



**JANUARY 18, 2008**

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## News from around the synod

1. **A GULF BLITZ – 6 PRESBYTERIES, 130 VOLUNTEERS**

## News from around the presbyteries

2. **CENTRAL NEBRASKA WOMAN APPOINTED TO MISSION**

## National PC(USA) news

3. **LESBIAN'S BID TO BECOME MINISTER MOVES FORWARD**
4. **MODERATOR SENDS MESSAGE OF 'STORAGE CRISIS'**
5. **ECUMENICAL GROUP ADDS 7 NEW MEMBERS**
6. **DISABILITIES POLICY AWAITS IMPLEMENTATION**

## A few good blogs

7. **GREENBERG CENTER LAUNCHES 'SPIRITUAL POLICY' BLOG**
8. **USE, MISUSE OF RELIGION IN POLITICS IS BLOG TOPIC**
9. **RELIGION BLOG TRIPLES TRAFFIC TO RELIGION NEWS SERVICE**

## And just one more

10. **VALENTINE SHARES LETTER WITH EXECS ON CALL TO MISSION**

1. **A GULF BLITZ – 6 PRESBYTERIES, 130 VOLUNTEERS:** More than 130 Presbyterians from six presbyteries in two synods – Lakes and Prairies and Lincoln Trails – are traveling this weekend to the Gulf Coast for perhaps the largest multi-presbytery effort since Hurricane Katrina devastated the region in August 2005. The group will deploy to Presbyterian Disaster Assistance camps in Luling, La., outside New Orleans, and Pearlinton, Miss., for a week beginning Jan. 19. The complete story is at <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2008/08042.htm>. Sue Coller, executive presbyter in the Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys, will begin blogging the mission trip Monday, Jan. 21, at <http://www.minnesotavalleys.org/GulfBlitz.php>.

2. **CENTRAL NEBRASKA WOMAN APPOINTED TO MISSION:** Kristin Hamner, a member of First Presbyterian Church in Grand Island, Neb., is one of three new Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) mission workers who completed orientation this month and have begun their international assignments. Hamner is a partnership facilitator serving in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. She works closely with the PC(USA)'s Self Development of People program and the economically poor, oppressed and disadvantaged groups with whom it partners in the Dominican Republic. Hamner has worked in the Dominican Republic

as a missionary and assistant project coordinator for the Foundation for Peace since 2005. She will continue those duties as she assumes her new responsibilities with the PC(USA). The full story is at <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2008/08047.htm>.

**3. LESBIAN'S BID TO BECOME MINISTER MOVES FORWARD:** San Francisco Presbytery has made way for an openly gay candidate for ministry in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to take the first steps in the ordination process under a controversial Authoritative Interpretation approved by the 2006 General Assembly. After three hours of debate in closed session, the presbytery voted 167 to 151 on Jan. 15 to approve as "ready for examination, with departure" Lisa Larges, a lesbian who has been blocked from ordination for more than 20 years. Larges' case marks the first time a presbytery has approved action to consider a candidate who declared a conscientious objection – or "scruple" – to the denomination's ordination standards involving sexual practice. The full story is at <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2008/08048.htm>.

**4. MODERATOR SENDS MESSAGE OF 'STORAGE CRISIS:'** The Rev. Joan S. Gray, moderator of the 217th General Assembly, opened her most recent message to the church by stating, "We Americans seem to be drowning in our stuff." She continued, "I read an article recently in the Wall Street Journal that helped me see the situation more clearly. Entitled 'The Struggle to Contain Ourselves' (January 4, 2008), the article talked about a University of California study published in 2006. The study showed that there is 'a storage crisis' in this country, in spite of the fact that Americans enjoy 'the largest amount of private housing space per person in the history of urban civilization.'" Gray's complete message can be found at <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2008/08046.htm>.

**5. ECUMENICAL GROUP ADDS 7 NEW MEMBERS:** Christian Churches Together – the fledgling U.S. ecumenical grouping that has quickly become one of the largest and broadest-based ever in the country – wrapped up its second annual meeting Jan. 11 in Baltimore by adding seven new member organizations. The new additions bring membership to 43, representing all five "families" of churches in the U.S. – Catholic, Orthodox, historic Protestant, historic racial-ethnic and Pentecostal/evangelical. The new members are: American Bible Society, The Church of the Brethren, Elim Fellowship, Habitat For Humanity, The Mennonite Church, The Polish National Catholic Church and The Vineyard USA. The full story can be found at <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2008/08035.htm>.

**6. DISABILITIES POLICY AWAITS IMPLEMENTATION:** "We envision a church that embodies the creative movement from awareness, through accessibility and integration, to full inclusion, and thus bears healing witness to the world." This statement – contained in Living into the Body of Christ: Towards Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities, approved by the 217th General Assembly in 2006 in Birmingham, Ala. – summarizes the prophetic public witness of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in the battle against disability segregation or exclusion that should be fought in both our religious and secular institutions. The Assembly challenged the members of the PC(USA) and its entities to seek ways to make this goal a reality, including support for the ongoing efforts of our ecumenical partners and other appropriate non-religious institutions. To read the full story, go to <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2008/08038.htm>.

**7. GREENBERG CENTER LAUNCHES 'SPIRITUAL POLICY' BLOG:** A new blog on religion and the 2008 election campaign has been launched by the Leonard E. Greenberg Center for the Study of Religion in Public Life at Trinity College in Hartford, Conn. The blog, called Spiritual Politics, features outside contributors as well as members of the Greenberg Center staff. Mark Silk, director of the Greenberg Center and professor of religion in public

life, inaugurated the blog in early December. "The idea is to provide daily tracking of the way religion seems to be enhancing, disturbing, and otherwise interacting with the 2008 election cycle," Silk explained. "We are trying to do this in a reasonably non-partisan way, though not without attitude" The blog is found at [www.spiritual-politics.org](http://www.spiritual-politics.org).

**8. USE, MISUSE OF RELIGION IN POLITICS IS BLOG TOPIC:** Questions being raised by Muslims, Jews and others about the use — and misuse — of religion this campaign season is the current topic on the blog of Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly, produced by Thirteen/WNET New York. This blog is found at <http://www.pbsorg/wnet/religionandethics/blog.html>.

**9. RELIGION BLOG TRIPLES TRAFFIC TO RELIGION NEWS SERVICE:** A multi-contributor blog has tripled traffic to the Religion News Service Web site since its formal launch in October 2007. The RNS blog features RNS editors and correspondents taking a critical and offbeat look at a variety of religion stories. Religion News Service has been known as the only secular wire service focused exclusively on religion, ethics, spirituality and moral issues. The blog can be found at <http://www.religionnews.com/weblogs/religionblog/>.

**10. VALENTINE SHARES LETTER WITH EXECS ON CALL TO MISSION:** Linda Valentine, executive director of the General Assembly Council, shared a letter from Hunter Farrell, director of world mission of the General Assembly Council, with middle governing body executives. Valentine wrote:

Today I share with you a letter from Hunter Farrell, who outlines the plans for a unique event in the life our church entitled, "Renewed Call to Presbyterian Mission in the World: A Dialogue for our Shared Future."

I have great hopes for this consultation as we gather together people engaged from many different places to talk about how we faithfully carry out Christ's mission in the world as Presbyterians. From January 16-18, I'll be joined by GAC members, Carol Adcock and Rick Ufford-Chase, former GAC member, Francie Erwin, members of our staff, and a host of others as Hunter describes below:

Dear Friends in Christ,

Across the Church, Presbyterians agree that international mission is a major priority for our denomination. In fact, most would concur that our mission work around the world has historically been a central part of our identity as a Church. Names like William and Lucy Shepherd, Samuel Lapsley, Samuel Moffett and places like Brazil, China and Egypt remind us of the remarkable mission legacy of our Church.

But in bygone days, we did almost all of our international mission work through the national denominational and women's mission boards. Distances and costs were simply too great for local Presbyterians to "go it alone." Innovations in technology and a fast-shrinking globe have radically changed that: today, more mission work is being done directly by congregations, presbyteries, and other "mission initiators." Thus, rather than looking exclusively to the General Assembly Council to handle their international mission work, many congregations are doing it themselves. But a growing number of thoughtful Presbyterian mission initiators are seeking ways to coordinate their efforts with those of others, to learn from the successes and mistakes of the past, and to improve the effectiveness and faithfulness of their work. We thank God for this moment!

In response, the Moderator, the GAC and the Office of the General Assembly are this week convening a church-wide consultation, "Renewed Call to Presbyterian Mission in the World: A Dialogue for our Shared Future," which will take place at the Preston Hollow Presbyterian Church in Dallas, Texas. Sixty-four people from across the Church and around the world will gather to a) build greater trust and coordination among PCUSA "mission initiators," mission supporters and the GAC ministries, and b) to identify and agree upon the "benchmarks" (core values) and consequent "mission practices" that should characterize all Presbyterian mission work.

Who will be at the Dallas consultation? Folks who haven't sat together in quite a while: in addition to global partners from three continents and PCUSA mission personnel, the following will participate: the Medical Benevolence Foundation, the Outreach Foundation, Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship, PCUSA mission professors, the Peace Fellowship, Presbyterian Global Fellowship, Witherspoon Society, Presbyterian Women, the World Mission Initiative/New Wilmington Mission Conference, mission networks, Young Adult volunteers, and many others, along with staff from the World Mission, Racial Ethnic/Women, and Relief and Development ministry areas and the GAC itself. Most of the participating organizations are paying their own way to be able to be present at what we believe is a paradigm shift moment in the GAC's relationship with many mission initiators from around the Church.

Pray with us that God would enable us to listen to each other and to see ourselves for what we are: mere "earthen vessels" to be used by the Creator to bring abundant life to all. Though we're often rather plain looking — and always partially broken — we have been created by God to be sent into the world to share the liberating love of Christ ... and to find healing and wholeness for our own brokenness in the process.

Could God be using mission to bring wholeness to our Church? "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?" (Isaiah 43:19a).

With thankfulness for your prayers,

Hunter Farrell  
Director, World Mission  
General Assembly Council