

June 2013

The Banner

Newsletter of the Presbytery of Arkansas

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"Constitutional Musings" report from OGA

Dear Friends in Christ,

Last week, we received the following message from the Rev. Joyce Lieberman, Associate of Constitutional Interpretation of the Office of the General Assembly:

The Office of the General Assembly (OGA) has seen an increase in the number of calls from congregations and presbyteries concerning printed materials being circulated within PC(USA) congregations which misrepresent the beliefs and practices of the PC(USA).

In response to the broader claims being made in these documents, the OGA staff have prepared a Constitutional Musing addressing some of these misrepresentations. This Constitutional Musing is available online at

<http://www.pcusa.org/resource/misrepresentations-pcusa/>.

You are free to use, adapt and circulate as you see fit.



If our office can be of further assistance, please contact us.

May God continue to bless, uphold and guide you in your ministry.

Rev. Joyce Lieberman

Associate, Constitutional Interpretation

Office of the General Assembly

100 Witherspoon Street

Room 4621

Louisville, KY 40202

1-888-728-7228 ext. 5434

Please note that the Constitutional Musing is printed in its entirety elsewhere in this issue of The Banner. You may wish to use this document in your conversations with colleagues, sessions, members of your congregations or communities.

Gratefully yours,

Bill

General Presbyter's Out-of-Office Commitments

June

03-10 Presbyterian Credo, Wooded Glen Conference Center, Henryville, Indiana

11 Statehouse Convention Center, Participant, Ordination of United Methodist Elders

12 Jackson Cook Memorial Lecture, Children's Hospital, Oklahoma City

16 Preach, Central Presbyterian, Russellville

30 Preach, First Presbyterian, Jonesboro

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Church Employment Opportunities in our Presbytery

Choir Director -- First Presbyterian Church, Harrison, Arkansas, seeks a choir director for Wednesdays and Sundays. A job description and an application form are available by contacting the church at 870-741-2464 or jane@fpcharrison.org.

Youth and College Ministry Director -- First United Presbyterian Church of Fayetteville. Seeking a young adult to a new, full-time position as Youth and College Ministry Director. Looking for someone with a mature Christian faith consistent with the Reformed tradition, and the warmth and confidence to do direct outreach on school campuses and at the University of Arkansas. The full position announcement is posted on the church's website at www.fupcfay.org under "Leadership" then "Positions Open." You may send resumes to jprice1210@hotmail.com.

Assistant Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Arkansas -- Effective January 1, 2014, part-time Assistant Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Arkansas. [Click here](#) to view job description. Current Assistant Stated Clerk NiAnn Thompson (niann@presbyteryofarkansas.org) will gladly answer questions about the position she will vacate next year. Stipend offered and mileage reimbursed. Send resumes to Rev. Guy Delaney, moderator of Committee on Administration, at info@presbyteryofarkansas.org for election on Oct. 5.

Choir Director -- Kirk of the Hills (Fairfield Bay, AR) seeks an organist/choir director beginning in July, 2013. If you are interested, please email Pastor Bob Hadley at rwhadley@artelco.com.

Pianist -- First Presbyterian Church of Jacksonville is in need of a pianist. The ability to play the organ is an asset but is not required. We are a small church of very friendly people. We are looking for someone to play the piano; someone who will support our Praise & Worship Band as well as play solo. Church service is 11-12 on Sundays. The choir and band practice once a week; the pianist would be wanted for the practice. Salary is negotiable.

Youth Director -- Trinity Presbyterian Church of Little Rock is seeking a Youth Director. This is a part time position and requires loving the Lord and loving Junior and Senior High kids. A short job description is available [here](#). If you are interested, please call the church office at 501-868-5848 or email at office@trinitypreslr.com for more information.

Youth Intern -- First Presbyterian, Harrison is seeking a young adult who has the ability to lead our junior and senior high youth into deeper Christian discipleship as they grow physically, mentally and spiritually. This person would need to be available on Sundays, mornings and evenings. For a more complete job description and application form please contact the Pastor/Head of Staff, the Rev. Jane Huffstetler at jane@fpcharrison.org, check out our website at www.harrisonfpc.org, or contact the church office at 870/741-2464.

Director of Youth Ministries and Christian Education -- Westminster Presbyterian Church, Hot Springs seeks qualified candidate for the position of Director of Youth Ministries and Christian Education. This is a professional, full-time lay position with primary focus towards Youth Ministries with additional responsibilities for Christian Education for the entire congregation. Email your resume and cover letter to wpchsar@sbcglobal.net. A complete job description is available if requested.

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People and Church News

News of Our People

--**Rev. Rebecca Spooner** of Conway will complete her service at the end of June as director of Laurence E. Schmidt Center in Little Rock, a ministry of Vera Lloyd Presbyterian Home & Family Services, Inc. Her new counseling practice will be at Wellspring Renewal Center in Little Rock.

--Ruling Elder **Jean Pope** of Graham Memorial Forrest City has been elected Cluster IV representative to Committee on Clusters and Ruling Elder **Jan Enke** of First, Van Buren has been elected Cluster VI's representative to Committee on Clusters. Ruling Elder **Laura Pierce**, Central, Pine Bluff has been elected Cluster V's representative to General Committee, and Teaching Elder **Ben Bateman**, HR of Hot Springs, has been elected Cluster V's representative to Committee on Clusters. All will serve in the Class of 2016.

--Christian sympathy goes to the family of **Deanna Shumate**, ruling elder at First, Conway, who died on May 17. She was a member of presbytery's Committee on Representation.

--**Andre Strydom** has resigned as director of music at First, Pine Bluff to take the same position at First, Bentonville, effective June 2.

--**Blake Smith** is the new Music Director at Presbyterian Kirk in the Pines, Hot Springs Village.

News of Our Congregations and Ministries

--**First, Arkadelphia** hosted a one-day Vacation Bible School on June 1 with bilingual elements that launched their new summer series on June 2 to introduce the Spanish language to children ages 4 through sixth grade.

--**First, Springdale** had a spring concert on May 19 honoring organist/pianist Celice Clark who is in her 25th consecutive year in that position.

--**First, Huntsville** plans another mission trip to Vera Lloyd Home in Monticello July 14-20.

--**Central Presbyterian, Russellville** youth sponsored a spaghetti dinner fundraiser on June 2 and look ahead to the annual trip to Arkansas Travelers baseball game on June 16 before heading to St. Louis for the mission trip June 23-28.

--**Westminster Presbyterian, Hot Springs** Mission Committee has a goal of gathering enough of each item to fill 50 clean-up buckets to be assembled at the Chili Cook-off on Oct. 27.

--**First, Rogers** invited fathers and sons to form a special choir last month on Mother's Day to present a personal gift of song.

--**Kirk in the Pines, Hot Springs Village** invites church members to notify the Kirk office if members are going out of town or if hospitalized so other members will know their situation and stay connected.

--**First, Heber Springs** offers traditional Sunday morning school, Tuesday night Bible class, and Wednesday afternoon Bible study and prayer meeting.

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Second Presbyterian, Little Rock Hosts Presbytery Meeting

By NiAnn Thompson, Assistant Stated Clerk

The 123rd stated meeting of the Presbytery of Arkansas was held at Second Presbyterian Church Little Rock on Saturday, June 1, 2013. Moderator Ruling Elder Sherée Niece, now of Hot Springs Village, called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. in the sanctuary following the annual training of cluster records review teams. Leading opening worship were Teaching Elders Steve Hancock, Karen Akin, Camille LeBron Powell, Ruling Elder Cyril Hollingsworth, Britton Varn and the choir of Second led by

Bevan Keating, director of music and the arts. Candidate for ministry Frank Marion "Mike" McCracken delivered the sermon, and 38 summer camp counselors at Ferncliff Camp and 39 youth and adults from Second's delegation and from the presbytery's delegation to Presbyterian Youth Triennium in July were commissioned. A total of \$1,706.27 was given during worship to support the presbytery's Triennium delegation. The ingathering of non-perishable foods benefitted AR Rice Depot. Total registered enrollment was 232, including the large group of young people. The meeting continued in the Great Hall until 4 p.m.



Ferncliff camp counselors commissioned at presbytery meeting



Triennium delegates from the Presbytery of Arkansas and from Second Presbyterian, Little Rock were commissioned at presbytery meeting

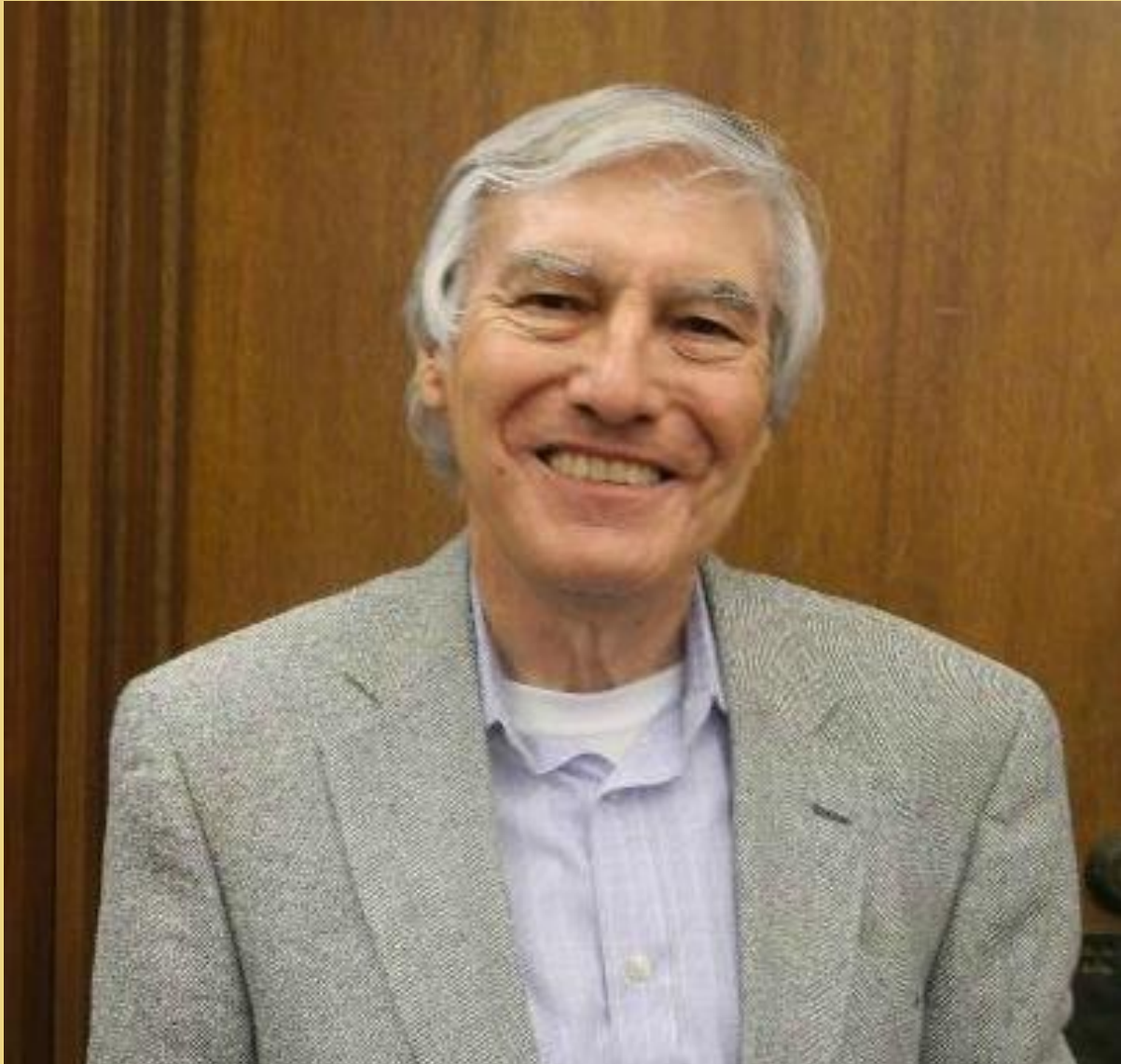
The presbytery voted to:

- approve the active and non-active status of honorably retired teaching elders for 2013
- approve the minutes of the 122nd stated meeting of the presbytery
- dissolve the Administrative Commissions for First, Harrison and for Vaughn, Bentonville
- approve a three-year extension in the Committee on Mission's unified mission emphasis of the presbytery as hunger, especially that of children and senior adults
- make a \$1 million pledge to the capital campaign of Ferncliff Camp and Conference Center, based on the understanding of sale of presbytery-owned property on Chenal

Valley, Little Rock by end of 2014 and if property does not sell by then, securing an interest-only bank loan for \$1 million with that property as collateral while suspending presbytery's budget support for Ferncliff in the amount of interest paid on loan until the loan is repaid

--refer to General Committee the concern of Committee on Congregational Care and Development for their present and future work with presbytery's properties and in the meantime, continue that committee's handling of property matters concerning new church development and dissolved properties in process

--approve the honorable retirement of TE Alan Ford of Newport, effective April 28, 2013



Newly Honorably Retired Teaching Elder Alan Ford of Newport

--approve dismissal of TE Andrew King to Presbytery of The Peaks

--approve dissolution of calls of TE Jeff Parker as pastor of First, Rogers; TE Debbie Spangler as pastor of First, Walnut Ridge; TE Carl McCormack as pastor of First,

Malvern; and TE Lance Clemmons as pastor of First, Pine Bluff
--approve covenant of TE Carl McCormack as interim pastor at First, Rogers through May 31, 2014 and his terms of covenant
--approve covenant of TE Barry Williams, a member of John Calvin Presbytery, as interim co-pastor at First, Bentonville through April 30, 2014 and his terms of covenant
--approve changing title and relationship of TE Kris Crawford to interim co-pastor at First, Bentonville through August 31, 2013
--approve covenant of TE Linda Whitworth-Reed, a member of Mission Presbytery, as transitional pastor at Grace, Little Rock from July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2014 and her terms of covenant
--approve the covenant of TE Emmett Powers as Stated Teaching Elder at First, Lonoke through Feb. 3, 2014 and his terms of covenant
--approve the call of TE Dari Rowen, current interim pastor, as pastor of First, Benton, effective July 8, 2013; her terms of call; and the details of her installation on July 14



Teaching Elder Dari Rowen (left center, in dark dress and jacket) with members of Benton, First
--examine and sustain the exam for ordination of Candidate "Mike" McCracken, under care of Sheppards and Lapsley Presbytery, and his call as pastor of Wynne Presbyterian; his terms of call; his enrollment as a minister member; and the details of his ordination and installation on July 28



Candidate for Ministry Mike McCracken (center) with Wes Shaver (left) and Ray Woodruff (right), both members of Wynne Presbyterian Church

- approve the constitutional amendment to the Book of Confessions to include the new translation of the Heidelberg Catechism
- elect a new member on Committee on Nominations and confirm election of five people to fill unexpired terms
- receive Rev. Sam Williams, retired UM minister serving at Spring River Presbyterian, Hardy, as a temporary member of Presbytery
- approve the call of TE Lindy Vogado as associate pastor at Second, Little Rock, effective July 8, 2013, her terms of call, and give Committee on Ministry authority to approve the details of Vogado's installation service which will appear in *The Banner*
- approve request of First, Jonesboro to swap land for parking and lighting improvements
- elect a TE as the 2014 commissioner to Synod of the Sun and an additional RE reader of theological exams for 2013

The presbytery heard reports of:

- a letter of appreciation from the Presbyterian Church in Colombia
- a constitutional musing which corrects information about the denomination
- TE Kevin Keaton, regional representative of the Board of Pensions, on the suggested change in medical dues payment for persons covered by the board



Visitors at presbytery meeting (left to right): Melinda Hunt from Texas Presbyterian Foundation, Dick Powell from Mo-Ranch Conference Center, Kevin Keaton from Presbyterian Board of Pensions

--TE Charles "Chip" Hardwick on the PC(USA)'s study on marriage from the Reformed perspective



TE Chip Hardwick presents study on marriage
--a panel of Pulaski County TEs on the new Church Protection Act ("guns in churches")



Panel of Teaching Elders on Arkansas' Church Protection Act (left to right): Ruskin Falls, Rebecca Spooner, Marie Mainard-O'Connell, Gordon Garlington

- Arkansas Interfaith Power and Light's work at Vera Lloyd Home to reduce their energy consumption and similar offer of assistance to churches
- invitation by Committee on Administration for immediate applications for the position of Assistant Stated Clerk which will open in 2014
- gratitude of Committee on Administration to churches who have pledged to the presbytery for 2013 and hope that churches would yet make and keep a pledge
- renewal through 2016 of commission of Commissioned Ruling Elder K. C. Chanthorn at Laotian Fellowship in Fort Smith

The presbytery read reports of:

- exam and approval without exception of minutes of presbytery's 2013 meetings by synod
- Committee on Mission's action to use funds budgeted for the now-expired covenant with Lacandon Presbytery in Mexico for Solar under the Sun
- removal of Bill Brown from the CRE and pulpit supply lists
- renewal of CRE Ted Mealor at First, Marianna through 2015
- addition of Ruling Elder Eddie Holt of Harrison and RE Joe Pruett of Conway and removal of TE Dick Knott from the pulpit supply list, all at their request
- renewal of validated ministries of TEs Rebecca Spooner, David Gill, Patty Schaller and Susie Wiggins for 2013 and for TE Elizabeth Gabbard through Feb. 9, 2014
- Committee on Ministry approving the request of the Session of Presbyterian Church of Bella Vista to begin process of calling an associate pastor

- COM's approval of RE Tom Rackley to serve Lord's Supper at First, Pocahontas
 - General Committee's approval of the celebration of the Lord's Supper by Presbyterian Women, chaplain at UofO and at Presbyterian Disaster Assistance national meeting; Task Force "listening team" to look at possible changes in the presbytery in light of the Book of Order's new Form of Government; and their strong encouragement of Committee on Care and Nurture of Church Professionals planned education of church professionals to prevent sexual misconduct
 - COM's removal at their request of REs Dean Kerr and Martha Moore from the pulpit supply list
 - annual statistical report of Committee on Representation on the demographics of those elected by the presbytery and the COR's recommendations to Committee on Nominations
 - Committee on Preparation for Ministry's final assessment of candidate Jen Bluestein as certified ready to receive a call, updates on inquirers and candidates for ministry
 - the presbytery's finances as of April 30, 2013
 - upcoming events open to the presbytery-Junior High Youth Quake and AR Presbyterian Pilgrimage
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PRESBYTERIAN DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) is a mission program of PC(USA)

Q: If a disaster, either natural or human-caused, happens in your church, who should speak to the media?

A: SELECT SOMEONE NOW to be your media spokesperson. Don't wait to designate!

And do SELECT SOMEONE BESIDES THE PASTOR. Your pastor will be exerting all his/her energy to provide pastoral care during a difficult situation. So -- your session should select a wise, articulate elder to be the church's face to the world. By selecting someone now, you give that person a chance to think through the role of spokesperson--before the pressure is really on.

By thinking these things through now, you may be able to keep an emergency from becoming a disaster.

Boston Response

Following the tragedy at the Boston Marathon, members of the PDA National Response Team were deployed to provide consultation and support to leaders of the faith community as they gather and assess their role in response to the violence in their community.

An initial report, prayers and worship resources are available online

Gifts to support the response may be sent to PDA designated for DR000015- Boston.

West, Texas, Response

The explosion of 25 tons of fertilizer at a plant in West, Texas, has devastated the community.

National Response Team members were organized and deployed to the area as quickly as possible. An initial report, prayers and worship resources are available online [here](#).

Gifts to support the response may be sent to PDA designated for DR000015- West, TX.

Oklahoma Tornado Response

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) continues to be present in Moore, Oklahoma, and in other communities experiencing inclement weather across the country - even as the media begins to move on.

For an update on PDA's response and options for volunteering, giving, and [here](#).

Gifts to support the response may be sent to PDA designated for DR00015-Spring Storms 2013.

Please Pray

Please keep the families and communities affected by these tragedies in prayer, that the hope of Christ will be evident, even through the chaos and trauma. Please visit the web reports for prayers to share with your congregation.

--This message is brought to you by the Presbytery of Arkansas Disaster Preparedness and Response Committee. Additional information is available at:

<http://www.presbyteryofarkansas.org/frmDisasterResponse.aspx>

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Resource Center News

by [NiAnn Thompson](#), Resourcing Director

Phone 501.663.2424, ext. 104

Tuesday-Thursday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Resource Center Board moderator Teaching Elder Ruskin Falls shares his appreciation of the Resource Center.

"It's called The Resource Center of the Presbytery of Arkansas. I think of it as The Presbytery Library-or even as The Presbyteries' Library, as it now serves both Arkansas and Pines presbyteries. It's located in our presbytery office building in Little Rock (at the intersection of Rodney Parham and Reservoir Road). It's a lending library that's there to serve the teaching and learning needs, both of congregations and of individuals. Whether you're seeking curricula for your church's educational program, or you're looking for resources regarding a subject of interest to a particular group, or you're trying to find things to help you with a personal interest of your own, The Presbytery Library and its director, NiAnn Thompson, are there to serve you and will serve you well with CDs, DVDs, books, periodicals, and helpful advice. The Pulaski Heights Church [Little Rock] and I have drawn on it for all the above reasons. It was, for example, the first place we turned, when we decided that it was time for our small congregation of largely older members to begin offering a children's Sunday School class; and the help we received was just what we needed. It also has been a great source of ideas and material for the wide range of topics that our adult class has taken up over the past several years.

And, in my own theological pursuits, sometimes for the sake of something specific that I was teaching, sometimes just to deepen my own understanding for understanding's sake, I have been grateful for the resources available to me there. I've even had delightful experiences just stopping by to browse and see what serendipity (providence?) might bring. I recommend the experience to all who live in or are visiting in Little Rock. Of course, you can browse the online catalog anytime anywhere (go to "Resources" at www.presbyteryofarkansas.org). And, Tuesdays through Thursdays from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., you can do your browsing by phone with NiAnn (501-663-2424, extension 104) or by email (niann@presbyteryofarkansas.org). It's your presbytery's Resource Center. Think of it as your presbytery library, and check it out!"



This time of year the question arises about what to do with culled (church or personal) library books. The network of Presbyterian Resource Centers advises that public library book sales are certainly the easiest places to donate, though nursing homes and correctional facilities usually accept book donations too. The following were listed in an online article from *Booklist* as purchasing weeded books: [Powells](#), [Better World Books](#), [B-logistics](#), [Libraries of Love](#), [bookforward.net](#) <http://www.booklistonline.com/Weeding-Tips-FAQ-Part-2-Vnuk-Rebecca/pid%3D6194184>

Other seasonal preparations point to looking ahead to fall educational opportunities. How do we decide what to purchase and use? To help with this task Church Publishing, Inc. has created The Building Faith Online Christian Education Community website which offers a **curriculum overview chart** for children, youth and adult groups. It includes publisher/denomination, foundation statement, content, teacher support, format, ages, and cost. Go to <http://www.buildfaith.org/resource-room/curriculum-center/>

It's also the season for mission trips-short-term, long-term, local, national or international. A new resource "**Reentry: What I Learned on My Mission Trip**" will guide your return to your routine as a changed person through prayer, reflection and scripture study. This booklet can be used by an individual as a devotional or by a group as a short-term study, especially for the long trip back home. With summer travel on the horizon, how do you engage and uplift that tech-savvy youngster? Rev. Neil MacQueen, a Presbyterian minister who has produced Christian software titles for kids for decades, reviewed for parents and grandparents in the May 13th issue of The Presbyterian Outlook these noteworthy choices specifically for tablets, iPads and smartphones:

The ABC's of God, an iPad/iPhone app for preschoolers

The Adventure Bible, an iPad app for ages 7 to 12 from Zondervan

Bible Word Find, an iPad/iPhone app featuring Bible wordsearches for ages 6 to 12

The Beginner's Bible, an iPad app for ages 2-6 from Zonderkids

Bible Coloring Book, an iPad/iPhone app for ages 2-7

Bible Trivia for Children, an iPad/iPhone app featuring 197 multiple choice questions, fun for a car ride, family table or Sunday School game

Bible Trivia Quiz Game for Android devices

REMEMBER OUR ONLINE CATALOG! Just go to the www.presbyteryofarkansas.org website, click on "Resources," then on "Resource Center" and "click here to search the catalog" to conduct a simple or advanced search for just the right item.

(The Resource Center receives funding from Presbytery's Committee on Christian Education)

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Presbytery of Arkansas Youth News

Save the Date!

Presbytery of Arkansas

Jr. High Youthquake

Sept. 27-29, 2013

Ferncliff

Theme:

*You Can Make a
Difference*

Jeremiah 1: 4-10

All 6th-9th graders are invited to attend!

Registration materials will be sent to each church in August and will also be available on the Presbytery website (www.presbyteryofarkansas.org).

**Want to stay updated about Youth Ministry happenings in the Presbytery?
"Like" us on Facebook!**

Search

PresbyteryofArkansasYouthMinistry

on Facebook,

or go to

www.facebook.com/PresbyteryofArkansasYouthMinistry

This page is for anyone wishing to stay updated about Youth Ministry happenings in the Presbytery -- Youth Workers, parents, youth, Educators, Pastors.

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APA - Ever Heard of It?

In the weeks and months ahead, you will be hearing a lot more about APA--the acronym for the Administrative Personnel Association of the PCUSA--because the Southwest Region of APA will meet in Little Rock October 17-19, hosted by the Arkansas Chapter.

Started by Joyce Bauer in 1976, its mission is "to offer opportunities for professional development and personal growth for those called by God to serve as support staff of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). This mission is accomplished by providing continuing education events for certification and occasions for fellowship, worship and spiritual nurture and prayer at both National and Regional meetings as well as seminary sponsored training events."

Bauer recognized that many support staff personnel working for Presbyterian governing bodies and in churches didn't have a background in Presbyterian history, polity or reformed theology, so she developed a method for administrative persons to be educated in those subjects and others, such as new technology, safety in the workplace, spiritual growth and discipline that are relevant and performance-enhancing.

I am thankful to have been a member of APA since 1982, supported first by First

Presbyterian Church in Batesville, later by the Presbytery of Arkansas, and now by Second Presbyterian Church in Little Rock. Over the years, it's been my privilege to meet many other administrative associates who feel a sense of call in their work for the church. APA helps develop that sense by equipping us to better understand the denomination, keep up with technology and learn from others in the unique work setting that is the church.

If you are a pastor reading this, I hope you will seriously consider sending your support staff person(s) to this event in October. If you work for the church in an administrative support role, I hope you will explore what APA has to offer. Our website is www.pcusa-apa.org, where our conference brochure is posted. I'll be glad to help you learn more about it as well.

Pam Luther
President-elect, APA Southwest Region
501-227-0000 or pamluther@secondpreslr.org

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Presbytery Offers Grants Through Congregational Care & Development Committee

The Presbytery of Arkansas offers grants to those churches that need help in doing the ministry of God. These grants are for ministry, and not "brick and mortar" needs -- although if a church has a "brick and mortar" need, the CC&D Committee refers the church to the Moody Trust.

An application for grant money, and more information, can be found here:

<http://www.presbyteryofarkansas.org/frmPresbyteryDocuments.aspx> (look for the document titled "CC&D Small Church Grant Application Form.")

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An Invitation to attend Presbyterian Pilgrimage #19 at Ferncliff Camp and Conference Center near Little Rock

October 10-13, 2013

The weekend activities begin about 5:30 pm on Thursday, Oct. 10, and conclude about 5 pm Sunday, Oct. 13. Enjoy a weekend of study, worship, fun, and fellowship that will bring you closer to God!

Moderator -- Tommy Watts

To register, visit www.pilgrimage-arkansas.org or contact Sandra Phillips, the Registrar at 870-688-9189. Through the Presbytery's financial support of Arkansas Presbyterian Pilgrimage, the ARPP would like to scholarship up to five Presbyterian participants for the upcoming pilgrimage weekend. You may request up to \$200 in scholarship assistance if needed. You may indicate your need for scholarship

assistance when you register.

Deadline to register for Arkansas Presbyterian Pilgrimage #19 is September 8, 2013.

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Constitutional Musing

Misrepresentations about the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

The Office of the General Assembly has had an increase in the number of inquiries about printed materials from outside of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), being distributed within congregations, that ascribe to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) beliefs and standards which are meant to show that the church is no longer worthy of support. Over the past years the list of these misrepresentations have varied little and most have been answered in detail in the religious press, study papers adopted by the church or by specific action of the General Assembly. **(i)** Whenever possible, the Office of the General Assembly directs those who inquire about specific conclusions drawn by these papers to resources which give a broader understanding of the issues.

Typically the materials being circulated focus on four broad areas of concern, each of which speaks to the core of who we are as a denomination and a covenant community. In response to these recent inquiries, we remind the church about who the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is both historically and in our current ministry.

1. It is said that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has distanced itself from historical tenets of the faith, especially identifying the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of Scripture.

The Lordship of Jesus Christ **(ii)** and the authority and centrality of Scripture **(iii)** are clearly expressed in the constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). These affirmations of our Reformed tradition found, most notably, in The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity in the Book of Order and in The Book of Confessions present the fundamental proclamation of the church concerning our historical faith. There is no clearer refutation of this allegation than the witness articulated in the answers to the constitutional questions asked at ordination. **(iv)** In ordination, and subsequent installations, every deacon, ruling elder and teaching elder stands before the church proclaiming their trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior and their acceptance of Scripture as the authoritative witness to Jesus Christ and God's Word to them. One cannot embrace a view of the whole church that claims distance from the Lordship of Jesus and the authority of scripture while every person serving in ordered ministries of our church has steadfastly proclaimed their personal commitment to these very truths.

No other actions of the church, or parts of the church, can dispute the primary commitment of the ordained leadership of the church to their vows of ordination and to the affirmation of reformed theology set out so clearly in the constitution.

2. It is said that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has adopted a liberal political agenda as a core mission.

The Book of Order describes the core mission of the church this way: "In Christ, the Church participates in God's mission for the transformation of creation and humanity by proclaiming to all people the good news of God's love, offering to all people the grace of God at font and table, and calling all people to discipleship in Christ." **(v)**

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) expresses God's mission differently in each of its 10,000 congregations, 173 presbyteries, 16 synods and six agencies. Historically this mission has been active in promoting the social good. At the second meeting of the original presbytery of our denomination, in Philadelphia in 1706, the presbytery adopted as a goal that "every minister of the Presbytery supply neighboring desolate places where a minister is wanting and opportunity of doing good offers." **(vi)**

This commitment to doing good in wanting places has been lived out in our powerful history of starting public schools, building hospitals, reaching out to the poor and those cut off from family, in promoting racial equality and lifting up the whole society by standing with those alienated from it. The church's commitment to doing good in wanting places has never wavered.

While a few of these ministries have been interpreted by some as being part of a liberal political agenda, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) understands that it is the mission of God in Christ which gives shape and substance to the life and work of the Church. **(vii)**

3. The decline in church membership is cited as a marker of spiritual illness and a failure of the church as a whole.

Leaders on all levels of the church are concerned about the decline in Protestant churches across the nation. **(viii)** This is not a uniquely Presbyterian issue, nor is it unique to churches, for a profound cultural shift in what it means to join a society and engage in committed covenants has affected religious, civic and volunteer organizations equally.

More important than identifying these trends is listening to Christ's call to fulfill a dynamic mission in a way most appropriate to the mission field around us. The Church continues to be "sent to be Christ's faithful evangelist:

- making disciples of all nations in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit;
- sharing with others a deep life of worship, prayer, fellowship, and service; and
- participating in God's mission to care for the needs of the sick, poor, and lonely; to free people from sin, suffering, and oppression; and to establish Christ's just, loving, and peaceable rule in the world." **(ix)**

The church's vision for 1001 New Worshiping Communities **(x)** is one example of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) responding to this challenge. To do this the church is encouraging entrepreneurial young leaders and finding ways to provide a structure which supports the historical faith in innovative ways. A less-restrictive Form of Government and a focus on governance at the more local levels all give credence to our trust that Jesus Christ is not finished with this vibrant church.

4. It is said that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is at odds with the global Presbyterian Church.

A unifying element of the global partnership of Reformed churches is a principle of our order and government that: "...every Christian Church, or union or association of particular churches, is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its communion, and the qualifications of its ministers and members, as well as the whole system of its internal government which Christ hath appointed ..." **(xi)**

There are times when it is necessary for a church to make a decision on theological grounds about which other churches might not necessarily agree. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s actions which make it possible for sessions and presbyteries to ordain people without regard to their sexual orientation is one such instance and has placed the church in a minority within the world community of Reformed churches. One of our global partners has broken relations with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) over the decision and the church's leadership is actively engaged in conversations with other partners who have also expressed their dissatisfaction.

The global church is hardly of one mind on this or any number of issues. Some within the community still object to our decision 50 years ago to ordain women, though there is virtual agreement across the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that it is the correct action. Many of our global partners consider holding the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) accountable to justice and stewardship issues, expressed in the Accra Confession, to be of primary importance in our dialogues. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) continues to engage in building relationships with open humility with all those whom Christ has called. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is a member of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The WCRC has a global membership of over 80 million congregants in over 200 denominations. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church is a member and the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians has applied for membership.

Prayer for Guidance

*Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with your most gracious favor and further us with your continual help, that in all our works, begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy name, and finally, by your mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. **(xii)***

i

For example: the 1993 "Reimagining God" conference is often listed as proof of a move away from reformed standards. Seldom do those making this accusation include the response of the following

(1994) General Assembly which replied to critics of the church of this conference by, among other things, overwhelmingly adopting the following statements:

- We affirm the one triune God
- We affirm the uniqueness of God's incarnation in Jesus Christ.
- We affirm the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for our salvation.
- We affirm that the Scriptures, by the Holy Spirit, are the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ.
- We affirm, again and again, the faith once delivered historically expressed in the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds, and the other historic confessions of our church.

We reject teachings that deny the tenets of our faith. Let there be no doubt that theology matters, that our Reformed tradition is precious to us, and that we intend to hand it down to the next generation—our children and our grandchildren." [Minutes of the 206th General Assembly (1994) page 88]

ii

F-1.0201 The Authority of Christ Almighty God, who raised Jesus Christ from the dead and set him above all rule and authority, has given to him all power in heaven and on earth, not only in this age but also in the age to come. God has put all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and has made Christ Head of the Church, which is his body. The Church's life and mission are a joyful participation in Christ's ongoing life and work.

F-1.0202 Christ Calls and Equips the Church

Christ calls the Church into being, giving it all that is necessary for its mission in the world, for its sanctification, and for its service to God. Christ is present with the Church in both Spirit and Word. Christ alone rules, calls, teaches, and uses the Church as he wills.

F-1.0404 Openness

In Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all creation, the Church seeks a new openness to God's mission in the world. In Christ, the triune God tends the least among us, suffers the curse of human sinfulness, raises up a new humanity, and promises a new future for all creation. In Christ, Church members share with all humanity the realities of creatureliness, sinfulness, brokenness, and suffering, as well as the future toward which God is drawing them. The mission of God pertains not only to the Church but also to people everywhere and to all creation.

The Book of Confessions: See 1.2, 2.2, 5.062, 5.131, 6.141, 8.11-8.15, 9.10.

iii

F-1.0203 Christ Gives the Church Its Life

Christ gives to the Church its faith and life, its unity and mission, its order and discipline. Scripture teaches us of Christ's will for the Church, which is to be obeyed. In the worship and service of God and the government of the church, matters are to be ordered according to the Word by reason and sound judgment, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

F-1.0401 Continuity and Change

The presbyterian form of government set forth in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is grounded in Scripture and built around the marks of the true Church. It is in all things subject to the Lord of the Church. In the power of the Spirit, Jesus Christ draws worshiping communities and individual believers into the sovereign activity of the triune God at all times and places. As the Church seeks reform and fresh direction, it looks to Jesus Christ who goes ahead of us and calls us to follow him. United with Christ in the power of the Spirit, the Church seeks "not [to] be conformed to this world, but [to] be transformed by the renewing of [our] minds, so that [we] may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2)

W-2.2001 Centrality of Scripture

The church confesses the Scriptures to be the Word of God written, witnessing to God's self-revelation. Where that Word is read and proclaimed, Jesus Christ the Living Word is present by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. For this reason the reading, hearing, preaching, and confessing of the Word are central to Christian worship. The session shall ensure that in public worship the Scripture is read and proclaimed regularly in the common language(s) of the particular church.

The Book of Confessions: See 3.19, 5.001-5.002, 6.004, 7.002 & 7.113, 9.27-9.30.

iv W-4.4003 Constitutional Questions for Ordination, Installation, and Commissioning.

v F-1.01 God's Mission

The mission of God in Christ gives shape and substance to the life and work of the Church. In Christ, the Church participates in God's mission for the transformation of creation and humanity by proclaiming to all people the good news of God's love, offering to all people the grace of God at font and table, and calling all people to discipleship in Christ. Human beings have no higher goal in life than to glorify and enjoy God now

and forever, living in covenant fellowship with God and participating in God's mission.

vi James H. Smylie, A Brief of the Presbyterians (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1996) 42.

vii F-1.01 God's Mission

viii "Nones" on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation. This report, released in October 2012, was produced by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religious & Public Life. The full report can be found at: <http://www.pewforum.org/Unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx>

ix F-1.0302 d. The Apostolicity of the Church

x 1001 Worshiping Communities: <http://www.onethousandone.org/Home.aspx>

xi F-3.0102 Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction

xii Book of Common Worship Pastoral Edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993) 348.

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Prayer List for Congregations -- 2013 can be found [here](#).

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