

Presbyterian Promise News

Issue Number 26
January 2010

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Comes the Moment to Decide

Ralph Jones

On February 13th, Presbyterian Promise will be ten years old. The most decisive moments of those ten years of ministry are likely to occur at the Presbytery meeting on February 6th.

Our Annual Meeting, on January 31st at Crossroads Church, will be our time prayerfully to reflect and prepare for the presbytery meeting. We need your presence both times.

A number of events have combined to bring us to this moment. A church where all may freely serve according to their gifts and calling is at the core of our witness. G-6.0106b, the constitutional language that impedes this service, was almost replaced through the votes of the presbyteries this past year. We came closer than ever, with many supportive votes from unexpected presbyteries. A new replace 'b' overture, endorsed by the Crossroads, New Haven and Stamford Sessions and written out of our presbytery's own experience of the harm 'b' does to all people considering ministry, is on the February docket. If it is to pass, your presence is essential so that people will hear what we believe.

Possibly even more critical is a matter not of our devising. Rev. John Merz wrote an article, "A Toast to Happiness," for the March 2009 issue of this newsletter that has become a catalyst for an intense response. It seems to have revoked whatever tacit "don't ask, don't tell" that supported the seeming quiet around here.

In his article, John tells of his odyssey to his legal Connecticut marriage to his partner, Bill Starkowski. Some Presbyterians read this as advocacy of defiance of the *Book of Order*. In publishing it, we understood it as truth-telling and a witness to the need for same gender marriage. To date, we've not had much success persuading others that theirs is not the only way to understand this issue – or rather, these issues.

It is generally agreed that the manner of life of church officers "should be a demonstration

of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world." [G-6.0106a] Of course it is the infamous next paragraph that goes on to specify that, "Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness." Issue # 1: Presbyterians do not agree on a definition of chastity. As the Office of the General Assembly stated in its Advisory Opinion 8 updated as recently as April 2009: "There exists a debate about whether the word "chastity" in the text of G-6.0106b is equivalent to the word "celibacy." There appears to be no consensus in that debate on the clear meaning of either word. The 215th General Assembly (2003) again declined to explicitly define the terms, instead pointing the Church back to our Confessions. The debate is not determinative to the discussion of the ordination of homosexual persons."

Issue # 2: According to the State of Connecticut, John and Bill are married. 'b' requires of them "fidelity within the covenant of marriage," not "chastity." Or are they married? Some Presbyterians seem to think otherwise, trying to force a distinction between civil and Christian marriage. Consider, however, that there are many couples on Presbyterian membership lists who were married before either of them became Christian. Their marriages have been recognized without any further requirements. The Apostle Paul recognized the preexisting marriages of gentiles who became

The Meetings...

Our Annual Meeting will be a chance to pray together and carefully consider the issues the presbytery is facing. Join John Merz, John Webster, Barbara Hager, Dick Hasbany, Ralph Jones and others for this strategic time. **January 31st at 3 PM** at Crossroads Presbyterian Church. Refreshments follow.

PSNE: On Saturday, **February 6th** our presbytery will meet at Westminster Presbyterian Church in West Hartford, CT to consider:

- An overture to replace 'b'. See the article "PSNE."
- Re-election of PSNE's Nominating Committee.
- Election of General Assembly Commissioners.
- Adoption of a presbytery policy on Validated Ministries.
- Other important matters are likely. Watch the "News" section of our website: <http://PresbyPromise.home.att.net>.

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Christian.

And what would be the pastoral response if a same gender couple, married under Connecticut law in a church of another denomination, were to transfer their membership to one of our PSNE churches? Would they be told they were welcome as members but that they weren't married and could only understand themselves as living in sin if they stayed committed to each other?

There can be no sustainable distinction between civil and Christian marriage. In *Londonderry v. PNNE 213-2 (2000)*, the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission found that, "It is not unusual for a document such as our *Constitution*,... To exhibit tensions and ambiguities... Nevertheless it is the task of governing bodies ... to resolve them in such a way as to give effect to all provisions." Our *Constitution* describes marriage as, among other things, "a civil contract." [W-4.9001] That would not be given effect by denying recognition to some but not other marriages. Since at least Calvin's time, the State has had responsibility for defining the categories of persons who may be married. The church consults with the particular couple about their relationship.

Issue # 3: The Westminster church has elected, ordained and installed Bill as a Deacon. As a married person, clearly this is in conformity with the existing requirements of 'b.' But for those who do not recognize John and Bill's marriage as Christian, it creates problems! Presbyterian Promise began its witness in the midst of an administrative case brought against the Session of the Stamford church for installing Wayne Osborne. That and subsequent cases have established that whatever it means, 'b' is not an absolute prohibition on LGBT ordination. But some Presbyterians find this very uncomfortable.

Issue # 4: Officers of the church (Deacons, Elders and Ministers of the Word and Sacrament) vow to "be governed by our church's polity." [W-4.4003] Depending on one's understanding, and the denomination's interpretation, of 'b' and the sections on marriage, John, Bill, the Westminster Session and others might be questioned. Indeed, PSNE's Council Minutes report that letters to this effect have been received by Council and the Committee on Ministry. [See the

10 December Minutes in the call to the 6 February meeting.] Let us be clear. The place of LGBT people in this church and Presbyterian Promise's ministry with them is being directly challenged.

A related matter: In 2008, Rev. Jean Southard married two women under the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Late this Summer, those of you on our e-mail list received information about this. If you want to read more, see the 2009 *News* section on our web site: <http://presbypromise.home.att.net>. (If you would like to be on our e-mail list, contact us there.) The matter went to trial before the Boston Presbytery Permanent Judicial Commission which found, since the Preface to the Directory for Worship states, "... that the Directory uses language that is 'simply descriptive', this Commission takes this to mean that the definition of Christian marriage in W-4.9001 is merely descriptive; there is no mandatory language in this article." That is, while the PC USA constitutional discussion of marriage refers to a man and a woman, that only describes the usual and does not exclude same gender marriage. This matter is currently under review and will undoubtedly be appealed to our GA PJC. For now, at least in Boston Presbytery, Presbyterian same gender marriage is legal.

Were this finding to be sustained, and there is no way to predict what the GA PJC will ultimately do, that would be a blessing to the same gender couples in our churches. No one expects this coming General Assembly or the presbyteries to revise the marriage language, although it is conceivable as there is an overture from Baltimore Presbytery (and probably others) asking for that.

Issue # 5: Missing from this long, too technical discussion is the pastoral and prophetic dimension of this situation. John Merz has served this presbytery energetically and well. He has been willing to serve when many others refused. He has taken on demanding work, like co-chairing the Committee on Ministry. His work with the Connecticut AIDS Coalition demonstrates compassion for an all too underserved community. He and Bill have formed a loving family and are raising a delightful daughter. They have been and are honest and open about their lives.

This family is showing the church the nature of community, the nature of welcome, and all those profound, abstract theological things. The present confrontation shows just how destructive the church's present teaching about human sexuality can become. We almost replaced 'b' this last time. Now we must succeed as we vote again on February 6th.

Issue # 6: Oh yes, Presbyterian Promise's standing in the Presbytery is also being questioned. While our ministry will continue whether we are recognized or not, our work to stand between the LGBT members of our churches and the assaults on their very being and identity is very much in accord with our denomination's official policy of welcome.

This is a moment to decide. We need your prayers, your

wisdom, your presence at both our annual meeting and at the February Presbytery meeting. And we need your votes. Please be sure your church has a full slate of commissioners to the February meeting and that they will attend.

Feb. 6 – At PSNE

Ralph Jones

As it presently stands, the Feb. 6th docket includes four items of particular interest.

First, the Ecclesiastical Relations Committee will be presenting an overture asking for the replacement of G-6.0106b, the infamous unwelcoming paragraph. The full text appears later in this issue and in the News section of our web site.

In a recent conversation, someone told me that our polity ought to be written to serve the needs of the 97% who aren't LGBT. I'm within 3% of agreement. Our polity should serve 100% of God's people. This overture developed out of discussions that occurred in the Committee on Preparation for Ministry while I was serving there. The "compulsion" to make inquiry of people's chastity evidently did nothing to build trust or to protect the church from bad ministry however one may describe that. It hurt those of us who were supposed to ask it and embarrassed those we needed to ask. It doesn't serve the 97%, or the 100%.

Several other replace 'b' overtures are being considered by other presbyteries. Some have already been approved, which means GA will be dealing with this. At the More Light Presbyterians national conference this past September we spoke about "losing forward." While it failed to win the required majority of the presbyteries, last year's replace 'b' initiative came closer than ever. This year is the time for justice.

The Crossroads, Stamford and New Haven churches have each asked for approval of this overture. At least one more session is yet to vote, so there may well be four or more by the time PSNE meets.

Next on the docket comes nominations to the Presbytery Nominating Committee. It seems for the past couple of years our presbytery Council forgot that their bylaws specify how they are to go about this. At the November meeting, PSNE elected Rev. John Merz to the nominations committee. Since John's character and standing are being questioned by several members and churches, suddenly Council was reminded of proper procedure. Having done things more orderly, PSNE will be asked to reelect the six present members of that committee. As of this writing, it is not clear if John will be among those proposed.

The Council Report also includes election of Commissioners to the General Assembly meeting this July. Traditionally Southern New England has sent "balanced" commissions to GA, meaning that our votes on issues of inclusion have generally nullified each other. It's not clear that this practice

serves the Presbytery well.

In addition, if PSNE does overture GA, it is entitled to an overture advocate. But in 2007, PSNE adopted a policy requiring that part of the cost be born by the churches that proposed the overture. We need to plan for this, but if we have an overture, we should have an advocate!

Yet another matter for this meeting is consideration of a presbytery policy covering Validated Ministries and Members at Large. This isn't directly related to Presbyterian Promise; however, the Presbytery's Committee on Ministry was asked to address this by several churches because of their concerns about John Merz. John's work with the CT AIDS Coalition is presently considered a validated ministry. Some are asking if that is appropriate.

Lisa Reflects

on the PJC Decision and San Francisco – Shiprah and Puah

Lisa Larges and Dick Hasbany

The PC USA's highest court, the Permanent Judicial Commission of the General Assembly (GA PJC), made two important decisions on November 3, and both were good news. The cases involved Lisa Larges, a candidate for ordination for more than two decades, and Paul Capetz, whose January 2008 reinstatement by the Twin City Cities Presbytery had been challenged. In his arguments before the Commission, Douglas Nave, a member of the Covenant Network's Board of Directors, relied heavily on a 2006 General Assembly compromise that allows Presbyteries to consider the status of partnered gay and lesbian candidates or ministers who submit a statement of conscience, or "scruple," on a case by case basis.



Lisa Larges

Dr. Paul Capetz, a professor at United Theological Seminary, set aside his ordination to protest the ban on partnered gay elders and ministers. Following the GA's compromise action, he submitted a scruple to his Presbytery and was reinstated. The GA PJC's November decision lets stand his reinstatement.

Lisa Larges submitted a scruple regarding the celibacy requirement for gay and lesbian candidates, but hers came as a candidate for ordination in the San Francisco Presbytery. When the Presbytery accepted her scruple and approved her candidacy, complainants took legal action and stopped the process. The high court's recent decision rejected the complaints and allowed the Presbytery to review Lisa's credentials and statement of conscience, the next step on the road to ordination. After approximately 45 minutes of discussion, the Presbytery voted to recognize her call as Minister Coordinator of That All May Freely Serve (TAMFS) as a vali-

dated ministry. The body then engaged Lisa for an hour and a half, considering her statement of departure from G-6.0106b, her faith statement, her ministry, and her sense of call. Following this lengthy and thorough examination, the presbytery debated the motion for yet another 25 minutes, voting finally to approve Lisa's ordination and enroll her as a member of presbytery. Unfortunately, even after all this, Lisa's ordination is a ways off. A "Stay of Enforcement" has been entered and the process has been halted again.

Lisa has been a marathon runner in the struggle to move the denomination to know, cherish, and include its lesbian and gay members as equal ministers of Christ's church. She reflected on the recent developments for Presbyterian Promise News.

On November 10, the Presbytery of San Francisco voted to approve my Ordination as Minister of Word and Sacrament. The vote, 156-138, was a culminating moment in my 23 year journey as a candidate for Minister of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church. In voting to approve me for Ordination, the Presbytery reviewed a "statement of conscience" (Scruple, or statement of Departure) which I had submitted to the Committee on Ministry. In this way, the vote highlighted a policy adopted by the General Assembly in 2006 by which Presbyteries (or Sessions, in the case of Deacons or Elders) may consider, on a case by case basis, those who, in good conscience, can not subscribe to a particular requirement in our constitution.

The decision of the Presbytery was immediately challenged, and there will now be another round of judicial hearings before invitations to a service of Ordination can be sent out. Even so, no decision by a Judicial Commission can take away from the gratitude I feel toward the members of the San Francisco Presbytery who met that November evening to listen to me, ask questions, and faithfully discern together my call to serve our church. In the end, to me, that's the point: sexual orientation and gender identity are not "issues" about which we can make policies in abstraction. Instead, we call the church to a face-to-face encounter with the witness of faith of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Presbyterians seeking a place at the table. "Personning the issue" is That All May Freely Serve's shorthand way of naming this work of telling our stories, sharing our faith, and inviting the church in to conversation.

On this journey I am in good company. Paul Capetz, now a minister member of the Twin Cities Presbytery, and Scott

Anderson, a candidate in John Knox Presbytery are among the other openly LGBT ministers and candidates for ministry who are "personning the issue" by bringing their own statements of departure. What's more, I am one of about 50 or more LGBT candidates and inquirers for ministry in our church.

It makes me think of Shiprah and Puah, the Hebrew midwives charged by Pharaoh to kill all the male Hebrew newborns. Pharaoh soon learned that the two midwives failed miserably in this small task that had been given to them. When asked to make an account for their poor performance, Shiprah and Puah said that the Hebrew women, strong and vigorous, were birthing their babies before the midwives had a chance to even show up.

I have no idea why there are so many LGBT candidates for ministry in the Presbyterian church. It's not as though they don't know the obstacles ahead of them. But they keep popping up, like Hebrew children. God's yes turns out to be stronger than any human no. May our church have the privilege of knowing each one of them – their stories, their struggles, their sense of call, their dreams for the church.



Virginia West Davidson
1916 – 2009

Hartwein-Sanchez

Virginia West Davidson

Dick Hasbany

Virginia West Davidson, Ginny to her family and friends, died peacefully in her home in Rochester, New York at noon on Monday, October 19. She was a gift to us, and we will miss her.

Ginny was imposing – tall, strong jawed, clear eyed. She entered a room and people turned toward her; the room knew it had been entered. When she called you "dear," you felt embraced and supported or, if you hadn't thought things through and weren't making sense, you might have felt that an icy irony had just done you in.

Ginny made her way well in the world and had many varied accomplishments. During World War II, she helped set up Red Cross centers for soldiers in London. Years later in 1974, she attended her first General Assembly as Moderator of the Genesee Valley Presbytery. The story goes that before leaving she promised her husband, Davie, that she would not take on any new responsibilities. Once there, though, the newly-elected Assembly Moderator, Rev. Bob Lamar asked her to serve as Vice Moderator. Her assignment would

be to travel the country and encourage greater women's leadership and, well, so much for not taking on new responsibilities. Her "yes" to Lamar was just the start. In 1976, Moderator Dr. Thelma Adair asked Ginny to chair the Task Force on Homosexuality and the Church. A dear pastor friend had told Ginny the story of his life as a gay man, and Ginny knew the importance of saying yes to this call. Chairing the Task Force was just the first stage of a deepening focus on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues, and perhaps led to the discovery of story telling as a means for truth telling. Personal story telling and informed analysis became the tools that Ginny kept always at hand, and she used them to help guide the Task Force through two-years of landmark research and thinking that encompassed the Bible, theology, psychology and scientific knowledge.

Her call deepened and found new shape following the travel and study related to the Task Force's work. At age 62, she enrolled at Colgate Rochester Divinity School because, she said, she had become weary during the Task Force years of people waving red bibles with gold embossed swords at her. She studied, and free from the neutrality of her role as chair of the Task Force, she got to work organizing. (It was in the organizing role that she walked into my lucky life.) She served as part of the team that transformed Presbyterians for Lesbian and Gay Concerns to More Light Presbyterians. Later, she served as a founding member and Moderator of That all May Freely Serve. As time went on, her award shelf bowed in the middle under the weight of the Woman of Faith Award, the More Light and Witherspoon Awards for advocacy, and many local, Rochester awards.

Enough! Most written memorials, this one included, usually begin to look like resumes, celebrating the work loved ones did for us. There is a danger that they will fail to capture those little things and elusive moments that made their subjects so deeply a part of our lives. So I want to try to share two sets of images that I have of Virginia Davidson, who helped shape my life even though we saw each other less and less as the years went on.

First, Ginny in Connecticut. She visited Presbyterian Promise several times, usually with Janie Spahr. The two of them typically stayed with Letty Russell and Shannon Clarkson in their home overlooking beautiful wetlands leading to the Sound. Sometimes I remember them in that house as a triumvirate of Christian women — a theologian, an evangelist, and Ginny, an analytical and prophetic witness, sitting around a dinner table, alternating between serious talk and laughter, helping us keep our perspective and focus our struggle with the structures of power that have blunted the good news of Christ's church.

The other image also includes both Ginny and Janie Spahr. The two traveled all over the country, telling their stories and challenging the church to cherish the gifts and share the ministry of Christ's church with called and qualified LGBT people. At some now forgotten gathering I was at,

Janie and Ginny shared a little insight into their life on the road. Here's the picture. It is before dawn and very dark. It is, perhaps, February in, let's say, Kansas. The horizon is a flat black line nearly treeless. Ginny and Janie are rolling their suitcases, just repacked for the eighth time, toward the open trunk. They've said their good-byes to the night's host, one of many in a network of sympathetic and sometimes isolated friends folks spread across the country. It's 5:30 a.m. The icy rental car creaks in the cold. Ginny and Janie are off to meet with another group of Presbyterians, some who will bear smiles, and some who are ready with their red bibles with gold embossed swords. Our two friends are intrepid, but it is cold and early. So they have gotten into the habit, when needs be, of starting a girl scout song:

Mrs. Fox Terrier said to her pups
in all life's adversity, keep your tail up,
keep your tail up,
keep your tail up.
in all life's adversity keep your tail up!!

Ginny was an important woman, and formidable, and a trooper. But it turns out that, for all that, even she had to sing sometimes, with a friend, in order to keep heart in this long, long struggle. This was one of the lessons she taught me, and that's how I'll think of her, with Janie, singing as the sun cracks through the darkness in Kansas in February.

Replace 'b'

[This is the overture text.]

An overture to the 219th General Assembly concerning G-6.0106b

The following sessions of the Presbytery of Southern New England

First Presbyterian Church, New Haven, CT;
First Presbyterian Church, Stamford, CT;
Crossroads Presbyterian Church, Waterford, CT

Request the Presbytery of Southern New England to send the following overture to the 219th General Assembly:

The Presbytery of Southern New England respectfully overtures the 219 General Assembly (2010) to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Shall the present paragraph G-6.0106b

~~Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be~~

~~ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament.~~

be replaced in its entirety with:

Jesus, the Head of the Church, has established standards for church officers. (G-6.0101) These standards are contained in the Scriptures rightly understood in the light of the Confessions, and expressed in The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church, USA. The constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003) shall guide those responsible for examination as they discern with an individual that person's calling, gifts and preparation and their willingness to adhere to church standards. Those seeking office shall demonstrate their understanding of and affirm their willingness to adhere to church standards.

Rationale

It is appropriate for the Book of Order chapter on the church and its officers to discuss the standards for holders of church office. The Presbyterian Church has considered these standards with care on several occasions and each time has decided in favor of our tradition's rich complexity rather than a specific list of "standards." Indeed, the decision to adopt a Book of Confessions epitomizes this affirmation of the richness and diversity of our reformed tradition's self awareness. It also acknowledges that the times and places where people of faith attempt to articulate their beliefs modify their expression.

The constitutional questions for ordination and installation are not in themselves a standard or a list of standards. They are questions that direct the attention of individuals considering church office and of the governing bodies charged with examining them to the full diversity of belief and practice that is the Presbyterian Church USA. The questions encourage, and can guide, discernment of the appropriateness of the person to particular church office by the individual, the calling organization and those responsible for the individual's preparation and examination.

All would agree that Jesus, the head of the church, establishes the standards. While this is said in G-6.0101, its absence from G-6.0106b has caused considerable theological controversy. Whatever we may say about standards must be based on Jesus' leading. Much of our polity, and much of the history of its development, is concerned with learning to listen to Jesus' leading. That is why we have come to rely on the decisions of the larger bodies of the church in matters of controversy. It is through our connectional effort to discern where Jesus is leading us that we have developed our polity and its practical expression of the way we participate in the true church.

Our standards have never been successfully expressed as a few simple ideas or behaviors. As Calvin understood, Scripture contains the word of God, but it is not the word of God. The result is that we depend on our confessions to inform

the way we approach, read, understand and interpret scripture. Likewise, Scripture and our polity contain our standards, but are not our standards. We continually engage them as we seek to faithfully apply our standards to particular people and callings.

The diversity that arises from our efforts at understanding and the diversity of individuals and of callings demands careful consideration of each person being considered for ordained church office. Those considerations rightly include the responsibility to apply the standards determined by the whole church to the particular situation. This is challenging work. That is why there is a process for review. That is why our reformed tradition looks to the wisdom of governing bodies to make these determinations. But it also depends on the willingness of governing bodies to trust the effort and good will of the decisions made on behalf of the whole church by other governing bodies.

Sessions and presbyteries are responsible for both the preparation and examination of people considering service as church officers. These responsibilities are best carried out in a spirit of mutual discernment that is only possible in an atmosphere of trust and love. The language presently in G-6.0106b is an impediment to this work. It creates an unnecessarily adversarial relationship compromised by suspicion. The people who desire to serve the church are conscientious and willing to give generously of their time, talents (especially when it comes to paying for a theological education) and lives. They deserve gratitude and support from their church. Even when the discernment that accompanies the process of preparation directs them to a different understanding of their call, they deserve our thanks and encouragement, not our suspicions.

Presbyteries and their committees on preparation do not need the language of the present G-6.0106b as they carry out their responsibilities. They have other, more gracious and more effective means for recognizing those cases where a call to ministry is inappropriate. Sessions likewise know the people they are preparing for church office and are not helped by the present language.

We need to replace the present paragraph 'b.' It has brought much strife and little peace, unity or purity to our church. We offer this proposed amendment as language that we can all agree to and apply to everyone being considered for church office.

As My Own Soul –

Chris Glaser's Look at Marriage

Gail Faithfull

Ten years ago, two of my dearest friends married in a powerful and moving ceremony at the Portland, Maine Quaker Meeting. Mary and Barbie had been devoted friends since their years together at Wheaton College. They had

gone on after graduation to get seminary training, to marry men, to work actively in their churches and for its missions. After each of their marriages ended in divorce, they started their life together in Maine and became active in the Friends Meeting. The Friends over a period of many meetings and much prayer and discernment decided to open their ritual blessing of marriage to same-sex couples. Mary and Barbie were the first to accept that invitation. At the service, there were spaces of silence, punctuated by numerous wonderful tributes to the two, and to the power of God acting through each of them, and through their relationship. It was a deeply sacred occasion. The marriage, of course, was not legal.

There are a number of gay couples who are part of that Meeting. I asked several if they too would marry. They responded that they were waiting for same-sex marriage not only to be blessed by their spiritual fellowship but also to become legal. It looked as if their day was coming when the State legislature passed a bill legalizing it, and the Governor signed it. On Nov. 3, the voters in Maine narrowly defeated the initiative. For many devoted couples, the wait, and the work, continue.

Chris Glaser's, *As My Own Soul: The Blessing of Same-Gender Marriage* is a wide-ranging, well-researched, and gracious addition to the dialogue currently being spoken and acted out about same-sex marriage, both in its civil and spiritual aspects. He builds on the work of Jack Rogers in his book *Reading the Bible and the Confessions* to make clear how the same overblown reactions to the possible dangers of same-sex marriage were the coin of the realm in the Presbyterian debate about slavery and allowing former slaves, and then women, to vote. A prominent Presbyterian, immediately after the Civil War said "Every hope of the existence of church and state, and of civilization itself, hangs upon our arduous effort to defeat the doctrine of Negro Suffrage." (Glaser, 14) And "in 1890, a British anthropologist predicted that granting married women the vote would lead to 'social revolution,' disruption of domesticities, desecration of marriage, destruction of the household gods, dissolution of the family." (Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, A History*, 272) Equally inflated rhetoric has attended our present discussion. Hear columnist Maggie Gallagher's breathless comments: "We are poised to lose the gay-marriage battle badly. It means losing the marriage debate. It means losing limited government. It means losing American civilization." (Glaser, 14)

Dialogue is difficult in such a charged setting, but Glaser manages to approach the subject of same-sex marriage with a calm sureness, looking at the great variety of meanings and practices of marriage throughout history. He notes

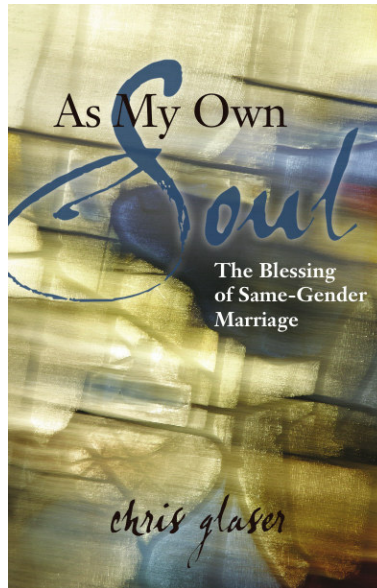
cultures which had higher regard for male-male relationships than for male-female relationships (Greece, for instance), and he reports on a study by the late John Boswell of Yale which describes liturgies for male-male Christian marriage found in an 8th century Greek manuscript. Stephanie Coontz reports that there are cultures where a woman may be married to another woman as a "female husband" (27) and there are Eskimo tribes where comarriage with another couple is common. "In a study of 109 societies, anthropologists found that only 48 forbade extramarital sex to both husband and wife" (Coontz, 22). And the predominant Old Testament pattern of marriage was polygamy with wise King Solomon boasting 700 wives and 300 concubines. Up until the last two centuries, in the vast number of marriages, wives had no voice in the choice of husband, and were not citizens, but were their husband's property. Men could beat their wives, and could divorce them by merely saying so. And marriage was arranged, and not for love, but for economic and political reasons.

So which of the many faces of marriage is now the preferred (possibly even required) one, for the opponents of same-sex marriage? It appears that that preferred face has much in common with the "Leave it to Beaver" family of the 1950's, a love-based intimate relationship where men went off to work, and women kept the house and raised the children, with neither the wife or the children expected to help in the support of the household. This was a new phenomenon in history, aided by the doubling of discretionary income in the 50's.

With people now having higher expectations of close and co-equal relationships, divorces by 1980 shot up to 50%, and then declined, but people got married later, had fewer children, and more women became major earners in the family, increasingly the major earner. For numerous and complex reasons, respect for the institution of marriage dropped precipitously. By 2003, 40% of couples with children chose not to marry compared to 45% who did marry.

Despite these vast social changes, opponents of same-sex marriage continue to speak as if there has been one form of marriage, the 1950's form, forever. Listen to Portland, Maine Bishop Richard J. Malone, whose diocese gave \$550,000 to fight the passage of same-sex marriage. He thanked the people of Maine "for protecting and reaffirming their support for marriage as it has been understood for millennia by civilizations and religions around the world." (*National Catholic Reporter*, 11/13/09)

Given the many couples who choose to dispense with marriage, the "traditional marriage" of the 50's is surely in trouble. But it just as surely is not same-sex marriage that is



undermining it. Indeed, it seems strange to me that those who ardently support the institution of marriage are not eager to include all couples who ardently seek it and are willing to take on its civic responsibilities and spiritual disciplines.

Glaser courageously wades into the difficult issue of our unconscious repugnance of various things, in this case homosexuality. A taboo of course is pre-rational, and thus hard to dislodge even when our thinking has matured way beyond the taboo. As interracial marriage was viewed with loathing, as it still is in some circles, homosexuality is viewed by some as “forbidden,” “not the way things should be.” His naming of this revulsion, and even claiming it of himself, calls us to a deeper honesty about ancient echoes in our own hearts of troubling feelings of shame and unworthiness, feelings that we may all too happily project onto others.

But for me, the final chapters of the book are the most compelling. He describes J. Philip Newell’s beautiful understandings of Celtic spirituality as an antidote to our Augustinian-Calvinist sense of deep depravity without discounting our tendency to sinfulness. The Celtic Christian view gave high priority to the image of God at the core of our being, proclaiming that all that God has made is good. This of course includes our sexuality. If the sexual can be affirmed, not primarily as an occasion for sin but as a power for creativity and love-making, then marriage becomes a sacred calling, a spiritual discipline, a school for love. And surely the more couples, straight and gay, who are willing to risk this depth of commitment become in themselves signs of God’s presence among us.

Finally, I commend especially the last tender chapters where Glaser first looks to Jesus’ relationships as a model for marriage, and then looks to the relationships of Jonathan and David on the one hand, and Ruth and Naomi on the other, to give witness to the depth of same-sex love, whether consummated or not. No other relationships in Scripture are described as touchingly as these, and they give me, a heterosexual, a brief and beautiful perspective on these long enshrined loves.

Our Directory for Worship says “Marriage is gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being of the entire human family.” (10.4.9000) The Directory goes on to describe marriage as a contract between a man and a woman, which seems to undercut the greater truth of the first sentence. If it is given to all humankind, then it is not just for heterosexuals. And it is indeed for the well-being of the entire human family. Depriving the human family of the spiritual power of loving committed same-sex couples, especially in a time when an increasing number of Americans and Europeans find marriage irrelevant, seems to me to be a sin against the Spirit. Chris Glaser’s book is another strong and sure step toward opening hearts to a more inclusive discernment of the blessing that same-sex marriage could bring to the church and to the strengthening of society.

Checking In with Bob and Alice

Dick Hasbany

From 2005 to 2007 Presbyterian Promise partnered with Plowshares Institute in the Reconciling Dialogue Project (RDP). RDP was basically a series of activities that nurtured dialogue, ministry, and reconciliation in the Presbytery of Southern New England (PSNE), and was an experiment exploring how Presbyterian Promise could advocate effectively for LGBT equality even as it pursued goals relating to pastoral issues and reconciling dialogue. Plowshares Institute, directed by Rev. Robert Evans, a minister member of PSNE and Hartford elder Alice Frazer Evans, has a quarter century of experience at national and international levels working to transform intractable conflicts. Its programs have had notable successes including a “Cities Program” in which leaders across the country learned to work together across race and class lines to promote reconciliation, a program in twelve U. S. seminaries promoting global perspectives through experiential teaching methodologies, and work in South Africa following apartheid. The Institute was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize for its work in South Africa. Plowshares’ partnership with Presbyterian Promise in the RDP was based on the idea that the Institutes’ unbiased, mediating role could enable it to facilitate discussion among people with different views on sexuality. Plowshares’ upcoming course at Ghost Ranch next summer gave us a reason to check in with Alice and Bob for a bit of reflection on the RDP and their ongoing work for reconciliation.

Pres Prom: Plowshares Institute has worked in vastly different arenas, from violent international and national conflicts to divisive issues in local churches and presbyteries. What differences and commonalities are there in conflict that has helped you to work successfully at these macro and micro levels?

Plowshares: Human conflict, whether between individuals or communities has fundamentally to do with relationships. At the core of this is the ability truly to listen to one another and to empathetically identify with the needs and interests of those with whom we have a relationship. This is the common ground for addressing conflict. The difference between local disputes in congregations and those between nations that might require a “truth commission” are ultimately a matter of magnitude and complexity of the history between the parties.

Pres Prom: Given the importance of resolving conflicts involving violence and oppression, why do you devote time to the much less severe conflicts, such as those we know in PC USA.

Plowshares: Since Alice and I believe we are called by God to be agents of reconciliation, as are all Christians according to II Corinthians 5, we care about all relationships which are broken by sin and ultimately can be reconciliation by God’s grace. The broken relationship between members of a congregation or a Presbytery is of equal concern as those

between nations.

Pres Prom: Looking back, do you feel that the Reconciling Dialogue Project has had any lasting impact in the life of PSNE?

Plowshares: I think the Reconciling Dialogue Project, which was grounded in a confidence in God's grace and Christ's reconciliation power has had an important positive impact on PSNE. It was one of the forces that turned the focus of the Presbytery from confrontation about differences in interpretation of Scripture or congregational life to our common ground as believers and the confidence that we are not only called as Christians to be agents of reconciliation, but by God's grace healed or restored relationships between individuals or communities can often become a reality. However restoring relationships through reconciling dialogue will often require more faith, energy and patience than we are willing invest.

Pres Prom: What do you feel are the crisis points of danger and opportunity for PSNE and the PC USA?

Plowshares: The fundamental crisis is around the need to return to what I believe are the Biblical priorities of reconciliation and peace. We have often in the church invested time and energy on conflicts which are not the primary issues of faith and life.

Frequently the church is distracted from its reconciling mission by concerns about such things as size, budget, or disputes over the interpretation of Scripture or the church's role in society. These are of course important issues to the individuals and communities involved. However, they always must be secondary to the primary calling, which is to love God and neighbor with all our heart, soul and mind.

Pres Prom: What is Plowshares working on next?

Plowshares: Alice and I are currently heavily invested in two international projects. The first is equipping government officials, leaders of nonprofit organizations and religious leaders in mainland China in the skills of conflict transformation and peace building. The project is called "Risk Management for a Harmonious Society" which employs the language that is common ground for many Chinese citizens as they seek a stable, just, and sustainable society. The second project is to address the dual crises of the youth unemployment and global warming. Plowshares is working in partnership with the Tallberg Foundation based in Sweden, which focuses on climate change, and the Youth Employment Summit (YES) with networks of youth leaders in 55 nations, primarily in the developing world. Plowshares role is to train youth lead-

ers and their national mentors in the skills of conflict transformation and peace building that will contribute to the vision of creating 2 million green jobs for unemployed or underemployed young people and furthering the efforts for a green and sustainable global culture.

Bob and Alice invite Presbyterian Promise friends to join them in "Becoming Agents of Reconciliation in Congregations and Communities," their summer course in Ghost



Bob and Alice Evans

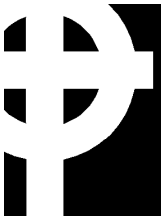
Ranch's beautiful desert setting in Abiquiu, NM, August 2-7, 2010. Here is the course description: Anxiety about the future, short tempers and conflicts in churches and communities are some of the byproducts of the current economic recession. Congregations can also be devastated by conflicts about ethnicity, worship, gender, age and sexual orientation. This course will equip clergy and lay leaders with constructive approaches to intervene in conflicts which can lead to constructive change. The week will focus on skills of deep listening, empathetic identification with others, and joint decision-making. This is a highly interactive workshop using case studies from congregations and communities to hone analytical skills and active role plays to practice constructive ways to respond to conflicts. An additional goal of the course is to assist each participant

with developing ways to share course concepts and skills with their home congregations or denominational colleagues.

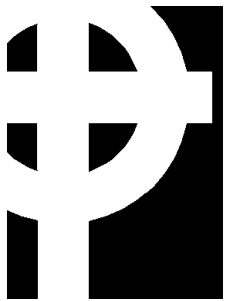
The seminar fee is \$250 per participant, plus roughly \$300-400 a week for room and board. For an application or more information and Ghost Ranch and rates for room and board, please go to: <http://www.ghost ranch.org/>. What a special vacation this would make.

Calendar

January 31 3 PM	Presbyterian Promise Annual Meeting Crossroads Presbyterian Church Waterford CT
February 6 9:30 AM	PSNE Meeting Westminster Presbyterian Church West Hartford CT



Presbyterian Promise News
 704 Whitney Avenue
 New Haven CT 06511



Presbyterian
 Promise
 News
 is published by
 PRESBYTERIAN
 PROMISE
 Inc
 704 Whitney Ave
 New Haven CT
 06511

Proclaiming God's promise of justice and love in Jesus Christ
 By organizing inclusive and inquiring churches in the
 Presbytery of Southern New England
 Into a community of mutual support for the empowerment of
 Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender persons,
 And for outreach, education and Christian evangelism.

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Crossroads Presbyterian Church	Waterford CT	(860) 442-3693
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First Presbyterian Church	New Haven CT	(203) 562-5664
First Presbyterian Church	Stamford CT	(203) 324-9522
Providence Presbyterian Church	Providence RI	(401) 861-1136
Westminster Presbyterian Church	West Hartford CT	(860) 521-6240
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...working to extend the hospitality of Christ to all God's children....

<http://PresbyPromise.home.att.net>

Affiliations
 That All May Freely Serve
 More Light Presbyterians

Our ministry is one of reconciliation – introducing GLBT people and families to welcoming congregations even as we educate churches about what it means to be truly welcoming.