

Covenant Network Producing Documentary

Working with an award-winning documentary team, the Covenant Network has begun production on a video designed to support dialogue across the church on the issue of full inclusion of gay and lesbian Presbyterians.

The documentary chronicles how individuals and their congregations struggle with our church's exclusionary policies based on sexual orientation.

The hour-long video will have four segments that can be shown and then discussed in adult education classes and study groups. A leader's guide will be made available.

"It is real people, real stories and the power of the Gospel that change people's minds," the Rev. Mark Smutny, Covenant Network Director and Communications chair said. "This documentary will combine those stories with biblical, theological and pastoral insights from some of our best and most respected theologians."

The video will be available by early summer. We hope to make the video widely available. We are inviting special contributions for this purpose. Please contact our office.

Jesus Interprets the Scriptures

(excerpt)

Rev. L. William Countryman

Mark 10:2-9

Jesus, in this morning's Gospel, is caught up in a religious conflict about sexuality with some people who quote Scripture at him. Does this sound familiar?

What Jesus is really doing in this story is turning the whole use of Scripture on its head. The Scriptures, he says, are not a book of statute law to protect the powerful.

They are a book of astonishing insights into God's extraordinary generosity. The purpose of God all through Scripture is the well-being of God's beloved human

creatures. If you find things in the Scriptures that seem to speak otherwise, consider who benefits from that. Whose hardness of heart caused that blemish in the sacred text? Whose hardness of heart is maintaining that interpretation even now?...

Hardness of heart is something that just keeps on cropping up... It wasn't unique to the Pharisees in Jesus' audience... It's

the property of the whole human race. You can't escape it just by being religious; but you can't escape it by ceasing to be religious, either. And if you quit reading the Scriptures, you not only lose the passages that cater to your particular kind of hard-heartedness; you also lose the ones that might wake you up and suddenly let you see how really big and

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Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity and Purity

Offers Three Affirmations

The Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church was established by the 213th G.A. in 2001 and intentionally represents the full theological breadth of the church. It is charged with helping the church consider "matters that unite and divide us," including "Christology, biblical authority and interpretation, ordination standards, and power." The Task Force will present its final report to the 217th G.A. in 2006, but has recently published a Preliminary Report on its work to date. This report also challenges and encourages the church with three affirmations. We are pleased to reprint the following excerpt and invite Presbyterians to read the entire report at <http://www.pcusa.org/peaceunitypurity>

The Presbyterian Church (USA) today longs for the spiritual blessings named in the task force's title. In the midst of strife and conflict, the church longs for peace; afflicted by quarreling and division, it longs for unity; weighed down by sin and confusion over the nature of the Gospel, it longs for purity in word and deed.

Through study, prayer, and reflection, a conviction has grown among members of the task force that these longings for peace, unity, and purity, far from being reasons for frustration or despair, can actually be seen as Spirit-filled testimony to God's promise of redemption. "We ... who have the first fruits of the Spirit," Paul tells us, "groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom 8:23-24). These longings, painful though they may sometimes be, are also accompanied by profound good news. They give evidence that the peace, unity, and purity we desire so fervently are already at work within us. They have already been given to us in Jesus Christ, and the task before the church is to live into the fullness of that gift. ...

A growing conviction has permeated our deliberations, namely, that our job—and the church's—is to appropriate what has already been done for us by Jesus Christ. The only way forward, as the reformers long ago insisted, is the way that leads through grace.

Although it is premature at this stage of the task force's work to present a comprehensive vision about how the peace, unity, and purity of the church might take form in our day, the task force does feel led to make three preliminary affirmations that we believe must guide our work over the next two years—affirmations rooted in our convictions about the church's perennial need for grace. These three affirmations are a prologue to the hard work ahead of us. **We members of the task force make these affirmations together, and we urge the whole church to make them with us.**

- 1. Jesus Christ Himself Is the Church's Peace**
- 2. Jesus Christ Himself Is the Church's Unity**
- 3. Jesus Christ Himself Is the Church's Purity**

Each of these three affirmations is developed at length in the report.