singles and divorced people. So how might they minister more effectively to glbt’s in their community and their membership?

Adee took life’s passages as his theme. Baptism is the first hurdle, for some ministers refuse to baptize the child of a same-sex couple. In adolescence there are questions how glbt’s will be accepted in the youth group. There are also questions about “coming out,” a major issue of “truth-telling.” To whom can one say it first? And how can the family, the pastor, and members of the church “come out” as allies, knowing that they will be challenging social norms? Coming out at a later time (which often happens) may be experienced as a second adolescence, learning new kinds of behavior and relationships. Gender change is an even more drastic transition. Marriage or a committed union is another rite of passage, filled with conflict for Presbyterian churches and ministers. And at the end of life, illness may be dogged by questions

whether a partner is really “next of kin,” able to visit and able to make decisions. Even in death there may be rejection.

Hal Porter, Pastor Emeritus of Cincinnati’s Mt. Auburn Presbyterian Church, led a workshop on the theme “Homosexuality is Not a Sin.” He noted the “harm, division, and ill will” caused by the 1978 General Assembly’s categorical declaration that “the practice of homosexuality is a sin.” Porter reflected on a number of biblical, theological, and clinical statements. He also distributed copies of an overture recently adopted by the Cincinnati Presbytery, calling on the upcoming General Assembly to amend the 1978 policy statement by deleting seven statements which set homosexuality in a negative light.

Those who were at the 2004 General Assembly will recall a dispute, continuing long after the close of the Assembly, over quotations read out during floor debate by Scott Schaeffer,

a former member of the Stated Clerk’s staff, during a debate over deleting G-6.0106b. Some of these were from the background paper and thus were not part of the 1978 Assembly’s action. But there are negative evaluations of homosexuality in the Assembly’s policy statement, too. Hal Porter pointed out that, if you go to the [www.pcusa.org](http://www.pcusa.org) web site, click on Search, and type in “homosexuality,” the first thing that pops up is this 1978 statement. (I tried it, and that’s indeed what happened.)

Much has happened since 1978. The American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association have made important statements about homosexuality and about attempts at “conversion therapy” which assume that it is a reversible “disorder.” There have also been many discussions of biblical and doctrinal perspectives on homosexuality. It is time for the church’s most formal policy statement on sexual orientation to be brought up to date and be made less blatantly offensive.

## Six perspectives on homosexuality

Princeton professor William Stacy Johnson, a member of the Theological Task Force, has summarized six perspectives on homosexuality, and these may help commissioners to the General Assembly as they reflect on the Cincinnati overture.

- the “prohibition” view: homosexuality is a perversion of God’s created order
- the “definitive guidance” view: homosexual orientation and conduct is a tragedy, to be responded to with repentance and abstinence
- the “justice” view: homosexuality is like other natural conditions, and reconciliation comes when heterosexuals repent of singling this out as the major sin
- the “pastoral” view: homosexual relationships may be disobedient in form but obedient in substance, and committed same-sex relationships are better than promiscuity
- the “celebration” view: homosexuality is a fact of creation, to be regarded as God’s good gift
- the “consecration” view: homosexuality is a fact of creation, but ambiguous, needing to be rightly ordered by consecrating one’s sexuality in an exclusive, committed relationship.

### MLP publishes a new educational resource on Biblical views of sexuality & homosexuality

The Rev. Barbara Swartzel Anderson, PCUSA clergywoman and pastor, has written a new education resource that Michael Adee, National Field Organizer of More Light Presbyterians, recommends for us by individuals, congregations, youth groups, campus ministries, seminary communities and MLP chapters.

We have posted the full text on the Witherspoon website, at [http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/2006/biblical\\_views.htm](http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/2006/biblical_views.htm)

Adee adds that “you can copy this for your use. Please know that this educational resource is copyrighted by the author and generously being shared with MLP by her.”

Adee also says, “Please do circulate and share this new educational resource. It could be very helpful to persons who seek “more light” on what the Bible says and does not say about human sexuality, marriage, homosexuality, same-sex relationships and same-sex love, hospitality, and what it means to be family and to be the Church.”

For more educational resources go to [www.mlp.org](http://www.mlp.org)

# Calls to Action

## RELEASED PRESBYTERIANS



by Lynne Reade, former Elder

Too many Presbyterians are leaving the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) because our denomination has in recent years denied ordination to them or their friends solely for sexual reasons. They leave for more welcoming and hospitable Christian denominations that allow members and officers to express the sexual orientation with which they were born.

I decided that I did not want to leave our denomination over this issue, critical as it is. But I wanted to show solidarity with those denied ordination solely because of “Amendment B”. If others could not be ordained because of how they were born, I did not want to be ordained either.

I wanted a new, concrete way to demonstrate support. I found it buried deep within the intricacies of the denomination’s *Book of Order*, namely G-14.0211a. This section describes the manner in which an Elder or Deacon in good standing may ask to be “released” from the exercise of ordained office. (Ministers of Word and Sacrament can use G-11.0414.)

So I asked my Session on Martin Luther King, Jr.’s birthday to “release” me – to set me free. My Session did so in a most loving way, understanding what I was doing.

The advantage of being “released” from ordination is that I can remain a Presbyterian member instead of cutting all ties with the denomination that I used to respect and still love. I can continue working for change and acceptance – just in different ways. So I am free.

Some others may wish to be “released” also. To achieve this released state, Elders and Deacons can simply apply to their Sessions. Those wishing to use this way to show support and solidarity with those denied ordination solely for sexual reasons may take the same action I did recently – one by one - by following the procedure described in the *Book of Order*, namely G-14.0211a. For convenience, a form is provided below.

Those who wish to have others know of their action may send their names to **Released Presbyterians**:

Lynne Reade, Coordinator  
Released Presbyterians  
3610 Dunbar Court  
Fremont, CA 94536      e-mail: [lynnereade@comcast.net](mailto:lynnereade@comcast.net)

If you send in your name, please print clearly and include the office from which you have been released - Elder or Deacon - and particular church membership. (Ministers of Word and Sacrament using G-11.0414 would indicate their Presbytery.)

See next page for a form or use in applying for “release” from ordained office.

Lynne Reade was a Ruling Elder for almost 40 years before her Session granted her request to be released from the exercise of ordained office on January 15, 2006. During those years, she served on four different church Sessions in California. A lawyer, she has served on various committees and commissions of the denomination, including the General Assembly Advisory Committee on the Constitution and Permanent Judicial Commissions of the General Assembly, the Synod of the Pacific, and the Presbytery of San Francisco.

She is currently an active member of Westminster Hills Presbyterian Church in Hayward, California, a More Light church.



## Support needed for church leaders in Colombia

A call for action, from the Rev. W. Mark Koenig, Associate for Resources and Publications in the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program

February 13, 2006

New death threats against leaders in the Presbyterian Church of Colombia and other human rights leaders in Colombia have been reported.

On February 10, 2006, the Ecumenical Network of Colombia and the Interecclesial Commission of Justice and Peace in Colombia reported that new death threats have been received against Milton Mejia, General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of Colombia (PCC), human rights workers whose offices are on the PCC campus, and Mauricio Avilez, now of Justicia y Paz. Both men are members of the Executive Committee of the Ecumenical Network of Colombia. While specific threats against Mejia and Avilez are enumerated, there are also implied threats against the entire human rights and church community working with the displaced on the north coast of Colombia. Threatened groups include ANDESCOL (the National Association of Displaced Families) and CEDERHNOS, a volunteer organization that is part of the PCC's human rights ministry.

Please consider contacting the Colombian Embassy in Washington DC (information is found below) today if possible. Colombia's *El Tiempo* newspaper has reported reports that President Uribe of Colombia is scheduled to be in Washington on February 13 to lobby agricultural and intellectual property right provisions of the TLC/Free Trade Agreement.

Contact the Embassy and the Vice President of Colombia by phone, fax, or email to express your concern over these recent threats. Advocate that the government of Colombia take the necessary steps to guarantee the protection and safety of those working with the church, the displaced, and in the defense of human rights.

Andres Pastraña Arango, Colombia's Ambassador to the United States  
His Excellency Andres Pastraña Arango  
2118 Leroy Place, NW  
Washington, DC 20008  
Telephone: (202) 387-8338  
Fax: (202) 232-8643  
E-mail: [emwas@colombiaemb.org](mailto:emwas@colombiaemb.org)  
Salutation: Excellency

Francisco Santos, Vice President of the Republic of Colombia  
Dr. Francisco Santos Calderon  
Vicepresidente de la Republica de Colombia  
Vicepresidencia Carrera 8A No 5-57Bogotá, Colombia  
Telephone: 011.571.334.5077  
Fax: 011.571.565.7682  
Email: [fsantos@presidencia.gov.co](mailto:fsantos@presidencia.gov.co)  
Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Vicepresidente/ Dear Vice-President

## A book note:

### Religion, Politics, and the Christian Right: Post-9/11 Powers and American Empire

*(a book notice from Fortress Press)*

Princeton theologian Mark Lewis Taylor provides an astute analysis of how after 9/11, Christian nationalists have forged an imperial America that subverts what most U.S. citizens and most Christians hold dear about their democratic life. Even as he exposes the dangers of the Christian right, Taylor also retrieves and highlights an authentic democratic spirit that U.S. citizens can nurture and develop in public life.

"Mark Lewis Taylor is the most prophetic theologian, political activist and cultural critic of his generation. There is simply no one on the scene like him. Don't miss this book!" — Cornel West, University Professor of Religion, Princeton University

**A Witherspoon note:** Dr Taylor was one of the leaders of the Witherspoon/Peace Fellowship seminar at Ghost Ranch in the summer of 2005. Witherspoon board member Jake Young reported on the seminar, and especially on Taylor's presentations, in *Network News*, Summer 2005, pages 9-10.

**Also, Dr. Taylor will be the main leader of our Semper Reformanda Pre-GA Conversation on Wednesday, June 14, 1:00 to 4:00 pm. (See page 5 above.)**

Ghost Ranch Seminar—July 17-24, 2006

## ECONOMY, ECOLOGY AND EMPIRE

In partnership with The Witherspoon Society, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship and Presbyterians for Restoring Creation (Jane Hanna, Coordinator)

*For two weeks in the summer of 2004, four hundred delegates to the 24<sup>th</sup> General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches gathered in Accra, Ghana, adopting a statement of confession and commitment to changing, renewing and restoring the economy and the earth. During our week at Ghost Ranch we will examine the realities of our world that have made this statement necessary.*

*We live in a time much like that of the Roman Empire into which Jesus and the church were born. How should people of faith respond to the root causes of massive threats to life that result from an unjust economic system supported by political and military might? We will consider our individual commitment to giving time, energy and gifts to changing, renewing and restoring the economy and the earth.*

*Resources will be available to assist us in taking the message to our congregations that in community we can work for economic and ecological justice in our local and regional settings as well as global.*

**(To read the statement “Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth” and the Letter from Accra, go to the WARC website:**

**[http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/side.jsp?news\\_id=181&part\\_id=0&navi=1](http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/side.jsp?news_id=181&part_id=0&navi=1)**)

*Attention will be given to the Book of Revelation, written to give hope to the oppressed during the Roman Empire, not as a prophecy for the end of the world. The week will be a time for reflection on God's sovereignty over all life and all the earth, to our deep connection to all that is.*

### Our Seminar leaders:

**Dr. Barbara R. Rossing**, ordained Lutheran minister and Professor of New Testament at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. She works on issues of Bible, ecology and empire. Her most recent book, *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation* was featured on “Sixty Minutes” as a critique of the fundamentalist “Left Behind” novels. She was one of the principal authors of the Bible Studies, “For the Healing of the World,” at the Lutheran World Federation Assembly in Winnipeg in 2003. She holds an M.Div. from Yale Divinity School and a Th.D. from Harvard Divinity School.

**Dr. Walter Owensby** served for 16 years in the PCUSA Washington Office as an advocate on economic and international affairs. A Presbyterian minister, he holds an M.Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary and a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin with studies in international development. His dissertation dealt with U.S. corporate investment in Mexico. He is the author of *Economics for Prophets: A Primer on Concepts, Realities, and Values in our Economic System*. He has served as a parish minister, a teacher of biblical and theological materials in Mexico, and headed an ecumenical program in Colombia focused on the social impact of foreign corporations and governments.

**Gary Cook** serves as Associate Director in the PC(USA) Worldwide Ministries Division and is responsible for the Global Service and Witness program area, which includes programs focused on international health, hunger, disaster relief, and development. Prior to 2004, he was the coordinator of the Presbyterian Hunger Program. He currently also chairs the PC(USA) Globalization staff team, convenes the Reformed communions' Globalization Working Group, and serves on the National Council of Churches' task force on a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Social Creed. He is a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh and Chicago Theological Seminary and served congregations in Ohio and Florida before joining the PC(USA) national staff in 1991.

For more information, contact Jane Hanna, [mjhfos@aol.com](mailto:mjhfos@aol.com) or  
Ghost Ranch: <http://www.ghost ranch.org/> or phone 1 (877) 804-4678 or 1 (505) 685-4333

# Resources

## A great resource for the ordination debates:

### Gene TeSelle reviews *Ordination Standards: Biblical, Theological, and Scientific Perspectives*

*Ordination Standards: Biblical, Theological, and Scientific Perspectives* is a survey and study guide prepared by the elders of the North Como Presbyterian Church in Roseville, Minnesota. The 556-page paperbound book is published by iUniverse (a subsidiary of Barnes and Noble) at a price of \$46.95. Both Amazon and Barnes and Noble have new and used copies at lower prices, starting at around \$35. The whole guide can also be downloaded as an Adobe eBook for \$6 per copy (go to either iUniverse or Amazon).

It's impressive, for starters, that something like this could be done at all. It is the result of five years of study by the elders and members of a local church. After looking into an issue that has agitated the church for three decades, they offer here a curriculum designed to stimulate discussion in other congregations. There are fourteen "modules" — four dealing with biblical and theological issues, ten with scientific.

They did not do it alone. The bibliographies indicate how much reading, research, and consultation they did. They had on-the-scene advice from Professors Paul Capetz and Richard Weis of United Theological Seminary, as well as many other academics and professional practitioners. They make much use of Jack Rogers' book *Reading the Bible and the Confessions: The Presbyterian Way* (1999), and Rogers has an endorsement on the back cover.

The opening modules look at the Bible and the Presbyterian approach to interpreting it. To prepare us for dealing with the contemporary debate about same-sex relationships, they look at two other

controversies, those concerning slavery and the status of women. The Bible can be quoted on both sides of these questions, and what most of us regard as the "right" approach was not given serious consideration until the 19th century in the case of the former, the 20th in the case of the latter.

Then we are led, step by step, through the history of the Presbyterian church's ordination standards, all the way to the addition of G-6.0106b to the Book of Order, its interpretation by the Permanent Judicial Commission, and the attempts to remove it. All the relevant passages — study documents, General Assembly actions, judicial decisions — are quoted, so that there is no need to hunt up the sources. There is also a helpful explanation of the way a condemnation of "homosexual perversion" got into Question 87 of the Heidelberg Confession (C-4.087) although it is absent from the original texts.

This leads, quite naturally, to a consideration of how the Bible is to be applied to the ordination standards as they currently stand. We get detailed discussions of the image of God (Gen. 1:27-28), Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19), the Levite's concubine (Jud. 19), several key passages from Leviticus, and the negative statements in Paul (Rom. 1: 26-27, 1 Cor. 6:9-10).

In the case of Genesis 19 and Judges 19, it is clear that the real issue is the violation of hospitality by humiliating other males — proving that they are "girlie-men," to use contemporary rhetoric. (Yes, the sin of Sodom is being perpetuated in our own day, at least "in their hearts" (cf. Mt. 5:21-28), by those whose bumper stickers say, "Don't be a girlie man, vote Republican.")

The socially approved way of satisfying masculine assertiveness was to substitute women as the legitimate victims. So much for what appears, at first glance, to be "biblical ethics." We discover that passages like these must be understood in the light of "the circumstances in which they were set down" (C-5.010) and the "views of life, history, and the cosmos which were then current" (C-9.29).

In dealing with Romans 1, we are reminded that the ancient world had no notion that same-sex attraction might be the result of inherent dispositions. Paul, furthermore, shared the assumptions of his time about the inferiority of women and the "natural use of women" (yes, that's his language). This, too, requires interpretation rather than proof-texting.

The modules on scientific perspectives are even more detailed. Following an introduction dealing with scientific method, we are led through topics such as homosexuality and transsexuality in the natural world; psychological studies of prejudice, rejection, and suicide as they affect GLBT persons; the debate between "essentialism" and "constructionism," genetic versus environmental factors; and the many issues surrounding "conversion therapies." There is a detailed survey of ex-gay ministries and individual leaders, some of whom subsequently left the movement. The last major segment deals with issues of professional ethics in attempting conversion therapy.

This is a thorough discussion guide. In fact, given its length it would be suitable for solitary reading, and in the process you can learn an awful lot! But it does invite — even requires — live discussion, since various perspectives are explored without reaching final resolution. As we know, there will always be new resources coming out. But that does not mean that this guide will become out-of-date, for it envisages exactly that kind of open-ended discussion.



## Biblical scholar sees a “wide, wide circle of divine love”

A book note by Berry Craig

The author is a professor of history at the Western Kentucky Community and Technical College in Paducah. He and his wife, Melinda, are members of the Witherspoon Society.

I hadn't heard of W. Eugene March or *The Wide, Wide Circle of Divine Love: A Biblical Case for Religious Diversity* until I read *The Layman's* editorial against the book and its author.

The *Layman*, the ultra-conservative, if not fundamentalist, Presbyterian Lay Committee's newspaper, was in especially high dudgeon. Thus, I figured *The Wide, Wide Circle* had to be a good read.

I was wrong. It's a great read.

The *Layman* lambasted March's "pluralism," which most Presbyterians share. The *Layman* argued that "pluralism...is a destructive ideology that restrains Christians from believing that Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, truly man and truly God, that there is 'no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved,' as Peter proclaimed in Acts 5."

The *Layman's* lament sent me to my favorite bookstore for a copy of March's musings. I got the last one in stock.

We Presbyterians — the Frozen Chosen — don't do "amens" except at the end of hymns. The *Wide, Wide Circle* is eminently "amenable."

The Lay Committee is an exclusivist minority, though a noisy one, in the Presbyterian flock. March's book expresses the inclusive majority view.

"Persons with an inclusive perspective consider their own religion to offer the best but not the only possible understanding of the Divine," wrote March, a professor emeritus at the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. "For Christians this means that God is most fully revealed in Jesus Christ. God's work is brought to its completion in Jesus Christ. The best, the most satisfying, the most secure, the most fulfilling relationship with God is to be found in faithfully following Jesus Christ. But such a commitment to Jesus does not require a denunciation of all other religious views."

Amen.

March warned against "militant religious extremism." He added that, "Those who teach or practice their religious devotion in ways that encourage disdain for others by distorting and misrepresenting their own traditions and those of others need to be challenged. Hate no longer can have a legitimate place at the table of any of our religious gatherings."

Amen.

It is easy to see how March's book riled the Laymen and others of the exclusivist persuasion. Indeed, I suspect that what makes the Laymen maddest at March is knowing — but never admitting, of course — that a lot more Presbyterians agree with him than with them.

March suggested that among exclusivists "somewhere along the

way the song 'Jesus *loves* me' became 'Jesus loves *me*.'" (Similarly, though less reverently, a folk rock group called the Chicken Chokers croons a tune titled, "Jesus Loves Me But He Can't Stand You.")


Early in his book, March pops the big question. "Do you have to be a Christian to get to heaven?...Or to put it more simply, must only one religion be true?"

March explained that "this side of heaven, there is no way to answer the last question conclusively, one way or the other." Probably nothing in March's book raised Laymen hackles higher than the author's next sentence: "*People may believe what they want, but there is simply no way to prove their beliefs to be correct.*" (Italics mine.)

Amen.

Religion isn't based on empirical science or history. Religion is rooted in faith. Hence, most Presbyterians heed the Biblical admonition to "Judge not lest ye be judged." Like March, most Presbyterians are proud of their faith but freely admit there is truth and validity in other religions.

March also urged that "the resources of the major religious traditions of the world...be marshaled to develop a basis for mutual respect and just cooperation among believers and nonbelievers alike." He concluded, "This book is a small contribution toward this goal."

I prayerfully disagree. It is a large contribution. Otherwise, the Laymen and their "Jesus loves *me*" soul mates wouldn't take so much umbrage at *The Wide, Wide Circle of Divine Love* and the "Jesus loves *me*" theology of its author. 

# Witherspoon News

## New By-Laws to be introduced at Membership Meeting during General Assembly

You may not lie awake nights worrying about the by-laws of the Witherspoon Society. For that matter, the members of your Executive Committee have not lost much sleep over them, either. But we have become aware that our current by-laws, approved in 1955, are increasingly out of sync with the realities of our church and our ways of working.

Most concretely, the shift to biennial General Assemblies has meant some changes in how we will work. For instance, our annual meetings, which have been held in conjunction with each GA, will no longer be possible in the same way. Also, some of the provisions of the old by-laws (such as local and regional chapters) have never really been put into effect.

So over the past few months, the Executive Committee has talked about needed changes, and two members have drafted a new set of by-laws, which we are publishing for all our members, beginning on the next page of this *Network News*.

The major changes are these:

1. The old Mission Statement has been replaced by the one adopted by the Executive Committee in October, 2004.
2. New language has been added to Article II, section 3, and to Article IV, section 8.b, to conform to current IRS and other legal requirements for a non-profit corporation.
3. Article IV, section 1, will change our governing body from an Executive Committee to a Board. This comes into harmony with the practice of many of our sister organizations.
4. Terms of office continue to be for two years.
5. Elections, as in the past, will be annual, by mail-in ballot.
6. We will replace the offices of President and Vice-Presi-

dent with two Co-Moderators. This will allow for (but not require) having a male and a female serving together, and sharing responsibilities. Again, this will be closer to the practice of many of our sister organizations. (Article IV, sections 2 and 3.)

7. Article V changes our "Annual Meetings" to "Membership Meetings," which will normally be held during the biennial General Assembly, but might also be convened during events such as a national conference.

8. Article IV, section 6, has a simpler discussion of local chapters, better reflecting our reality. It also opens the way in Section 6.b for the establishment of on-going work groups to carry on many of the regular tasks of our organization, involving Witherspoon members as well as elected officers.

*Now the important part:*

### **You are hereby notified and invited to vote on the proposed By-Laws:**

This action will take place in our Membership Meeting during General Assembly, on Sunday, June 18, 2006, at about 2:30 pm, following the Witherspoon Awards Luncheon at the Sheraton Hotel, in Birmingham, Alabama.

All Witherspoon Society members are eligible to propose amendments, take part in discussion, and vote on the proposed By-Laws.

If you have questions, comments, or suggestions for changes, we invite you to contact Doug King or Jennifer Stone, whose addresses and such you'll find on the back cover.

**Important: We are seeking suggestions of people who might be nominated to fill all of the positions in our Board.**

See page 38, at the end of the new By-Laws, for details.

**BY-LAWS OF THE WITHERSPOON SOCIETY**  
**DRAFT**

To be submitted to the Witherspoon Membership Meeting  
June 18, 2006, Birmingham, Alabama

**ARTICLE I**      **Name:**

The name of this organization shall be The Witherspoon Society. The Society is an organization affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

**ARTICLE II**      **Mission:**

**Section 1.**      **Statement of Mission.**

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

Our mission is:

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

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

(Revised Mission Statement adopted on October 1, 2004)

**Section 2.**      **Limitation of Purposes.**

The corporation is organized exclusively for charitable, religious, educational and/or scientific purposes under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

**Section 3.**      **Limitation of Powers.**

No part of the net earnings of the corporation shall inure to the benefit of, or be distributable to, its members, trustees, directors, officers or other private persons, except that the corporation shall be authorized and empowered to pay reasonable compensation for services rendered and to make payments and distributions in furtherance of Section 501(c)(3) purposes.

No substantial part of the activities of the corporation shall be the carrying on of propaganda, or otherwise attempting to influence legislation, and the corporation shall not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distribution of statements) any political campaign on behalf of, or in opposition to, any candidate for public office.

Notwithstanding any other provision of these articles, the corporation shall not carry on any other activities not permitted to be carried on (a) by any corporation exempt from Federal income tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code or (b) by any corporation, contributions to which are deductible under Section 170(c)(2) of the Internal Revenue Code.

**ARTICLE III**      **Membership:**

**Section 1.**      **Eligibility.**

Membership shall be open to all members of the Presbyterian Church (USA.), and to organizations thereof, which support the Mission of the Society.

The Society shall not discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, income, or marital status.

**Section 2. Dues.**

The annual dues and “Network News” subscription rate of the Society shall be determined by the Witherspoon Board. Dues shall be payable to the Society annually.

**Section 3. Termination of Membership.**

Any member desiring to resign from the Society may submit his or her resignation in writing to the Board, to be removed from the list of active members. A member’s membership may be terminated by the Board in any case in which the member has engaged in actions or communications that clearly violate the values and mission of the Witherspoon Society, as expressed in its Mission Statement (Art. II, Section 1).

**ARTICLE IV Organization:****Section 1. Witherspoon Board.**

The affairs of the Society between Membership Meetings shall be conducted by a Board composed of the elected Officers of the Society.

All Board members shall normally be elected for terms of two years, except that persons may be elected for a three-year term in order to maintain the rotation of terms as provided in Article V, Section 1. No member shall serve on the Board for more than six consecutive years. The Members at Large shall be elected for two-year terms on a rotating basis, half to be elected each year. Elections shall be held annually in May.

New Board members shall be invited to attend the fall meeting of the Board, and shall take office at the end of that meeting.

Vacancies occurring between annual elections shall be filled by the Board until the next annual election. The President-elect and other incoming Board officers shall be invited to attend and participate in the fall meeting. They shall take office at the end of the fall meeting of the Board.

**Section 2. Officers.**

Officers of the Society shall include the following:

- Co-Moderators (two in number)
- Membership Coordinator
- Treasurer
- Secretary/Communicator
- Issues Analyst
- Members at Large (at least four in number)

**Section 3. Responsibilities of Officers.**

The responsibilities of each office may be adjusted to use most fully the gifts and skills of the Board members. The general responsibilities of each office will include the following:

The Co-Moderators shall:

- convene and chair meetings of the Board
- serve as liaisons with national staff of the Presbyterian Church, and with other Presbyterian and ecumenical organizations.
- guide and facilitate the work of the other officers
- maintain a close relationship with conveners of Witherspoon Society chapters
- submit the annual report to the General Assembly
- serve as Co-Moderators of the Corporation

The Membership Coordinator of the Society shall:

- have primary responsibility for membership recruitment for the Society
- provide for the maintenance and updating of the Society’s membership rolls
- contact all members to remind them when their membership renewals are due
- develop strategies and resources for the continual renewal of present membership and recruitment of new members
- develop strategies and resources for the creation and growth of local chapters

The Treasurer of the Society shall:

- provide for the maintenance of the financial records of the Society, and for all necessary and authorized transactions related thereto
- provide the Board with financial reports at each meeting
- provide the Board with an annual budget proposal for adoption prior to the start of the budget year
- develop funding strategies and resources for the Society
- serve as Treasurer of the Corporation
- arrange for an annual written financial review of all financial records

The Secretary/Communicator of the Society shall:

- keep minutes of all Board meetings and all Annual and Special Meetings of the Society
- coordinate the communications within the Society
- work with the editor of Network News and the Witherspoon website, and through other channels, to communicate Society action to appropriate people and groups
- coordinate selection of the Wareham Seminary Intern
- maintain the records of the Society and ensure their transmission to the succeeding Secretary
- serve as Secretary of the Corporation

The Issues Analyst shall:

- gather data to inform the Society's decision-making for issue focus
- resource and coordinate the Society's work on issues determined at national, synod, and presbytery levels
- facilitate the Society's evaluation of its issue work
- convene strategy working group of the Board

The Members at Large shall:

- participate regularly in the discussions of the Board, offering their wisdom in ways reflecting their particular gifts, skills, and perspectives.
- join as fully as possible in Witherspoon Society activities at General Assemblies, in conferences and other events sponsored by the Society
- take part in the work of at least one of the on-going work groups, serving also as liaisons between those groups and the Board

All members of the Board will be expected to:

- participate regularly in the discussions of the Board, through face-to-face meetings, as well as e-mail and telephone discussions
- play an active role, insofar as possible, in Witherspoon Society activities at General Assemblies, in conferences and other events sponsored by the Society
- join in the work of at least one of the on-going work groups

Board members shall be expected to participate regularly in meetings.

- If a board member is absent from three successive meetings (either in person or by conference call) without requesting to be excused, he or she shall be assumed to have resigned from the board, and a temporary replacement shall be appointed by the Board until the next annual election can fill the position.

#### **Section 4 Other Positions.**

The Board may establish any other positions as necessary, such as newsletter editor, representatives to governing bodies or events, or administrative assistant. These persons must belong to the Society and be accountable to the Co-Moderators or another member of the Board, as appropriate. These volunteers may attend Board meetings at its request and may be granted voice in its deliberations.

#### **Section 5: Election of Board Members.**

##### **Section 5.a. Time of elections**

Elections of Board members shall be held annually, by mail, in May.

All Board members shall normally be elected for terms of two years, and no member shall serve on the Board for more than six consecutive years. The Members-at-Large shall be elected for two-year terms on a rotating basis, half to be elected each year. Normally one Co-Moderator shall be elected each year, with the Membership Coordinator and

Treasurer being elected in even-numbered years, and the Secretary/Communicator and Issues Analyst elected in odd-numbered years. Board members may be elected for terms of one or three years as needed to maintain an appropriate rotation of officers.

New Board members shall be invited to attend the fall meeting of the Board, and shall take office at the end of that meeting.

Vacancies occurring between Membership Meetings shall be filled by the Board until the next annual election.

**Section 5.b. Nominating process.**

A Nominating Committee of four members, none of whom currently serves on the Board, shall be elected at every Membership Meeting during the General Assembly, to serve until the next Membership Meeting. This committee is charged with the task of presenting a slate of nominees for the offices to be filled by annual elections until the next Annual Meeting. A Co-Moderator of the Board shall serve as an ex-officio member of the Nominating Committee, without vote.

The Nominating Committee shall announce vacancies and solicit nominations in the issue of Network News published in the first quarter of each calendar year, and shall publish its slate of nominees and ballots in the issue for the second quarter of the year.

Any member wishing to make nominations shall submit them in writing to the Nominating Committee.

All members of the Society, including members of the Nominating Committee, but excluding members who are ineligible under Article IV, Section 1, may be considered for nomination. All nominees proposed shall give their prior consent to serve if elected.

The Nominating Committee shall contact each potential nominee, informing that person of the responsibilities of Board members in general, and of the particular office for which he or she is being considered. The Nominating Committee shall exercise due diligence in ascertaining the interest of the person being considered for nomination, and his or her willingness to devote the needed time and energy to the task.

**Section 5.c. Election process.**

The election shall be held annually in May, using a ballot mailed to all members in the Network News issue for the second quarter of the calendar year, or through a special mailing, which is to be returned by postal mail or e-mail to the Nominating Committee. The Nominating Committee shall set a deadline by which all ballots must be received. A majority of votes cast shall be necessary to elect. Proxy balloting is not permitted. Should there be a tie vote by ballot for any office, the tie shall be resolved by a vote by written ballot printed in the next issue of Network News.

The results of each election shall be announced as soon as possible on the Witherspoon Society web-site, by e-mail to the membership list, and in Network News.

If a vacancy occurs after the ballot is published and prior to a Membership Meeting, the Nominating Committee and/or other members present at that meeting may nominate from the floor and elect members of the Society whose willingness to serve has been obtained. If no Membership Meeting is held in that year, the Board shall appoint a person or persons to fill the vacancies.

**Section 6. Other organizational elements.**

**Section 6.a. Local chapters.**

In addition to the national structure of the Society, members of the Society are encouraged to organize chapters, perhaps at a local level, or including the area of a presbytery or synod. Each chapter is encouraged to send an annual report to the President of the Society prior to the Membership Meeting.

**Section 6.b. Work groups.**

The Co-Moderators, in consultation with the Board, shall name Work Groups as needed to carry on necessary aspects of the Society's work.

Work Groups shall be created and continued as long as needed. Some may be relatively permanent, while others may be named for specific functions and be dissolved when those functions are completed.

Long-term Work Groups may include, but are not limited to:

**General Assembly Work Group**

At least two members of the Board, along with others, will plan Witherspoon events for each General Assembly. The Board will be responsible for planning strategy to guide Witherspoon activities at each Assembly.

**Membership Development Work Group**

Will work with the Membership Coordinator to find ways of encouraging new people to join the Witherspoon Society.

**Financial Development Work Group**

Will work with the Treasurer to plan funding appeals to members and to outside sources.

**Audit Committee**

Two Members-at-Large of the Board will constitute the Audit Committee which will annually conduct an internal audit of the financial record of the Society.

**Communications Work Group**

Will work with the Secretary/Communicator and the newsletter/website editor to make existing channels of communication more effective, and to develop new channels for communicating both with and among Witherspoon members, and with the wider Presbyterian Church (USA).

**Section 7. Policy Statements.**

The Society may adopt and issue policy papers or statements at the Membership Meeting. The Board is empowered to issue statements in their own names when necessary to respond to an urgent need, provided the matter falls within the concerns of the Society as expressed in Article II of the By-Laws.)

**Section 8. Financial Affairs.**

**Section 8.a. Financial Reporting**

The Treasurer shall provide for the maintenance of the financial records of the Society, and for all necessary and authorized transactions related thereto.

Financial reports shall be provided quarterly to all members of the Board, and to every Membership Meeting.

The Treasurer shall provide the Board with an annual budget proposal for adoption prior to the start of the budget year.

The Treasurer shall arrange for an annual written financial review of all financial records, with two Members at Large of the Board participating in the review process.

Funding development shall be guided by the Treasurer, in cooperation with the Financial Development Work Group. Plans and results shall be reported to the Board at least annually.

**Section 8.b. Legal Requirements**

In accordance with the requirements of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002, the corporation shall retain contracts and other important documents and take measures to avoid their accidental loss or destruction. No litigation-related document may be altered or destroyed. No employee, director, or member of the corporation shall be punished for acting as a "whistle-blower," i.e., alleging fraud or other misconduct. Until allegations are investigated and resolved, every effort shall be made to keep the matter confidential to avoid unjustified damage to any person's reputation. If claims are discovered to be unfounded, the corporation will not reprimand or retaliate against the employee, unless it is shown that the allegation was unfounded and was made for malicious reasons. This provision constitutes a limitation on the power to expel members or to remove officers.

**ARTICLE V**      **Meetings:****Section 1.**      **Membership Meetings.**

The Society shall meet biannually during the General Assembly meeting of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), at a time and place designated by the Board. Notice of the time and place shall be published in the 2nd quarter issue of the "Network News," or by mail, and on the e-mail list.

Other membership meetings may be called and convened by the Board, when some Witherspoon Society event such as a national conference warrants such a gathering.

The purpose of the Membership Meeting shall include, but not be limited to: receiving the report of the election of new Officers; electing the Nominating Committee for the succeeding two years; reviewing Society activities for the prior year, and receiving financial reports.

## Section 1.a.      Quorum

For Membership Meetings during General Assembly, and for any Special Meetings of the Society, a quorum shall consist of all members of the Society present at the meeting.

**Section 2.**      **Board Meetings.**

The Board shall meet twice each year: in one meeting annually in the Fall and a second meeting either at the General Assembly in years when it is held or in the Spring in years with no General Assembly. It may meet at other times, either in person or by telephone conference call, at times it may deem appropriate.

## Section 2.a.      Quorum

For Witherspoon Board meetings a quorum shall consist of at least one-half of the members of the Committee.

## Section 2.b      Voting

Board decisions shall be made by consensus as determined by the presiding Co-Moderator, or by a majority vote of board members present.

## Section 2.c.      Called Meetings

The Board may meet through phone or email contact to take votes on time sensitive matters. For such urgent business, care will be taken to involve as many board members as possible. All Board members shall be contacted, being given at least three days notice of such votes. On such occasions phone polling of members is encouraged but not required. For such votes, the majority in favor shall rule with a minimum of three votes.

**ARTICLE VI**      **Rules of Procedure:**

The rules contained in the current edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* shall govern the Society in all cases in which they are consistent with these By-Laws or any special rules adopted by the Society.

**ARTICLE VII**      **Amendment of the By-Laws:**

These By-Laws can be amended by a two-thirds vote of those present at any Membership Meeting of the Society, provided that the amendment has been presented at the previous meeting, or has been mailed to the membership at least fifteen (15) days prior to the meeting at which the vote is to be taken. Should an amendment be needed before a Membership Meeting can be held, the proposed amendment shall be presented in Network News, with discussion invited on the Witherspoon website, by telephone or letter. Votes shall be submitted by mail or e-mail, with a deadline no sooner than 3 months from the publication of the proposed amendment in Network News.

**ARTICLE VIII**      **Dissolution of the Society:**

Upon dissolution of the Society, which shall require action by the Society as described in Article IX, Amendment of By-Laws, the Board shall, after paying liabilities of the Society, dispose of all assets of the Society exclusively for the purposes of the Society in such manner, or to such organization(s) organized exclusively for a charitable, educational, or religious purposes, as shall at the time qualify as tax exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 (or corresponding provision of the then current United States Internal Revenue law), as the Board shall determine.



# Witherspoon business for our Membership Meeting at General Assembly

## Acting on our proposed new By-Laws

One of our most important tasks at the Membership Meeting on Sunday, June 18, following the Witherspoon Awards Luncheon, will be to consider the new By-Laws that are presented here for your enjoyment, beginning on page 32. (If you like that sort of thing.)

We are proposing some important changes, partly to reflect reality, and primarily to adapt to the new biennial Assemblies.

In the meeting, amendments may be offered and considered. And if you can't be there but want to suggest changes, we invite you to contact our president, Ken Smith.

If you have questions or concerns or suggestions, please pass them along to Ken, too. You'll find his contact information on the back cover of this newsletter.

## Electing new officers – so we need your nominations!

Because our last election was held at our annual meeting two years ago, and all terms are limited to two years, all of our current officers' terms are expiring.

We will propose a slate of nominees on the trusting assumption that our Membership Meeting will approve the revisions of the By-Laws, which include some changes in the offices to be filled.

These are:

- Co-Moderators (two)
- Membership Coordinator
- Treasurer
- Secretary/Communicator
- Issues Analyst
- Members at Large (at least four)

For a description of the responsibilities for each of these positions, please see pages 33-34 above.

The Nominating Committee will welcome your suggestions – and it's just fine to suggest yourself!

**Please send us your nominations!**

Just copy or clip this form, and send it to the chair of the Nominating Committee  
 Heather Shortlidge  
 3319 Hixson Pike, Chattanooga, TN 37415  
 or send an e-mail to  
 hshortlidge@hotmail.com  
 or call (423) 877-8527

### To the Nominating Committee of the Witherspoon Society

I would like to suggest for the office of

My name:

\_\_\_\_\_ (office)

\_\_\_\_\_ How to contact me:

\_\_\_\_\_ (name)

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ (address)

Could you say a bit about why you're suggesting this person?

\_\_\_\_\_ (phone)

\_\_\_\_\_ (e-mail)

**Nominate more than one! Just copy this form or submit the information on separate sheets or by e-mail.**

The  
**Next  
Network  
News**

Our next issue of *Network News* will be even more focused on the General Assembly than this one. As usual, it will be sent to all GA commissioners and advisory delegates, to share with them our progressive perspectives on some of the issues.

And we'd welcome your contribution! If you are particularly engaged in one of the issues coming to the Assembly – perhaps as the author of an overture, as a member of the committee writing one of the reports being submitted to the Assembly, or simply as someone who cares and is informed about an issue – we'd like to hear from you! Please get in touch with me, and we can talk over what you might do, what length might work best, and all that sort of thing.

*Doug King*

**Deadline for submissions  
is  
April 10, 2006**

**Please let us hear from you!**

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