

reNEWS

A Publication of Presbyterians For Renewal

Fall 2005

PFR responds to the report of the Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity

– page 4

“The heart of the matter is that the proposed Authoritative Interpretation grants sessions and presbyteries the power to overlook certain behaviors.”

New PFR Staff Position

Applications are being accepted for an Associate Director for Congregational Ministries, a new position that will have responsibility for PFR’s Wee Kirk Ministry, Congregational Renewal Ministry, and Christian Life Ministry, which includes the Christian Life and East Coast Pastors’ conferences. For a complete job description, see www.pfrenewal.org or the new online PFR Referral Service, www.pfreferral.org.



First Presbyterian Church in Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi, was mostly spared, but the area all around it was destroyed by Katrina. Wee Kirk partners will help the church reach out to the surrounding community. (Photo by Mike Doyle)

Churches Devastated by Katrina Receive a Helping Hand

The PFR Wee Kirk Ministry is forming direct relationships between churches in the larger Wee Kirk family and the 107 “wee kirks” affected by Hurricane Katrina. “We want to create relationships that will provide financial, material, and spiritual help, and to create long-term relationships between churches,” said Gary Bowker, director of the Wee Kirk Ministry.

A list of all 107 churches is on the PFR web site, www.pfrenewal.org, under “Prayer for Renewal.”

**New Online PFR Referral Service • Response to Task Force Report • Lydia Scholarship
OneByOne on Sexuality and the Church • PFR Youth • Christian Life Conference**

PRESBYTERIANS FOR RENEWAL

Our Mission

As followers of Jesus Christ, seeking to conform our lives and beliefs to the Word of God, our mission is to participate in God's renewing, transforming work in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Our Values

- OBEDIENCE** – Submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ
- FAITHFULNESS** – Anchored in God's Word and the historic Reformed faith
- CONVICTION** – Passionate about shaping the church's life and theology
- ENGAGEMENT** – Involved positively in the structure and politics of the PC(USA)
- COLLABORATION** – Working with others who share our mission and vision
- SERVANTHOOD** – Committed to ministry that reflects the graciousness of Christ
- PRAYER** – Depending upon God's direction and power

Our Vision

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will be a church that

- **boldly proclaims Jesus Christ** the incarnate Son of God and the only Savior and Lord of the world.
- **confidently relies upon Scripture** as the authority for our faith and life.
- **effectively equips disciples** to live abundantly in Christ.
- **intentionally develops godly leaders** for future generations.
- **consistently supports congregations** as the primary agents of God's mission in the world.
- **willingly relies upon healthy governing bodies** for accountability, mutual encouragement, and shared witness.
- **courageously embraces action** for social justice and evangelism as essential dimensions of our primary task, to proclaim the Good News.
- **faithfully lives with holy abandon** in the power of the Holy Spirit, willing to risk all and serve all in order to show the love of Christ to all.



From the PFR President
Keith Hill
Douglasville, Georgia

It was the great quest of the Middle Ages, to find the Holy Grail. No one was sure Jesus' chalice from the Last Supper existed, but plenty of adventurers figured that if it did, they would be the ones to find it.

Such was the adventuresome spirit of the Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity. In a church fatigued by divisions over ordination standards and sexual ethics, many hoped that the Task Force would find a Holy Grail of polity that would give us a way forward. Others doubted that such a Grail exists. They ask, "What possible solution can be found when some don't like *yes*, others don't like *no*, and no one likes *maybe* or *we'll see*." Still, these Task Force adventurers were willing to launch a quest.

One is reluctant to dismiss their efforts out of hand—"There is no Grail!"—since these adventurers are friends in Christ, in many cases more praiseworthy and knowledgeable than those reading this essay, and certainly more so than the one writing it! Moreover, some of them are current or former members of PFR's own board. We respect their quest.

Nonetheless, the larger church must now discern whether the Task Force adventurers have indeed found the long-sought Holy Grail of polity. The Task Force is sure they have; PFR believes they have not, as you will read in this issue of *reNEWS*.

Was their effort worth it? We will not fault such an earnest quest. Indeed, we thank God for their faithful efforts. We can learn from their quest and the way they conducted it. But that does not change the task of discernment before the church. Let us pray for God's clear guidance. And may the One who held the fabled chalice now hold us.

Keith Hill completed his term as PFR President in September. Newly installed officers are listed below.

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New from PFR Referral Service Now Online

Finding the right ministry staff person for your congregation or zeroing in on God's call for you just got easier. On October 15, the PFR Referral Service went online: www.pfreferral.org.

All who register with the new online PFR Referral Service, both congregations and individuals, are asked to endorse the Mission, Values, and Vision statements of PFR (listed on page 2).

The service features an easy-to-use database that narrows the search by region, job title, ministry type, salary, and other criteria. PNCs or other church committees can narrow their pool of potential candidates quickly as they seek pastors or other ministry staff who meet their requirements. Those seeking a call can connect with congregations or ministries in a timely manner.

PIFs, CIFs, resumes, or ministry job descriptions may be posted quickly and easily in PDF or Microsoft Word format and the listing becomes available instantly. Privacy safeguards protect confidentiality. Only registered churches will have access to candidate profiles; only registered candidates may view church job listings.

Church memberships in the online PFR Referral Service will be \$50 for six months, with unlimited ministry job listings permitted during that period. Individual memberships for pastors or others seeking ministry positions are \$10 for six months. All listings are renewable for an additional fee.

We pray that the new online PFR Referral Service will be a tool for renewal in our denomination as it facilitates connections between congregations and servants of the church who seek renewal in the PC(USA).



Meet the Son Servants from Formosan Presbyterian Church in Houston. They helped build houses in Mexico and did a VBS-type program. Pastor John Potter (back row, left) liked the cross-cultural aspect of the mission program, working with other U.S. church groups while serving Mexicans. Front row, left to right: Susan (PFR staff), Jason Eng, Ashley (PFR staff), I.J. Chang, Jenny Jong, Maria Yang, Monica Cheng, Marie Fang. Back row: Pastor John Potter, Wilson Hung, Justin Chang, Gary Cheng. For more photos and information about PFR Youth Ministry, including the 2006 schedule, check out www.pfryouth.org.

PFR Youth Ministry

Crossing Cultures, Serving Christ

More than 9,000 Presbyterian kids heard the claims of Jesus Christ this past summer at a PFR Youth event. Hundreds committed their lives to Christ for the first time, according to Chuck Neder, Director of the PFR Youth Ministry.

It was a great cross-cultural summer for many. Youth Pastor John Lee took 15 youths from Korean Presbyterian Church in Rockville, Maryland, all the way to Mexico. He reports, "Our PFR Son Servants experience was hard work and hot, but they all want to return next year! We tend to do things just with Koreans, and it was good to break that pattern." Although they worked in Mexico, he said, working alongside Anglo youth groups helped his students feel more a part of the American scene.

Lee's comments were echoed by John Potter, a pastor at the Formosan Presbyterian Church in Houston. "We interacted with the Anglos more as the week wore on, and in the afternoons we sang in Spanish with the Mexicans. Boundaries came down. I appreciated the Christ-centered program each night, and the worship. We were constantly reminded of Who we were doing this for."

Chuck Neder muses, "There are millions of details that have to be worked out to take students out of the country. Sometimes we wonder if it is worth the effort. And then that middle-school girl meets Christ, and the high school guy is so touched by what Christ can do in a foreign culture, that he dedicates his life to missions. It is worth it! Absolutely!"

The Task Force Report

“AI, AI, Oh!”

There is much about which we can rejoice in the report of the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity, and little to regret. But that which we regret is indeed troublesome. It is the Authoritative Interpretation (AI). “AI, AI, Oh!”

Once the dust settles, the only part of the Task Force report that will matter is the proposed Authoritative Interpretation (recommendation 5). The orthodox theology, the faithful dialogue, and the dedication to the church that the Task Force modeled will quickly fade in people’s minds, as have many other reports made to General Assemblies past. An Authoritative Interpretation has the force of law. In court, only the Authoritative Interpretation, not the rest of the report, would have force.

The Theological Reflection that begins and anchors the report is a positive statement. It is faithful to the Scriptures and the long-established convictions of the PC(USA). It is a vital part of the report and we support it. Among the points we appreciate are

- the clear affirmation of God’s eternal triune identity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;

- the description of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the true Word of God and our rule of faith and life;
- a strong Christology that understands Jesus Christ as being fully human and fully divine;
- the confession that our hope resides in the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and
- a recognition that Christ alone is Lord and Savior and that the entire world stands in need of his grace.

Theological disconnect

The problem is that the proposed Authoritative Interpretation does not seem to flow smoothly and clearly from the Theological Reflection. At issue is the nature of the church as a covenant community. While we are reformed and always reforming, we seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit together, not separately. With regard to ordination standards, the majority has discerned that even though we are all sinful, there are certain behaviors that preclude some from being called to particular offices. This AI is an attempt to maintain, and yet get around, these standards.

The heart of the matter is that the proposed AI grants sessions and presbyteries the power to overlook certain behaviors that currently prevent some people from being ordained or installed by declaring, case by case, that those behaviors are not a departure from an *essential* of Reformed faith and polity. Currently, lower governing bodies are bound to honor the discernment of the majority.

Therefore, we must object to this proposed Authoritative Interpretation and *recommend that it **not** be adopted.*

Seven reasons *not* to adopt recommendation 5

First, this Authoritative Interpretation will permit behavior by ordained Presbyterian officers that is prohibited by Scripture and our constitution. (See G-6.0106b and the AI of 1993, which affirms such behavior to be sin.)

Second, it is a flawed attempt at compromise to say, on one hand, that we have standards that have not changed and, on the

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This Authoritative Interpretation will be divisive and unworkable. Every session and presbytery will be left to debate which standards are essential.

other hand, that those standards may be considered not essential. This proposal wants to keep the language of G-6.0106b, for example, and its affirmation of “fidelity within the covenant of marriage ... or chastity in singleness,” and to continue to call this a standard of the church, *yet allow it to be treated as optional, a desirable but nonessential guideline.*

Third, the Task Force report itself affirms, “Ultimately, the church cannot simply agree to disagree on important matters of faith and practice” (lines 775–776), yet that is what this Authoritative Interpretation would have us do.

Fourth, this Authoritative Interpretation dismisses the past *three decades* of discernment by the entire PC(USA). We read much about discernment in the Task Force report, and we affirm discernment! But for *30 years* the entire church has been considering the issue of ordination standards. The General Assembly has been calling on the entire church to pray and conduct dialogues, listening sessions, conversations, and studies. The General Assembly itself has appointed special committees, called for a three-year period of study, and held its own dialogues, as have sessions and presbyteries. What about the discernment of the entire church through those years?

Three times, beginning in 1996, every presbytery in the country has voted on the language of G-6.0106b. *This is the single most debated and voted upon paragraph in the Book of Order.* By increasing percentages through the vote of the presbyteries, the entire church has affirmed that it wants to keep this language. But not only has the church voted to keep this language, *the church has understood what it was voting on: a national standard* to be adhered to by all who seek ordination. Through all of the praying and studying and dialoguing and deliberating by the entire church, the church has found its “center of gravity” on the issue of the ordination of practicing gay and lesbian persons. And yet this Authoritative Interpretation, by a single majority vote of one General Assembly, would render that deliberate resolution by the entire church subject to overrule by any session or presbytery.

We have no doubt that the Task Force considered the dialogue of these many past years and its results. Yet their recommendation effectively sets those results aside.

Fifth, recommendation 5 is out of step with the rest of the Task Force report. In its Final Word the report states,

“a season of discernment is due in the church” (line 1503), and it urges that this happen “before engaging in processes of constitutional change” (lines 1513–1514). Yet make no mistake: *recommendation 5 will change the constitution!* It will, as Michael Walker has pointed out, “collapse” all other standards in the Book of Order under G-6.0108 and give every session and presbytery the authority to determine that any departure is nonessential. (Michael’s article, “Lordship of Jesus, Local License,” is at www.pfrenewal.org.)

This AI, therefore, takes an unwarranted leap at a new constitutional solution by presuming upon the outcome of the very process of “intensive discernment” in which the report is calling the church to engage.

Sixth, adoption of this Authoritative Interpretation will have a chilling effect on our relationships with global partners, nearly all of whom consider the official allowance of homosexual practice in the church to be something they cannot permit themselves or support in others.

Seventh, this Authoritative Interpretation will be divisive and unworkable. Every session and presbytery will be left to debate which standards are essential. Furthermore, what will happen when persons move? Ordaining bodies that hold “fidelity and chastity” to be essential standards must either reject some who have been allowed to be ordained elsewhere by this AI, or permit them onto their sessions and into their presbyteries.

As noted earlier, the Task Force report itself says, “Ultimately, the church cannot simply agree to disagree on important matters of faith and practice.” We agree. And so, trusting the leading of the Holy Spirit in accordance with the Word of God over these past decades of our life together in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), we conclude that *this Authoritative Interpretation should not be adopted.* However well-intentioned this proposal is, it will not further the peace, unity, and purity of the church.

This article was written by Henry Greene and the PFR Issues Ministry and was endorsed by the PFR Board of Directors at its meeting on September 22–24, 2005.

“Speaking a Mystery”
A video resource on
God’s design for human sexuality.
www.speakingamystery.com

OneByOne Looks at Sexuality and the Church

by Kristin Johnson

The issues surrounding sexuality are dividing our families, our denomination, and our country.

Morality and sexual ethics, however, are more than political issues; they are pastoral issues, and pastoral issues require action. If ever there was a time for PC(USA) congregations to take action, it is now.

OneByOne can help you take a courageous biblical stand to uphold fidelity and chastity against the advocacy of same-sex marriage and other equally grievous heterosexual addictions and practices. As OneByOne embarks upon its second decade, our hope is that you and your congregation will witness firsthand what it is like to see lives changed and restored. We want you to preach good news to the afflicted, bind up the broken-hearted, and proclaim freedom for those held captive to sin, just as our Lord did and as he called us to do.

Pray and ask the Lord to show you how he would like you to address the issue of sexuality in your church. Here are some ways you and your church can do ministry:

- **Educate your church** in the area of sexuality. Begin with the *OneByOne Pastoral Care Guide*, an extremely helpful tool. Order it and other materials from our website, www.oneby1.org. Also see the Regeneration Books website, www.regenbooks.org,

with books and materials addressing all forms of sexual and relational brokenness from an evangelical transformation perspective.

- **Incorporate OneByOne materials** into your adult Sunday School curriculum or your Stephen Ministry training.
- **Host a weekend workshop in your church.** OneByOne can provide a speaker.
- **Start a small-group Bible study** for members of your congregation who are struggling with sexual brokenness or who have loved ones who are struggling.
- **Talk to your mission or evangelism committee** about partnering with OBO financially and recognizing OneByOne as a mission outreach of your church.

Kristin Johnson is Executive Director of OneByOne. For more information about partnering with OneByOne in ministry, contact Kristin at KJohnson@oneby1.org or (585) 586-6180. PFR and OneByOne have a formal partnership, working together for the renewal of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

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The Last Word

by James D. Berkley

After six years as *reNEWS* editor, this is my last Last Word. So, what have I learned in those years to pass on as a grand valedictory?

Well, I discovered all the more that Jesus Christ is the beginning and the end. Without him at the center, nothing is right, and with him, nothing is impossible. PFR, *reNEWS*, the PC(USA)—all must be about Jesus Christ and for his glory.

Second, I have discovered that “right” and “popular” are growing farther apart. Dedicated Christ-followers are increasingly receiving the rejection and scorn our Savior bore. Where once society shared our beliefs, now it progressively considers us and our convictions unacceptable. It is no longer popular to be right or righteous.

Third, oh, how Satan loves to divide and conquer! Evangelical and moderate Presbyterians—the vast majority—can render their own efforts futile by scuffling over the means to a common end. Misunderstandings arise, noses get bent out of shape, and major efforts are expended simply to get along, rather than to get ahead. The Enemy stirs discord among the faithful and then laughs as tactical chaos ensues. Surely we can do better!

Fourth, cynicism and impatience make us defeat ourselves. I wonder what evangelicals might have accomplished in the PC(USA) if only colleagues had stayed the course. But repeatedly, cynicism has discouraged some troops and impatience has caused others to abandon the field. That leaves thinner, more dispirited forces to carry on a struggle inevitable in a fallen world. What a way to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory!

Finally, good intentions don’t automatically produce good results. Wanting what would be good, refining strategies to bring it about, envisioning what the good would be—none of these substitutes for actually endeavoring to make it happen. It is far easier to analyze, criticize, and speculate than it is to venture forth boldly. Delicacy and caution have their place, but action requires enterprise and risk. We must do the good, not just refine our plans to do it.

I have been blessed in PFR with a host of brilliant, courageous, dedicated colleagues. All over the country are outstanding disciples of Jesus Christ making a difference through PFR. I thank all those who have read *reNEWS* and encouraged, joined, and supported PFR’s ministries. I wish everyone God’s blessings as our paths now part. I will remain a colleague at your side.

On September 1, Jim Berkley left his roles as reNEWS Editor and PFR Issues Ministry Director to become Interim Director of Presbyterian Action for Faith and Freedom, the Presbyterian arm of the Institute on Religion and Democracy in Washington, D.C. He continues to work out of a home office in Bellevue, Washington.

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Attention, Women in Seminary!

Lydia Scholarship applications are available now. Note a new guideline for eligibility: A candidate attending a seminary that has been approved by her presbytery is eligible to apply for this scholarship.

See npwl.org for information and an application. Applications are due March 1, 2006.

There's a little time left to get to the

Coalition Gathering IX

Nov. 7-9, 2005, in Orlando
www.presbycoalition.org

Thank you!

PFR is deeply grateful to Richard Coak who has served as volunteer administrator for the PFR Referral Service for many years, and to Gloria Herron who has assisted him.

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See page 3 to learn more.

reNEWS

Fall 2005 • Vol. 16, No. 3
Pamela Bowman, Editor

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