



PEACE RIVER  
PRESBYTERY



Dear Colleagues and Friends,

**A TIME TO REFLECT**  
**Life in the PCUSA – First thoughts after the Fellowship Gathering**

Question: how are you with adventure? What is your excitement quota?

- If by adventure you mean going on a trip to a foreign land and learning of and immersing oneself in the culture of that land, many of us look forward to those kind of adventures. Personally, I get excited. In fact, as a young adult volunteer in mission I taught English in East Java, Indonesia. That is an adventure I will never forget and it was personally transformative.
- If by adventure you mean going on a roller coaster ride, personally I did it for the sake of my kids. I can't say the up-and down twisting and turning is something I liked to do because often I got off with a sick feeling in my stomach, but I did it for my kids, and might even do it for Grace and Genevieve, my grandchildren.

So how are you feeling about this adventure of being the church in and for the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Sometimes, at least for me, this time in our life as a denomination feels like being on an adventure.

- On one hand, we know the final destination is good, after all we are a resurrection people. We are not always sure what is next, what is around the corner, what new adventure will surprise us, or what new thing we will learn, but the trip is good because we know the final goal.
- And on the other hand, sometime we feel this time in our life together as the PCUSA is more like a roller coaster with all the feelings that go with that ride.

As I mentioned in the [September issue of \*The Interpreter\*](#), we live in a denomination whose polity is shaped by a central theme of the reformation: “ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda,” or “the church reformed and always reforming” according to the Word of God. That means the possibility of change is part of our DNA. Whether we find ourselves sitting in a pew or standing in a pulpit or member of the Presbytery, we have committed ourselves to be a pilgrim people, or like the children of Israel, a people on a journey, or as in the New Testament, followers of Jesus. We are committed to be a people on the way, or followers of the Way, meaning we are on a lifetime adventure with Jesus.

The problem is that in this post-modern context in which we live,

- we (the PCUSA) are no longer part of the establishment culture as we were in the 1950's and 1960's when all we had to do is build a church and people came,
- some would say we are closer to the culture of the 1<sup>st</sup> century that surrounded the early church than we are the culture many of us remember from growing up.

So for some it feels like the church has lost her way and for others it feels like we are not being

faithful followers of Jesus in reaching out to all God's children.

So how do we move forward at such a time as this?

There is deep pain on all sides of all the issues. If we frame this time in the life of the church in terms of winners and losers, who got the vote and who didn't, or who will control any future vote in this Presbytery or at the General Assembly, then I think we all lose. And I believe that the "world God so loves" loses because we will continue to be consumed and torn and distracted by our internal debates.

What I appreciated about some of what I heard at the ["Fellowship" Gathering](#) in Minneapolis, which was a gathering of those who are troubled by the change of the Book of Order regarding ordination standards, was their announced desire to find a way past the debates that have divided us for so long.

So how do we do that? While the NEXT church gathering in Indianapolis earlier in the spring was a call to a missional engagement with the world, the Fellowship gathering in Minneapolis, proposed four different tiers ([click here for the Presbyterian Outlook summary](#)) as possible responses that folks might follow, depending on one's own conscience, as well as one's particular context.

The tiers ranged from tier one - a deeper missional engagement in one's local congregation and Presbytery context, to a tier four response of seeking dismissal to a new reformed body yet to be created.

The middle tiers involved several options. One tier suggested having conversations within a particular Presbytery and exploring how, like in the Catholic Church, there are orders that create some level of deeper or additional commitments (i.e., beliefs, spiritual practices, and a guiding rule) for those within that order. Just as Franciscans or Jesuits are Catholic, they are something else as well. It is that something else that has led to a deeper, fuller and varied expression of faith within the Roman Catholic Church over the centuries. So those who have certain understandings about ordination standards could be part of an order within the Presbytery or even PCUSA, and their perspective and position would be honored and respected and safe-guarded. [Richard Mouw](#), President of Fuller Seminary, in an evening [keynote address](#) suggested this as a way forward.

Another suggestion was the idea of Presbyteries having two Examination, Ordination and Installation Commissions, as opposed to one committee. One Commission would be guided by essential tenets that would include the former language in the Book of Order in G – 6.0106b and another Commission would be guided by the newer language in 10-A. Other tiers or directions included exploring the idea of a presbytery within a Presbytery or non-geographic Presbytery, which as I understand it, would need the approval of the next General Assembly and a subsequent change in the Book of Order.

Many have asked me, what do I think?

Personally, I affirm the spirit of ["No Stinky Talk"](#), which was the title of the opening sermon at the Gathering by [Dave Peterson](#). That sermon set a positive tone to the gathering, and I pray will continue to shape how those on all sides of all the issues talk and think.

In my ordination vows and in my call here to Peace River as General Presbyter I have made a

commitment to this Presbytery and our 39 churches to:

*seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ...*

*be governed by our church's polity and abide by its discipline...*

*be a friend to my colleagues in ministry...*

*further the peace, unity, and purity of the church...*

*and to serve the Presbytery with energy, intelligence, imagination and love...*

among other equally important vows.

Additionally,

- as some wrestle with the question of when in the history of the church has the church been pure, and how pure does it have to be for me or us in good conscience to participate in and with it,
- or when we think about the many splits over doctrine, belief or behavior over the past generations,

I believe we need to be continually guided by Jesus' prayer for the church which was that we may be one as the Father and he are one (John 17), as well as the Apostle Paul's frequent pleas to the New Testament churches urging them to find their unity in Christ (see Romans 1:10, Eph. 4:1ff).

Those verses have always been a strong guiding value for me, even though in our Reformation Project over the past 500 years we have not always done very well. That does not mean we give up or say Jesus' prayer is to be disregarded or because past generations have not done well at this unity thing we have an excuse not to do well either. I don't know how we live it out, but Jesus did say as far as our witness to the world: *By this they will know you are my disciples by your love for one another* (John 13:35).

An unfortunate development in our Presbyterian history is that one of the core functional reasons and biblical values around which we organized ourselves from the time of Calvin, which was translated into the first gatherings of Presbyterians in the colonies, was misplaced over the years. Calvin's theology and our Presbyterian polity call us to be a sacred community together. Our polity says that what guides our life together in addition to confessional standards is the way we connect, relate, encourage and are accountable to and with one another as clergy and congregations. This Presbyterian way, rather than being a congregational form of government, as we read of it in the early history of the first Presbytery in the 1700's, encouraged:

- pastors to be more faithful
- churches more effective,
- and mission more strategic.

The way that understanding was framed was in a commitment to be in 'a covenantal relationship' with one another. This covenant was understood primarily in a relational way. However, because of our reformed understanding of human depravity, and Calvin's view that even clergy mess up, and knowing that power or position can be abused, in the various Books of Order that have governed our life together for the past 250 years, the language that is used about our 'covenantal relationships' could be understood in regulatory, contractual or hierarchical ways.

Yet, at the heart of our life together is the understanding that we walk this journey not alone, but in relationships with one another, as elders, clergy, and congregations. In other words, the

obligation is on us as clergy and congregations within the context of a Presbytery, to be deeply connected, caring and supportive of one another. For Calvin, that found expression in what was called the Company of Pastors, and for our Presbytery's forebears, it is evidenced in the minutes of their meetings and what they did when they came together.

Like a lot of things, sometimes we forget or lose our original vision. So personally, I am intrigued by the idea of an order that may help us reclaim some of our rich heritage and deepen our support, connections, encouragement, and affirmation of each other. Also, an order could provide a safe place for folks who hold to our common essentials of the reformed faith, as well as commit themselves to some particular spiritual practices, core values and beliefs. Rather than going thinner, this approach may allow us to go deeper with one another as we follow Jesus, even as it honors our ordination vows. What is intriguing is there could be several orders that allow us to do deeper in different ways while holding to a common faith and common Lord, as the Apostle Paul expressed it in Ephesians 4.

**However, having said all of this, and please hear me when I say this: we are Presbyterian, and by our call, values and polity we are committed to figuring this out together.**

So I know that:

- those who went to the Fellowship Gathering will have their own observations and opinions,
- those who went to the NEXT Church gathering have their hopes,
- some deeply committed members of Peace River might be wondering, aren't we all one family? So how do we live that way?
- the General Assembly's three task forces that are currently meeting will bring their recommendations to the whole church ([see Speaking from the Hart - September Interpreter for more information on that](#)),
- teaching elders and ruling elders in Peace River Presbytery will need to be in conversation together, listening deeply to one another, and learning from each other as we seek to follow Jesus in the Way.

I am committed to help us have the kind of conversations in which we can honor one another, help all of us maintain our own integrity and freedom of conscience within the boundaries of our ordination vows, find ways to be faithful to our ordination vows, and, as a Presbytery, to go deeper in our mission/vision statement and our ability to:

*affirm congregations  
connect disciples in mission  
and be the body of Christ together.*

So do I think we in Peace River Presbytery are on a roller-coaster ride? No, however to some it may on occasion feel that way. Rather, I believe we are on an adventure with our Risen Lord and Savior, who calls us to new lands, invites us to go deeper, encourages us to be more faithful, even as we learn together and support one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Thanks be to God who continues to be the wind in our sails and helps us steer into the future!

Peace,

## *Graham*

Graham Hart  
General Presbyter  
[graham@peacriverpresbytery.org](mailto:graham@peacriverpresbytery.org)



At our recent Presbytery meeting in Fort Myers Beach, we were privileged to hear from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers who were cycling to Lakeland hoping to meet with Publix CEO Crenshaw. However, that meeting did not occur. For more of their journey, follow the link below, and continue to encourage conversations and prayer with your local Publix as to your concern about this justice issue.

[Coalition of Immokalee Workers \(CIW\)](#)



Click logo to go to The Presbytery web site:

Click on logo below for the PCUSA Mission Yearbook of Prayer and Daily Office scripture reading:



*Please add these concerns to your personal prayer list.*

**Please pray for:**

We pray for God's comfort and strength for all the people who lost loved ones in the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. This Sunday is the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that tragedy.

**Please continue to pray for:**

Joan and Steve Mock on the loss of Joan's mother on August 27

Rev. Dr. David Uhl, HR, as he deals with health problems  
Rev. Dr. Jim Berger, Pastor at Hope United, as he recovers from surgery  
Rev. Dr. Bob Rea  
Pastors and Educators in transition  
Those affected by natural disasters in the United States  
Nations in crisis

**Please also keep in your prayers:**

Beth-El Farmworker Ministry  
Misión Peniel  
Cedarkirk Camp and Conference Center

**CONGREGATION OF THE WEEK:**

September 4	Community Presbyterian Church, Englewood Scott Wilson, Pastor <a href="mailto:swwilson3@hotmail.com">swwilson3@hotmail.com</a>
September 11	Buckingham Presbyterian Church, Fort Myers Randy Moody, Pastor <a href="mailto:bpcpastor@comcast.net">bpcpastor@comcast.net</a>
September 18	Covenant Presbyterian Church, Fort Myers Taylor Hill, Interim Pastor <a href="mailto:tayhil@gmail.com">tayhil@gmail.com</a>
September 25	Cypress Lake Presbyterian Church, Fort Myers Clint Cottrell, Pastor <a href="mailto:clint@clpc.us">clint@clpc.us</a>



## News & Announcements

From the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

September 6, 2011

Office of the General Assembly

[by Cynthia Bolbach](#)

Moderator of the 219th General Assembly (2010)

Louisville

Last month I attended the Fellowship of Presbyterians gathering in Minneapolis. I think it's fair to say that the organizers of the event are driven by concerns over the effect of the new ordination standard in the Book of Order – G-2.0104b – as well as by how the church in general

can proclaim the gospel both effectively and with integrity in the 21st century. With nearly 2,000 in attendance, obviously the issues and concerns raised by the organizers struck a chord in many.

I was thankful that the tone of the gathering was not angry; rather, it was, “Where do we go next?” There was much energy, much conversation, and much discussion – all of which, it seems to me, is good for the church.

What’s even better for the church is that these conversations about how the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) can retool itself to be an effective and persuasive agent for ministry and mission are not just happening within the Fellowship, They’re taking place across the broad spectrum of our denomination – at the “Next” Conference in Indianapolis earlier this year, for example.

Those conversations are also happening within General Assembly groups that are tasked with figuring out what it means to do ministry in our present context: the Middle Governing Body Commission, the Committee on the Nature of the Church in the 21st Century, the Task Force on Racial Ethnic and New Immigrant Church Growth, and more.

As a denomination, we face a daunting task that I like to describe this way: We have to rebuild the 1950s era black-and-white television set that tends to be the PC(USA) organization today into a new, flat-screen, HD TV – all the while ensuring that programs will continue to be shown while the rebuilding takes place.

The Fellowship organizers talk about creating a “new reformed body.” I appreciate the energy and commitment they are bringing to that task. But, in a sense, all of us across the entire PC(USA) are caught up in creating a “new reformed body” – that new flat-screen, HD PC(USA) – that most effectively brings to a 21st-century world the good news of Jesus Christ.

**The articles below may interest you. I have found some of them in my reading, and others have been passed on to me. *Just click on the underlined phrases.***

[Bloomberg, faith groups face off over 9/11 prayers](#)

Religion News Service: Critics hope enough pressure will convince Mayor Bloomberg to allow clergy to speak Sunday at ceremonies to mark the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks.

[Can our denomination overcome fear of failure?](#)

United Methodist Portal: We United Methodists know about failure, says Eric Van Meter. We just don't know what to do about it. [Most 'liked' on Facebook recently? Jesus, not Bieber](#)

Time: The most “Liked” page on Facebook for the past three months didn't have to do with popular singers, crazed soccer fans or silly time-wasting games, but was Jesus Daily, a page created by Aaron Tabor, a doctor in North Carolina, as a hobby.

[Starbucks' Howard Schultz and how to restore confidence](#)

Harvard Business Review: Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz's message about finding common grounds for action has nothing to do with coffee grounds. Shultz is on a campaign to restore confidence in America and the American economy. He wants to ignite a contagious upward spiral of

confidence.

[Tough minds and tender hearts: An open letter to young clergy](#)

Huffington Post: Neglecting King's theology increases the likelihood that our democracy will forego a dedicated minority of clergy who insist upon active citizenship as an expression of Christian discipleship, writes Andrew Wilkes.

**PRESBYTERY CALENDAR** (for more details, go to [www.peaceriverpresbytery.org](http://www.peaceriverpresbytery.org))

**SEPTEMBER, 2011**

8<sup>th</sup>

Board of Trustees

Presbyterian Women Coordinating Team at St. Paul's, North Port

Personnel

Nominations via conference call

13<sup>th</sup>

Committee on Ministry

14<sup>th</sup>

Committee on Preparation for Ministry

Interim lunch

15<sup>th</sup>

Mission and Justice

Theology and Worship

18<sup>th</sup>

PYC at First, Port Charlotte

20<sup>th</sup>

Evangelism and Church Development

Disaster Preparedness and Response Team

22<sup>nd</sup>

Council

29<sup>th</sup>

Sexual Misconduct Prevention Workshop at Pine Shores, Sarasota