The following article is written by Rev. Thomas H. Priest, Jr., a Presbyterian Teaching Elder minister in the Presbytery of Detroit. Tom serves two small United Methodist churches on the East side of Detroit and has served as past Moderator of the Presbytery of Detroit, former Chair of the Metro Urban Ministry team, and Co-Chair of Anti-Racism and Reconciliation Team. He has written this article as the sole remaining African American on the truth commission for racial equality that was established by the Michigan Roundtable for Diversity and Inclusion to identify solutions to Detroit’s racial segregation and inequalities. The commission’s charter can be found at (http://www.miroundtable.org/Roundtabledownloads/FinalMandate2011.pdf).

The Truth about Racial Reconciliation: Too Many Missed Opportunities
A Personal Perspective by Rev. Thomas H. Priest, Jr.

Seeking equality, especially racial equality, is difficult work. The harvest is plentiful (opportunities for reconciliation) but the laborers (those who would initiate reconciliation) are few. Racial inequality, racial separation, racial segregation, racial hatred is alive and well in the United States of America and in the Detroit metropolitan area.

The Detroit metropolitan area continues to be one of the most racially segregated and racially separated areas in the United States of America. The African American community suffers from being cut off from living in a right relationship with people of privilege and power.

The history of racial privilege and racial oppression is well documented, yet certain people – African Americans – continue to suffer from its effects. The question remains: If so much has been documented, so much has been experienced, so many have suffered, why are we still segregated and separated by race in the Detroit metropolitan area?

Racial reconciliation in the Detroit metropolitan area is very difficult work. The history of racial tyranny and the patterns of racial privilege and racial oppression are well documented in this area. Attempts to identify solutions to the area’s pronounced racial separation and segregation have not been successful. Structural racism and racial inequality remain alive and are doing well.
Two years ago the Michigan Roundtable for Diversity and Inclusion established the Metropolitan Detroit Truth & Reconciliation Commission on Racial Inequality to make recommendations to bring about racial equality and reconciliation. Nine commissioners were selected from the surrounding metro Detroit Area: seven from Detroit and surrounding suburbs, and two from outside the metro Detroit area (one from Lansing and one from Saginaw). Four were African Americans, three Caucasians, one Arab American and one Latina. Five men and four women comprised the gender diversity of the commission.

Two years later – minus three African American commissioners, one executive director, sponsorship, and funding – the remaining six commissioners (three Caucasians, one African American, one Arab American and one Latina – now struggle to discern the commission’s next steps. Racial reconciliation is indeed very difficult work in the Detroit metropolitan area.

The truth and reconciliation commission had hoped to examine past injustices and offer recommendations to address the pain, suffering, and despair experienced by African Americans, so that all in the area would heal, prosper, and reach their full potential. Commissioners were chosen based on their demonstrated commitment to the values of truth, reconciliation, equality, and justice. Despite having these traits in common, the commission itself experienced the real difficulty of reconciliation work.

Commissioners resigned from this work for a variety of reasons: job relocation, personal concerns, and issues relating to the clarity of the mandate. As we attempted to work through these issues, it was evident that the process to truth-finding revealed significant differences in perspective and personal biases. Some were painful and hurtful.

The mandate was not enough to keep commissioners committed to its achievement. Life challenges required more of the commissioners than some could accommodate. Each commissioner’s perspective on the work of truth-finding was unique and diverse, and created times of disagreement. During these times of disagreement I felt we did not give adequate time to address some of these deeply rooted and personal truths. As a truth commission we missed valuable opportunities to learn more about each other. At times when disagreements and hurt feelings were evident, seeking a deeper understanding was avoided.

Each commissioner was, and I believe is, committed to racial reconciliation, but they now realize that the emotional and time investment is significant. One reason that makes racial reconciliation work painful is that it’s very difficult to move forward without acknowledging the pain of past experiences that others, especially African Americans, have. It also seemed awkward for some to engage in discussions about the pain currently experienced by African Americans and others. This pain must be accepted and acknowledged as the group moves forward. There is a tendency especially by people of privilege to say, “let’s move forward from here.” But, the pain of racial inequality does not go away until healing and true reconciliation occurs.
Regardless of the disagreements and lack of reconciliation thus far, I remain optimistic that racial reconciliation is possible and will happen in the Detroit metropolitan area. People continue to die as a result of violence, lack of proper medical care, and lack of living in a nurturing environment, all resulting from discrimination, racial hatred, and racism. As long as the possibility exists that lives can be saved due to racial reconciliation work, I will remain committed to do this work.

Key questions are what makes reconciling racial oppression difficult work and why is reconciling racial oppression difficult work? Until these questions are answered and the lessons are learned, further attempts to identify solutions to racial inequality will be difficult to achieve. Has the commission missed its opportunity to reconcile differences?

Those who remain on the current commission are faced with that question. Without understanding the process of reconciliation and addressing its opportunities to reconcile differences, can the commission meet its goal to provide solutions to racial inequality in the Detroit metropolitan area?

My answer is NO! If the truth commission has not been able to fully recognize and address its own philosophy regarding racial differences, reconciliation will not happen in the larger community. Lessons learned indicate that if a group is not able to confront its differences, attempt different solutions, and accept different styles in small group reconciliation, it will not happen in the larger community. We are confronted daily with opportunities that cause division, yet there are no intentional, successful efforts to reconcile racial inequality differences in the Detroit metropolitan area.

There is something about confronting the truth that causes pain, suffering, and fear. The truth exposes secrets, vulnerabilities, and failures – the not-so-good side of us. Truth confronts the pain that comes from being separated and cut off from love, nurture, and acceptance. Truth flushes out the pain and hurt of being disrespected. Do we really want to know the truth?

Missing from the reconciliation effort is active, continuous, difficult work from all of these elements of society:
1. the Church and other religious institutions,
2. the private business sector,
3. educational institutions,
4. government bodies,
5. civic and philanthropic groups, and
6. health care providers and agencies.

The “D” in Detroit can stand for “diversity.” Detroit, despite its racially divided neighborhoods, has a rich cultural fabric. Detroit can be considered one of the most diverse metropolitan areas in the country. Another missed opportunity?
One of the institutions missing from racial reconciliation work is the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Can the Presbytery of Detroit benefit from pursuing a “Racial Inequality Leading to Reconciliation” mandate? Absolutely, YES! God created humans to live in community where peace, hope, and love are evident. Yet demographics reflect too many racially segregated and separated churches. The disparity faced by predominantly African American churches compared to predominantly Caucasian churches is evident in programs, leadership and support.

While Presbyterian churches, regardless of ethnicity, suffer from the common ills of mainline Protestant reform churches in America, the disparity in racial inequality is evident. Predominantly African American, Presbyterian, urban churches experience the residuals of urban areas blighted from high unemployment, high crime, and despair. Yet within the bounds of the Presbytery of Detroit is one the richest counties in America! These struggling, predominately African American, Presbyterian churches and the communities they serve could benefit from intentional, collaborative efforts toward racial reconciliation.

I have learned this one truth from my work on the truth commission and as a servant leader in the church: If we cannot reconcile racial inequality in the church, then we will be unable to reconcile racial inequality in society. If we cannot eliminate racism in the church, then racism will not be eliminated in society.

If we the church can’t be the model, the light in a dark world, then how can we ever live as a beloved community in the world that God created and called very good – a world that made God satisfied? Can we truly claim that how we live today is very good?

The questions for all of us who belong to the PCUSA are:
Has the Presbytery of Detroit and its various efforts to reconcile racial inequality in the Detroit metropolitan area missed an opportunity for genuine racial reconciliation? I say yes!
And, is racial reconciliation in Detroit – and elsewhere in the United States – still possible? I say yes!

Rev. Thomas H. Priest Jr.

In order to save money and trees we want to develop an effective electronic communications network with our members. Please send your current e-mail address to our membership coordinator sylviac65@comcast.net
Since the PCUSA General Assembly is meeting in Detroit, MI, in June 2014, PV4J wants to provide those who are likely to attend with a variety of information about the city – an urban metropolis whose public image rarely captures its entire reality. The following is excerpted from an article published by CNN online. The entire article can be found at [http://www.cnn.com/2013/11/08/travel/detroit-travel-10-things/index.html?iref=allsearch](http://www.cnn.com/2013/11/08/travel/detroit-travel-10-things/index.html?iref=allsearch).

10 things to know about visiting Detroit

By Aaron Foley, Special to CNN

Friday, November 8, 2013

Know that you haven’t left civilization. Relax. You’re in Detroit. It's a city, an American city. It's going through a tough time, sure. Regardless of why you’re here, there will be something here you’ll never forget. Welcome, and open your mind.

Savor African and African American art. The great migration out of the rural South that began before World War I coupled with opportunities within the automotive industry made Detroit an enduring stronghold of African American culture. The city of Detroit is home to one of the largest collectives of black artists, and the Charles H. Wright Museum of African-American History houses one of the world’s best-curated collections of art from the African diaspora.

Tour Elmwood Cemetery. There are no more calming places anywhere than cemeteries, but Elmwood is special because of the haunting, Gothic monuments among lush, tree-lined paths. The founding fathers of Detroit -- and Michigan -- are buried here.

Walk Pallister Avenue. Even in a city built around the auto industry, there are hidden gems where your own two feet remain the best mode of transportation. Stroll down the brick-laid, American Foursquare-lined Pallister -- where no cars are allowed. While this residential pedestrian avenue takes you to a quieter, simpler time, it was developed by none other than the workhorses at General Motors.

Get hip to the latest pop-ups. The barrier of entry to entrepreneurship is lower in Detroit, and many budding business owners are taking advantage of the pop-up model to establish themselves. Take The Taco Lady, for one: Wherever Detroit native Erica Class' traveling stand Two Dollar Tacos pops up, there’s sure to be a good time.

Sample culinary creations beyond the coney dog. Get some Asian Corned Beef. There are plenty of nooks and crannies hiding delicacies unique to Detroit that contribute to the city's flavor.

Try our local sport. Football + bowling = Fowling. Got that? The proprietor of Fowling Warehouse and his family invented a summer game based on horseshoes, except instead of ringing horseshoes around a metal rod, you knock down bowling pins with a football. All the activity at Fowling Warehouse is spur-of-the-moment, so it's not uncommon for one-on-one matches to morph into an all-out dodgeball-style tournament with more footballs and pins.
Don't go urban exploring. Why would you want to go into an abandoned building? They're old, they're dangerous, they're full of asbestos. The street cred associated with going through these places is long gone. And most Detroiters are offended if that's the only reason you visit. Lastly, it's illegal.

Don't ask stupid questions. Yes, 8 Mile is a real place. No, 8 Mile isn't exactly like the movie "8 Mile." Don't make assumptions, and use the same common sense in Detroit that you would anywhere else.

Remember that people are people. Detroiters are not meant to be ogled like exhibits in a museum. They're not to be talked down to, pitied, shamed, or treated with kid gloves. The so-called "grit," "never-say-die spirit," and "determination" is not unique to Detroiters, either. It's in all of us, everywhere. Say hello. Smile. Shake hands. Be courteous. Be polite. Be normal. Welcome to Detroit.

"What’s Really Going on in Detroit’s Bankruptcy”
By PV4J Team Member Rev. David Oliver-Holder

It’s been frustrating enough watching the big banks and hedge funds and other investment houses on Wall Street get largely away with causing the world’s economy to melt down. What’s infuriating and heartbreaking now is how many of these same financiers might get away with looting the pension funds of America’s public sector workers.

Matt Taibbi, author of five books, including *Griftopia*, and a contributing editor for *Rollingstone* magazine, reported on this unfolding crime in his recent article, “Looting the Pension Funds.” His article draws heavily on a detailed report commissioned by the Institute for America’s Future, written by journalist David Sirota, entitled, “The Plot Against Pensions.”

It all goes back to 1974, Taibbi writes, when Congress passed the Employee Retirement Income Security Act, also known as ERISA. It was good legislation intended to protect the retirement funds of workers. But ERISA had one major flaw, or loophole: it failed to include public pensions.

That flaw was quickly taken advantage of by politicians in ways we’ve been reading about in the news for years. State legislators have “borrowed” funds from public pensions for other needs in state budgets. In other cases, state legislatures would intentionally fail to make their mandated Annual Required Contribution (ARC). Massachusetts, for example, made only 27 percent of its ARC, while New Jersey has made only 33 percent of its ARC, with it’s the pensions for its teachers receiving only 10 percent.

Still, Taibbi notes, in spite of such abuses, state public pension funds were, for the most part, in decent shape prior to the economic collapse of 2008. In September 2008, the collapse began and tax revenues plummeted. Should the financial sector, especially on Wall Street, be held accountable? Regrettably, that has yet to happen. Instead, the myth of pension fund unsustainability was born.

Two allies have been working together to foist the myth upon the American public. One turns out to be the Pew Charitable Trust, which many would assume is a
centrist, nonpartisan organization whose purpose is to provide unbiased assessments of public opinion and substantive policy analysis. Not so much. Taibbi reminds us that Pew is the legacy of J. Howard Pew, former president of Sun Oil Company, now known as Sunoco. Taibbi suggests that were he alive today, he would be a Tea Party backer. During his life, he saw the New Deal as a threat to American society.

In 2011, the Pew Charitable Trust aligned itself a man who enriched himself in the Enron scandal, and who then went on to amass billions as a hedge fund manager and natural gas trader. His name is John Arnold. His foundation is dedicated to, among to other things, the reform of the pension system.

It’s a sordid tale that Taibbi reports. “Thanks to a deadly combination of unscrupulous states illegally borrowing from their pensioners, and unscrupulous banks whose mass sales of fraudulent toxic subprime products crashed the market, these funds were out some $930 billion. Yet the public was being told that the problem was states workers’ benefits were simply too expensive.” All of us heading to Detroit need to know the full story, and Taibbi’s journalism tells it well. Then we need to do our part to advocate on behalf of the pensioners who deserve better.

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**The mission of Presbyterian Voices for Justice**

We are a playful and passionate community of women and men in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) who are called to proclaim the Gospel vision of God’s extravagant love and justice in church and society.

We seek the wisdom of the Spirit for following Christ’s example and for living into the hope of sustained gender equality, racial reconciliation, full human rights for LGBT persons, economic justice, environmental wholeness, an end to war and all forms of violence, and a justice-loving shalom over all the earth.

We commit to risking the transformation of our own selves and our organization to live into this vision, even as we invite both church and society to meet this challenge.
PV4J Adopting New Fundraising Program

The Leadership Team of Presbyterian Voices for Justice has decided to discontinue being a dues paying organization. Instead, we plan to rely on contributions from those who support its goals and its work on behalf of justice.

In the past, receiving copies of our newsletter, Network News, has been one of the perks of membership. However, the Leadership Team recently decided for a number of reasons that Network News would be published electronically, except for a print edition sent to all commissioners and delegates prior to General Assembly.

Thus, PV4J has joined the ranks of many groups that have moved from a membership base to support from donors. We hope that sufficient numbers of people will want to keep the voice of justice alive in the PCUSA through the work of PV4J.

We intend to strengthen our communication via Facebook and our website, and we are in the process of helping to prepare those attending General Assembly for their Detroit experience. We also partner with other progressive groups in important coalition work, and we help advance the Gospel through our broad concern for all justice issues.

Please consider financially supporting PV4J by donating any amount on our website, www.pv4j.org.

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Join Us Today!

Contribution categories (includes on-line newsletter and print GA edition)

- $50 Supporter of the Beloved Community
- $100 Agape Activist
- $250 Justice Marcher
- $500 Peace Pilgrim
- $1,000 Shalom Circle
- Other

You can join online and pay by credit card, at http://www.pv4j.org/join-us.html

OR

Please make your check payable to Presbyterian Voices for Justice, and send to:

Sylvia Carlson
Presbyterian Voices for Justice
1 Medinah Court
Greensburg, PA 15601
National Conference of More Light Presbyterians in Tucson, Arizona
Report by Rev. Will McGarvey, MLP board member and member of the PV4J coordinating team

The More Light Presbyterians Conference was held September 27-29 at St. Mark's Presbyterian Church in Tucson, AZ. The theme was "For you were once strangers yourselves..." based on Leviticus 19:33-34. It was a weekend of worship, educational workshops, and networking around "Building a Church that reflects God's heart."

The weekend began with a pre-conference workshop with the Institute for Welcome Congregations' curriculum called "Building an Inclusive Church." This training is both a 101 on how to start a conversation in your congregation about becoming a welcoming and affirming congregation. Some congregations use the curriculum as a part of their process toward affiliating with More Light Presbyterians, and others use it to deepen their welcome after being open and affirming for years or decades.

St. Mark's was a most hospitable site. People were especially helpful with rides to and from the local hotels where conferees stayed and provided the guests with a plethora of healthy food options. The conference itself began with greetings from the Co-Moderators of the Board and our new Executive Director Alex Patchin McNeill. Worship was heartfelt and challenging. Like our More Light worship services at General Assembly, the music and singing was shared with gusto, and the Spirit flowed through all of the people of God. John Russell Stanger shared a powerful sermon entitled, "Thank God We Are Like That" (http://www.mlp.org/2013/10/08/thank-god-like/#more-1110), reminding us that our own sense of victimhood is shared by many others in our culture – including those who have been most resistant to welcoming the LGBTQ community.

Saturday began with worship in the form of Sung Morning Prayer with Lutheran seminarian Nicole Garcia bringing a message reminding us of God's love for people of every gender identity and expression. Vice-Moderator of the PCUSA General Assembly, Rev. Tom Trinidad, brought greetings to the plenary, modeling a wonderful sense of pastoral presence and being in the moment with our theological as well as personal diversities. Later that afternoon, Rev. Debra Peevey led a plenary on what was learned from some of the different marriage equality measures in states around the country, including Washington where she was instrumental in organizing the faith community. This presentation was inspiring – given the recent changes going on in our culture as more and more same sex couples come out to their friends and family – and challenging, as we came to understand the work before us. Rev. Heidi Peterson (Co-Moderator of MLP) and Rev. Brian Ellison (Executive Director of Covenant Network) then shared information about the partnership between our two groups as we prepare for General Assembly in Detroit next summer.

The afternoon was filled with workshop options, including: LGBTQ Aging: New Wine in Old Skins – with Barbara Satin (Institute for Welcoming Resources); Gender Begins at
Home – led by Nicole Garcia; and Ending HIV/AIDS Criminality – presented by George Kerr and Gail Tyree. I overheard people from all the workshops wishing that everyone had a chance to hear each presentation. I was shocked to learn about an increasing number of states that are criminalizing those with HIV/AIDS, as well as the number of innocent people still held in the prison system, even after their accuser has exonerated them.

Later that afternoon there was a plenary with local ministers and community center members that are working on border justice. They shared the plight of those who risk their lives to make it to the U.S. as economic refugees from their native lands, where they have been put out of work by Free Trade Agreements and the global financial system. We also heard about the intersection of the hispanic LGBTQ community whose work in solidarity with immigrants is creating connections across social, spiritual and racial lines. MLP hosted its annual business meeting, and then we enjoyed a wonderful dinner in the church courtyard as dusk turned to night stars. The evening program began with the presentation of two Rosemarie Wallace Awards for LGBTQ activism: one to Rev. Ellie Schafer of Phoenix, and the other to Rev. Mike Smith of Tucson. The night was capped off by a concert shared by the local Desert Voices and Reveille Men’s Chorus – a wonderful collection of voices from across the gender and orientation spectrum.

Sunday morning brought worship with our own Alex Patchin McNeill as preacher at two services, and a special Adult Education offering hosted by our Co-Moderators Nathan Sobers and Heidi Peterson. The 11:00 am service was punctuated with the congregation’s Jazz ensemble (which includes former MLP board member, Mike Smith!). The highlight for me was the Children’s Jazz Band, which included a wonderful improvisation that allowed each of the children an opportunity to share a riff. Alex’s message can be viewed here (http://www.mlp.org/2013/10/22/remembrance-stranger/). Bios on all of those who provided our learning can be found at http://www.mlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/BiographiesFinal.pdf.

As a member of the MLP Board and the Coordinating Team of Presbyterian For Voices for Justice, I’m glad that our two organizations work together so well and will be partners at the next General Assembly. Remember that we are knitting and crocheting our way to GA, and this time we are asking our generous congregations and partners to consider making their gifts in the shape of marriage rings to be worn around the neck, in the spirit of Saints Sergio and Bacchus – http://www.mlp.org/2013/10/23/call-knit-crochet-pray-way-ga/. I’m making my famous rainbow leis again. See you then!
“Marriage Matters”
National Conference of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians
October 31- November 2 at Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago, IL
Report by Rev. Charlsie Ramsey, member of the PV4J coordinating team

Daily worship explored the theme of marriage in sermon, sacrament, and song. The preacher for opening worship – Dr. Frank Yamada, president of McCormick Theological Seminary – reflected on the story of Creation from Genesis 2, remembering that God made each of us in God’s own image.

The sermon in worship on Friday evening – “A More Perfect Union” – was given by Rev. Sharon Youngs, pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Oak Ridge, TN, and former Assistant Stated Clerk of the General Assembly and Communications Coordinator. Her text was taken from Ruth 1 and reminded us of the various ways we live together in covenant. The choir of Fourth Presbyterian Church provided music, and the congregation celebrated the Lord’s Supper.

Preacher for the closing worship was Rev. Brian Ellison, Executive Director of the Covenant Network and former pastor of Parkville Presbyterian Church in Parkville, MO. Rev. Ellison has led various boards and committees of the General Assembly and Heartland Presbytery, including service as its stated clerk. His message, entitled “Marriage Matters…Why?,” spoke a fresh word on 1 Corinthians 7, reflecting on the Presbyterian marriage liturgy with an emphasis on community.

Keynote Speakers were:
Kimberly Bracken Long - Associate Professor of Worship, Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, GA
Macky Alston - Director of Auburn Media, a division of the Center for Multifaith Education, Auburn Theological Seminary, New York, NY
Amy Plantinga Pauw – Henry P. Mobley, Jr. Professor of Doctrinal Theology, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY
William Stacy Johnson – Arthur M. Adams Professor of Systematic Theology, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ

As always it was difficult to choose a workshop; each one sounded so good. I attended “The Reformation Project: Changing Minds in Conservative Churches,” led by Mathew Vines, president of the Reformation Project and author of the forthcoming book, The Gay Christian: What the Bible Says – and Doesn’t Say – About Homosexuality. Vines has posted an hour-long video of a speech he gave at a Kansas church about the Bible and homosexuality, making the case for the acceptance of same-sex relationships in the church. Since then, Mathew has been working to open the dialogue on LGBTQ issues in evangelical communities.
My second workshop, “Marriage Matters – But So Does How We Welcome Single, Divorced, and Widowed People,” was led by Rev. Libby Shannon who serves as Associate Director of the Center for Spiritual Life and Associate Chaplain at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida, where she also teaches courses in Women and Gender Studies. Rev. Shannon is entering her fourth year as a member of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship and second year as Co-Moderator. We heard questions: Does the church family camp include me? Will there be childcare at those 7:00 p.m. session meetings? Where’s my Sunday School class, since I’m not a young parent? As we seek to welcome all the diversities of families found in our churches, how does our programming (implicit and explicit), language, and church structure welcome or exclude those for whom singleness matters

Rev. Tricia Dykers Koenig, the national organizer for Covenant Network, told us that CN will continue to work for the unity of the church, striving to keep communications open, and continuing to be respectful while working for marriage equality for all people. Ordination and inclusiveness of all God’s children still needs work. Covenant Network will host regional gatherings in 2014, and the next national conference will be held 2015. Sermons and keynote presentations from the conference will be posted on the website: www.covnetpres.org

Some of the phrases and insights that I will remember:
- Marriage matters
- Marriage is complicated
- What does a Christian Marriage look like?
- Singleness is to be upheld as well. To which are we called?
- There are the miserably married and the happily single – and vice versa
- It’s time
- Welcome one another
- Don’t vilify opposing views
- Stories matter – stories can change thinking
- Let us live into the life that is ours to live into through Jesus Christ! Amen!

**News from ACSWP-- Government Shutdown, Unbound Update, and the Road to General Assembly**

**Introduction:** While many PV4J readers may know the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP—long A, cee, swap, in conversation), this is the body that serves the prophetic calling of all Presbyterians by preparing studies and policy recommendations for the General Assembly. In some cases, such as the Peacemaking Program or the Immigration legal office in the Office of the General Assembly, for examples, ACSWP reports lead to the design of new programs. Overall, ACSWP helps the church think (and pray!) before it speaks—and provides ideas and assistance for advocates on many issues. The Committee consists of 12 persons, 9 elected by the General Assembly and 3 elected by both the Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board, plus two staff and the managing editor of Unbound (see below). Copies of most policies and studies may be downloaded free for use by mission, adult
education or social concerns committees or printed copies can be ordered from the warehouse or ACSWP offices: acswp@pcusa.org.

The social witness process of the church reflects the conviction that elected members propose stances on matters of Christian conscience, hence the church wide nominating process. The Committee also has the responsibility to advise on overtures and other business coming before the Assembly through “Advice & Counsel” memoranda printed below the actions for consideration (now posted on www.pc-biz.org).

Government Shutdown

Like most Americans, the members and staff of ACSWP watched with a mixture of anxiety and disillusionment as the US government hit yet another point of gridlock in October and shut down for 16 days. Reflecting on the political situation that got us to the point, Chris Iosso wrote the following editorial for Unbound, pairing his viewpoint with a selection of applicable General Assembly stances and, for contrast, a funeral meditation on the late Republican statesman, William Scranton. This essay approaches the government shutdown tactic not simply in relation to the Affordable Care Act, but as an extreme form of the distrust of government that is a long theme in US history.

Unbound Update

As this is written, Unbound (www.justiceUNBOUND.org), the online Christian justice journal of the PC(USA) and successor to Church & Society Magazine, is in the final weeks of an issue entitled Amos’ Plumbline; Whose Church? The Future of Social Witness, which explores the various grassroots forms of social witness taking place across the wider Church. This issue experiments with a new “rolling” format – releasing several articles a week a period of time rather than releasing an entire issue at once – that has been well-received and will likely be adopted for future issues. Unbound’s next issue will be released in December and will focus on various justice themes in the new Presbyterian hymnal.

The Unbound staff, in collaboration with Rev. Cynthia Holder Rich and former Managing Editor Rev. Patrick Heery, are in the process of developing a working board of young adults to contribute regularly to writing, editing, and posting. Our current Advisory Board will be asked to remain as advisors and contributors, but with less expectation of a day-to-day investment. This team has a long list of potential candidates, but the staff welcomes any and all further suggestions. If you know someone who might be a good candidate, please email Ginna.Bairby@pcusa.org.

Road to General Assembly

ACSWP met from October 17-19 at Ghost Ranch in New Mexico to share in good work and fellowship. The vast majority of this meeting was dedicated to reviewing reports and recommendations that will come before the 221st General Assembly in 2014. Among these is the report and proposal of the Peace Discernment Steering Team, established
by the 219th Assembly (2010) to address the position of the PC(USA) in relation to war and empire and to update current peacemaking policy. The team has developed the first draft of its proposal to the 2014 Assembly. This draft has gone before members of the Social Ethics Network and ACSWP in their recent meetings, and the steering team is taking the suggestions and critiques of these entities into account as its members continue to develop their proposal. This proposal will come before the Assembly and, if approved, will be sent to the presbyteries for their input and vote before the final proposal and recommendations are adopted by the 222nd Assembly in 2016.

The Tax Reform team has been hard at work on the study they have been commissioned to bring to the Assembly this summer. The team continues to develop its recommendations, but it shared with ACSWP two important studies that will strongly inform its report: a Reformed theological analysis of taxation and a summary paper on the history of progressive taxation. ACSWP is also seeking ways to collaborate with ecumenical partners and councils on issues of tax justice.

A resolution on drones will also be important item on the table for GA. A paper on drone warfare has been developed into a study for The Thoughtful Christian entitled Drones: Legitimate Weapons of War? This study may prove helpful to PV4J members as they seek to understand the issues and will serve as the basis for any recommendations made to the Assembly. This represents another way to bring policy and witness into the educational life of those churches and individuals who use The Thoughtful Christian.

In conjunction with ACWC, ACSWP will bring a statement and recommendations on sexual violence in the military, pointing also to other areas where this danger exists. Other proposals and resolutions will address urban ministry, ministerial compensation, and issues of justice and human rights related to the Western Sahara and the Middle East. A commissioned paper on end-of-life issues posed by new technologies will also be reviewed by the Committee in January.

A last word, in line with the fine articles by Gloria Albrecht and Sylvia Thorson-Smith in the last issue: Detroit. At this Assembly, the site cannot be taken for granted. While Detroit is not unique in kind, it is the largest city to undergo a bankruptcy. The Committee is developing a resolution on this matter of urban abandonment/struggle, and one of our pastor members from Detroit is developing a Sunday worship experience for commissioners that will include some street-time and brief visits to 2-3 sites on the way to the sanctuary.

Grace, peace, and justice, ACSWP
Chris losso
Christian.losso@pcusa.org
Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations

Celebrate Human Rights Day:
December 10

Presbyterians join the international community to celebrate Human Rights Day every year on December 10. This commemorates the adoption of Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. For followers of Jesus, our commitment to universal human rights begins in the affirmation that all people are made in God’s image with inherent worth and dignity. The biblical concepts of justice, freedom, peace, and security further ground our commitment. General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its predecessor denominations have repeatedly affirmed support for human rights and for international efforts to enshrine and protect those rights. Learn more and find liturgical and action resources to observe Human Rights Day.

Work for peace in South Sudan

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance and Presbyterian World Mission are working to help more than 90,000 displaced people, mostly Murle, in South Sudan’s Jonglei State, who have fled inter-ethnic conflict and gross human rights violations by the South Sudanese military. Working with our South Sudanese partners, Presbyterians seek to provide food, emergency supplies, trauma recovery and peace building support.

- Learn how you can help.
- Learn more about the root causes of the conflict and the current situation in South Sudan.
Advocacy Training Weekend 2014  
March 21-24, 2014 in Washington, D.C.

Many types of violence afflict our world. Come to the Advocacy Training Weekend to address the causes of that violence and to seek hopeful solutions. Training will kickoff March 21, 2014 with the Compassion, Peace, and Justice Training Day for Presbyterians. Learning will continue with our ecumenical sisters and brothers during Ecumenical Advocacy Days the remainder of the weekend.

Download and share the Advocacy Training Weekend flyer with your worshiping community and friends.
Register for the Compassion, Peace, and Justice Training on March 21.
Register for Ecumenical Advocacy Days (which begins after Compassion, Peace and Justice Training ends).

Quick Takes

- How does the UN work for religious freedom? Read the report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief.
- Dr. Mary Mikhael of the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon talks about the crisis in Syria.
- Find ideas for actions in response to the crisis in Syria.
- Observe an Orange Day on November 25 – witness and work for an end to violence against women.
- Order Proclaiming the Good News of God’s Peace – the 2013 Advent Devotional from the Peacemaking Program.
- Shopping for Christmas already? Consider a TassaTag and help end sex trafficking of children.

The Rev. W. Mark Koenig, Director, Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations, Compassion, Peace and Justice Ministry, Presbyterian Mission Agency, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 777 UN Plaza, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10017, (212) 697-4568

mark.koenig@pcusa.org, www.pcusa.org/un

Support the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations:
Give online <http://gamc.pcusa.org/give/E865034/> or
Text "UN" to 20222 to donate $10 to the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations
Top SIX Ways to Stand for Love Before the 221st GA

Submitted by More Light Presbyterians

1. Pray and act. Pray for your church/chapter/seminary/campus ministry and presbytery, that open hearts and willing hands will join together to do the justice-making work of the gospel of Christ so that people of all sexual orientations and gender identities experience God’s boundless love and grace. Be overt and openly demonstrative of your personal welcome and of your congregation’s affirmation of all children of God, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. If you hear someone has a friend or relative who recently came out to them, call them - don’t wait for them to reach out to you.

2. Use the MLP Marriage Study Guide to have conversations about marriage or lead a marriage study in your congregation or presbytery. This study guide is unique because it incorporates diverse perspectives on the inclusion of same-sex couples in our Presbyterian understanding of marriage in order to directly address the specific concern prompting the charge from the General Assembly to study marriage. Download the guide at http://bit.ly/marriageguide

3. Knit and pray your way to the PC (USA) General Assembly. We hope that many of the rainbow scarves will resemble the rings worn by St. Sergius and St. Bacchus, the early church martyrs who were married in an official church liturgy of their time. Find pattern at http://bit.ly/rainbowscarves

4. Sign Stand for Love as a teaching or ruling elder. Teaching elders sign the following statement: “As a teaching elder in the PCUSA, I have married or am willing to publicly marry same-gender couples in my pastoral role, in obedience to my ordination vow to ‘show the love and justice of Jesus Christ.’ Respecting the conscience of fellow Presbyterians, I accept the consequences of this declaration, including the provisions of discipline in our Book of Order.” Ruling Elders sign the following statement: “As a ruling elder, I publicly affirm the choice of teaching elders to perform same-gender marriages, in accordance with their ordination vows.” Sign at http://bit.ly/standforlove

5. Pass a marriage overture or overture concurrence in your session or presbytery. The board of directors of More Light Presbyterians and Covenant Network are committed to work for the passage of BOTH an authoritative interpretation and a constitutional amendment, believing that both are absolutely essential. More Light Presbyterians will prioritize working for the amendment while The Covenant Network will focus on education and advocacy for the A.I. before the Assembly. Learn more about our strategy leading to the 221st General Assembly here at http://bit.ly/ga221strategy

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Antony Hebblethwaite
More Light Presbyterians
Communications/Technology Manager

Friends of Bill Knox

We’ve learned that Bill Knox – active member of the Witherspoon Society and husband of Gayl Knox (also active in Witherspoon and Voices of Sophia) – had some health problems while visiting a friend in Florida and is recuperating there before going back home to Montana. Cards and notes would be most welcome at this address:

William R. Knox
East Orlando Health Center
250 South Chickasaw Trail
Orlando, FL 32825

Serving on PC(USA) Committees

Each General Assembly elects people to a variety of committees and boards. Some have a high profile such as the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board or the Permanent Judicial Commission. Yet even lesser known ones can have an important role to play in determining the operation of the PC(USA) or its stance on issues. The application form is found on the website of the PC(USA) General Assembly Nominating Committee (GANC). The manager of the process is Valerie Small. <valerie.small@pcusa.org> 1-888-728-7228 Ex 5406. She can answer questions about which slots are open and qualifications for various positions. Some are quite specific, others more general. Most require ordination as a ruling elder or teaching elder as a minimum. The deadline is December 2.
Prayer and Action for the Philippines – What You Can Do

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA).

Our prayers are with you

Photo Credit: Arlynn Aquino EU Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection

Lord our God, be the provider of your people’s needs according to your riches in glory by Christ Jesus. (from Philippians 4:19)

Super Typhoon Haiyan left monumental devastation when it struck the central Philippines on November 8. The storm, known as Yolanda in the Philippines, has been identified as one of the worst storms in recorded history.

Reports indicate severe destruction, with damaged roads and buildings, downed power lined and telecommunications, and flooded villages. Hundreds of thousands of people are displaced. The areas hit cover already-poverty-stricken communities, which have suffered from successive and simultaneous emergencies.

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance is working in collaboration with our mission partner, the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), and other members of ACT Alliance to respond to this crisis. Initial response includes the provision of nonfood items, material resources, drinking water, emergency-shelter kits and cash-for-work programs.

Will your congregation stand in the GAP (Give/Act/Pray) to help survivors of Super Typhoon Haiyan?
What you can do

Donate now. Learn more: get the PDA situation report.

GIVE: Share your financial blessings by designation gifts to DR000012-Philippines. Give through your Presbyterian congregation, online, or by mailing a check to Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), PO Box 643700, Pittsburgh, PA 15264-3700. You can also text PDA to 20222 to donate $10 for disaster response.

ACT: Sign up to receive PDA RIN (Rapid Information Network) emails to stay aware of current responses and urgent needs that you can share with your congregation. Visit PDA on Facebook for more.

PRAY: Please pray that through the response of the faith community, the people and communities affected by Super Typhoon Haiyan and those offering assistance will be strengthened, have their needs met, and be reminded of the hope and compassion that are found in Christ. Join the PC(USA) in prayer.

Other Resources from Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA):

- Who We Are
- National responses
- International responses
- Volunteer opportunities
- Your gifts at work
- Give now

Read the call to prayer for the Philippines signed by Moderator Neal Presa, Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons, and Executive Director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency Linda Valentine.

Look for us at www.pv4j.org
Presbyterian Voices for Justice Coordinating Team

Sylvia Carlson, Treasurer, Greensburg, PA
Teaching elder, honorably retired; second career clergy; active in presbytery and Presbyterian Women; traveled to Sudan as part of Redstone’s partnership with the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church and involved in Sudan Mission Network; volunteered with Presbyterian Disaster Assistance after Katrina; GA Junkie; sylviac65@comcast.net

Charlsie Ramsey, Newark, OH
Teaching Elder; Pastor, Hanover Presbyterian Church; second career clergy; worked 25 years in the oil industry; led women’s support group and annual retreat in Houston; served churches in Arizona; moderated and served on numerous Presbytery committees; love attending seminars and workshops; revramsey@windstream.net

Sylvia Thorson-Smith, Co-moderator, Tucson, AZ
Ruling Elder; retired from Grinnell College where she taught sociology, religious studies and gender/women’s studies courses; involved at all levels of PCUSA in women’s, sexuality, LGBT issues; editor/writer of several major studies; co-founder of Voices of Sophia; lover of books, movies, and Airedale terriers; sylviats@cox.net

Will McGarvey, Pittsburg, CA
Serving shared ministry with UCC congregation; active in many justice groups, including More Light Presbyterians board; Adjunct Faculty, Pacific School of Religion; raised as a Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints) and served a two-year mission; willymac4@aol.com

Kate Duffert, Decorah, IA
Student Engagement Coordinator at Luther College, theatre major and graduate of Luther College; 10-time attendee to General Assembly; Young Adult Advisory Delegate to the Birmingham GA; ktrigger@gmail.com

Diane Monger, Davenport, IA
Teaching Elder, clergy couple; served PCUSA at all levels and in many capacities as clergy and volunteer; active involvement in governing body and justice work; GA junkie (has missed only 5 since 1976); revedmonger@aol.com

John Van Nuys, Crawfordsville, IN
Teaching Elder; Pastor, Wabash Ave Presbyterian Church; serving on local Habitat for Humanity board; convener of local poverty relief network; short-term mission work in Democratic Republic of the Congo; jevchurch@att.net

David Oliver-Holder, Secretary, Bayfield, WI
Teaching Elder, clergy couple; Pastor, Bayfield Presbyterian Church; active in many local and justice ministries; ordained in American Baptist Church, USA; volunteer ambulance driver; manitou2@charter.net

Manley Olson, Co-moderator, St. Paul, MN
Ruling Elder; retired college dean; service at all levels of the PCUSA, including presbytery moderator and member of General Assembly Council; active in many justice groups; GA junkie; hymn text writer; birder; served on planning committee for Re-Imagining Conference; manleyolson@gmail.com

Vicki Moss, Staff for Communications/Website, Ridgewood, NY
Teaching Elder; Pastor, Ridgewood Presbyterian Church; General Assembly booth coordinator; church educator, musician, chaplain; sailing and kayaking enthusiast; self-described mermaid; luscana@me.com

Deadline for next Network News, February 6, 2014