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The Covenant Connection

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A Time for Hope in the Church A Statement by the Board of Directors of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians

In August 2005, the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church released its final report. At that time, the Executive Committee of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians issued a statement committing ourselves to study the report. We have done that. We have also listened to the responses of other Presbyterians, including those with whom we disagree on matters before the Presbyterian Church (USA). We have prayed about the report with sisters and brothers in Christ, together seeking the will of our Lord.

Here are some things we have learned:

- The process of discernment in presbyteries over the last eight months has shown that the great middle of the church views this report as a source of hope.
- There is widespread gratitude and approval for the theological reflection with which the report begins.
- Good and faithful Presbyterians continue to disagree on ordination standards. We are disappointed that the Task Force has not found a means of immediately recognizing that gay and lesbian Presbyterians are called to the ordained offices of the PC (USA).
- The Task Force has reminded us what it means to be Presbyterian, with national standards applied by local governing bodies. In so doing, it has lifted up for the church traditions and practices that have been affirmed by Presbyterians countless times in addressing ordination standards, especially in periods like the present, when there is deep disagreement about significant issues.
- The Task Force recommendations have not satisfied everyone. Some are unhappy with deficiencies in our standards; others are unhappy with deficiencies in their enforcement. It appears to us that the Task Force has invited the 217th General Assembly to adopt an orthodox view of both our standards and their enforcement.
- Prompted by the unanimity of the Task Force report, there is a new spirit of mutual forbearance among many Presbyterians.
- A number of influential leaders, including almost all living former General Assembly Moderators, and all of the Presidents of our Presbyterian seminaries, have endorsed the full Task Force report.
- We are among the many who find compelling the Task Force's plea that we show the world how the gospel of Jesus Christ enables us to live with and love those with whom we deeply disagree.

In light of all we have learned in the past months, the Covenant Network's Board of Directors believes that the church stands at a remarkable moment of hope that will not come again soon. As our contribution at this critical juncture in the life of our church:

- We hold fast to our conviction that God is calling faithful gay and lesbian Presbyterians to full inclusion in the life and leadership of the church, and the deletion of G-6.0106b remains our goal. But we acknowledge that the Covenant Network has contributed to a partisan spirit in the denomination by our tendency to draw apart from those who differ with us. We repent of anything we have done to undermine respect, understanding, and love among those who disagree about important matters before the church.
- We are foregoing our usual practice of suggesting to commissioners, in advance of the General Assembly, how they might act on various items of business. We trust that the voice of the Holy Spirit may be heard more clearly if the voices of partisan advocacy are still. We believe that it is time to step back and allow commissioners to pray, to listen, and to discern for themselves what will best lead to a church that is as generous and just as God's grace. More than ever before, with the example of a unanimous Task Force before us, we are confident that commissioners will find and follow the will of God.
- We have encouraged presbyteries to send overtures seeking the deletion of G-6.0106b and related clarification of our ordination standards. As commissioners engage in the ongoing process of discernment, we will continue to support these overtures, trusting that the Spirit will lead the commissioners to a faithful response to the Task Force report and the related overtures they will consider.

We invite our fellow Presbyterians, especially those in issue-oriented groups like ours, to join in a spirit of expectation, prayer, and receptiveness to what God will do through this 217th General Assembly. We trust that God will do more, through Christ Jesus, than we have yet asked or even imagine possible. This is a time for hope in the church!