

**Moving Beyond The Theological Task Force Report
A Call for Progressive Advocates to Unify for GA 218**

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by Raymond J. Bagnuolo, Minister of the Word and Sacrament
Ordained as an Openly Gay Man Refusing to Abide by G-6.0106b
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In 1998, the Office of the General Assembly released "A Call to Sabbatical in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)." The document was respectfully submitted by Clifton Kirkpatrick, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly; John Buchanan, Co-Moderator, Covenant Network of Presbyterians; John Galloway, Pastor, Wayne Presbyterian Church, Wayne, PA; Jack Haberer, Moderator, Presbyterian Coalition; Roberta Hestenes, Moderator, Human Sexuality Committee 208th General Assembly; and Laird Stuart, Moderator, Book of Order Committee, 209th General Assembly (1997). The introduction of the press release¹ states its purpose:

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is at a crossroads. We have spent the last 20 years in debate, taking actions in the General Assembly, voting on constitutional amendments, and engaging in judicial process related to concerns over human sexuality and ordination. We believe that continued reliance on overtures, amendments, and judicial process will not lead us to a new vision or to the restoration of Christian community but may well lead us to division and schism.

We believe the time has come for our church to enter into a sabbatical season on these issues. A sabbatical is not meant to be the end to discussion and learning. It is meant to be a season of peace and rest from the confrontations of recent years.

A sabbatical would be a time to refrain from seeking legislative and judicial solutions to our conflicts so that they may be dealt with in our congregations and presbyteries primarily in a personal and pastoral manner. A sabbatical would be a time to engage in reflection and repentance, a time to listen to God together, and a time to reaffirm and to celebrate our life and mission together as God's people.

¹ <http://www.raybagnuolo.net/References/1998.05.18 A Call to Sabbatical.pdf>

A sabbatical would not change the policy of the church as amended in the Book of Order G-6.0106b. It also would not remove the deep sense of alienation which many Presbyterians feel over the provision. It would allow us to engage this and other crucial concerns such as Christology, the authority and interpretation of Scripture, and the mission of the church in a changing culture and world in an environment that is not overshadowed by pending legislation or threatened judicial actions.

In an interview with *The Layman Online*² each of the signers was asked a series of questions about the document and its suggested provisions. John Buchanan, then Co-Moderator of the Covenant Network, Moderator of 208th GA (1996), currently editor of *Christian Century*, and long-time pastor of Fourth Church in Chicago responded to one of the questions as follows:

Question: If this "sabbatical" becomes the standard for the PCUSA, what is the remaining significance of G-6.0106b?

Answer: G-6.0106b is part of our constitution and will continue to reflect the mind of the church until and unless it is changed.

Mr. Buchanan's comment was as prophetic then as it is true today. The recent ruling of the GAPJC³ solidified the church's position, underscoring that until and unless constitutional change is implemented, there can be no resolution to this struggle that has been with us since the 1970's. In effect, it gave us the choice of continuing to argue the basis of its decisions on paper or moving on and directly addressing the root of the continuing pain: G-6.0106b.

Calls for sabbaticals, moratoriums, studies, task forces, or proposed legislations that circumvent G-6.0106b and delay its removal have always lacked the reality of Mr. Buchanan words: this amendment reflects the "mind of the church" and will continue to do so until it is gone. Additionally, it reflects the violence we are willing to tolerate toward Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) folk, in the interest to our own form of *Pax Romana*.

The 218th General Assembly can change it all.

It's Time to Put Aside Differences and Focus on G-6.0106b as One

There can be no elimination of the inherent homophobia in our church, generalized across the spectrum of sexual identity, until constitutional change is effected. Progressive advocacy groups must join together, setting aside their differences to embrace ***the call***: End this decades long marginalization and dehumanization of our LGBT family, conducted in the name of God to exclude the people of God.

² <http://www.layman.org/layman/news/sabbatical/sab-response-buchanan.htm>

³ <http://covenantnetwork.org/home.htm>

What better reasons to come together than to live the theme of this General Assembly: “Do justice; Love kindness; Walk Humbly with your God”? (Micah 6:8)

There is collaboration...

In many ways, some of the progressive advocates are in concert; however there are still differences that threaten to make this General Assembly another contest between the groups, rather than a unified powerful witness to what God has done within our own movement, as a model for others to notice. Evidence that this unfortunate path may be repeated again is in what is *not said* in a press release issued following a March gathering at The Stony Point Center – A National Conference Center of the Presbyterian Church(USA)⁴ in which “various progressive Presbyterian advocacy groups” gathered to try and work out their differences in preparation for GA. The full press release is available in many locations, this excerpt taken from mlp.org:⁵

“Through discussion and collaboration, the representatives agreed that it is important for all of the groups to continue to educate and inform the members of the PC(USA) of our hope for a church that will eliminate the barriers to full participation by all people to ordained service in our church and Jesus Christ. Each group brings with it a different approach and a diverse membership, but our unity lies in our vision of a welcoming and inclusive church.”

We have to do better. Supporters, board members, churches, friends, families – all of us have to contact these organizations and encourage them back to a table and a room, hopefully not leaving until a clear national program is in place. In truth, it is a relatively easy thing to do, if the groups are willing to take the risks.

And, we need more than a “unity of vision.” If the lessons of the past have proven anything beyond the lengths to which this church will go to keep LGBT folk from being included fully, they have shown that vision, concepts, welcoming statements, and divided approaches are fine until it comes to the truth: we remain immobilized, confined to a smaller and smaller space within the church until G-6.0106b is removed from the constitution without any substitute to assuage concerns or bargain for votes.

Gone. G-6.0106b needs to be gone! Any group that calls for a pause or is unwilling to set aside failed efforts so that we can move forward together needs to be otherwise persuaded.

Cohesive action in a time like this is the responsibility that comes with the generosity of resources contributed to the advocacy groups. Each group, just like the broader church, is a steward of the gifts it receives. The advocacy groups have all been formed and/or publicly focused to lead us to a new and right

⁴ <http://www.stonypointcenter.org/>

⁵ <http://www.mlp.org/>

church. It is expected of these groups, I believe, to come together as one voice with the combination of prayer, heart, call, resources, and humility to change what needs to be changed – now.

The Groups as One Voice with Shared Resources:

A concerted effort needs to be initiated and led by The Covenant Network,⁶ More Light Presbyterians,⁷ Presbyterian Promise,⁸ Presbyterian Welcome,⁹ That All May Freely Serve and its Affiliates,¹⁰ and the Witherspoon Society¹¹. These advocates need to rally their supporters and persuade this church to do three things:

- delete G-6.0106b from the Book of Order,
- remove the Authoritative Interpretation of the 190th General Assembly reaffirmed at the 205th general Assembly in 1993 that states: “That unrepentant homosexual practice does not accord with the requirements for ordination...¹²”,
- change the language of marriage in the Directory for Worship (W-4.9001, W-4.9002, W-4.9004, W-4.9006) in accordance with the Baltimore Overture¹³ so that marriage is identified as being between two people.

Isn't it that clear? To consider other options is to have lost our vision and the immense opportunity and gravity of these times that are pulling us toward one another. What could be left to pull us apart? Whatever it is that is in the way needs to be overcome; surely we can do that.

The “New Thing” God is calling us to do for the church...are we ready?

As humans, we have a way of taking fundamental problems and making them much too complex, especially given shifting memories over time. We forget things. We become tired, losing a bit of confidence and trust in the Holy Spirit. We compensate by intellectualizing, analyzing, relying on blue and red to tell us whether we have the votes to succeed, waiting until we are assured of success. It seems the opposite of what Jesus taught us to do. When he set his face to Jerusalem, he didn't know what was going to happen. He just knew that was where he needed to go. At least, I see it that way.

⁶ <http://covenantnetwork.org/home.htm>

⁷ <http://www.mlp.org>

⁸ <http://presbypromise.home.att.net>

⁹ <http://www.presbyterianwelcome.org/>

¹⁰ <http://www.tamfs.org/>

¹¹ <http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/>

¹² The Authoritative Interpretation of the 190th General Assembly and reaffirmed by the 205th General Assembly requires only a vote at the General Assembly and is not voted upon by the presbyteries.

¹³ <http://raybagnuolo.net/GA218/2007.Marriage%20Overture.pdf>

We don't need assurances of the outcome. We just need to go to Jerusalem ourselves, with the same trust and faith that God is with us as God was with Jesus. There are no assurances here; it is a matter of belief and faith. Either we make a decision to trust and have faith, or we don't. This is really more about us, the progressive advocates, than about the general church. We already know what the church will do, given the chance to be left alone. Do we now believe that we are ready to hold hands and walk as one?

The Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church (TTF) has shown us the way...

During the post GA218 period, using the model successfully implemented by TTF as a starting point, we can lead the national church in supporting discernment processes and healing. We can create a series of country-wide task forces, going out as disciples and witnesses, visiting with every presbytery that would have us: to teach, inform, talk about our lives, and listen to others share about their own.

This is our work, our evangelism as a movement. We were taught this long ago, as well: "For wherever two or more are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20).

Those opposed to ordination for LGBT need to be embraced, as well...

We all know that nothing changes the hearts and minds of others more than being together in prayer and conversation. The call to unity and the recommendations for post GA healing and education is not a call to ignore or even change the minds of those who oppose ordination for LGBT folk. We cannot ask for acceptance of others (tolerance is not enough), unless we are willing to accept them and their convictions. The simple truth is that we can worship and work together with our differences. We do it all the time. The pre- and post-GA218 outreach is not about changing peoples' beliefs, as much as it is to dispel the fear that keeps us separated. Until G-6.0106b is removed from the Book of Order – fear has the upper hand. Fear has plagued us, and some of the reasons for this are of our own making.

Where would we, the LGBT community, be without our allies? Their ongoing support and contributions and courage have helped us to prepare immeasurably for what is ahead. Still, we invite a subtle fear any time we agree to not speak for ourselves as LGBT folk. When we depend on others to speak and decide what is best for us, we directly contribute to the belief that we must have something to hide. We LGBT/Queer sisters and brothers need to be more vocal and involved, if only in letting the progressive groups know our thoughts.

And, any time we acquiesce to a process that delays our sisters and brothers from being included in the full work and worship of this church, we suggest that there is still something wrong with us. We are not quite "cooked" enough. Beware!

The fear that we will cause a schism is frightening even to some of our strongest supporters. We need to do more to dispel this fear-based exaggeration. My friends, our effort at inclusion in this church is not the culprit – G-6.0106b is what is dividing us. As long as it is in the deck – fear holds the trump card. If we want to ensure a united church we must make sure that G-6.0106b is deleted, the AI voted away, and the Baltimore Overture passed.

God and change is ready for us...

The PC(USA) is poised for the most remarkable change in its history with the potential for impact throughout religious and spiritual communities around the globe.

The inclusion of LGBT folk in the full work and worship of this church, with equal status to those who identify themselves as otherwise, will change this church of 2.2 million or so members into a church whose doors are truly open to all those who seek God.

If membership is a goal, we should plan on building more churches, once we get this right.

If witness and the Gospel is our call, then we have no choice but to follow the lesson of Maundy Thursday:

"Mandatum novum do vobis ut diligatis invicem sicut dilexi vos"

"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you John (13:34)

It is time, as it always is, to love one another as Jesus loves us. This time, let's demonstrate it together and lead this church to a place that includes the LGBT community without caveats, interpretations, or safeguards -- for God's love comes with none of such things.

What else is left to wait for?

At no point since the first Lesbian and Gay Candidates stood before the General Assembly in the 1970's have we been so ready, so prepared, so *tested*, and so clearly called to eliminate all barriers, constitutionally and otherwise to the examination and ordination of all those God calls.

For close to a decade, constitutional change regarding G-6.0106b has been placed aside in favor of the anticipation, process, and the outcome of the *Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church*. From the moment the task force became a possible choice, many opted to "wait and see" what happened, rather than commit their wholehearted support to "delete B" overtures

In a remarkable juxtaposition of effort and policy, the last GA saw some of the same organizations simultaneously addressing different committees to pass both the recommendations of *Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church* and the overtures and concurrences associated with the deletion of G-6.0106b. Knowing the Presbyterian Church, it is not difficult to understand why given a choice the TTF recommendations were accepted over a change in the constitution to delete G-6.0106b.

Not unlike the sabbatical's initiatives, the task force offered committees and the plenary the choice for an easier softer way to address the perceived needs of the LGBT community. Rather than embrace the more comprehensive justice and spiritual change that the deletion of G-6.0106b would have produced, those gathered chose a way that allowed G-6.0106b to remain in the Constitution.

Simply, one has to wonder, "How could we have done this after all we have been through. What on earth has the LGBT/Queer community done to be treated this way—again? "

Some say it wasn't time. The issue of "timing" is not new nor is it relevant. Time is now, nothing else.

Others, who have been opposed to full inclusion during these same years, have increased their rhetoric. Like a beating drum, they continued to use the declining votes in favor of deletion of G-6.0106b as a sign of growing disinterest and disapproval of the effort. For good measure, this was often linked to the decline in membership of the church, heaping a generalized blame on the LGBT community and a cry for funds to keep us out – or lose the church. It was and continues to be a campaign of fear.

In reality, the increasing numbers of "Nay" votes at General Assemblies were not as much against deletion of G-6.0106b as they were in favor of the promise provided by the TTF. Initiated by the 213th General Assembly in 2001¹⁴, *The Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church* has spanned at least four General Assemblies and influenced every vote on the deletion of G-6.0106b in a negative way.

To the consternation of many during this time, it was absolutely right for progressive advocates to continue to move overtures for the deletion of G-6.0106b, even though the prospects for passage were impaired by the work of the TTF. As for the struggle causing the decline in membership that those in opposition point to as an outcome of such efforts, the truth is that the presence of G-6.0106b is the true cause of any movement away from this church, not adding LGBT brothers and sisters as Ministers of the Word and Sacrament to serve an ever increasing number of people in the world bringing their faith journeys to the PC(USA).

¹⁴ <http://www.pcusa.org/peaceunitypurity/>

There is a “word” for doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results...

The recent decisions of the GAPJC are not surprising, nor were they all that unpredictable. And, once more, the effort at adding procedures to make the church more welcoming for LGBT persons has produced the opposite.

The events put into motion by the TTF with regard to ordination standards have had unexpected results. They parallel the time when The Presbytery of The City of New York sought Definitive Guidance of the General Assembly as to whether it could ordain Bill Silver. Bill, who passed away May 26, 2007¹⁵, was an openly gay man who sought ordination in 1975. As a result of this effort, the church produced an even tighter response.¹⁶

At the time that The Presbytery of the City of New York sought Definitive Guidance from the Office of the General Assembly about ordaining Bill, there were no constitutional barriers to his being cleared to seek and accept a call. The attempt to work in good faith within the polity of the church produced the aforementioned Definitive Guidance. It also eventually led to the addition of G-6.0106b in the Book of Order, in an attempt to make sure that no open, self-affirming, practicing homosexual would ever, could ever be ordained. It was a sad day for this church and a day that devastated Bill and every LGBT person who has since sought a spiritual home in a truly welcoming, inclusive Presbyterian Church.

In many ways, the TTF's effort to seek the approval of the church, has produced a similar result. An important part of the TTF's work was upholding The Adoption Act of 1729,¹⁷ which in part states: (excuse the gender references)

§ 7. Act Preliminary to the Adopting Act: “And in case any Minister of this Synod, or any candidate for the ministry, shall have any scruple with respect to any article or articles of said Confession or Catechisms, he shall at the time of his making said declaration declare his sentiments to the Presbytery or Synod, who shall, notwithstanding, admit him to the exercise of the ministry within our bounds and to ministerial communion if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge his scruple or mistake to be only about articles not essential and necessary in doctrine, worship or government.”

The Adopting Act has been available to those choosing to declare scruples since 1729. Presbyteries have had the option of using it long before the TTF brought it

¹⁵ [http://www.raybagnuolo.net/References/2007.06.04 Bill Silver Obit2.pdf](http://www.raybagnuolo.net/References/2007.06.04%20Bill%20Silver%20Obit2.pdf)

¹⁶ <http://www.pcusa.org/101/101-homosexual.htm>

¹⁷ <http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/subscription/adoptingact.html>

to the attention of most Presbyterians. The acceptance of the recommendation by the TTF at GA217 brought the act greater attention and greater scrutiny. Eventually, this led to the current GAPJC decision,¹⁸ which upholds the theology of declaring a scruple with regard to G-6.0106b but prohibits its practice as a violation against scrupling an *essential* part of the Constitution.

The effort to navigate the constitution with G-6.0106b in the Book of Order once again produced whiplash for the LGBT Community and all the faithful supporters of a welcoming church.

Is it “purity” or unchecked homophobia?

In 2005, I was cleared for ordination ordained after stating in word and text that as a gay man I would not abide by G-6.0106b. It was a Spirit-filled evening of honest, transparent, and difficult discussion that continues to be needed.

I did not declare a scruple or cite The Adopting Act of 1729. I cannot attest to what took place in the hour-long discussion that followed my fifty minutes of examination. However, when I was cleared by a vote of 88-9-1, it was apparent that the Spirit that brought us to the that intersection and the Body of the Presbytery had moved in a way that honored God’s call and the importance of conscience.

Once more, a court ruling has come down in favor of tightening, not loosening the Spirit of God in this world and the importance of conscience, specifically targeting LGBT sisters and brothers who share the same baptism as all other Christians. Some may say that the GAPJC’s ruling is much more general and not just aimed at our community. History and practice suggest otherwise.

Reduced to sexual acts...

In early March, following the GAPJC’s rulings, a letter to the National Church was released by “Candidates and Inquirers for the Ministry of Word and Sacrament who are Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Re: Bush vs. Presbytery of Pittsburgh PJC Ruling Regarding Ordination Standards and G-6.0106b.” It is a powerful letter; the following excerpt delivers a sense of the tone:

This PJC decision puts a wedge between theology and practice, belief and action, being and doing. It demeans the lives of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer persons by again reducing our lives to sexual acts. It fails to recognize God’s ability to choose whomever God wills to serve the Church. It perpetuates the mythology that sexual orientation is simply a matter of behavior. It says that we are not filled with God’s grace.¹⁹

What is striking about the letter and its content is that it was even written. This is a group that has met in safe havens out of fear of repercussions and retaliations

¹⁸ <http://www.pres-outlook.com/tabid/2232/Article/7086/Default.aspx>

¹⁹ http://www.tamfs.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=111&Itemid=1

from their Committees on Preparation for and of Ministry, Presbyteries, and the broader PC(USA). These faithful individuals are not the ones frequently being referred to as the “old guard,” the worn-out radical troublemakers who are out of step and touch with the new emerging, non-Robert’s Rules Church.²⁰ Many of us are hearing a similar beat in presbyteries across the country, suggesting that we have lost the pulse of this “movement,” and are missing out on (or refusing to see) the recommended and new, collaborative way of being church and making decisions.

No, those who wrote this letter are the faithful candidates and seminarians who are the future church, some of them placing their ordinations on the line just by writing this letter. Still, out of the twenty-eight who signed the work of their hearts, twelve felt threatened enough to remain “Anonymous.” What does that say about how safe and progressive we are as a church and how effective our movement has been? What does this say about how we are moving people into ministry – as partly-anonymous creations of God so that they need not fear the people of God?

What does that say about how open and honest we have been, leaving a closeted path as a legacy?

Dare to see Christ in our midst...

In late April, another ruling is expected. The GAPJC will hear the final arguments in the case against The Rev. Dr. Janie Adams Spahr, centering on her performing marriages between same-sex couples. Attempts to limit Janie’s ministry and outreach are not new.

“In 1991, Downtown United Presbyterian Church (DUPC), Rochester NY, called Janie Spahr to become one of its four co-pastors. The congregation knew of her sexual orientation, but was more interested in her compassion, her experience, and her powerful Sunday sermons. DUPC members voted to employ Janie and believed that nothing prevented her from changing jobs, especially given the “grandparent clause,” which seemed to exempt then-current ministers from the “definitive guidance.” Unfortunately, other Presbyterians in the Rochester area did not agree and formally challenged the call. Although the Downtown Church’s actions

²⁰ Note: There is a concerted effort to “move away” from making decisions in the church, with the TTF process often being reflected as a model of how this might be done. For example, there are many who call for the elimination of “Robert’s Rules of Order” in decision-making. Most would agree that up and down votes do not always represent consensus or minority opinions. In fact, such votes and minority voices often witness to the pain that is caused in such outcomes. No group knows this better than the sisters and brothers of the LGBT community in this church. However, the attempt to implement the “small group/consensus/mutual invitation (feminine model)” of being church to address the deletion of G-60106b and other relevant decisions in presbyteries and at GA, once more unfairly burdens and delays justice for the LGBT community. It does so by asking us to be the “test” for the process, while the great majority of presbyteries continue with their votes and rules for order. It is a sure thing, as well, that GA218 will make its decisions using what it has always used: Robert’s Rules and votes. It is a fair question of some, “Is this just another effort at delay for full inclusion of LGBT folk in the PC(USA)?”

were upheld twice by its Presbytery (Genesee Valley) and by the Synod of the Northeast, the official protests led finally to a negative ruling from the Permanent Judicial Commission of the Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assembly -- a ruling that denied the Downtown Church's call to Rev. Spahr.

In a constructive response to this painful denial by the highest church court, DUPC in March 1993 created *That All May Freely Serve (TAMFS)* to participate in the dialogue and education process which the General Assembly established. DUPC then invited Janie Spahr to become an evangelist to spread the good news of God's love for everyone by 'personing' the issue.²¹ TAMFS is co-sponsored by Westminster Presbyterian Church²² of Tiburon, California.

It may be true that Janie Spahr has weathered more charges and challenges than any other Minister of the Word and Sacrament, simply for being a Lesbian and remaining faithful to her call and ordination vows in a church that still has much to learn from her.

In 1999 an effort was initiated to prevent Janie from receiving the *Woman of Faith Award*.²³ The National Ministries Division (NMD) of the PC(USA) actually rescinded the award because her ministry "was not in keeping with the policies of the PC(USA)," according to The Rev. Curtis A. Kearns, Jr. the NMD head. Finally, in April of 1999, by secret ballot, the General Assembly Council reversed the decision of the NMD by a 9-2 vote. Listen in your hearts to Janie's words following the reversal:

"As one who continues to be transformed and informed by the Living Word, I pray that we as a church will dare to see Christ in the midst of us, face to face, challenging any system, yes even the church, which attempts to exclude its very own children. To dare less is to become implicit in perpetrating violence against those defined as 'Less Than'..."²⁴

It was in that same year that Ministers Joseph Gilmore and Susan DeGeorge of South Presbyterian Church in Dobbs Ferry²⁵ came under charges for conducting "holy unions" described as being the same as a wedding. The ruling by the Synod of the Northeast ruled that the Hudson River Presbytery²⁶ did not violate the constitution when it authorized sessions to permit their ministers to conduct same-sex unions and to use church property for the ceremonies.

²¹ <http://www.revjanespahr.org/>

²² <http://www.wpctiburon.org/>

²³ <http://www.layman.org/layman/news/news-from-pcusa/spahr-will-get-women-of-faith.htm>

²⁴ <http://www.revjanespahr.org/>

²⁵ <http://www.southpres.org/>

²⁶ <http://www.hudrivpres.org/>

Almost ten years later, we wait to see whether one of the most remarkable women to serve as Minister of the Word and Sacrament will be found guilty in the “supreme court” of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Again, Janie’s words:

“I am deeply saddened that our church has chosen not to recognize the loving relationships of members of its own family.” Rev. Spahr continued, “These couples and many like them have found a sacred trust in their love for each other; this reversal of the Presbytery’s decision promotes a belief that somehow this love is less than valid.” Spahr said, “The church’s pervasive attitude of prejudice promotes violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people.”²⁷

It is that pervasive attitude of prejudice that promotes violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. It is homophobia not faithfulness that produces the fear and violence. It can only become more rampant unless we do something about it.

The GAPJC rulings have defined our mission...

There are myths in this church. The first is the one that suggests we are welcoming, just not ready to embrace queer folk 100%. Many of us have heard these words before:

Myth One: *We love you but hate your sin.*

Reply: Our *sin* is the same as all others. We were born with this built-in distance from God that we spend our lives trying to reduce.

Our sin is not our sexuality or our expression of it in loving relationships. Our sexuality is of the same sacred mystery of sexuality in which we all share. It cannot be divided – it is not divisible. We cannot be “partly” loved, nor can anyone else.

Myth Two: All we need to do is to *keep our heads low; follow the Book of Order; get ordained and then can change the church from the inside.*

Reply: Were this true, the church would already be changed.

In fact, if we wished to change the church in the next 24 hours, all it would take is for every LGBT person who is a Minister of the Word and Sacrament to identify themselves, as such. It would make this one of the most memorable days in our history and a General Assembly like no other.

²⁷ <http://www.revjanespahr.org/>

What is not a myth is what Barbara G. Wheeler, President of Auburn Seminary said in her address at the 1999 Covenant Conference, Network of Presbyterians on Nov. 6, 1999 in Atlanta, Georgia. "True Confessions: a Presbyterian Dissenter Thinks About the Church":

[...]most compelling for me, given my concern about homosexuality, is the fact that this denomination, with its history, social status, and many influential members, has impact far beyond its own organizational boundaries. As I noted earlier, our condemnation of homosexual practices reinforces hatred of homosexuals throughout this society. Former moderator John Fife once said that every time a gay teenager commits suicide, there is a sense in which that goes on the Presbyterian Church's chart. If a small group of dissenters with views like mine decamps to another denomination or starts a new one, that will have limited and temporary effect on the social tragedy we have helped to create. But if the Presbyterian Church (USA), changes its official teaching on homosexuality, it will go a significant distance toward changing the message that moderate religion broadcasts to the world. Maybe even homosexual teenagers will hear it, and think differently about the meaning and value of their lives. One important reason to stay is that the harm that the PC(USA) has done can only be undone by the PC(USA).²⁸

I couldn't agree more.

**The fence that was never there – is surely gone.
All that was ever there – and remains still – is barbed wire...**²⁹

Emperor Charles V commenced the imperial Diet of Worms on January 22, 1521. Luther was summoned to renounce or reaffirm his views. When he appeared before the assembly on April 16, Johann Eck, an assistant of Archbishop of Trier (Richard Greiffenklau zu Vollraths at that time), acted as spokesman for the Emperor.

When Counselor Eck asserted that Luther had no right to contradict traditional orthodoxy, Luther replied: "Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason--I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other--my conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe."

"Hier stehe ich. Ich kann nicht anders. Gott helfe mir. Amen
Here, I stand. I can do nothing else. God help me. Amen."³⁰

²⁸ <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=530>

²⁹ References to "G-6.0106b being barbed wire around God's radical hospitality" with thanks to The Rev. Joe Gilmore, South Presbyterian Church, Dobbs Ferry. <http://www.southpres.org>

³⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diet_of_Worms

There are simply times when everything must come into play. Who we are and will continue to be relies upon our making courageous decisions that propel us into what we have yet to know. This has been the inherent risk of Christianity from its beginnings. God calls us to more, not less.

God is calling all of us and those who lead us to more than we have given in the past. That will only come from the community we now must form in a new way – or the new thing God is doing in this world will slip through the folded hands with which we pray. And, that will be on our chart, as well.

Let it not be so. Let us do what needs to be done, not just what is easy or safe to do.

Amen.

End.