

Presbytery of Boston

November E-Connection

Thanksgiving for Things Not Visible to the Human Eye

A monthly column for the church-at-large by The Reverend Grady Parsons, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

November 2008

Maybe we should skip Thanksgiving this year. After all, it has been a rough fall. Our investment crops have been devastated. Our long election campaign has left us an angry divide. We still have sons and daughters in harm's way. The number of people who are homeless, sick, and hungry grows daily. Perhaps a look back at the roots and the two sets of personalities that make up our Thanksgiving tradition would be helpful at this point. The pilgrims and the Native Americans known as the Pakanokets who gathered together in the fall of 1621 make up the first set of personalities. Nathaniel Philbrick has written an excellent account of the pilgrim experience in his book *Mayflower*. He tells the story of the first fall harvest, with the ready availability of wild game (including turkeys) and the five freshly killed deer that the Pakanokets brought to the event. They did not have a long table with a white tablecloth in the dining room; rather, theirs was a giant outdoor picnic where the dinner guests outnumbered the continent guests by about two to one.

The second personality to our Thanksgiving tradition is Abraham Lincoln who issued the Thanksgiving Day proclamation in 1863. Both those in 1621 and in 1863 did not have much reason to give thanks back then. The little pilgrim band did not have a family among them who had not suffered loss during that first year. Less than half of those who landed on Plymouth Rock were still alive. And Lincoln's proclamation came during the Civil War. The nation was a country of widows and grieving parents. The bloodiest war in its history had destroyed families and fields. Perhaps their acts of thanksgiving were a reflection of the great Hebrews 11:1 definition of faith – “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Thanksgiving this year may be one of those times when we will be reminded that the things not visible to the human eye are what bring us the greatest joy and peace.

Musings on Race in a Post-Race America

A monthly column for the church-at-large by The Reverend Bruce Reyes-Chow, Moderator of the 218th General Assembly (2008) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

November 2008

When “Barack Obama has been elected President of the United States of America” rang out, I wept, cheered, and prayed. Our world has changed. Our children’s view of “American” will never be the same – here or around the world. While Obama is not just a person of racial designation, we must not underestimate the symbolic nature and

corresponding power of having a person of color as president. The memories of my grandparents’ struggle through injustice in this country came flooding back. My Filipino grandmother in Alabama struggled with where to sit on the bus because no one knew if she was white or black. Miscegenation laws were repealed just decades ago that would have prohibited my White wife from marrying this Filipino man. At least a few layers of historical injustice were peeled back through this election to reveal a reality of pure joy. I felt, if just for a moment, a promise was fulfilled. However, let us not be naive and think this election has made us a post-race culture and world. We have a long way to go before we have solved racism. The biggest concern I have is the idea that this generation is somehow so past race that we no longer need institutional safeguards against systematic and institutional injustice. I strongly believe we would be foolish to claim success in defeating racism simply because we have elected an African American president and/or all the generational assessments about race that have punctuated the political discourse. At the same time, I don’t think this idea is totally off. I see glimpses of truth that hold the potential for changing the way we deal with issues of race. Those glimpses include our flattening world and the increasing interactions between different ethnic groups; open source technology, with the idea that the community will correct and police itself along the way; and changes in population percentages. I hope we will embrace the opportunity and challenge to talk about and deal with issues of race in new ways, with new vernacular and new institutional approaches.

Live in hope.

Please join the many conversations taking place at Bruce’s Moderator blog:
www.mod.reyes-chow.com.

Board of Pensions

Treasurer Ken Dewar reminds all church treasurers and sessions about the changes in 403(b) regulations; adoption agreements must be submitted to the Board of Pensions by Dec. 31. Please read the following:

Preparing for the final 403(b) regulations: Adoption Agreements required for Retirement Savings Plan participation

To maintain the tax-qualified status of their 403(b) plans, sponsors and employers must ensure that the documents and administration for all their plans are in compliance with the final IRS regulations by **January 1, 2009**, when the new regulations take effect. In the case of the [Retirement Savings Plan](#) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (“the RSP”),

the plan document has been changed to bring it into compliance with the final 403(b) regulations.

[Employer Frequently Asked Questions](#) about the final 403(b) regulations is available on Pensions.org or by calling the Board of Pensions. During the coming months, the Board will continue to keep church treasurers and business administrators informed about the regulatory changes.

Adoption Agreements required

As part of the Board's efforts to ensure the RSP complies with the new regulations, churches and other employing organizations are now required to complete an [Adoption Agreement](#) in order to continue their participation in the RSP beyond December 31, 2008. Doing so fulfills the IRS requirement for a written plan document by memorializing any eligibility requirements or employer contributions that are unique to that employer. Church treasurers and business administrators whose organizations participate in the RSP must submit their Adoption Agreements to the Board no later than **December 31, 2008**.

Presbytery of Boston Classifieds

Coordinator of Education/Family Ministry Part-time Position (10-12 hrs/week) The Presbyterian Church in Burlington, MA

A vibrant, small congregation blessed with many young families is seeking a committed, creative person to help coordinate educational activities and nurture new, family-based ministry. Our goal is the growth of faithful, loving, service-oriented families able to meet the challenges of the surrounding culture and minister to others in their communities. The coordinator will help achieve this goal by supporting the work of our fine C.E. volunteers/teachers, and by developing innovative resources for family ministry: face-to-face activities, internet possibilities (such as family prayers, blogs, and interactive educational content), and outreach events.

Applicants must be able to work collaboratively with C.E. leaders and pastor. Being a self-starter and having good time-managing skills are important. Solid church experience is a must (theological education not required, but a plus).

Contact Elder Paula Sutton (pemerys@yahoo.com) or the church (burlpres@aol.com) for more information. Complete job description at church website: www.burlingtonpres.org.

Applicants should submit a letter of interest and resume.

Planning a Mission Trip in 2009?

Mission Trips [<http://www.pcusa.org/missiontrips/>] provides planning tools and resources for group leaders interested in short-term mission trips. Presbyterians interested in leading – or taking – a mission trip will find information about opportunities around the country and internationally. Organizations that would like to host a mission group will also find the resources they need.

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance Needs Your Help!

As post-Katrina recovery continues, the aftermath of Hurricane Ike has dropped off the radar screen. Help is needed. Presbyterian Disaster Assistance is coordinating efforts, but money and volunteers do not begin to match the response to Katrina. OGA Executive Director Linda Valentine has posted the following:

November 2008

Greetings,

While headline-grabbing news of the ongoing economic crisis and national election fever has dominated our airwaves and front pages in recent months, the cries of our brothers and sister whose lives were overturned by Hurricane Ike have gone primarily unheard and unheeded. Hurricane Ike hit land over the Texas Gulf Coast as a Category 4 storm late in the night of September 12, with wind gusts up to 160 miles per hour, and was considered to have caused some of the worst storm destruction in U.S. history. The damage in the greater Houston area alone is estimated at \$8.9 billion.

In the wake of such devastation, what is Christ calling us to do?

From Bridge City, Texas, a second grade teacher reports that not only did she and her family lose everything in their home, but at the school where she taught – which stood flooded in ceiling-high water – she sustained losses of all of the resources and materials that she had acquired over two decades of teaching. What is Christ calling us to do?

Because news of the devastation created by Hurricane Ike – like this teacher's story – virtually fell off the front pages of our newspapers, while also rapidly disappearing from evening news broadcasts and major websites, donations and volunteer sign-ups have been at a record low number. We have not even begun to approach the level of resources that we need to help the affected individuals, families and businesses with long-term recovery, a ministry that Presbyterian Disaster Assistance [<http://www.pcusa.org/pda/>] does so well. What is Christ calling us to do?

A GAC team from assembled on Tuesday of this week in order to update our strategy for continued presence of this tremendous need within our synods, presbyteries, congregations and the mainstream media. This will include letters to middle governing

bodies and pastors, news articles, frequent web updates, an ad this coming Tuesday in the New York Times, and possible other messages in the mainstream, where there is a large concentration of Presbyterians. Presbyterian Disaster Assistance staff will also be meeting with the Katrina and Ike stakeholders next week.

Because Christ is calling each of us not to forget or forsake our brothers and sisters affected by this disaster, I appeal to you now to encourage those with whom you come into contact to pray without ceasing – worship resources are available through the PDA Website [<http://www.pcusa.org/pda/tools/resources-worshipresources.htm>] - and to give generously of their financial resources and their time, so that we as the church can reach out with Christ's love. [<http://www.pcusa.org/pda/donate.htm>] PDA issued a church wide appeal in the weeks after Ike hit. PDA's initial ask was for \$7 million, which has recently been pared back to \$4.5 million. To date, we have received less than \$80,000. It will take at least \$750,000 simply to establish three volunteer villages in PDA's mission to help the most vulnerable. What is Christ calling us to do?

With resources to be able to do so, we will touch people like an elderly couple in Surfside, Texas, whose home was destroyed by Ike. The husband is paralyzed and in a wheelchair. The wife suffers from stage 4 cancer. They have only disability income and no resources to repair their home. When asked why they hadn't contacted anyone for assistance their response was, "We know that there are others out there in a lot worse shape than we're in and we want them to get help first."

What is Christ calling us to do?

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to continue to encourage those you know to support PDA's efforts so that we may be the love-scarred hand of our Savior, reaching out to the least of these and seeing that the last are made first.

Faithfully yours,

Linda

Book of Order – Form of Government

Note to Presbytery of Boston members: Sessions are encouraged to begin studying the Form of Government documents. We are planning presbytery and New England regional discussions in 2009. Please read the following letter from the Co-Moderators of the Form of Government Task Force:

Fellow *Book of Order* Travelers:

The expanded Form of Government Task Force was charged by the 218th General Assembly with engaging sessions and presbyteries in a period of study of the new Form of Government documents. Since the 218th General Assembly, the Task Force had

revised the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity and Form of Government documents (see attached) based on the feedback received through the Assembly, including all of the overtures, advice and counsel memoranda, and Assembly Committee comments. These revised documents are now presented to the denomination for their study and response.

In addition to the revised documents, the Task Force has created several additional documents (see attached) to aid the church in this time of study and response:

- *What is Missional Ecclesiology?* Written by Task Force member Paul Hooker, this paper explains the missional theology which stands behind the Task Force's work.
- *Preface to Study Guides.* This document introduces the study process, and suggests ways to study and respond to the work of the Task Force
- *Individual Preparation Guide.* This document guides individuals through the Foundations and Form of Government proposals, to prepare them for taking part in a group study.
- *Group Study Guide.* This document guides groups in discussing and responding to the Task Force's work.
- *Updated Advisory Handbooks for Councils.*

These documents can also be seen at the Form of Government Task Force website:
<http://www.pcusa.org/formofgovernment/>

The Task Force will receive responses to their work from now until June 30, 2009. Following the period of study and response, the Task Force will make additional revisions to their work, and submit final versions to the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly by the date set by the 218th General Assembly, October 15, 2009.

Sessions and presbyteries are encouraged to take advantage of this period for study and response, so that the best possible proposal may be presented to the 219th General Assembly in 2010.

Cynthia Bolbach and Dan Williams

Co-Moderators, Form of Government Task Force

Presbytery of Boston Meeting Calendar

November

17 – Presbytery meeting, Burlington

26 – POB office closes at noon for Thanksgiving holiday

December

2 – Nominating, 11:30, NPC
CPM, 5:00, Presbytery office

4 – COM, 7:00, NPC

8 – ICL, 3:30, NPC

11 – CS&D, 7:30, Presbytery office

Prayer Concerns & Celebrations

Maria Chung and her husband will attend the Moderators' Conference 2008, November 21-23, 2008 in Louisville, KY.

Prayers for Emadel Ramsay, who is recovering from a fall.

Prayers for Diane Cusumano, who is recuperating from surgery on both her knees.

Prayers for Peg Ferguson, who is recuperating from spinal surgery.

Wren Collé asks for your continued prayers for her family, especially for her father. Wren's mother died on October 19.

Upcoming Events

The 218th General Assembly challenged presbyteries to study environmental issues and global warming. Last year we sponsored pre-presbytery events focused on the greening of the church, and a discussion of the DVD Renewal. We hope many of you can attend the Nov. 20 *Summit on Climate & Energy* from 11:00 – 2:30 at Plymouth Congregational Church, Framingham, to hear **Bill McKibben**. He will also be speaking at ANTS that evening; contact Rodney Petersen for details. And if you can't make either of those, the next night, Nov. 21, 7:30, Trinitarian Congregational Church at 54 Walden Street in Concord hosts "An Evening with Bill McKibben."

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November 18 – N.T. Wright at the **Ockenga Institute, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA.**

November 20 – *Religious Leaders' Summit on Climate & Energy*, 11:00 – 2:30, Plymouth Congregational Church, **Framingham**. Bill McKibben will be the speaker.

Requested donation is \$40. Contact Tina Clarke at 413-863-5253 or

tclarke@cleanwater.org.

December 2 – “God Against Religion: Biblical Texts and the Critique of Christianity.” Speaker: Rev. Dr. Matthew Myer Boulton. **Massachusetts Bible Society** luncheon, 12:00-1:15, Paulist Center, 5 Park St., Boston. For more information: 617-542-2230 or admin@massbible.org.

2009

February 18-19 - *Presbyterian Global Fellowship Winter Gathering* at Peachtree Presbyterian Church. Reggie McNeal will be the featured presenter. Schedule and more details will be updated at www.pgfconference.org. East Boston Fund scholarships are available. Contact the Presbytery Office if you are interested or need more details.

March 9-11 – “Stewardship Kaleidoscope” Presbyterian Stewardship Conference. Kansas City, MO. See: www.heartlandpby.org/kaleidoscope.

March 13-16 – “*Enough for All Creation*” in Washington D.C. Join us at the 7th annual Ecumenical Advocacy Days, as we explore ways to bring about a world with 'Enough for All Creation'. Learn about the connections between climate change, migration and poverty in the U.S. and around the world. Come together with faith-based advocates and activists from across the United States in the nation's capitol as we discuss the abundance of our world and how it can be allocated in a way that is fair and just for all Creation. Register now at www.advocacydays.org

March 15-18 - "*Conversations on Renewal and Transformation in Mainline Congregations*" with Diana Butler Bass, Marcus J. Borg, and Brian D. McLaren. Louisville Seminary will welcome this celebrated trio of church leaders/scholars at the Seminary's annual Festival of Theology. Register online.

June 11-13 – **The Big Tent**. Event to feature conferences by ten PC(USA) ministries and groups. (New Website with promotional video just launched at <https://www.pcusa.org/bigtent/>.)

Christmas Joy Offering

A Presbyterian tradition for almost seventy years, the Christmas Joy Offering is one of the four special offerings designated by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to provide congregations direct ways of supporting specific causes that help those in need. You are encouraged to support the Christmas Joy Offering through gifts to your congregation's offering. Fifty percent of the receipts to the Christmas Joy Offering are distributed to the [Board of Pensions](#) for assistance programs that provide support to retired and active church workers and their spouses and families. The other fifty percent supports [Presbyterian-related racial ethnic education](#) through the National Ministries Division of the General Assembly Council.

The Christmas Joy Offering is usually received the Sunday before Christmas. All of the resources are available through PDS by calling (800) 524-2612 or order online at [Presbyterian Marketplace: http://www.pcusa.org/marketplace/](http://www.pcusa.org/marketplace/).

Excerpted from www.pcusa.org/cjoffering

Ordination Anniversaries for December & January

Alison Moore John	12/5/99	9 years
Nancy Kilgore	12/9/84	24 years
Bob Ferguson	12/21/64	44 years
Pat Kepler	12/27/64	44 years
William Newman	12/30/79	29 years
Philip Lin	12/66	42 years
Kevin Ford	1/6/91	17 years
Judson Dolphin	1/14/73	35 years
Ara Heghinian	1/16/94	14 years

Congratulations and thank you!