

let justice roll down

Witherspoon Network News

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Witherspoon welcomes
our new partners from
Voices of Sophia



The Co-Moderator's Column



Time For the Vows

By Bill Dummer

The now only *relatively* new *Book of Common Worship* has replaced in the Marriage Rites the traditional “betrothal questions” and the giving away of the bride with three steps: Declarations of Intent of the bride and groom, Affirmations of the Families of the couples, and Affirmation of the Congregation. Then after readings from Scripture and an optional sermon, it is on to the Vows.

Well, as the Witherspoon Society and Voices of Sophia move toward our “holy union,” we have started moving through all the right steps.

The Declaration of Intent took place during the General Assembly in San Jose last June, and the Affirmations of the Families have taken place since then, as members of both groups have expressed to us their support of this merger. The

Witherspoon Society Board held its now annual face-to-face meeting on May 14 to 17 in Minneapolis. Participating fully in the meeting was a caucus of four members of the Voices of Sophia (see p. 3 of the Winter issue of *Network News*.) We took action to include all four of them as full members of the Board beginning with that meeting. We worked on the details of the “holy union” as we have begun calling it, as together we began shaping the vows on which our union will be built. As with many marriages, there may be some change of name on the part of one or both parties. We will be soliciting suggestions about the name from the members of the two groups, in time for the events accompanying the General Assembly meeting next year. (See pages 34-35 for our announcement of the Giant Naming Contest.)

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Douglas King, 2198 Vining Dr., Unit B, Woodbury, MN 55125-7575

In my last position as an Interim Ministry Specialist before retirement, I served a UCC congregation in a changing neighborhood in Milwaukee. The church had an endowment fund, thanks to the merger with another congregation some 15 years earlier. Just before I retired, they were in discussion with another congregation that wished to merge with them. Each time this happened, the financial picture improved, but ultimately the membership figures did not. Now they have a pastor who is serious about turning the membership decline around by making contact with the new folks in the neighborhood. We learned together that membership really matters.

The reason I mention this is that I offered to work with Gusti Newquist, our Membership Coordinator, on a pilot project in increasing membership. It involves organizing chapters in places around the country where five or more members live in close proximity. So far, one meeting of the Milwaukee Presbytery chapter has been held. Another is planned for September. I learned a few things from this initial effort. From those who did not come, I learned not to attempt something new on Mother's Day. From those present at the meeting I heard the importance of having active Witherspoon chapters in those places where there are seminaries, and holding those chapter meetings on campus. This was an extension of my original idea of forming chapters, so

that members could invite a friend to a meeting.

The new merged WS/VoS is already becoming an exciting and vigorous affinity group for our denomination. However, we need to reach out to many more justice oriented and feminist folks in the church. I agreed to fill a vacancy for Co-Moderator until mid 2010. The board agreed that when Co-Moderator Jake Young rotates off the Board in September, one of the "Voices of Sophia caucus" group will likely be asked to replace him.

Once the "honeymoon" of the merger is over, I intend to work on activating chapters of the new group around the country, both to help members provide mutual support for one another where they are, and to strengthen our numbers and influence in the church as a whole.

I look forward to hearing any comments you'd like to share, through an email or a phone call.

Bill Dummer, Co-Moderator
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**Our new "Holy Union"
means we need a new
name and a new logo.**

**Check pages 34-35, and
see what ideas
you can offer!**



The Editor's Spot

Witherspoon welcomes our sisters and brothers from Voices of Sophia

We are delighted to welcome, with this issue of *Network News*, the emergence of a new grouping of progressive Presbyterians in the PC(USA). With the merger of Voices of Sophia and Witherspoon we believe we are fashioning a new community and a new voice within our church, joining our Witherspoon's historic concerns for peace and justice with Voices' deep commitment to voicing (sorry, but I can't think of a better word) the wisdom and strength that women have gained through centuries of largely ignored experience.

If all goes well with our merged mailing lists, you will soon be receiving a letter from Jake Young, out-going co-moderator of the Witherspoon Society, and Sylvia Thorson-Smith, a member at large of the Witherspoon board who has been instrumental in representing the Voices of Sophia leadership in bring our groups together.

That letter will say more about our merger, and will invite you – if you're not already a paid-up member of one or the other of the groups – to join us as an active, contributing member. We hope you will contribute not just your membership dues, but your ideas and concerns, your action and your influence in encouraging others to join. We're looking forward to the new energies and endeavors that will emerge from our new ... well, yes ... holy union.

Doug King

We invite you to join us!

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

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

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“Big Tent” Meant More Than Just Words

by Mitch Trigger

Ever since the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) went to biennial assemblies, our church has been looking for something to fill the void left in the off-years. I admit to being one of those “GA junkies,” the people that attend General Assemblies no matter where they are at or what issues are being discussed. I missed seeing friends, hearing first-hand stories about what was happening around the denomination, and talking to the many wonderful people who serve the PC(USA) through the offices in Louisville.

This year, the alternative offered was called “Big Tent.” It was a bold choice of names, especially considering how much it is used in politics, but it was an apt description. “One tent, one family, many children” – there was a diversity at this gathering in Atlanta that seemed very natural. As Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk of the PC(USA), put it, “I can’t believe this. I’m in a room with 1,500 Presbyterians and I’m not packing a Book of Order!” Unlike a General Assembly, where there is often conflict among those with opposing viewpoints, the “Big Tent” had a much more “grace filled” feeling as all of us gathered to learn and worship together. Ten PC(USA) ministries & groups held their conferences at the same place:

- Evangelism & Church Growth Conference



A Korean dance troupe offered a liturgical dance at opening worship.

- Healthy Ministries Conference
- National Elders Conference
- National Multicultural Church Conference
- New Immigrants Ministries Convocation
- Peacemaking Conference
- PHEWA Social Justice Biennial Conference
- Presbyterian Communicators’ Network Conference
- Racial Ethnic Convocation
- Stewardship and Investment Conference

Every one of the many people I talked with spoke enthusiastically about their conferences. The workshops were outstanding, the presenters among the best in our church, and many of us left feeling much more equipped to help our congregations and presbyteries. Some of us were there to attend only one of the conferences, while others had the unique opportunity to “pick and choose” from the many wonderful offerings.



As fine as the workshops were, they took second place to the worship services. The music was a perfect blend of old and new, traditional and contemporary; there were Korean dancers and African-American gospel singers; the preaching was outstanding. Anna Carter Florence, professor of homiletics at Columbia Seminary, and Claudio Carvalhaes, professor of worship at Louisville Seminary, opened the Big Tent with powerful, inspiring sermons. Buddy Monahan, chaplain at Menaul School in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Graham Baird, pastor of Highlands Church in Paso Robles, California, proved how widespread the preaching excellence is in the PC(USA); Buddy encouraged us to share our different stories so we can find our commonalities, and Graham urged us to minister to all kinds of people, no matter how messy it gets.

Perhaps the best moment for me, in the midst of the powerful worship and enlightening workshops, happened my last morning. I was eating a quick breakfast before my first workshop when I observed a young man from the conference standing in line at the food counter, with an older couple at his side. The couple ordered hesitantly, looking at the young man, who nodded at them as they ordered. As they finished ordering, the young man paid for their meal, said a couple of words to them and left without getting anything himself. No one else noticed what was going on, but it turned out to be a homeless couple living on the streets.



Gospel singers provide music for worship

The young man had seen their obvious hunger and responded.

The “Big Tent” event didn’t replace the General Assembly. In its own way, it was better. The full spectrum of Presbyterians was present – young and old, conservative and liberal, men and women, people of many different ethnic and economic backgrounds. What weren’t present were the issues that often divide us. That’s not to say it was perfect. There were the occasional instances of insensitivity – unintended insults to ethnic groups and intended insults to opposing viewpoints – but they were not the rule. What did seem to unite those attending was a clear vision of how our church can share our stories of God’s work in our own lives and how we can be part of that work in the lives of others.

And isn’t that what being disciples of Jesus is all about?

The author:

The Rev. Mitch Trigger is Secretary/Communicator of the Witherspoon Society, and serves with his wife, Sue, as co-pastors of First Presbyterian Church, Rockaway, NJ.

The freedom to marry — at the heart of Christianity

By Rev. Marvin M. Ellison

As a Christian theologian, I support marriage equality because I take the Bible seriously. More importantly, I take the God of the Bible seriously. The God I worship has a divine passion for justice that compels me to respect all neighbors and defend their human rights, including the freedom to marry regardless of the gender of the two people.

This freedom to marry is important because my religious tradition teaches that love — the call to love and be loved — is at the very heart of what it means to be human. Love is also holy ground. “Where there is love,” the tradition affirms, “there is God.”

Gay men and lesbians, like their heterosexual counterparts, fall in love, enter into committed partnerships, form families, and often raise children, as well as care for other family members. To deny gay couples the freedom to love and marry is morally wrong. It’s a denial of their fundamental humanity as people created in the image of God. To honor same-sex couples with the freedom to marry civilly is one way, and a very important way, to recognize that gay men and lesbians are fully human and can model the best of loving, committed partnerships.

deeply contested issue, our assumptions matter. I assume, first of all, that the institution of marriage has changed and will continue to change. Because of its checkered history, that’s good news. Many traditional marriage laws and practices have been oppressive. Slaves were denied the freedom to marry and form families. Historically, marriage has been far less about love and far more about property and progeny. That love sometimes flourished in these matches is nothing short of miraculous. That abuse, control and lovelessness often reigned is no surprise.

Second, I assume that marriage should change to fit our contemporary values of regard for women as co-equal with men and respect for the full humanity of gay men and lesbians.

Third, in honoring the Christian mandate to seek justice and compassion in all things, I assume that any marriage changes should be viewed through the lens of biblical justice. Biblical justice is about right relation: correcting wrongs and restoring people to full dignity in community. Forty years ago, the social wrong was a law prohibiting interracial couples from state-licensed marriage. Now the issue is

Because marriage equality is a



whether same-sex couples should have equal access to state-licensed marriage and its benefits, protections, and responsibilities. Christian support for marriage equality is based on the centrality of the biblical mandate for justice and compassion and on Jesus' own example of including the marginalized into the beloved community. On the biblical grounds of loving God and loving neighbor as self, including our gay and lesbian neighbors, it is a good thing to recognize the humanity of same-gender loving people and grant their right to civil marriage.

Out of fear and uncertainty, some are tempted to draw a picture of love that is much too small. Our opportunity today is to draw a larger picture of love, commitment, and family that includes same-sex couples. Drawing that bigger, more inclusive picture of love and justice in Maine is sacred work.

The author:

The Rev. Marvin M. Ellison, Ph.D., teaches Christian ethics at Bangor Theological Seminary, co-chairs the Religious Coalition for the Freedom to Marry in Maine, and is author of *Same-Sex Marriage? A Christian Ethical Analysis* (Pilgrim, 2004).

This opinion essay was published on April 18, 2009, in the *Bangor Daily News*. It is presented here with the kind permission of the author.

“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.

Theological musings

John Calvin: His Significance, Then and Now

Paul E. Capetz

The Rev. Dr. Paul E. Capetz is Professor of Historical Theology at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities.

Historical traditions, religious or otherwise, are ambiguous inasmuch as they transmit mixtures of truth and falsehood. No tradition, in other words, is innocent. The Reformed tradition in Protestantism that takes John Calvin's achievement as its primary point of departure is no exception to this rule. For this reason, the upcoming celebration of his five-hundredth birthday on July 10 has to occasion some ambivalence in the light of the historical effects of his legacy. Perhaps, then, a balanced assessment of Calvin has to begin by placing him firmly in his own context, attempting to understand him as a man of his own time and place, before venturing to suggest what his significance for Reformed theology today might be.

In spite of much excellent historical scholarship undertaken to retrieve the historical Calvin from the various images of him perpetrated by his admirers and detractors alike, most Presbyterians probably don't have a very good idea of who he really was and what he stood for. Even when invoking such watchwords from the sixteenth century as *sola fide* and *sola*

scriptura, it is difficult for us to grasp the real meaning of the theological ideas expressed by these slogans because our presuppositions and questions are so different



Paul Capetz

from those of the Reformers. We don't live in a culture dominated by the church or by a single religious tradition. We don't live in a society in which heresy is a criminal offense punishable by death. Most of us aren't afraid of eternal damnation. We take for granted accurate translations of the Bible based upon the oldest available Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. Ours is a worldview shaped by modern science and we are the beneficiaries of its technological transformations of nature. Today women are fully enfranchised and working as ministers and theologians in our churches. Many of us are committed to understanding non-Christian religions on their own terms as more or less equally respectable alternatives for under-

standing what it means to live an authentic human life. In each of these aspects, our world is certainly not Calvin's. But this is simply to acknowledge that we would be as foreign to him as he is to us!

Calvin lived at the intersection of two great movements in the history of Western civilization: the Renaissance and the Reformation. His achievement is comprehensible only when viewed in relation to them.

Both movements were critical of medieval culture. Oddly (at least from our perspective) their criticisms of medievalism were not forward-looking,

but backward-looking. Antiquity was the gold-standard by which their contemporary situation was to be measured. The humanist¹ scholars of the Renaissance called for a return *ad fontes* ("back to the sources") of Greco-Roman literature wherein were espied the ideals of eloquence and virtue. The hope of Renaissance humanism was that assiduous cultivation of classical Greek and Latin studies would lead to a renewal of Western culture. The Reformers were beneficiaries of this humanist scholarship since it enabled them to set aside the Latin *Vulgate* translation in favor of Erasmus' critical edition of the Greek New Testament. (For the Masoretic

text of the Old Testament and knowledge of Hebrew, the Protestants turned to the Jews.) Before joining Luther's movement, Calvin was an accomplished humanist scholar whose first published work was a commentary on a text by the Stoic philosopher Seneca. When he became a Lutheran, Calvin put his vast humanist learning in the service of the cause of reforming the church. Calvin was, in short, a Lutheran humanist.

I would argue that fidelity to Calvin's legacy today means at least two things: first, ... commitment to the highest level of historical and theological scholarship on behalf of the church's proclamation and, second, ... commitment to a continual examination of our church's doctrine and practice for the sake of insuring that the fundamental message of God's unequivocal grace is not being compromised.

While pursuing a different aim than the humanists, the Reformers were nonetheless engaged in an analogous pursuit by calling for a return to *sola scriptura* ("scripture alone") from which the medieval church was believed to have deviated in its fundamental teachings about the nature of salvation. As a Lutheran theologian, Calvin shared the German reformer's conviction that the gospel had been badly misconstrued by the church of his day. To be precise, they believed that the gospel of grace had been perverted into a law of works. Even though the Roman church explicitly taught that we are saved by "grace alone" (*sola gratia*), Luther

and Calvin nonetheless thought that the various theological efforts that had been made by scholastic theologians to coordinate “grace” and “merit” actually had the effect of undermining the doctrine that salvation is a free gift of God. Hence, for them, “reformation” did not mean mere reform of those practices in the church that many had already identified as abuses. Rather, it meant quite literally *re-forming* Christian doctrine in order that the false doctrine of grace-plus-merit that had given rise to abuses might be shown to be a distortion of the gospel. Luther’s doctrine of *sola fide* (justification by faith alone) was the Protestant alternative to the Roman Catholic understanding of salvation. Accordingly, we are justified (saved) by God’s merciful forgiveness of sinners revealed in Christ and our sole appropriate response to this forgiveness is trust (faith) that our sins are truly forgiven.

Calvin viewed Luther as the great pathfinder of the Reformation, but this meant that Luther’s achievement was not to be accepted uncritically. Calvin differed from Luther in two crucial respects: first, in his doctrine of the Eucharist and, second, in his doctrine of the law. Regarding the former, Calvin shared Luther’s view that the purpose of a sacrament is to confirm our faith in the truth of the gospel’s promise that sinners are forgiven for Christ’s sake. In this, Calvin was closer to Luther than to Zwingli for whom the sole purpose of a sacrament is the public profession of our faith as Christians. For both Luther

and Calvin, Zwingli’s understanding of the sacraments was valid as a description of their secondary purpose, but not of their primary and most important purpose. But Calvin did not share Luther’s doctrine of “transubstantiation,” namely, that Christ’s body and blood are physically present “in, with, and under” the sacramental signs of bread and wine. For Calvin, we are united with Christ in the Eucharistic celebration by virtue of the Holy Spirit who lifts our spirits to heaven where we commune with Christ’s body.

When it came to the understanding of the uses of the law, Calvin departed from Luther as well. For Luther, there were only two uses: the “theological use” wherein the law shows us our sinfulness and our consequent need of God’s mercy revealed in the gospel and the “civil use” of the law operative in a society’s coercive restraint of sin, thereby making a measure of public communal life possible. Additionally, Calvin taught a “third use” of the law, by which Christians are instructed and exhorted in their religious-moral duties as explicated chiefly in the Decalogue. Not only was this third use supplemental to Luther’s two uses, but Calvin explicitly affirmed that the third use is the law’s primary use. Lutherans have usually claimed that this doctrine of Calvin’s represents a relapse into the very “works righteousness” from which Luther had rescued the church with his doctrine of faith alone. But this is a grave misunderstanding: as a second-generation reformer, Calvin wasn’t asking Luther’s driving existen-

tial question, “How can I find a gracious God?” Calvin began his theological activity on behalf of the Reformation assuming Luther’s answer to his own question, but precisely for that reason Calvin was asking a different existential question: “How can I serve the God whose grace has been made known in Christ and rediscovered by Luther?” This is not a doctrinal disagreement with Luther but, rather, a shift of emphasis. But it is an important shift of emphasis all the same, since it has given to the Reformed tradition its characteristic concern for ethics as an integral part of theology.

When we look at Calvin’s accomplishment in the sixteenth century in this light, how are we to assess his significance for us five hundred years later? Clearly, there is no self-evident answer to this query. But, still, a suggestion may be hazarded. If we consider the two contexts of Calvin’s work as a reformer (the Renaissance and the Reformation), I would argue that fidelity to his legacy today means at least two things: first, a non-negotiable commitment to the highest level of historical and theological scholarship on behalf of the church’s proclamation and, second, an equally non-negotiable commitment to a continual examination of our church’s doctrine and practice for the sake of insuring that the fundamental message of God’s unequivocal grace is not being compromised. Actually, these two commitments are really flip sides of the same coin. Pure preaching of the gospel demands assiduous study of the Bible,

the tradition, and the disciplines of theology and ethics. Rigorous theological scholarship exists for the sake of the church’s ministry.

No doubt, there are other aspects of Calvin’s work that could be lifted up as we celebrate his five-hundredth birthday, but for me these two are paramount. If we can do in our time half of what he was able to do in his, we will be faithful heirs to his legacy, even if we may have to register our disagreements with him in certain respects. But this appreciative yet critical approach to assessing Calvin’s importance for our church is no different in principle from that exercised by Calvin towards Luther. Calvin, in other words, is our pathfinder. Reformation does not stop with him, nor would he want it to! *Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda.*

Happy birthday, John. On July 10th, you can be sure that I’ll be lifting up a glass of wine in your honor.

¹ “Humanism” in this context does not mean “atheistic” or “anthropocentric” as it often does today. Rather, it has the connotations that we associate with “the Humanities” or “the liberal arts,” namely, study of languages, history, rhetoric, and literature.

Statement of Faith
Gusti Linnea Newquist

The Holy Spirit breathes the very breath of God through our whole existence our entire lives,
uniting us intimately with the ground of our being, and cultivating within us

a disciplined, hope-filled, compassionate trust
in the triune God's

generous provision for,
faithful redemption of,
and patient persistence with
every part of this beautiful and good,
abundant and extravagant,
life-giving and life-restoring,
yet tragically fallen creation,

even when—especially when—our doubt and fear is at its strongest:

in the midst of suffering and loss,
in the midst of depravity and oppression,
in the midst of interpersonal and international
violence, and
in spite of every reason to give in to despair.

Praying within the temple of our bodies,
the Spirit binds us to the incarnate Christ,
through whom all things—including you! including me!—were
created,

the Word made flesh in Jesus of Nazareth,
the Son of God, the Son of Man,
yet born of Mary,

a poor woman living under occupation in the
first century Roman Empire,
protected by Joseph when his infant life was
threatened, and
instructed in the teachings of his particular people
Israel.

Through no fault of his own, Jesus was assaulted by evil his entire life:

by temptation and flogging and shame-filled
crucifixion,
by betrayal and denial and abandonment,
by the sickness and hypocrisy and sin he sought to
heal.

Yet he joyfully lived and laughed and proclaimed the present and eternal Jubilee of God:

good news to the poor,
 release to the captives,
 recovery of sight to the blind, and
 liberty to the oppressed.

In his agonizing death he bore the sin and suffering of the world:

as a final priestly sacrifice in atonement for sin,
 as a victim of death-dealing powers and principalities,
 and
 as an act of solidarity with the suffering of creation.

Yet his resurrection embodies God's eternal promise of victory:

deliverance from sin and evil, death and despair;
 repayment of our crushing debt as a burdened human race;
 transformation of suffering and violence into a movement for new life; and
 reconciliation between God and humanity, among humans, and between humanity and the rest of creation.

Fully human, fully divine, Christ unites us to the One he calls "Abba," Father:

whose sovereign name we cannot even begin to pronounce,
 the Great "I Am," the Alpha and the Omega,
 who groans over creation like a woman in labor,
 who will not ever forsake us—her nursing children—
 who welcomes the repentant prodigal home,
 who delights in wisdom,
 whose faithfulness justifies us through grace alone,
 who refuses to be limited by human idolatry,
 who demands nothing but to be loved with every part of who we are,
 who demands nothing but to be loved through our
 love of our neighbor,
 who demands nothing but to be loved through
 our love of our selves,
 who is revealed in the covenant community of Christ
 through the study and proclamation of the Old and
 New Testaments,
 whose faithfulness to humankind is sealed in Baptism and The Lord's Supper,
 whose peaceable kingdom—a new heaven! a new earth!—is
 both now and yet-to-come.

Revering this God is the beginning of wisdom,
serving this God is the beginning of strength,
dying in this God is the beginning of eternal life.

May it be so for all of creation.

Amen.

Gusti Newquist is a member of the Board of the newly merged Witherspoon Society/Voices of Sophia. Having recently completed her seminary studies at Harvard Divinity School, she has been called as Co-Pastor of St. Mark's Presbyterian Church in Tucson, Arizona. This is the Statement of Faith she presented to the Presbytery de Cristo. The Voices of Sophia caucus suggested that we share it with all our members as an example of a Reformed feminist faith commitment, informed by her years in ministry with the National Network of Presbyterian College Women. She was ordained by the Presbytery of Mid-Kentucky on Pentecost Sunday, May 31, 2009.

We are happy to share it here, with thanks to its author.

Taking Responsibility for the Future

by Gene TeSelle

The 2008 General Assembly received an overture from New Covenant Presbytery (southeastern Texas, centered on Houston), whose advocate was the Rev. Casey Jones, a frequent critic of Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick and a candidate for his office in 2000.

Raising the theme of “intergenerational injustice,” it urged the 218th General Assembly to declare the federal government’s unfunded or underfunded mandates — specifically Social Security and Medicare — “a grave moral concern” as well as “a clear danger to the republic.” In strong language it called on the church and the nation to “repent of the sins of greed and of stealing from future generations who cannot defend themselves.”

Committee 9 and then the Assembly approved the overture with no debate, perhaps regarding it as too vague or the problem as too complex. Now, with the economic downturn, the issues are much more urgent — and more controversial than ever.

Conservatives and “deficit hawks” have been warning for years about the future obligations of Social Security and Medicare, especially as the steadily enlarging “age cohort” of Baby Boomers starts collecting benefits. Other analysts have pointed out that the squeeze is building up slowly, and that it can be avoided by using a variety of measures,

such as making relatively small adjustments in retirement age, or removing the “cap” on Social Security taxes (currently at \$90,000) so that corporate executives would pay a proportionate share into this insurance plan, or restructuring government’s relation to health care, not only for seniors but for all.

Back in June of 2008 this looked like a problem limited to the federal budget, although at the time the mortgage crisis was already growing. Now the same demographic problems are hitting corporations, which claim, with far more credibility than before, that they cannot meet their contractual obligations of health care to current employees, let alone pensions and health care for those who have retired and have lived longer than the corporations expected when they signed those contracts.

It does not help that health care costs have more than doubled over the last decade. When we say that, we need to ask “*In what ways?*” The answer seems to be “Just about everywhere.” *Premiums* have doubled, but that could be because more people are staying alive and the costs must be spread around (“redistribution” of that sort is built into the insurance industry). The *prices* of most procedures, especially those using sophisticated equipment, have doubled. And then there are *administrative costs*, amounting to about a third of the health

care bill. The *pharmaceutical industry* is usually rated the most profitable of them all. The *for-profit hospitals* have been doing well, too.

Even before the economic downturn, corporations were complaining about the cost of paying pensions to retirees who live longer than expected. And often they have succeeded in lessening their obligations. Sometimes they persuade unions to accept decreased benefits during the process of negotiating new contracts. Sometimes bankruptcy proceedings lead to a diminution of benefits (airline employees have been especially hard hit, and they are now being joined by the automotive sector). Sometimes it happens through corporate mergers or acquisitions, or when a private equity fund buys a corporation with the purpose of restructuring all its obligations and making it more profitable to potential investors.

Recent controversy has centered on the auto industry. Democrats in Congress wanted a special appropriation of funds, while Republicans wanted any bailout to come from the \$700 billion already appropriated, and they wanted it limited to \$25 billion. They also did not want any bailout for “legacy” payments to retirees, despite the concessions made by unions in recent years.

The general question, raised alike by politicians, academics, and grassroots people, is how the corporations got themselves into this fix, and why the federal government should bail them out.

(Cont. on next page.)

Captain Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger, the aviation hero of January 2009, flew for USAirways. That means that some years ago his pay was cut 40 percent and he lost his pension. This fact has been reported in some of the news media, and he himself sent a letter to Congress pointing out the problems of increased hours and increased stress for pilots; but it hasn’t attracted the attention (or the collective shouts of self-congratulation) that his landing on the Hudson River did.

Here’s what happened. In 2002 the Alabama state pension fund gambled a large portion of its assets to buy a significant share of USAirways stocks and bonds, because the airline was an important employer in the state. But the next year the Alabama fund joined with banks and bond holders to demand that the pilots’ pensions be given up in order to pay creditors. One pension fund helped wipe out another.

In 2005 United Airlines defaulted on its pension contributions, and the next year all of United’s defined benefit plans were cancelled, ignoring the unions’ requests for an outside trustee and in fact bypassing the unions altogether.

Health care and pensions could have been funded if corporations had dedicated enough of their assets to retirement funds of this sort. ERISA, the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974, was a gesture in that direction, requiring pension plans to have assets equal to their liabilities at year's end, and not letting the employing firm invest more than 10 percent in its own stocks.

But ERISA allowed plans to be terminated through bankruptcy proceedings or by showing that costs of continuing the plan would cause the business to fail.

ERISA also opened the way to new measures that reduce the corporations' responsibilities — and scale back employees' security.

One was a shift from the “*defined benefit*” approach, offering annuities with a fixed payout to retirees and survivors, to “*defined contribution*,” with employees' contributions matched by the employer but without any certainty about the payout.

The other was the substitution of IRAs, Individual Retirement Accounts, managed by the employees, often without independent expert advice. These accounts are managed by the finance industry, which is dominated by a few large firms, and has been one of the most profitable of industries.

Pension and health funds are the stepchildren of the corporate world, with much lower priority than creditors

and stockholders. Those who criticize Social Security for not covering its future obligations overlook the fact that such lack of foresight is even worse at the corporate level. Pension funds are a promissory note based on optimistic expectations for the future; if those expectations are not met, then the contracts with employees are regarded as dispensable.

The solution, of course, is that every corporation be required to invest a stated percentage of its stock each year in a varied and secure pension fund to ensure long-range viability. The usual reaction, however, is that “this is not what stocks are for.” The assumption is that they must remain in the competitive marketplace, to be constantly bought and sold and evaluated, as though the preferred beneficiaries are speculators and equity funds and corporate officers, all of whom are rewarded for issuing a favorable quarterly report, not for making provision for future obligations.

In discussions of this sort, TIAA-CREF, started ninety years ago for academics, is held up as a model. Its board is elected by the participants. It offers a variety of investment programs that can be chosen by the participants. Like all other retirement plans it has had its ups and downs; in 2008 most of its funds dropped in value by 40 percent (its Social Choice fund dropped only 25 percent). In times of economic growth, stocks look good. But in times of decline, we may wish we had put more into treasury bills. The unanswerable question for fund managers is how to gain, in a responsible way, from the good times,

and yet have a hedge in the form of treasury bills against the bad times that keep coming.

Another model is the pension funds for state employees, especially those of California (CalPERS) and New York, which not only have many dollars to invest but are paying increased attention to *where* they are invested. The state plans increasingly consider labor and environmental standards, and more generally the social consequences of investments; they prefer to invest, therefore, in constructive projects like housing and job creation, and now alternative energy sources and alternative transportation.

The person who has done the most to put some sense into our thinking about pension plans is Teresa Ghilarducci, who has taught at Notre Dame and is now at the New School. She has appeared on talk shows and in op-eds, and she recently published the book *When I'm Sixty-Four: The Plot Against Pensions and the Plan to Save Them* (Princeton University Press, 2008, 374 pp., \$29.95). The key feature of her proposal is Guaranteed Retirement Accounts, administered by the Social Security Administration at a 1 percent cost (in contrast with the higher percentages and insecurity of privately administered IRAs). These would *supplement* Social Security, providing the 70 percent of pre-retirement earnings that most experts advise. Participation would be mandatory, and withdrawals could not be made until old age. Contributions into these accounts would earn a \$600 tax credit annually (not a

deduction), thus helping middle-class people rather than the wealthy. There would not be a fixed retirement age; people could continue to work and contribute, and retirement income would be based on total rather than average lifetime earnings.

These are some thoughts from a non-expert concerning a question that has become a vital one for all of us — and especially for those who have been hit with unemployment, loss of pensions, or a drop in the value of retirement funds. Responses from those with more insight — or just more experience — would be welcome. It is the kind of conversation that we must all be engaged in during the coming years.

The author:

Gene TeSelle has served since 2001 as Witherspoon's Issues Analyst, and before that, from 1996 to 2000, as President. He is laying aside his official role, but promises to continue working with others to shed a progressive light on issues of concern in our church and our society. We thank him for all he has given of his analytical skills and his wisdom, and for the promise of his continuing engagement with our work.

Doing theology in the Nuba Mountains of Sudan

by Sylvia Carlson

We traveled to Sudan as part of a mission partnership of Redstone Presbytery with the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC).

Due to visa issues, we had only three days in Khartoum to visit with all of the people we wanted to see and to visit the various churches and ministries. The women in our contingent did get to spend some time with the Women's Committee of SPEC. It is vitally important that the Presbyterian women in Sudan know that Presbyterian women in the U.S. care about them. Two young American college women who accompanied us were able to visit with young people close to their own age.

Fortunately, four of our group were able to extend our trip to include a trek to the Nuba Mountains. We were two clergy women, one clergy man, and one retired physician (also a man). We flew from Khartoum to El Obeid – and were fed a wonderful brunch by the people in the Presbyterian Church in El Obeid.

Then our odyssey began. We drove for 10 ½ hours – the first hour on paved road, and the next 9 ½ on dirt track – through the African bush in two aging Toyota Land Cruisers, one



A student mud-brick hut under construction.

of which liked to stall out and not restart without being pushed. You could tell when you got near a village, because you could begin to see plastic grocery bags clinging to anything that protruded from the reddish-brown dirt.

We spent the night in a Norwegian Aid center in Heiban, and dined on canned tuna and wonderful locally baked bread – by the light of oil lamps. When it was light, we got back in one aging Toyota Land Cruiser (the one that hadn't been stalling out) and continued into the Nuba Mountains. After about 1 ½ hours we arrived at Kumo, where we were warmly welcomed at the Kumo Bible School by staff and students. They were very proud of the classroom that had been built with funds from the U.S. We saw the mud huts that students had built to house themselves during the school year. We saw the brand new well that was being dug by students that would be shared by the whole village. We saw the baby trees (mango, palm, lemon)

that had been planted by students, who were expected to keep them watered and free from harm. (Thorn bushes make great natural barriers to keep wildlife away from baby trees.) We also had an opportunity to personally examine the “outhouse” – reeds formed the walls – that was open to the Sudan-blue sky above.

And then we went into the sand-floored classroom to talk. Rev. Abraham, Principal of the Kumo Bible school began the conversation, by saying that he understood that there were “issues” in the PC (USA). (I wonder, did we think that people around the world were oblivious to what we are honestly wrestling with here in the USA?)

First he raised the “issue” of ordination of homosexual persons. The clergy man in our group spoke of Jesus’ outreach to the disenfranchised – to the people forced to the margins of the society of his time. Jesus broke down the barriers that divide people.

And then Rev. Abraham looked over at us clergy women, and said, “I don’t believe that women should be ordained!”

The other woman, our group leader, began to speak of the many biblical passages that point to the leadership role of women in the church – she spoke of Mary Magdalene as the first preacher of the resurrection, of the prophets Miriam and Hulda, and of other foremothers in the faith, including Dorcas, Lydia and Priscilla.

At that point, the young man, Rev. Barnaba Abbass, Dean of the Kumo Bible School, said that he believes that women should be ordained, and that that day is coming soon. He credits this to his homiletics teacher at Nile Theological College, in Khartoum, the Rev. Betsy Mc-

Cormick, a long time PC(USA) missionary to Sudan, along with her husband, Barry Almy. He said, “Betsy taught us how to preach well!”

Barnaba also spoke of his

promise to his wife that she would be able to complete her education after their marriage. He is making good on that promise.

That seemed to end that portion of the conversation – and then Rev. Abraham said, “Our ‘issue’ is polygamy.” The church in Sudan is



Rev. Donna Havrisko speaking to the “issue” of women’s ordination.



Students and faculty with Rev. Ken White, after presentation of a hand-crafted wood cross to the Principal of the Kumo Bible school, Rev. Abraham and the Dean, Rev. Barnaba Abbass.

wrestling with how to deal with converts to Christianity who have multiple wives. (Polygamy is mainly about power and prestige – and second and third and fourth wives are often little more than servants.) The church will not ordain an elder who has more than one wife, and they struggle with whether such men should be welcomed at the communion table. (I can't remember if it was mentioned whether the wives were offered communion.) To force a man to divest himself of excess wives would be to sentence the women to ostracism by the community. They seem to deal with this more or less on a congregational basis – with each congregation determining how best to address this issue.

So here we were, in what felt like the back of beyond – in a village with no running water and no electricity – having an intense conversation about

complex and important issues facing our respective churches. We all listened to each other – with the young students listening in intently – and learned from each other. I was overwhelmed!

The first class will graduate from Kumo Bible School in December of 2009. These young men are already serving as evangelists (unordained church-planters) in churches in villages that

are at least a 4 or 5 hour walk each way from Kumo. To be ordained, they will have to attend the Nile Theological College in Khartoum for further education.

Bless Sophia, dream the vision, share the wisdom, flowing deep within,

Sylvia Carlson

The author:

The Rev. Sylvia Carlson is the Chair of the Redstone Presbytery Mission Committee, convener of the Redstone Witherspoon group, and an honorably retired member of Redstone Presbytery. She has just joined the Witherspoon board as one of the “caucus” representing Voices of Sophia.

FROM HOMELESSNESS TO HOPE**CREATING JUST, SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES FOR ALL
GOD'S PEOPLE**

A very helpful study document on homelessness was approved by the 218th General Assembly in 2008, and is available on the PC(USA) website at <http://www.pcusa.org/acswp/pdf/ga218/homelessness-hope-oga8.pdf>.

(This is Item 09-07, in the report of the Assembly Committee on Social Justice Issues, pp. 1 through 31 in the PDF document reader, pp. 866-896 in the pagination of the GA Report as printed.)

To make the gist of it more easily accessible as a way of beginning to think and act on this urgent problem in U.S. society, we are publishing here a condensed version of an already condensed "executive summary" of the report, which was prepared by the Rev. Bobbi Hargleroad, for the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy.

We encourage you to start with this, but to move beyond it to get more information from the Presbyterian Network to End Homelessness, and to find ways to work both locally and nationally to help people find and develop decent, affordable housing for themselves and others.

<http://www.pnteh.org/index.php>

Introduction

American households are under increased pressure to maintain housing. When eviction or several moves force a choice between being housed and being able to meet other expenses, individuals and families seek alternatives such as moving into a cheap motel or living out of their car. Then, not knowing where else to turn, they appear at the doors of churches seeking a handout, a meal, or a place to stay. The cycle of homelessness will be broken when each person or family experiencing homelessness is treated with dignity and respect and is offered hospitality and welcome to permanent housing, and when everyone has access to resources and services to meet their individualized needs.

These affirmations emerge from several principles that underlie faithful ministry with persons who are homeless:

- Universal access to safe, decent, accessible, affordable, and permanent housing is a measure of a truly just society and a sign of the coming reign of God.
- The church is called to create communities of hospitality that assure all members

of society a right to basic economic and social well-being, including safe, affordable housing.

- The church is called to honor God's gift of the earth and to create, through personal lifestyle choices and the structures of society, sustainable communities where people can be securely housed in just relationship with one another and the earth.
- The church is called to challenge society to provide safe, decent, accessible, affordable, and permanent housing for all persons who cannot secure such housing through their own means.

The Problem

Some individuals or families — as a result of an interruption of income, fire, or a medical crisis — have a short-term need for housing assistance. More often, however, the crisis of homelessness is the predictable result of a complex interaction of losses and conditions. Individuals and families needing assistance with housing nearly always need a complex array of other services in order to achieve enough stability to maintain permanent housing.

Housing is considered affordable when the cost of housing plus basic utilities, apart from telephone, does not exceed 30 percent of the household's income. More than 37 million households pay so much for housing that they cannot afford other necessities such as food and medical care.

The primary legislation to address homelessness is the McKinney-Vento Act, first passed in 1987. These funds are an essential component as communities work to garner all available resources to meet the needs in their area. An ideal policy would have three foci: prevention, housing assistance, and supportive services.

Theological-Ethical Framework

The people of Israel, with their experience of being strangers and sojourners before coming into the land, understood covenant with God to include care for vulnerable strangers in their midst. Worship and outreach to those in need could not be separated (Isa. 58:6-7).

Much of Jesus' ministry is marked by acts of hospitality; his choices about where and with whom to share his meals break down the prevailing walls of division and exclusion. His ministry and that of his followers are dependent on the hospitality of others. Moreover, he characterizes the coming reign of God in terms of a banquet where all are welcomed and find a seat.

We serve God when we respond with compassion to our brothers and sisters, when we feed, welcome, clothe, and care for persons in need (Matt. 25:31-46). Seeing the face of Jesus in the face of “the least of these,” churches often begin with a direct response. While necessary, these responses do not address the causes of homelessness and do little to break the cycle for individuals and families in need. Churches can also respond on a deeper level by getting involved in partnerships to create affordable housing. However, to truly be about the work of constructing just, sustainable communities, the church needs to be involved in advocacy for public policies that prevent people from becoming homeless and remedy the injustices inherent in the vicious cycle of poverty.

Constructing Just, Sustainable Communities

Presbyterians and other persons of faith have responded valiantly to the crisis of homelessness over recent decades. But the problem persists. How can the cycle end?

A. Strategies for Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness

A replicable, community-based strategy for breaking the cycle of homelessness has several components. These components include: 1) prevention, which helps people keep their housing; 2) individualized, comprehensive programs of housing and services for those who become homeless; and 3) affordable, permanent housing with a variety of support services so that residents are able to maintain their housing.

B. Faithful Response to Homelessness Through Advocacy

While individual acts of mercy and compassion are well understood as “Christ-like,” and providing financial support to groups and ministries engaged in the relief of misery and injustice is common, many Christians are reluctant to become directly involved. Fewer still accept the call of the gospel to engage the “structures and systems which create or foster brokenness and distortion” (*Book of Order* W-7.3003). Yet as Reformed Christians, our heritage is filled with examples of such faithful engagement, and the church has again and again affirmed the efficacy of such action. This commitment stems from a strong belief in the sovereignty of God over all aspects of life.

While some would claim that tending to people who are poor and homeless is the rightful work of the church – and not of the government – the religious community cannot do it all. A vital role of the church and its resources is to call government

to account and to leverage governmental funds to address the agendas in which the church and the society agree action is needed. This is called advocacy.

1. Municipal and State Level Advocacy

As with direct engagement, advocacy often begins with what is obvious and at hand, and then grows in complexity. Such efforts include:

- Living Wage campaigns, which support workers in the struggle for a living wage
- Inclusionary zoning policies
- Strategies to counteract neighborhood exclusivism (e.g. NIMBYism, Not in My Back Yard syndrome).

2. National Level Advocacy

Currently, there are several policy directions which all levels of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are called to support. These include policies dealing with financing; zoning; provision of more affordable housing; including provision of temporary and low-cost housing, services for persons recently released from prison, those with mental or physical illness, educational needs; correction of abusive lending practices, and changes in tax policies such as the Home Mortgage Interest Deduction.

The study team that produced this report consisted of eight well-informed leaders in homelessness ministry, affordable housing development (in New York City and San Francisco), successful program development (Shreveport and Chicago), and varied outreach efforts (Tucson, Baltimore, rural North Carolina, Minneapolis). One member is a professor of housing studies; four have theological training; one teaches social ethics. The consultant/ writer is a former urban pastor and editor.

(Item 09-07. The action derived from a resolution developed by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy.)

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

Please put "web updates" in the subject line.

Remembering Maggie Kuhn and the Gray Panthers – for clues to dealing with such a time as this

by Gene TeSelle, Witherspoon Issues Analyst

Roger Sanjek, the author of a new book entitled *Gray Panthers* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 298 pp., \$59.95 hardcover), is an anthropologist who has also written about neighborhood life in New York (*The Future of Us All: Race and Neighborhood Politics in New York City*, Cornell University Press, 465 pp., \$36, previously reviewed on this web site).

He and his wife participated in the Gray Panthers in Berkeley in the 1970s and in New York in the 1980s, then resumed active membership when he got into his sixties. (Another “younger” Gray Panther was Ron Wyden in Oregon, who has since become a U.S. Representative and then Senator.) So the book is not only a history of the movement but includes eyewitness accounts by a “local informant” or “participant observer” who is increasingly aware of his own ageing.

Maggie Kuhn, of course, worked with the United Presbyterian office of Social Education and Action, first in

Philadelphia and then in New York at the Interchurch Center (that was before the denominations caught the fever of moving into the “heartland,” away from wicked, cosmopolitan, minority-controlled New York). When she was faced with mandatory retirement in 1970 she teamed up with others — Margaret Hummel in Curriculum, Shubert Frye, Al Wilson, and Cameron Hall, all of whom were to remain active. She burst onto the public scene with a press conference at the 1972 General Assembly in Denver. (Later she would appear on a number of talk shows — Studs Terkel, Phil Donahue, David Susskind.) Witherspooners were among those who responded, and in 1974 she was the first recipient of the Witherspoon Award (now the Andrew Murray Award).

The movement was reinforced by volunteer activists who were already participants in Ralph Nader’s Retired Professionals Action Group. The health care industry was an early target, starting with nursing homes and hearing aids, and abuses were brought to light in unorthodox ways. Housing and homelessness, too, emerged as major issues. Maggie’s approach, Sanjek points out (p. 241-42), was to be where older people were not expected to be, and to do what older people were not expected to do. And we are reminded of the “Gray Panther growl”:



raise both arms, reaching for a peaceful world;
 open the eyes wide to see suffering and need;
 open the mouth to cry out against injustice;
 stick out the tongue;
 growl three times from the depth of the belly (p. 150).

Panthers headquarters remained in Philadelphia, first in the Tabernacle Presbyterian Church, but local chapters formed in many places. Berkeley and New York are dealt with in some depth, since Sanjek has been personally involved with them. Increasingly there was a need for a presence in Washington. The movement supported Ron Dellums' plan for a National Health Service, then compromised on a single-payer national health plan. It had to deal with attacks on Social Security as early as the Reagan and Carter administrations. It also shared in two major victories — federal legislation amending the Age Discrimination in Employment Act in 1986 and the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, both signed by Republican presidents.

While Sanjek offers a thorough history of the Gray Panthers and celebrates their accomplishments, he also fulfills his responsibilities as an anthropologist and participant observer, telling frankly about the

difficulties experienced by the organization through the years — the consequences of death and disability, changes in board and staff, tensions between national and local, changes in the political environment.

Two major points stand out.

One is that the Gray Panthers were never a single-issue movement, focused only on ageing; its founders had already concerned themselves with the whole range of social issues, and advancing age only heightened their awareness of the many linkages.

The other is that ageing helps focus one's attention in marvelous ways. If it had never occurred to us at an earlier time, it now becomes apparent that cooperation is more realistic than competition, and that policy decisions must move us toward a society attentive to need rather than greed.

This review is also on our website, at http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/2009/maggie_kuhn_and_grey_panthers.htm .

If you're interested in ordering the book, you'll find a link to www.Amazon.com, where you can place your order (at a discounted price), and earn a small percentage of the purchase price for Witherspoon.

Jesus Interrupted – When Science Looks At Faith

by Darcy Hawk

The books of Bart D. Ehrman, James A. Gray Distinguished Professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, present an easily accessible critique of the way we Christians often treat our canonical scriptures. We hold them above the approved methods of historical and literary criticism that are afforded all other literature. This is especially relevant for those of us who were raised, like Dr. Ehrman, in traditions affirming Biblical inerrancy and the direct inspiration of scripture. Previously he wrote about the tortured history of manuscript copying and the errors and intentional “corrections” that have often produced received texts bearing precious little resemblance to the autographs and intentions of the authors.

His latest work, *Jesus Interrupted*, (Harper Collins Publishers, 2009), takes a slightly different approach. Rather than offering historical criticism of the source material his central point is that we have misread what we have received. The cobbled-together narrative of the life of Jesus evident in many church celebrations is a blending of four very different Gospel accounts. This results in a new Gospel that none of the Evangelists intended. For instance, in order to gather seven last words from the

cross you must raid the forsaken Jesus of Mark and Matthew, the pastoral Jesus of Luke, and the triumphant Jesus of John to produce the schizophrenic Jesus that nobody wrote about. At Christmas Matthew contributes wise men, Luke introduces shepherds, Mark doesn’t find anything unusual worth reporting about how Jesus was born, and John brings Jesus in on a light beam like Captain Kirk. In slightly less colorful language Dr. Ehrman tells us that mashing the Gospels together removes their individual voices and degrades their narrative integrity. The sobering conclusion of *Jesus Interrupted* is that the individual Gospels are often irreconcilable because of fundamental contradictions of fact and theses. Each seeks to present Jesus as understood by a different time and community.

Aside from the value of this work as a popular and accessible exposition of current Bible scholarship, it constitutes a challenge to myopic Christianity. Even if his agnostic conclusions are debatable, Bart Ehrman is telling us that we are not dealing honestly with the text as we have received it.

The author:

The Rev. Darcy Hawk is treasurer of the Witherspoon Society and pastor of Gibsonia Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh Presbytery.

Jack Rogers provides an expanded version of his helpful book on “Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality”

Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church, Revised and Expanded Second Edition

In this updated and expanded best seller, evangelical theologian and former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Jack Rogers makes a biblical case for equal rights for people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT). Throughout history, he observes, Christianity has moved towards ever greater openness and inclusiveness. Today’s church is led by many of those who were once excluded: people of color, women, and divorced and remarried people. He argues that when we interpret the Bible through the lens of Jesus’ redemptive life and ministry, we see that the church is called to grant equal rights to all people. *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality* describes Rogers’ own change of mind and heart on the issue, charts the church’s history of using biblical passages to oppress marginalized groups, argues for a Christ-centered reading of Scripture, debunks stereotypes about people who are LGBT, refutes the conventional wisdom about the texts that are often used against people who are LGBT, and presents ideas for how the church can heal itself and move forward again.

The revised and expanded edition also includes:

- A new preface with “stories from

the road” as a result of Rogers’ two year book tour in support of the first edition;

- Updates on recent developments within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.);
- A new chapter that examines God’s radical welcome for all who have faith as revealed in Scripture;
- A new appendix that maps the recent progress toward LGBT equality in major U.S. denominations; and
- A study guide for group or personal reflection.

About the Author

Jack Rogers is Professor of Theology Emeritus at San Francisco Theological Seminary and Moderator of the 213th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). He is the author of *Reading the Bible and the Confessions*; *Claiming the Center: Churches and Conflicting Worldviews*; and *Presbyterian Creeds*.

Here’s a link to the book on Amazon.com:

<http://www.amazon.com/Jesus-Bible-Homosexuality-Revised-Expanded/dp/066423397X>

And here’s a link to Jack’s website:

<http://www.drjackrogers.com>

From More Light Presbyterians: “God’s Whole Family” Conference

Registration is open now.

The National Welcoming & Affirming Presbyterian Conference will be held September 4 - 6, 2009 Labor Day Weekend at Second Presbyterian Church, Nashville, Tennessee. “God’s Whole Family” is hosted by Second Presbyterian Church, Nashville and produced by More Light Presbyterians for pro-LGBT Presbyterians, families, friends and allies.

Easy online registration is available now with housing options at:
www.mlp.org/mlp2009reg

Rev. Bruce Reyes-Chow, Moderator of the 218th General Assembly, PCUSA, will join us as a keynote speaker and preacher. Bruce is pastor of Mission Bay Community Church, a multi-cultural Presbyterian congregation in San Francisco, CA Bruce’s blog: <http://www.mod.reyes-chow.com/>

Rev. Debra Peevey, MLP’s Campaign Outreach Coordinator for Amendment 08-B, will be with us to share heart-warming stories of faith, courage and transformation plus lessons learned from the campaign. Debra is a minister in the Disciples of Christ tradition and lives with her spouse, Candy in Surprise, AZ.

We will gather in community and deepen our faith through affirming worship and by celebrating the gifts of God’s creation, love and grace for us and all the world. Think Road Trip! Get a group from your church, youth group, campus or seminary commu-

nity, or presbytery to be in “Music City USA” for the LGBT-affirming faith and spiritual experience of the year!

We look forward to seeing you in Nashville.

Michael

Michael J. Adee
Executive Director & Field Organizer
More Light Presbyterians
michaeladee@aol.com, www.mlp.org



Are you moving?

Please tell us where you’ve gone (or where you’re going, if you’re one of those plan-ahead people), so we can keep in touch with you.

Just send your new address (and maybe your old one, just to be sure) to your Witherspoon Communications Coordinator, Doug King
2198 Vining Drive, Unit B
Woodbury, MN 55125
douging2@aol.com

GHOST RANCH PEACE & JUSTICE WEEK

July 27 - August 2, 2009

Now is the time to make reservations to be a part of the 2009 Peace & Justice Week at Ghost Ranch, July 27-August 2. There are eight seminars to choose among, including the Witherspoon-sponsored class "New Eyes for Peace & Justice from the World Church" led by Clifton Kirkpatrick.

Other seminar opportunities include "Organizing Alternatives to Military Service" planned by Rick Ufford-Chase, "Faith in Action & Stone Building" led by brothers David William Abazs and Andrew Kang Bartlett. Mark Koenig and Joel Hanisek will be guiding "Chariots & Horses: Weapons of Mass Destruction, Weapons of No Discrimination" and Jean Richardson is providing opportunity for renewal in "Moving to Wholeness."

Three other classes are designed to provide ways to respond to some of today's challenges. Greg Garrett offers "Speaking Out for Peace & Justice: Writing, Preaching & Speaking that Make a Difference." Amy Franklin and Kay Pranis will lead "Fundamentals of Peacemaking: Exploring Connectedness" and "Climate of Fear, Climate of Hope" will be led by Kolya Braun-Greiner and Pamela Sparr.

You can read descriptions of all these classes at www.ghost ranch.org, along with information about the "camp culture" alternative for lower-cost housing and food. The Rev. Corey A. Nelson will serve as Worship/Music Leader for the week as well as working with the children/youth program. The Rev. Nancy Copeland-Payton will be available all week for one-on-one sessions of spiritual discernment. There will also be an opportunity to attend the commemoration at Los Alamos of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Family members seeking other kinds of classes can choose from among a wide variety in the Creative Arts Festival lineup, plus several other opportunities including Casa del Sol Retreat Center or just rest and relax.

Note: Send your registration in now, to get your housing choice. The registration fee is \$350. It pays to sign up early.

For details on each of the seminars, go to http://www.ghost ranch.org/index.php?option=com_oscommerce&osMod=index&cPath=93



As our part of the
Ghost Ranch Peace & Justice
week,
Witherspoon is sponsoring:

New Eyes for Peace and Justice From the World Church

with Dr. Clifton Kirkpatrick

Years ago Robert McAfee Brown reminded us of the important "gift of new eyes" that we receive from the world church, which help us see our calling to Christian faithfulness in witness for peace and justice in North America. That has never been more true than today! This course will explore several recent global, ecumenical developments that have the potential for reshaping our witness for justice in the 21st century.

Each day we will focus on a different development and what it might mean for our work for justice and peace and will use our final session to pull the threads between these movements together. These developments include:

- The Accra Confession (WARC's call for Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth);
- Decade to Overcome Violence (WCC-sponsored movement of Christian communities around the world seeking alternatives to violence that lead to justice);
- Calvin Jubilee (2009 is Calvin's 500th birthday and churches around the world are exploring what it means to have a Calvinist revolution in the 21st century);
- A Common Word Between Us and You (the dramatic call from 138 Muslim scholars and leaders to find common ground around our common calling to love God and neighbor).

The Rev. Dr. Clifton Kirkpatrick, of Louisville, KY, serves as President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC). He has completed forty years of service as an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA). For the last twelve years he has served as Stated Clerk of the General Assembly Council, and at the conclusion of his term of service in 2008, was elected by the General Assembly as Stated Clerk Emeritus. On January 1, 2009, Rev. Kirkpatrick became a Visiting Professor of Global Ministries and Ecumenical Studies at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

Calling all artists, doodlers, creative thinkers, feminists, progressive Reformed theologians & independent minds

We are merging two progressive Presbyterian organizations —
Voices of Sophia and the Witherspoon Society —
and now we need to live into a new identity.



Sooo ... we're looking for a new
name and a new logo!



You can help.
Join one or both of these contests and win huge
prizes!

LOGO

Your logo submission should express the mission and character of the new, united organization. (These include peace, justice, affirmation of women's distinctive experience and perspectives, and an inclusive and hospitable community of faith in the Reformed tradition.) Please submit an image that **will fit within a 3" by 3" square** (though it does not need to be exactly that size), and that can be reproduced in a variety of formats – black and white, grayscale, and in one, two and four colors.

NAME

Please suggest a name of one to four words that will reflect the mission and character of the group, as outlined in the "Logo" paragraph. If you wish, feel free to add a brief explanation of your suggestion, in **no more than 50 words**.

AND THE WINNERS WILL RECEIVE ...!

The winning entry to each contest will receive:

Your choice of a \$50 cash award,

OR your choice of free tickets to any three of our events during the 219th General Assembly (July 2 - 10, 2010) in Minneapolis: the pre-Assembly “Reformation 2010” conversation, the Voices of Sophia Breakfast, the Commissioner Orientation, the Witherspoon Luncheon, and (ta-daa!!) the Witherspoon Dance.

All entries will become the property of the Witherspoon Society/Voices of Sophia.

PLEASE SEND YOUR ENTRIES BY DECEMBER 31, 2009

ONLINE with “Name and Logo Contest” in the Subject line, to Mitch Trigger at mitch@revtrigger.org

OR BY MAIL to
 Mitchell Trigger
 First Presbyterian Church
 35 Church Street
 Rockaway, NJ 07866

Got questions?

Please call Mitch Trigger at (973) 784-4818, or send him an email: mitch@revtrigger.org

 Please clip ballot here (or copy) to return.

Vote for Witherspoon/Voices Officers

___ Co-Moderator: Bill Dummer (2009-11)

___ Co-Moderator: Molly Casteel (2010-11)

Members at Large:

___ Colleen Bowers (2009-11)

___ Sylvia Carlson (2009-11)

___ Molly Casteel (2009)

Please mark your ballot and return it by September 1, 2009, to Rev. Jake Young
 North Anderson Community Church,
 Presbyterian
 4200 Liberty Highway
 Anderson, SC 29621

Witherspoon News

The Witherspoon Society Board met in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on May 14 - 17. Among other things, we spent some hours simply getting acquainted, for this meeting included three new members who joined us as a “caucus” representing the Voices of Sophia.

Through the process of learning about the different histories of the two groups, we became convinced that a “holy union” of the two groups is indeed the right thing to do.

One way to make the union a reality is to create a board that will reflect both groups. So the Board plus “the caucus” voted to present a slate of candidates to fill vacancies on the present board, and to name a new co-moderator who will represent the “Voices” stream as well.

You will find a listing of officers, present and proposed, on pages 38 - 39. **And on page 35 you’ll find a handy little ballot** with the names of the nominees for election. We hope you’ll take a moment to cast your vote, and send it in!

The candidates are these:

Bill Dummer has served as a Member at Large, and will become Co-Moderator for 2009-2011. Bill is a retired

minister living in Milwaukee, and a passionate gardener. He is active in promoting a mission partnership between his presbytery and the church in Ghana.

Colleen Bowers lives in Baltimore, is an elder, has been an RN for 35 years, is currently on the Council of Governors for the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, and on the leadership team of PARO. *And* she is a doctoral student in the history of nursing. In the past she has served as interim director of PHEWA, and a volunteer in mission to Pakistan

Sylvia Carlson is an honorably retired minister member of Redstone Presbytery. She facilitates the Redstone Witherspoon group which meets monthly during September through June. She is a feminist, who cares about justice and empowerment for women here in the US and also around the world.

Molly Casteel lives in Louisville, where until last fall she served as Associate for Women’s Advocacy under the General Assembly Council. Since she will be working in an interim position in the Office of the General Assembly until the end of 2009, she will be “on leave” from her elected office until the first of the new year.

Some blogs worth visiting

Voices of Sophia blog

<http://voicesofsophia.wordpress.com/>

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

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

Witherspoon's Facebook page

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

Mitch Trigger, Witherspoon's Secretary/Communicator, has created a Facebook page where Witherspoon members and others can gather to exchange news and views. Mitch and a few others have posted bits of news, both personal and organizational. But there's room for more!

You can post your own news and views, or initiate a conversation about a topic of interest to you.

John Harris' Summit to Shore blogspot

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

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

John Shuck's Shuck and Jive

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

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

The Witherspoon / Voices of Sophia Board

Co-Moderator (2008-09)

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Co-Moderator (2009-10)

Bill Dummer *
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Secretary/Communicator (2008-10)

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Sylvia Carlson * (2009-2011)
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Molly Casteel * (2009-2011)
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John Harris (2008-09)
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Catherine C. Snyder (2008-10)
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Sylvia Thorson-Smith (2009-2011)
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NOTES

* The Board members indicated by an asterisk were designated by the Board during its May, 2009 meeting in Minneapolis. They are being recommended to the Nominating Committee for confirmation and election. (See page 36.)

Molly Casteel was also named by the Board as Co-Moderator for 2009-2011, with a leave granted until January 1, 2010, while she is serving as an interim staff person in the Office of the General Assembly.

Barbara Renton, who has been serving as a Member at Large, has submitted her resignation, effective as of the May 2009 Board meeting; the Board accepted her resignation with thanks for her service.

Sylvia Thorson-Smith, an At Large member of the Board, was asked to serve as Issues Coordinator, replacing Gene TeSelle, who has served, above and beyond the call of duty, as Issues Analyst since 2001.

The next issue of *Network News*

will bring you news and analysis of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and our shared calling to serve peace and justice in the world.

We hope this will include reports from the Ghost Ranch Peace & Justice Week.

We welcome your contributions and reflections!

Please contact *Network News* editor Doug King:
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 E-mail: douging2@aol.com

Deadline for the Summer issue is August 15, 2009.

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Register soon for Ghost Ranch Peace & Justice Week!

July 27 - August 2.

See pages 32-33.