

Christ Our Light In Darkened Times

As many of you know, there have been significant changes in our denomination over the past several months. Our ordination standards and our form of church government have been overhauled. What is our proper response to these changes? Our session has asked me to address them with you via my newsletter article. Since we have briefly discussed the issues facing our congregation in a recent informational meeting and previous newsletter articles, I will not repeat them here. (An expanded version of this article will be available that does address them thoroughly, as well as the previous renewal efforts within the denomination.) Instead, I'm going to turn my attention primarily to the gathering I attended in late August.

The Fellowship

Recognizing the massive discontent within the PC(USA), several pastors of major churches joined together to form The Fellowship of Presbyterians. The Fellowship was envisioned as a way that like-minded churches might work together to find another way of doing church. The Fellowship is very concerned that not just progressive churches are dying, but conservative, orthodox churches are also at a plateau or declining. The Fellowship is not interested in continuing the theological battles of the past. Instead, the Fellowship desires to be a group of Presbyterian Christians who agree on certain essential beliefs and wish to work together to further God's Kingdom. In January 2012, the Fellowship will meet again to create a statement of essential beliefs and a constitution for the organization. Interest was enormous, as over 850 churches were represented; key leadership from our denominational headquarters in Louisville was also present.

For churches within the PC(USA) that want to be differentiated from the denomination, four major options were given at the Fellowship meeting in Minneapolis in August:

- Tier One – For various reasons, some churches may decide that they should stay where they are in the PC(USA) but would like to be associated with other like-minded churches. Tier One churches would have the opportunity to be “Fellowship Affiliates.” They might put a logo on their website, attend Fellowship events, be engaged with other Fellowship churches in their area, and so forth. They would agree to the essential beliefs of the Fellowship. However, they would remain as they are now in terms of belonging to the PC(USA). This would not require permission from the local Presbytery, as the Fellowship would essentially be an affinity group at this level, similar to partnering with CROP Walk.
- Tier Two – Some churches might decide to remain in the PC(USA), but they would like to associate with like-minded churches in their area and move out of their current presbyteries. Tier Two would like to see new presbyteries created where Fellowship churches could join together. They would in some sense “overlay” the existing presbytery. For this to officially happen, not only would the local presbytery have to approve it, our form of government would have to be amended to allow it. Realistically, this is unlikely. However, I have been in conversations with churches in our presbytery who would like to work together “unofficially” to support one another, offer joint mission trips and youth opportunities, and so forth.
- Tier Three – Some churches could form separate presbytery committees within the existing presbytery so every group of churches could do its own thing within their current presbytery. (This idea had little traction and there is no way to do it under the current form of government, so I will not confuse things by discussing it further.)

- Tier Four – Some churches feel that they must separate from the denomination in order to stay true to their faith, but they still want to retain connections to other PC(USA) churches in the same boat. In this scenario, a church would negotiate a separation from their presbytery and would ask to become a church belonging to the official Fellowship of Presbyterians denomination. Once joined to that new denomination, they would become a part of a new presbytery under the care of the Fellowship. However, the separation between the denominations would only be partial, as the Fellowship of Presbyterians is looking to share a number of resources with the PC(USA). This might include the Board of Pensions/insurance, mission work, and so forth. In addition, pastors might be allowed to freely switch back and forth between Fellowship churches and PC(USA) churches. This, however, is still at a negotiation stage only.

A fifth option, jokingly and unofficially referred to as “Tier Five,” was briefly mentioned in breakout sessions – moving to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, an already existing denomination made up primarily of churches that left the PC(USA) earlier over theological differences. A number of reasons this might or might not be a viable option were discussed.

The meeting in Minneapolis involved wonderful worship and good times of meeting colleagues from around the country. However, the primary business was discussing these options in small groups and giving feedback to the leaders of the Fellowship. The meeting was not about agreeing on one way forward or on dealing with the theological failures of the PC(USA), but about presenting possibilities.

Is The Fellowship A Good Idea?

Let me summarize my thoughts about what works in The Fellowship’s proposals...and what doesn’t.

The Good:

- Joining with The Fellowship in some manner says that we are not comfortable with the status quo and wish to get back to a more basic, traditional understanding of being Christian and being Presbyterian.
- It gives us the opportunity to align and work more closely with like-minded churches in our area and presbytery without theological compromise.
- Tier 1 gives us the opportunity to align with The Fellowship’s goals and theological beliefs without having to worry about property issues, changing the Book of Order, or leaving the denomination. Yet other options would still remain “on the table.”
- Having a network of theological trustworthy churches we agree with will make it much easier for us to find churches for members when they travel or move out of town.
- The Fellowship is not so much “against” anyone so much as it is “for” a new way forward.

The Not-So-Good:

- In its attempt to stay on good working terms with the PC(USA), the Fellowship has not and will not rebuke or attempt to correct the PC(USA) in its serious and dangerous theological errors. Biblically, the unity of the Body of Christ is important enough that splitting the church should only be done when the church has broken away from orthodox Christian belief. Is it morally irresponsible to split a church if we are unwilling to say why, even if we know why?
- The path forward is individualistic. The Fellowship does not provide any hope that churches that do wish to leave could work together to negotiate with the denomination; instead, each individual church is on its own with its local presbytery.
- At this point, the Fellowship has provided only the barest ideas as to what its structure and essential tenets will look like. We may reach January only to find that what The Fellowship has agreed upon is not a good fit for us.
- While affiliating at a Tier One level with The Fellowship is attractive, it still does not protect the church from further changes that may come within the next few years in the PC(USA). It is very possible that the denomination will continue to move towards even more progressive theology or mandate certain beliefs, especially if a number of conservative congregations leave for the new Fellowship denomination.

As you can see, while there are many promising opportunities that may arise out of the Fellowship eventually, there is no “magic bullet” solution.

Can't We All Just Get Along?

As a congregation, we care for one another, work together, and love each other. Yet we are not united in our theology. There are those on both sides of the theological spectrum. There are many in the middle who either haven't yet chosen a side or would prefer not to do so. It might seem easiest if we could all just agree to disagree peacefully. Yet Jude 1:3 urges us “to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.” To do our faithful best, we cannot simply play ostrich and bury our heads in the sand. We must work together to seek God's will for us as His people.

Is it God's will for us to join ourselves with the Fellowship in some way? I cannot honestly say for certain yet, not until the Fellowship clearly creates an official structure and faith statement. Is it God's will for us to differentiate ourselves from the PC(USA) in some other manner? Again, this is a matter for prayer and discernment. There is no easy road ahead. There is the very real possibility that God will once again see fit to revitalize and renew the PC(USA) and bring her back to Christian orthodoxy. It could very well be that we, small as we are, might be called to be a part of that movement. Then again, God could be calling us to something altogether different. If so, we must discern what that is and how to do it.

The question has been asked, “How will this affect our membership and attendance?” Realistically, no choice is free from this consequence. A few will leave based on whatever decision we make, and some will leave if we choose to do nothing. Every choice has its perils. As such, from every conceivable standpoint, our best option is to find the road we believe to be most faithful to Christ and to follow it.

Will our church dramatically change because of all of this? Hopefully not. I have rarely if ever preached on the denomination or its issues in my sermons. I have and will continue to preach from the Bible in a systematic way that hopefully will lead us to greater love for God, greater discipleship, and greater outreach to the world around us, regardless of what happens in the PC(USA).

A Final Note

Some have wondered aloud about my position on all of this and what the church should do. While my conscience has been severely tested by the changes in our denomination, I continue to believe in my call to lead Church of the Covenant as its pastor. I have enjoyed serving here during the last three years and I hope that God might extend that call for a good deal longer. My first loyalty is to Christ, then to His church. Whatever decisions the church makes, whether or not I am in full agreement with them personally, I will do my best to honor them unless and until God makes it clear that He is calling me to something new.

In the meantime, I encourage us all to be steadfast in prayer for our denomination, for our elders, and for all in leadership as we work through the challenging days ahead.

Sincerely, Pastor Jason

COVENANT FOOD PANTRY

Please remember to bring canned or boxed food for our emergency food pantry. Suggested items to purchase are frozen meats, soup, peanut butter & jelly, cereal, spaghetti and jars of sauce, macaroni and cheese, and cans of tuna, chili or stew. When you contribute to the Deacon's Fund on the first Sunday of the month, this money goes toward restocking the food pantry. We are able to give people enough food for a few days and then refer them to the Hope Center Pantry.



CHILI COOKOFF

- ⇒ Saturday, Oct. 15 at Church of the Covenant.
- ⇒ Come and enjoy fellowship with your neighbors, a bounce house for the children, a hayride and delicious chili.
- ⇒ The event starts at 4:00 pm, chili judging is at 5:00 pm. Bring your best recipe. After the judging, everyone will eat! There is no charge.
- ⇒ Bethel Church members will participate also.



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

THE ARK

We are looking forward to fun-filled adventures in the ARK and more great conversations with Nick and Cooper. Join us every Sunday because you don't want to miss a minute of fun!

WE NEED YOU!

The Christian Education Committee is looking for adults and youth to help us as an extra pair of hands in the classroom on Sunday morning. Whether its one Sunday or once a month we welcome everyone who was a kid, has kids, has grandkids, or is still a kid themselves (you should be able to find yourself in this list somewhere). Please see Catha Huff, Diana Byks or Barbara Chadwick for more information or to volunteer. We appreciate your continued support as we strive to provide creative, fun and educational learning opportunities for Church of the Covenant.



SHOW ME JESUS

The children's Sunday morning program is called "Show Me Jesus" and it will concentrate on families. As the children begin to develop relationships outside the family circle, home becomes a core/foundation of their life and a way to teach them about what it mean to be a part of God's wider family. They will be challenged to trust and obey the loving heavenly Father who has called them to belong to His family and has revealed who He is through His Word.



OUTREACH

On Sunday October 2 and October 9 we will be distributing empty back packs to fill for a local Head Start class. Each back pack will be marked with the child's name and age and have a list of items needed to fill it. Please take one and go shopping for a child. The filled back packs need to be returned to the church on Oct. 16 for delivery to the class at Carcanord Elementary School.

A new Usher and Greeter list is being prepared. Please sign up for one or more Sundays. Ushers pass out bulletins and later collect the offering. Greeters stand at the door before church service and welcome people. All volunteers will be greatly appreciated.

COMING EVENTS

SENIOR CARDS & SACK LUNCH

A group for fellowship and card playing meets at the church at 11 am on the 2nd. and 4th. Tuesday of every month. Please come and chat or play Euchre or Pinochle. Bring your sack lunch, coffee will be available and there is a 50 cent donation to defray expenses. This group is open to everyone in the community; talk to Phyllis Haase if you have questions.

EUCHRE NIGHT

The next Euchre Nights are on Saturday, October 22 and Oct. 29 at 5:30 pm at the church. Registration begins at 5:30 and play starts at 6:00 pm. Refreshments are for sale and prizes are given. Please be on time as seats fill up fast.

CHILI COOK-OFF

Please come and bring a friend to the Chili Cook-Off on Oct. 15 at 4:00 pm at the church. Everyone can enjoy delicious chili after the judging at 5:00 pm. There is no charge.

WOMEN'S GROUP

The next meeting of the Women's Group is on October 22 at the Pancake Factory at Schoenherr and 23 Mile Rd. We will meet at 9:27 am for breakfast and then a craft demonstration. Gay Rapin is the hostess.

So What?

On October 2 and 16 at 11:30 am following worship, all teens are invited to our new youth study called *So What?* The first section is called *Knowing The God Who Is*, and we'll be looking at problems in knowing God, really getting to know Him, loving Him, and knowing His character. The study will run twice a month. We will be serving lunch with the study for the teens each week, so if you're an adult who'd like to help, let Pastor Jason know if you can supply us with that week's meal.

Bible Study Returns!

Our evening Bible study will meet on Wednesday evenings Oct. 12 and 19 at 7:00pm. We are using a video lesson about the end times. If you are would like to be in a small group to study the Bible, please come. We'd love to have you!

Interested In Strengthening Your Marriage?

We have two DVD series on the subject called *Love and War* and *Sacred Marriage*. Pastor Jason is interested in running these studies on a Sunday evening around 5:30 pm if there is enough interest. If you are interested, please let Pastor Jason know. (We will attempt to have child care available if needed.)

OCTOBER 2011



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
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2 9am Music Rehearsal 10am Worship Communion Youth study 11:30 am	3 7pm AA Meeting	4 Administration, Deacons, Outreach & Worship meet 7pm	5	6 Praise Team 7 pm	7	8
9 9am Music Rehearsal 10am Worship	10 7pm AA Meeting	11 11-2 Senior Cards Session meeting 7 pm	12 Bible Study 7 pm	13 Praise Team 7 pm	14	15 Chili cook off 4—7 pm
16 9am Music Rehearsal 10am Worship Youth study 11:30 am CVS Flu Clinic	17 7pm AA Meeting	18	19 Bible Study 7 pm	20 Praise Team 7 pm	21	22 Women's Breakfast at Pancake Factory 9:27 am Euchre 5:30 pm
23 9am Music Rehearsal 10am Worship	24 7pm AA Meeting	25 11-2 Senior Cards	26	27	28	29 Euchre 5:30 pm
30 9am Music Rehearsal 10am Worship Mission speaker	31 7pm AA Meeting					

PRAYER CONCERNS:

Armed Forces Members, including: Mark Alm, Trevor Brown and Cory Cynowa
 People affected by Hurricane Irene
 People who are moving away
 Marge Fuller & the Fuller Family
 Norm & Phyllis Haase
 Ruth McGraw
 Margaret Neebes
 Peace in the World
 Annetta Pokrzywinski
 Melissa Putt
 Betty Radcliffe



Contemporary Worship Sun. 10 a.m.

Come and praise the Lord

Sunday Morning Classes for Children

Coffee hour after service

23401 23 Mile Road, Macomb Twp., MI 48042
 (586) 948-2440 www.covenantmacomb.org
 Pastor Jason Huff

October Birthdays

10/3	Betty Kordas
10/5	Dorothy Morton
10/10	Mackenzie Alm
10/11	Mary Lechniak
10/14	Lynn Jasmund
10/15	Gary Cynowa Vicki Reynolds
10/23	Melissa Putt
10/28	Sara Byks Steve Slocum
10/29	Dan Putt

October Anniversaries

10/7	Paul & Loraine Remesz
10/14	Sandy & Wally VanVyve
10/17	Tracy & Jim Cascio
10/20	Julia & Paul Wilbert
10/30	Dorothy & Tom Joseph

Your Church of the Covenant wants to help celebrate your special days. If we have missed your birthday, anniversary, graduation, or other special event, please let your Deacons or the church office know.

BEST WISHES



Heading To The Hospital?

Some congregation members remember not so many years ago when a pastor or elder would show up at the hospital to pray with you or a friend or relative. They didn't have a hotline to God, though! At one time, it was standard practice for doctors and hospitals to call pastoral staff before scheduled surgeries or in emergency situations. However, due to modern privacy laws, your doctor and hospital will **not** notify the church. Pastor Jason and the elders would be happy to go with you or visit with you at the hospital, even for minor situations. If you would like a visit – even a regular home visit – please call the church office at 948-2440 or email us at pastor-jasonhuff@aol.com. It is a blessing to stand with you in prayer in both joyous and difficult times...so please let us know how we can be in prayer with you!

CVS FLU SHOT CLINIC

After church on Sunday, October 16, CVS will bring a Flu Clinic to our church. Please mark your calendar and watch the bulletin for more information. They will bill your insurance or Medicare. If you don't have insurance, the cost is \$29.99 and you will get a \$5.00 coupon for CVS.

CHURCH OF THE COVENANT VOLUNTEERS

Head Usher — Gloria Cynowa

Elder of Month — Ed Pokrzywinski

	Oct. 2	Oct. 9	Oct. 16	Oct. 23	Oct. 30
Ushers	Gary & Coleen Heacock				
Greeters	Gloria Cynowa	Jean Plonkey			
Coffee Hour	Phyllis Haase	Catha Huff	Gay Rapin	Men's Group	Mary Ann Krause & Jeanne Steckman
Cookies	Denise Tilly & Mary Lechniak	Jeanne Steckman & Diana Byks	Gay Rapin	Tammy Simmons	
Nursery	Natalie Heacock	Gay Rapin	Sara Byks	Mackenzie Alm	