



# PRESBYTERIAN PROMISE NEWS

Issue Number 40 May 2016

## Our Churches Need True Colors Education

Kimberley Fais

*A note from First Presbyterian Church of New Haven's Director of Christian Education for Children and Youth.*

*Is the Bible a Voice of Hope or a Word of Death for LGBTQ+ Folk?* This was the title of the first workshop I attended at the True Colors Conference held at UCONN in March. This annual conference is one of the largest gatherings of LGBTQ+ youth, teachers, and social workers in the country. *Is the Bible a Voice of Hope?* was one of several workshop listings from the Spirituality Institute, a category I hadn't even expected to find there.

The facilitator, a lesbian pastor, asked, "Have any of you been abused with Scripture?" Several people raised their hands and told their stories. "Okay," she said, pursing her lip and gathering some holy resolve. "You're the reason I'm here. There's always an inner circle and an outer circle to these events, right? This workshop is open to everyone, but you – you are why I'm here."

Together we studied some of the history and linguistics of the clobber texts from the Hebrew Bible and the Pauline

letters. The growing relief in the room was palpable, but by the end, there were still some questions that the pastor could not answer. Her presentation focused entirely on the lens of gay and lesbian people, and it became clear that she was only

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prepared to discuss the implications of same-sex relationships and none of the various other issues the LGBTQ+ community encounters in religious contexts. Those attending the workshop engaged specific questions from a

transgender person and a parent of a transgender child, and the conversation broadened accordingly.

This collaborative session highlighted for me not only how vital it is to empower people who have endured spiritual abuse and marginalization, but also how easy it is even for well-meaning and highly trained leaders, allies, and LGBTQ+ people to erase and neglect certain people and the particularity of their experiences. It was a reminder to me that no matter how welcoming and inclusive my church and I may consider ourselves, surely there is always something more to learn, someone whose reality we do not yet understand well enough to affirm them as fully as we intend.



Kimberley Fais  
Hasbany

Earlier, at that morning's opening program, activist and former NFL player Wade Davis addressed the crowd of hundreds of youth, family members, and professionals. He said: "Do the work that doesn't just look like you in the mirror. Don't think just because you're LGBTQ that you don't have your own stuff to work through." He urged everyone to learn more about other gender identities and orientations, but also about the intersectionality of issues like race, class, and disability, and the nuances these layers contribute to individual and communal experience. With a selection of related courses, the conference offered opportunities for participants to find spaces which better honored our whole selves, and also opportunities to step outside our contexts.

My final workshop of that first day was about *Solidarity*, primarily from the perspective of Black transgender people. After inviting our definitions, the two facilitators explained their own take. "Solidarity means, 'What are you willing to give up?' Allies ask what they can do, and I say allies could do a lot *less*. That is, use the time and space and platforms you have, and give them to queer voices."

And so in that spirit, I ask:

- What are we willing to ask of our communities?
- Whose voices are still missing in leadership, liturgy, and decision-making around the church? If for any reason these bodies are not yet present or in positions of power, how might we lift up their voices nonetheless?
- Are we willing to center listening and learning in our activism, rejecting the notion that these tasks are inherently passive?
- Are we willing to give up our sense of satisfaction as progressive Christians, as pastors, as educators, as activists, and humbly admit that even the most knowledgeable and dedicated of us still have more to learn?
- Are we willing to give up whichever concepts of queerness or alliance make it too easy not to challenge ourselves?
- Are we willing to give up our time, energy, and space – physical spaces, verbal spaces, sacred spaces – for purposes of hospitality, education, and safety?



June O'Neil presenting a Rainbow stole  
True Colors Conference

Contact me via Presbyterian Promise about the True Colors Conference. I will be happy to correspond or meet with those who would like to know more. I encourage youth, families, healthcare professionals, educators, ministers, and parishioners to attend future conferences. I urge our churches to invite guest speakers, panelists, and workshop leaders to train our congregations – ideally the *entire* congregations of our affirming churches, and not just the folks who might make special effort to attend such training.

And in tandem with that learning, I suggest we take inventory of our programs and our spaces through the lens of LGBTQIAPD+ people\* – not as a monolith, but envisioning each and every identity we aim to know and affirm. Let us consider the earliest tangible gestures of welcome we extend. We might designate restrooms as gender neutral and take care to mark them in such a way as to include non-binary gender identities, i.e., not just men or women. We might use gender-diverse language for both humans and God in our liturgy and printed materials and perhaps display some of the lesser-known pride flags alongside the ubiquitous rainbow flag.

But let us back up these gestures with the diligence of learning precisely why such visible affirmation is necessary and appreciated, why some of our most progressive churches are not yet fulfilling their potential to be wellsprings of life and liberation to

the queer community, and why a full classroom of youth and young adults in 2016 attended a workshop called, *Is the Bible a Voice of Hope or a Word of Death for LGBTQ+ Folk?*

\*Lesbian, gay, bisexual, bigender, transgender, two-spirit, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, aromantic, agender, pansexual, polysexual, demisexual, and any not listed here. I chose this term for this piece to highlight these various identities, but as the acronym grows, some people prefer other options such as SGM for Sexual & Gender Minorities.

## Becoming Nicole: or Which Door Should She Open?

Gail Faithfull

*Gail is a teaching elder, psychoanalyst and former Presbyterian Promise board member.*

A ten year-old stands in the Middle School hall outside the boys' and girls' bathrooms. Dressed in a colorful skirt and sweater, long hair fashionably cut hanging over her shoulders, there is a long hesitation. From "her" point of view, she has always been a girl. The inconvenience is that she was born with male genitals. The other inconvenience is that she lives in North Carolina, which calls her a pervert and pedophile.

Can you imagine the stir, perhaps the danger, of "her" walking into the boy's bathroom.?

Walking into the girls' bathroom is illegal in her state but infinitely safer. North Carolina and the Federal government have filed suits against each other; North Carolina's suit alleges that it will protect little girls from "predatory transgender people." This in a month when Dennis Hastert confessed to being a predatory pedophile.

For those who have given little thought to the transgender experience, except perhaps the constant TV coverage of the transformation of Caitlyn Jenner, *Becoming Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family* by Amy Ellis Nutt, is a MUST. Beautifully written (Nutt won a Pulitzer Prize in 2011), *Becoming Nicole* describes a normal hard-working family

who adopt identical twin boys at birth. Perfect. Except that one of the boys, Wyatt, from age 2 on, prefers to dress as a girl, and play with her Barbie doll, and dance in a pink tutu.

The book helpfully tells the story of the whole family as they try to understand and adjust to this turn of events. It is the mother who takes the lead role in working with social workers, the school's officials, and teachers, attempting to ease him/hers way, to prevent bullying when possible, and to address the bathroom and locker room conundrums.

Nutt provides two chapters on what scientists now understand about the difference between gender and gender identity, and how these two are formed in the womb. For those of us who grew up thinking that there was male and female, period, this book challenges us to understand a full

bouquet of sexualities. There is a spectrum between male and female with many stops along the way, perhaps including gay and straight. There is a spectrum between people who are asexual and those highly sexual. And then there are people whose physical sex organs do not correspond to their deep inner identity. Who knew? For those of you wedded to a black/white view of sexuality, which certainly makes life easier, skip this wonderful heart-wrenching book. For those who stand with the youngster trying to help him/her decide which door to open, you will find this book an adventure into a world much more nuanced than you had expected, and introduce you to a family who continually supported each other, and took the State of Maine to trial to provide their daughter with what North Carolina is fighting to deny.

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## General Assembly Matters

*Dick Hasbany*

The 222nd General Assembly in Portland in June will consider several items of interest to people who care about LGBTQ persons. The Social Justice Committee has been assigned **On Supporting the Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Regarding Protecting Individuals from Violence and Discrimination: [Item 11-04](#),**



*Dick Hasbany*

an overture from the Synod of the Covenant. Item 11-04 would express the Assembly's commitment to end violence, discrimination, criminalization and punishment based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

**[Item 11-23, On Therapies Purporting to Change Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity](#),** also comes from the Synod of the Covenant. It condemns reparative

therapy, empowers church agencies to oppose its use, and encourages congregations to avail themselves of accurate information in order to support families with LGBTQ members.

**[Item 14-01](#),** in the Theological Issues and Institutions Committee would reverse the recent actions of the PC(USA) by amending the Book of Order to allow only opposite gender couples to marry. Advocacy groups, including More Light Presbyterians, The Covenant Network of Presbyterians, and That All May Freely Serve will be supporting items 11-04 and 11-23, but will oppose item 14-01.

Perhaps the most controversial of overtures relating to LGBTQ persons will be **[Item 11-05, On the Admission of, and Apology for, Harms Done to the LGBTQ/Q Members of the PC\(USA\), Family and Friends](#)**. This overture was originally passed by the Presbytery of New York City and garnered concurrences from the Presbyteries of Chicago, Genesee Valley, and Hudson River. It calls on the Assembly to apologize for the harm done to LGBTQ persons by the church as it enforced exclusionary policies. To read the full text of the overture and its rationale, go to: <https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/6335>. The core of the "apology" overture follows, along with three reflections on the overture's approach to justice, healing, and reconciliation in the church.

*The Presbytery of New York City overtures the 222nd General Assembly (2016) to do the following...*

2. Affirm, confess, and apologize as follows:
  - a. Admit that the PC(USA) has been wrong in the way it has treated the LGBTQ/Q community.
  - b. Apologize for the teachings and actions that have created marginalization of our sisters and brothers, adding to the erroneous belief that people who identify as LGBTQ/Q should be considered unworthy to serve fully or be honored as family within and without the church.
  - c. Acknowledge that during this struggle we have often treated one another in ways that did not reflect the presence of the Risen Christ in our midst, including those in opposition to one another, as well as those within their own communities.
  - d. State publicly that the PC(USA), as a denomination, makes this pronouncement as an act of forgiveness, healing, mercy, and reconciliation.....



# The Truths Of It

*Lisa Larges*

I had the great privilege, for ten years, to work with That All May Freely Serve in advocating for the full inclusion of LGBT Presbyterians. One of the many highlights of that work was getting the chance to be a part of some of the important work that Presbyterian Promise did in promoting reconciliation and addressing conflict. For certain, participating in that movement for full inclusion changed me. One of the ways in which I grew and was stretched by that work was in coming to know what forgiveness is, both in the giving and the receiving. The work that Presbyterian Promise did in cultivating reconciliation was part of that growing and stretching into forgiveness. All of this is in my mind now as our church takes up the question of making amends, through an apology, for the harms done to the LGBT community as a result of our actions.

Here is how things stand in my own heart. Sometimes, a passing thought or something I read will trigger a memory of those church trials or General Assembly votes from the years of struggle. Rage will flash up in me like a lightning strike. At those moments, I am both surprised and a little embarrassed about the sheer intensity of that anger. Surprised – because I have such happiness in my life right now, and because the gifts I received from that time in my life are so extraordinary and so overwhelming. Those patches of white hot anger seem incongruous. Embarrassed – embarrassed, because unhelpfully, I tell myself I ought to be a better person, should be over this by now, and other needless, unproductive self-talk.

Probably the nub of it is the church trials, about a dozen of them altogether, which stretched across decades, and which had the effect of denying and delaying my longing to serve the church. That was hard for me, harder than I mostly care to admit. It still hurts. That's the simple truth of it.

For my own sake and sanity, I know that forgiveness is the only thing for me. The best I can come up with is a willingness to forgive. I will attend to the healing of my own wounds – do my own work. I will take hold of the assurance that grace is sufficient for me, and that, in time, I will have that inner serenity which comes with the liberation of

forgiving.

Let me be clear, too, that I'm talking about the church here – the corporate decisions made as a matter of governance, and the actions taken to enforce those decisions. It's the church – and the harm done by the church in my own life and in the lives of LGBTQ persons within and beyond the church – it's the church that I need to forgive. For forty years, our denomination actively, purposefully, and categorically denied ecclesial standing and the rights of membership to a class of persons. We wrote the denial into our constitution!



*Lisa Larges*

Often, in that forty year's struggle, we hid the truth of that exclusion by perpetuating the myth of a false equivalency – blame all around – simply a matter of working out the differences between opposing viewpoints. But it wasn't that way. For forty years, LGBTQ persons, by action of the church, were singled out. They did not have voice and vote in our legislative process, were barred from ordination and were denied the right to have their marriages recognized. We actively discriminated against a group of persons, and in so doing, lent the authority of the church to the position that LGBTQ persons were sinful by virtue of their identity. The harm done because of those official church positions is far reaching and consequential. There's just no getting around that.

Do we, as a denomination, need to apologize? Of course we do. In our history, we've misused our power and ecclesial authority to denigrate and marginalize others as well. LGBTQ persons are but one example. It has been our pattern to fight, divide, and belatedly act on the side of greater openness. We change. We move on. But sooner or later, we're going to have to come to terms with the wreckage of our past. The first step is talking about it.

Repentance, and forgiveness, are, in the end, the work of the Spirit. It's our job, though, to humbly say, we are ready.

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# Time, Timely, Timing

*Ralph Jones*

Perhaps the distinctions between time, timely and timing can help us grapple with the *Admission of, and Apology for, Harms done to the LGBTQ/Q Members of the PC(USA)*,

*Family and Friends* overture coming before General Assembly this June. I will largely leave discussion of time to the philosophers and cosmologists. There was a time when I deceived myself into thinking I was on to Heidegger, but now I am both wiser and dumber. I never thought myself able to understanding Einstein's relative time. Thinking more practically, we experience time as the inexorable present that

turns our future possibilities into our experienced past. This process generates at least some and perhaps most of the urgency around this overture.

If you and I, dear reader, were standing in line and I unexpectedly stepped back on your toe, my apology would



Ralph Jones

Hasbany

be immediate. Assuming the harm was no greater than a temporary pain, my apology would be sincere though not profound, and your acceptance would be immediate also. These things happen. We learn that we both receive and give offenses. Forgiveness is the better course.

An immediate apology is always the most timely. But immediate apology is not always possible.

Perhaps you've been hurt or offended by something I've written. I generally hesitate to look back over my writing lest I find something hurtful or ignorant or stupid. Maybe I would readily agree with you that I was wrong and insensitive. But we are not present with one another. I do not know that or how I've hurt you nor do you know that I now agree with you. We have not met on the ground where apology is possible.

There's another complication. We would need to negotiate the issue to discover if apology was due, and who should apologize to whom. The truth can hurt. That doesn't make it less true. We all carry around our personal sets of delusions and mis-information. So first we would need to seek a reconciliation, a common understanding, in order to figure

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## Where Does It End?

*Ralph Jones*

Years ago, while the Vietnam war was raging and I was in seminary, as my father and I were walking to the car after church, he asked me what I thought about confessional prayer. Not expecting the question and with no clue where he was going with it, I must have stammered something about its being an essential part of the liturgy. He explained himself. "I think I'm basically a good person who is willing to admit my mistakes, but I have a hard time confessing sins I don't think I've committed." I haven't thought about confessional prayer in the same way since. It is hard to write a meaningful corporate prayer of confession, apart, perhaps, from the generic Episcopalian, "We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; And there is no health in us." Succinct and memorable, but words lose

out what was appropriate. Immediate apology always may be timely, but the timing may not always be appropriate. There is a process of becoming present one to another, a process of reconciliation (not necessarily of coming to agreement, but of reaching mutual understanding), that is necessary to transform apology from glib to profound.

I remember a seminar led by Michael Adey in a tiny, hard to find hotel room at some GA. Virginia Lewis, the moderator of the Hesus webpage, then a leading voice in the inclusion effort, told about her journey over months and years toward coming to enjoy and welcome gay extravagance. That is a journey that takes most people some time. Presbyterians are all sorts of different places along this journey. For many people, the timing of the apology proposal is way too late. For others, it's time is now. But for many, it seems too early. Too few of us have had the opportunity to recognize the gifts and calling of LGBTQ people. For too many, this is still "an issue" lacking a personal face. We have not yet come to an understanding of how we have hurt our neighbors. Apology is not yet germane.

So should we wait for the educational process to expand its reach? Certainly education, "personing the issue," needs to continue. That is an express hope of the overture and of those who prepared it. But time, that inexorable present, is converting the hopes and potentials of too many into experienced frustration, hurt and loss. At a TAMFS gathering in Rochester NY some years ago now, my friend, John Rhodes said that "after waiting thirty years to get on with my life, I can't wait much longer." For many, apology is way past due. For others, the timing is wrong; apology is not yet timely. But time does not wait. It is time for the church to understand and find a way to act.

their power when repeated too often. Without developing self-awareness, confession cannot move from the routine to the real.

Reaction to the apology overture before the upcoming PC USA General Assembly has been all over the place. A good many of those who will not apologize for condemning what they consider sin are already leaving the denomination. Others see an apology as a compromise of their promise to respect the freedom of the other Presbyterians consciences' to hold the view for which the apology would be offered. Yet others, recognizing that the church does owe its LGBTQ people an apology are asking why would we stop there? Don't women deserve an apology, and people of color – all those "minorities" that are actually majorities except in respect and authority? And what about those able church leaders we disqualified from service because of divorce?

Shouldn't we also apologize to those who mastered the

contortions necessary to answer affirmatively the ordination vows back when the Westminster Confession was our core authority? What about those of us who, more recently, "sincerely receive[d] and adopt[ed] the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions..." even though those confessions, for example, prohibit women from speaking in church? The Confession of 1967 was a blessing in that it acknowledged that our understanding of faith is expressed differently in different times, but it didn't get patriarchy or gender right. What about those who believed that, "as soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs?" – a promise that set Martin Luther on his reforming ways? What about those the reformers ordered killed? What about the victims of the Inquisition? Where does it end?

The list could go on and on, but two categories seem particularly urgent. This denomination owes an apology to those it taught the beliefs it found erroneous when it

permitted gay ordination and gay marriage. Too often we said belief does not matter, which translates into we do not love you enough to face the pain of getting to know you. And we own an apology to the many whose Christian education we have allowed to end with confirmation. (1 Cor 3:1-2) In this era of expanding multiverses and epigenetics, we owe each other an honest representation of the essential claims and promises of our faith. Actually I, for one, am less interested in that apology than I would be in finding honest theological exploration in the church.

The apology overture should not be diluted by being generalized. Very real harm has been done to very real people in the queer communities. That needs to be addressed. My point is that in our ecclesiastical arrogance, those harms are the fruit of a long tradition of harming the faithful. We need to combine apology with confession of our role in what we have done.

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## One Step Forward (one step back?)

*Dick Hasbany*

The United Methodist Church voted 428 to 405 at its General Conference in Portland, Oregon to allow bishops to appoint a commission to re-evaluate rules on gay, lesbian and transgender clergy and marriage. The *New York Times* reported that the move was "celebrated" by LGBTQ Methodists "as a way to buy time and avoid church discipline against more than 100 clergy and clergy candidates who came out as gay in advance of the conference," but social media reports from LGBT persons on the floor showed very little that looked like celebration. The *Times* reported that UMC liberals had hoped that societal momentum had been pushing the church toward accepting measures

creating greater equality for LGBT persons in the denomination. It became clear during the Conference that those measures would be rejected, and liberals accepted a proposal to ask the Council of Bishops to find a way forward. The bishops will now appoint a commission to undertake a "complete examination and possible revision of every paragraph in our Book of Discipline regarding human sexuality." Presbyterians cannot be surprised at the anguish that accompanies years of study for the sake of church unity.

On a brighter note, the Church of Scotland's General Assembly voted on Saturday, May 21 to allow individual congregations to "opt out" of the church's traditional view of marriage as between a man and a woman. The churches who opt out will be allowed to appoint ministers or deacons in same-gender marriages or civil partnerships. The Theological Forum will present a report considering the theological implications of same-sex marriage next year.

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## Creating Out and About at Providence

*Wil Snodgrass*

*Wil moved to Providence fairly recently after working to develop the welcoming church movement in Chicago. He is a new member of the Presbyterian Promise board.*

Have been racking our minds this last year trying to figure out how to create something that we have no idea what it is supposed to look like. How to create a group that comes with no expectations or boundaries. Weird way to start an article?

Well, sharing something that is still undefined at this moment is even weirder, especially since Providence Presbyterian Church (PPC) is trying to hear the voices of a people who long to heal, a people who long to forgive, and a people who long to be forgiven. PPC is an inclusive community of faith who believe that all our voices need to be raised to help share the message that God has flooded our world with an abundance of grace, and that we as Christians must help disburse this Grace equally.

PPC has organized a new group that we unofficially call "Out & About." As a subset group at PPC, we only have one rule, "all are welcome." So far this year we have held two potlucks

and have hosted a LGBTQ Movie Night. On June 3rd at 7:15 pm, we will hold a potluck, which will be followed by an ice cream contest to determine which creamery in Rhode Island has the best homemade vanilla ice cream. We are also going to try and coax more members from PPC to help us staff the Presbyterian Promise Booth at the Rhode Island Pride Festival. It will be a great chance for members of all sexualities to come out as Christians and show a community, which has been historically hurt by the Church, that we are living the words of Christ, who commanded us to love our neighbors.

Knowing who we are at this moment is not our objective.

What we are trying to accomplish is to open ourselves to the possibilities of how we can serve our community. We at Providence Presbyterian Church, are often clobbered over the head with the fact that God has provided the world with enough grace for everyone. Out & About's only goal may end up just being another tool to help PPC open another passage way to a community that believes all things are possible when God is in the driver's seat.

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*"What we are is God's gift to us. What we become is our gift to God." Eleanor Powell*

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## John Stanger Leaves Parity



*John Stanger*

*Dick Hasbany*

Rev. John Russell Stanger will step down on June 23 as executive director of Parity (formerly Presbyterian Welcome). John will be moving to Kentucky to begin a graduate program in Marriage and Family Therapy at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. In the May 12 announcement, Timothy Palmer Curl, President of Parity's Board of

Directors wrote "Since joining us as Organizer of Mission and Advocacy in 2012, John has created a ministry that has touched more than 1,000 LGBTQ and allied youth throughout New York City. In the wake of polity change in the Presbyterian Church (USA), he has shepherded a community of LGBTQ pastors into their ministries, and planted the seeds that will enable us to extend our emerging pastors program

to other Christian traditions."

John noted in an email that "It was the unique tone of pastoral advocacy that drew me to Parity. Through my work here my sense of call—to help others accept themselves and live abundantly—has only deepened. This return to seminary (and the South!) will allow me to further develop my skills for sitting with people as they explore the tender places in their lives."

Presbyterian Promise has been lucky to be able to work with John, especially as we've supported the emerging leaders retreat over the years. We also enjoyed his sensitive retreat leadership at the Sanctuary in 2014. We will miss working with him, but we are thrilled to know that as things have developed in the PC(USA) young LGBT leadership can move to respond to God's deepest call, wherever that may lead.

The Parity board has already begun to search for the next executive director, who will nurture [Parity's](#) four principal programs: the emerging pastors program, ministry to LGBTQ youth, Not So Churchy, and the Parity Awards, which recognizes national leaders in the healing and inclusive Church movement. We wish them well in their search and look forward to working with Parity in the future.

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## Calendar

**June 5**, Sunday Pride in the Park (Fairfield County Pride), Mathews Park, Norwalk, 12pm - 8pm. Presbyterian Promise will have a table to witness to welcoming Presbyterian Churches in the area. We need volunteers. If you have questions or want to volunteer, call Dick Hasbany at [\(203\) 208-0578](tel:2032080578) or [dick\\_hasbany@yahoo.com](mailto:dick_hasbany@yahoo.com).

**June 18**, Saturday. Rhode Island's 40th Pride. Complete information may be found at [www.prideri.com](http://www.prideri.com). The festival including booths, food and entertainment is runs from noon to 8 pm, South Water Street, Providence; the illuminated

Night Parade begins after sunset. Visit our booth (Providence Presbyterian Church & Presbyterian Promise) or for more information or to volunteer contact Dan Blackford: [dblackford01@gmail.com](mailto:dblackford01@gmail.com) or [401-648-1707](tel:4016481707).

**June 18 - 25**, 222nd General Assembly (2016) will be held in Portland, Oregon.

**July 16**, Saturday, 10:00 - 12:00, Presbyterian Promise Board meeting at Pat Wales' home in Hamden. A pot luck picnic will follow the meeting. All are welcome to join us for the picnic. Save the date and watch for further announcements and directions.





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working to extend the hospitality of Jesus  
to all God's people...

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