

The Layman

RAISING THE STANDARD

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A church resurrected after fire in New York

By Nathan Key
The Layman

Fire destroyed a New York church just four days after Easter in 2011. On Easter Sunday this year, Mayfield Presbyterian Church members found themselves seated for their first service in a new sanctuary.

The new sanctuary was built and finally occupied after the membership of Mayfield raised the funds to reconstruct a larger and more modern facility to replace the one that burned after being in use since 1823.

Mayfield Presbyterian Church, located at the base of the Adirondack Mountains on Great Sacandaga Lake between Syracuse and Albany, was founded in 1792 as a Dutch Reformed Church that became Presbyterian in the early 1800s.

The 130-member church met in the nearly 190-year-old building until a fire sparked by lightning on April 28, 2011, destroyed the facility. Around 6:30 a.m. on April 28, lightning struck the bell in the steeple, knocking it off its cradle and sending it crashing through the roof of the church.

Once inside the sanctuary, the bell exploded, igniting the structure and burning it. The building sustained heavy fire and water damage, leaving very little to salvage. As a result, all that was left standing was demolished to make way for new construction.

"It was just overwhelming," the Rev. Bonnie Orth said as she recalled the fire. "It still is. I can still see it and remember the looks on the faces of people from our congregation whose ancestors helped build the church. The whole community felt the impact of our loss."

Undaunted by the devastation of losing their building, Orth and members of Mayfield pressed on in their continued service and worship of the Lord. They rented auditorium space at nearby Mayfield High School and met there until their new facility was ready for occupation.

The congregation quickly reached a decision to rebuild at its former site, Orth said, noting that Presbyterian Disaster Assistance



Glass from stained glass windows destroyed in the fire was used to construct a top for the communion table.

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Reflections on a presbytery's meeting with PCUSA moderator

By Martha Leatherman
Special to The Layman

As a person interested in truth and in the faithfulness and future of the church, I wanted to hear the message of our Moderator, Neal Presa, when he came to my presbytery, and want to attempt to faithfully convey his message as well as my perceptions of the way his message was received.

Owning my perspective is important to acknowledge. I have been a member of the Presbyterian Church (USA) for over 20 years and have watched with consternation as the church has drifted away from orthodoxy. I attended the 220th General Assembly in Pittsburgh (2012) and was present when Presa was elected moderator. Since that time, I have also followed the constitutional discussion that arose from the controversy surrounding the election of his vice moderator. So, I was happy to learn that Presa would be holding a town hall meeting in my area on May 2, 2013.

The meeting was held in the sanctuary of a local PCUSA church. Of the approximately 30 people who attended the meeting, I estimated that only about 10 of us were "regular" people (meaning non-clergy and non-



Neal Presa

See A CHURCH, page 14

See REFLECTIONS, page 15

Three gifts for pastors and the congregations they serve

By Rob Bullock

The Presbyterian Foundation

Pastors' lives are extraordinarily complex. Multiple, often conflicting demands present themselves daily: Pastors are expected to be excellent preachers and knowledgeable teachers, effective managers, caring visitors and wise counselors, visionary leaders and volunteer coordinators ... the list is endless.

All of this is made more difficult by the sometimes byzantine web of relationships that exists in every congregation. To top it off, there is no clear, shared conception of what a pastor is supposed to be and do – not in the congregation, nor the denomination nor among colleagues. The insight needed to navigate the shoals of pastoral expectations cannot be overstated.

John Calvin was convinced that reform of the church is based on the three pillars of “doctrine,” “administering the sacraments” and “governing the church.” He was also convinced that pastors are essential to the revival and maintenance of the church's faithful theology, worship of God and ordered mission.

The Presbyterian Foundation shares Calvin's confidence in pastors. In March of 2013, the Foundation celebrated 214 years of service to the Church – cultivating and stewarding financial resources to serve Christ's mission. We often associate birthdays with gifts – and in that spirit, the Foundation has three gifts to offer the pastors who faithfully serve our congregations.

Financial Health Assessment

There's no shortage of advice on ways churches can improve their finances. The array of possibilities can sometimes seem dizzying. Should we revamp our annual stewardship campaign? Work on paying down debt? Tend to our endowment? Some pastors may not be sure where the trouble spots are to start with.

The Foundation has created a Financial Health Assessment tool to offer pastors and their congregations an organized look at their financial health and a way to prioritize where to start.

The assessment starts with a short survey – just 13 questions – about the church's stewardship practices. The tool then considers responses to these questions, along with the church's last five years of statistical reports, in comparison to best practices, peer and national trends. Within a minute or so, a detailed report is generated and emailed to the pastor (or other church leader

completing the survey).

The report offers something of a road map to financial health, starting on the first page with a checklist of best practice areas and alerts to any areas where the congregation appears to be struggling. “What do we need to do first?” Look for the areas marked for immediate attention.

The pages that follow offer assessments, best practices tips and resources for follow up in areas including stewardship participation, leadership, planning, preaching and communication, deficits



and debt, endowments, major gifts, capital campaigns and planned giving.

Charts and graphs offer visual cues and comparisons. How does your congregation's giving compare to regional peers, or to the national average? How's your ratio of investment income to other sources of funds? How does your mission giving compare? All of these and more are covered in the report.

Each section contains links to online resources in the Foundation's ministry toolbox which can help address areas of need or concern. In addition, steps for follow-up and contact information for your area's Ministry Relations Officer are also included.

To take the assessment for your church, visit <http://assessment.PresbyterianFoundation.org>.

Online Giving

Does it seem like the offering plate brings in a little less every year? There are several reasons why this may be true. First, “regular” attendance is far less regular. Children's sports, business travel and countless other distractions cause even the most committed churchgoers to miss one or more Sunday services each month. Second, fewer people write checks these days. For many, the weekly offering may be the only check they write. Younger members may not even have a checkbook. That leaves pocket change as the funding source available for the offering. Which leads to a third reason: People carry far less cash today, relying instead on debit and credit cards to

make most of their purchases.

Financially healthy churches recognize that their worshipers often want additional ways to give. Specifically, dozens of pastors have asked the Foundation for help with online or electronic giving. And the Foundation has developed a solution: the Presbyterian Mission Exchange.

The Mission Exchange makes online giving easy, safe and readily available for any Presbyterian congregation. The system facilitates gifts via debit or credit card, or through electronic funds transfer directly from the donor's bank account. Donors can set up recurring gifts so that the church doesn't suffer on weeks they cannot attend.

All contributions are automatically acknowledged, and gift reports are available to the church treasurer or pastor. And unlike many systems which provide only monthly transfers, the funds given can be requested for transfer to the church's bank account at any time.

There are no set-up fees or monthly maintenance charges. The system is paid for through a 1 percent fee on gifts made. Any card or bank charges are also deducted from the gift.

To learn more, call the Foundation at 1-800-858-6127 or visit www.PresbyterianFoundation.org/partnership.

The Pastor's Life

While excellence in financial management is central to the Foundation's mission, we are aware that the faithful leadership of pastors is an essential component of the church's faithful ministry and mission. The third gift we offer is one with that leadership in mind.

The Pastor's Life is a twice monthly email designed not to talk about the Foundation's ministry, but to provide brief resources that we hope will be helpful to pastors in their ministry. These range from reviews of books we think pastors will enjoy, to excerpts from contemporary novels which could make good sermon illustrations. Others include brief Bible studies to enrich the pastor's own walk with Christ, and teachings from the Confessions or from early church writings with application to the world today.

We hope to contribute to the fidelity of pastors' preaching, teaching and leadership, as well as provide nourishment for their souls. Our greatest purpose is to serve the Church, and its pastors, in support of their vital ministries.

To subscribe to The Pastor's Life, email serving@PresbyterianFoundation.org.

New PCUSA study on marriage gives background, never gets to the point

By Alan F.H. Wisdom
The Layman

When the 2012 Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assembly found itself unable to decide on same-sex marriage, it requested “a season of serious study and discernment concerning its meaning of Christian marriage.”

The PCUSA Office of Theology and Worship has now released materials for congregations to conduct that study. The purpose of the materials, the office explains, “is to equip the PCUSA for this discussion [of same-sex marriage] by giving it a firm foundation in the church’s tradition on marriage.”

This is a commendable goal. Presbyterians do need to undertake some “serious study and discernment” regarding marriage. Before we decide whether to redefine marriage, we first should understand the current definition. For Reformed Christians, the place to start is the Scriptures, God’s authoritative Word.

The sad truth is that few congregations are studying marriage. Although we have heard loud debates at recent PCUSA assemblies, many local churches try to ignore the issue.

The silence probably benefits same-sex marriage proponents the most, as they are more passionate, better organized and have the cultural winds at their backs.

Laying a firm foundation

Advocates of the traditional view of marriage will make progress only by engaging the conversation that so many others avoid. So they should welcome a study that focuses broadly on marriage rather than narrowly on same-sex relationships; that aims to lay “a firm foundation in the church’s tradition on marriage;” and that turns to passages of Scripture, the PCUSA confessions, the *Book of Order* and the marriage liturgy to build that foundation.

The Office of Theology and Worship materials invite study participants to grapple with key Biblical texts, such as the passage in Mark 10 in which Jesus answers a question on divorce by citing Genesis: “But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.’”

Selections from three confessions, the *Book of Order* and the wedding liturgy show how marriage:

- is a gift of God going back to creation;

- is a covenant relationship witnessed by the community of faith;
- involves “the full expression of love between a man and a woman”;
- “contribute[s] to the well-being of society,” especially through “the birth and nurture of children”;
- is “a holy mystery” reflecting the union of Christ and the Church;
- and “is a means by which Christian spouses live out their lives of discipleship together.”

Open-ended questions

It is difficult to square these teachings with the idea of same-sex marriage; however, the study materials do not raise this point. Instead they pose open-ended questions. For example:

- “If you are married, how can your relationship with your spouse deepen your life of discipleship?”
- “Why is physical intimacy so important to the marriage relationship?”
- “How are the ordering of human society and the birth and nurture of children connected?”

These are the kinds of questions that Presbyterians should be asking, quite apart from the debate about same-sex marriage. If this study did nothing else but encourage couples to think of themselves as “one flesh” and see their marriage as a form of Christian discipleship, it would be worth the effort.

The Office of Theology and Worship is reticent about the issue of same-sex marriage. The issue crops up only in a cumbersome question at the end of each session: “How does the sexual identity of those who marry inform the understanding of marriage as covenant relationship ...” (and each of the other understandings about marriage enumerated above)?

If the objective is to aid discernment regarding same-sex marriage, some more pointed questions might be in order: Is marriage related in some basic way to people being created male and female, and to the importance of bringing together the two sexes? Is the requirement for one man and one woman in a marriage related to the fact that it takes precisely one man and one woman to conceive a child? Does the Bible give us permission to say that God has ordained the sexual union of two members of the same sex in the same way that He ordained the union of husband and wife?



A major omission: marriage as norm

These are among the crucial questions the church will have to answer in the debate over same-sex marriage. But the study materials do not provide enough tools. There are some major omissions. Study participants do not read Ephesians 5:21-33, the passage that draws out the comparison between marital love and the love between Christ and the Church. They are given only a snippet from 1 Corinthians 6-7, Paul’s extended discussion of marriage, singleness and sexual sin.

Oddly, the materials cite the Confession of 1967’s paragraph on the kingdom of God, but not its paragraph on marriage and sexuality. That paragraph (9.47) speaks of how “[t]he relationship between man and woman exemplifies in a basic way God’s ordering of the interpersonal life for which he created mankind.” It decries “[a]narchy in sexual relationships.”

This is the note that is missing from the materials: that marriage is God’s norm for human sexual relationships, and that we sin and suffer when we depart from that norm. This is why the stakes in the same-sex marriage debate are so high. Either same-sex relations remain a departure from the norm of marriage, and therefore something that the church must discourage—or they become a new norm of marriage, deserving the highest honor.

It would be well, therefore, for Presbyterians to contemplate the stark alternatives before them in the same-sex marriage debate. They can do so through two “additional resources” for the study, the contrasting reports on marriage from the 2010 General Assembly. But it would be wise first to build “a firm foundation” in the Scriptures and the confessions, as the new study materials seek to do.

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A never-ceasing quest for knowledge drives Pirtle

By Nathan Key
The Layman

An attorney who became a stay-at-home mom, Cindy Pirtle always has had a love for learning. So much so that more than 20 years after finishing law school, she went back to school to further her education, this time as a seminary student.

It's that kind of never-ending quest for knowledge that enhanced Pirtle's faith and led her down the path to become one of the Presbyterian Lay Committee's newest board members.

"I'm a lover of knowledge," Pirtle said. "I love to continue to learn because there's still so much out there for me to know."

A lot of that learning for Pirtle has come from immersing herself in Scripture. She taught a class on *The Bible in 90 Days* at Windwood Presbyterian Church in Houston, Texas, and that merely made her thirst for more.

"I do not consider myself a Biblical scholar, but everything I read in the Bible makes me want to learn more," she said. "The more trust you have in God, the greater your faith is. It's an amazing thing to continue to learn, whether it be in seminary or elsewhere."

"We have to keep going forward; we can't rest on the past. That thirst for knowledge continues to help me grow in my life."

Born in Conroe, Texas, Pirtle attended junior and high school in Enid, Okla. Eventually, she found her way to law school at Oklahoma University in Norman before moving back to Texas where she now resides in Spring with her husband Phillip, a physician, and daughters Katy, 14, and Cassie, 10.

She spent 10 years as a trial attorney, specializing in oil/gas litigation and pipeline regulatory work. After changing firms, she dealt with constitution law, civil rights litigation and criminal law.

"I went from the defense to the plaintiff; that's strange," Pirtle quipped.

But Pirtle walked away from actively practicing law. She and her husband both were working 12-15 hours each day, taking them away from their girls. So, they decided a change was in order. Pirtle stepped away from her career, choosing to be home with her daughters.

"We worked, that's what we did," she said. "Finally, we had to make a choice where we would raise our children or have somebody else do it. While law can be thrilling, there is no more important job than raising your children. We were blessed that my husband also had a job that could support us and allow me to be home with the girls and volunteer with the

church."

That has become a major part of Pirtle's life. She still is a licensed attorney, though she does not practice. She has not lost her connections in the legal world, though.

"Everything I

do is pro bono work for the church and people in the church," said Pirtle, who is an elder at Windwood, a church of approximately 1,300 members in the New Covenant Presbytery. "I pretty much live at the church and get paid in peach cobbler these days."

Pirtle's desire to serve the PLC came about from a common theology she shared with the board.

"Obviously, I had read *The Layman* and met (President and Executive Editor) Carmen (Fowler LaBerge) a couple of times and found that the Lay Committee impresses me," she said. "I think that

right theology is crucial. The church is such that we have to depend on God's Word. If people are misled by bad theology that is a huge step backward, something that makes my heart hurt."

"Scripture is always first. God called out error where there was error, and a lot of people in this world won't do that. Apparently, (PLC board members) are people who will stand up for the faith and what is correct and right in Scripture. If I'm going to be part of an agency like that, wow, how exciting! If I can help others through the Lay Committee, how better a way could there be to answer God's call?"

Pirtle admits there are plenty of challenges facing the Presbyterian denomination these days.

"We've got to look up; we have to keep our eyes up to God," she said. "But there are challenges to that. Everybody has his/her own interpretation of Scripture, and they all can't be right. Even the 'church' disagrees on what is right. If the 'church' can't agree, how can I know what is right? We've stopped being the 'church' and started being a whole lot of churches. We've got to look to God to know what is right."

Pirtle's passion in serving on the PLC board is in helping smaller membership churches connect the dots of what is going on denominationally. For churches needing the help, Pirtle can be reached through the PLC offices at 800-368-0110.



Cindy Pirtle

Board profile

When clergy become an authority unto themselves

In a recent conversation about same-sex marriage with a pro-LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) advocate who is an ordained teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church (USA) she disclosed that she persisted in performing gay marriage ceremonies even though she understands the denomination's clear prohibition of the act. It is legal in the state where she resides, and it is right in her own eyes. That trumps the denomination's constitutional definition and the many rulings by the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission on the matter.

When I asked if she understood herself to be a person under authority she answered "yes." She says that she sees herself as under the authority of Christ and as a pastor under the authority of the PCUSA. If that does not make sense to you, you are not alone. However, my conversation partner is not alone in her self-perception. There is a growing anarchy in the ranks.

Patrick Evans, the interim executive director of More Light Presbyterians, a pro-LGBTQ movement of PCUSA churches, wrote in a May 18 post, "*We urge sessions and clergy to have conversations now about whether or not officiating at and/or hosting same gender marriages will be part of their ministry and if so, to be clear in that proclamation and witness.*"

MLP maintains a list of pastors who have publicly proclaimed their dis-allegiance on this point to the mutually agreed upon standards in the PCUSA constitution which they have vowed in ordination vows to uphold. These church officers, who are in clear violation of the constitution, expect to be brought up on ecclesiastical discipline charges. However, that seems unlikely in the current environment of the PCUSA. There has been more than ample time for such charges to have been brought against any of a number of pastors who have made their disregard for the rules very public in the past year.

Charges have been filed against a pastor in the United Methodist Church. MLP recently shared the news that an ecclesiastical trial is scheduled in that denomination for a minister who performed the same-sex marriage of his son. The article features the comments of another UMC minister, the Rev. Kathryn Johnson, who wrote, "Let this serve as my notice that I intend to totally ignore the unjust laws of the church related to sexual orientation and same-gender weddings from here on out."



Commentary
by Carmen
Fowler LaBerge

"It's time to clean the UMC closet. It's embarrassing every time we air one of those things out in public. Should someone file a complaint against me I think I'll just ignore it. Should my bishop call me in to account for my actions (in so far as it relates to performing same-gender weddings) I have a hunch I just won't go. Should a trial be scheduled, I'll be hard pressed to participate and would ask my clergy colleagues to refuse to serve on a jury to convict me for breaking a law which is so clearly unjust to begin with. In fact, let's have a pot luck clergy party. I'll bring the chocolate chip cookies. Anyone else in? ..."

The gathering storm of anarchy is upon us. We now face the reality of a self-elevated class of clergy who do not

submit to the mutually agreed upon standards of the church's constitution. Indeed, they have become an authority unto themselves, openly mocking the very institution that gives them credentials and paychecks, pulpits and voice.



Carmen's calendar...

To schedule Carmen to speak, teach or preach, email her at cfowler@layman.org. For an interview, call 800-368-0110.

Looking ahead...

- 6/9 Preaching at **First Presbyterian Church** Jacksonville, Fla.
- 6/18-22 Covering **EPC General Assembly** at Cherry Hills PC, Colo.
- 6/27-29 Covering **Board of Pensions** meeting Philadelphia, Pa.
- 9/18-22 **PLC Board** meeting, Whitefish, Mont.
- 9/27-28 Speaker, **National Apologetics Conference** Truth for a New Generation Charlotte, N.C.

Presbyterian Lay Committee

Raising The Standard Since 1965

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Mission Statement

The mission of the Presbyterian Lay Committee is to inform and equip Christians to share the Biblical faith by proclaiming Jesus Christ alone as:

- The Way of salvation.
- The Truth of God's Word.
- The Life of discipleship.

Objectives

1. To provide reliable information and resources concerning significant issues confronting Presbyterians and the Church Universal, thereby equipping and empowering faithful congregations and leaders to fulfill the Great Commission in the 21st century.

2. To inform and equip Presbyterian congregations and leaders concerning the urgency for greater emphasis on the teaching of the Bible as the authoritative Word of God and regular Bible study and prayer.

3. To inform and equip Presbyterian congregations and leaders concerning the urgency of presenting Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior through preaching, teaching and witnessing, with evangelical zeal, as the primary mission of the Church.

4. To inform and equip individual Christians in Presbyterian denominations to engage the ethical and moral issues in cultural, economic and political affairs as Christ's active disciples.

The PLC is a member – and affirms the respective statements on mission, ethics and accountability – of the Evangelical Council on Financial Accountability and the Evangelical Press Association. It also is a member of the Presbyterian Renewal Network and the Association for Church Renewal.

A preview of the 2013 EPC General Assembly

By Carmen Fowler LaBerge
The Layman

The 33rd General Assembly meeting of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church will be held at Cherry Hills Community Church in Highlands Ranch, Colo., June 18-22. Stated Clerk Jeffrey Jeremiah said the theme, “‘In Christ Alone’ points us to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, our only source of salvation and our true source of life and hope.”

Assembly preachers include Presbyterian layman and former U.S. Senator Bill Armstrong, career missionary and head of the EPC’s Engage 2025 global initiative to the Muslim world, Dr. Greg Livingstone, Moderator Ken Roberts, host pastor Dr. Jim Dixon and new to the EPC pastor Jim Noble of Desert Hills Presbyterian Church in Scottsdale, Ariz. During the assembly the moderator-elect, Bill Dudley, pastor of the Signal Mountain Presbyterian Church outside Chattanooga, Tenn., will become the EPC moderator.

The June 19 pre-assembly workshop will focus on mobilizing the people of the church for evan-



gelism and mission that matters. Featured speakers will be well-known Christian authors, cultural diagnosticians and Christian apologists Lee Strobel and Mark Mittelberg. June 20-21 will feature the “business” of the assembly which includes worship, networking lunches, standing committee meetings and four business sessions.

A big part of the assembly will be the integration of hundreds of new delegates from churches that have realigned their denominational affiliation to the EPC in the past 12 months. Every minister member of the EPC and a complement of elders from every EPC congregation may be seated as commissioners. With more than 400 churches now in the denomination, 1,000 commissioners is not unreasonable to expect.

The business of the assembly is expected to include discussion of a resolution from the Committee on Administration which reads, “In light of the uncertainty, complexity, and risk of imple-

menting of Obamacare, the Committee on Administration (COA) of the EPC proposes ... the 33rd General Assembly gives commission power to the COA effective July 1, 2013, to determine whether EPC Medical Benefits Plans should be retained, revised, outsourced or terminated.” Anticipating that many members and their families currently covered by the EPC Medical Benefits Plans will be interested and concerned, the EPC GA has posted video and print resources on its website: www.epc.org/benefits/coa-resolution-to-the-ga/

The assembly is also expected to deal with requests from presbyteries that need to divide geographically in order to accommodate the dramatic growth in the EPC in some regions of the country. Two new presbyteries were formed at the 2012 GA (Pacific and Alleghenies) and it is expected that two more will be formed this year.

One unique and joyful feature of the EPC GA is its intentional design for families. Throughout the assembly there are opportunities for clergy spouses and children from the cradle through high school to fellowship, learn and worship as a part of the EPC experience. Follow the EPC GA via the denomination’s EPC-community which you can connect with at www.epc.org.

How to read The Layman

By Carmen Fowler LaBerge
The Layman

Watching, listening to or reading the news is not a leisurely activity. It has become a labor of constant vigilance in a 24-hour news cycle with 15-second sound bites. If we want the whole story we often feel we have to read many sources and we need to know the particular viewpoint of the author, publication or media outlet producing the particular version of the information we’re consuming. We also need to follow a story over time as initial reports are often insufficient for real understanding of the issues and rarely give us accurate predictions of the ultimate outcomes.

One component of The Presbyterian Lay Committee’s ministry is serving as a media outlet. We follow stories and we pass along the news to you. Just as in secular media, when you read *The Layman* and The Layman Online you need to pay attention to what you’re reading. Some stories are straight news. We seek to report the facts of

what we saw and heard when reporting from a meeting or event.

Then there are times when we offer deeper analysis. Taking into account the development of a story over time, analysis is designed to help you remember or see the larger context, recall the history of the ground previously covered on a particular topic, or give you a wider perspective than you might otherwise possess from your personal corner of the world. **Analysis** is always labeled as such.

Commentary is what it sounds like: a commentator’s personal comment on a subject. My column and the column by the Lay Committee board chairman are commentary. All other commentary is clearly labeled as such.

Online you will also find many stories that we link to from third parties. This is called “aggregating” and we do it as a service to those who share our interest in all things Presbyterian and



the wider Christian concerns of religious liberty, persecution and cultural challenges to the historic orthodox Reformed faith. Links may be to news, analysis or commentary. In the digital age it is understood that “blogs” are commentary.

The print version of *The Layman* now includes a sampling of the news, analysis and commentary we post every week day online at www.layman.org. If you are waiting for the print edition of the paper, you are missing 90 percent of what we publish.

Finally, we acknowledge that all of our reporting is influenced by who we are as The Presbyterian Lay Committee. Our mission and objectives are clear (see page 5). We appreciate the opportunity to speak the truth in love and we like to hear from you through the comment section following every article online or via email to laymanletters@layman.org.

If you are waiting for the print edition of the paper, you are missing 90 percent of what we publish.

EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In the War Room

Examining the real battle on the front lines of living faith

Lesson 1: Who is the Enemy? (not flesh and blood but very real)

The first appearance of God's adversary in the Scriptures is found in Genesis 3, where he appears as the serpent, deceiver, tempter and liar. His appearance leads to the Fall. In other texts, the Enemy (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43) is described as a fallen angel (Isaiah 14:12-15), the father of all lies (John 8:44), and the prince of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). The Enemy is the Devil (Ephesians 6:12) which means spoiler, destroyer, demon, shade, and accuser. He is invisible and yet he prowls around looking for those he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). Jesus dealt with him (Luke 4:1-13) and Jesus instructs His disciples in how to deal with him as well (John 8:42-47).

C.S. Lewis' great work, *The Screwtape Letters*, unmask the reality that much of what Satan is up to is couched in just enough truth, just enough love, just enough good, that we are fooled into believing it – willingly exchanging the truth about God revealed in the Scriptures for lies.

Satan's primary tactic

Leading people to exchange the truth about God for lies

The Enemy's primary tactic is to convince people that God cannot be trusted. He seduces people into believing lies that lead to death. Adam and Eve exchanged the truth about God for the lies of the devil and the tempter has been leading people down that path of destruction ever since. Consider Judas who exchanged the truth about God's plan of redemption for the false hope of a worldly savior. Consider Ananias and Sapphira who exchanged the security of God's people for the false hope of material possessions. Consider those referred to in Romans 1, who literally exchanged the truth about God for lies. Paul says that "God gave them up" to futile thinking, sinful desires, sexual impurity, idolatry, shameful lusts and depraved minds. They are described as senseless, faithless, heartless and ruthless. Such is the path of the Enemy that leads to destruction.

There is a war going on...

- *In the cosmos ... between the God who is good and God's adversary, Satan*
- *In the world... between the people of God and our Enemy, the devil. Consider the visible evidence of evil at work around us.*
- *In every human heart ... there is notable evidence of the battle within us and some have been taken captive by the Enemy.*

This study, written by Carmen Fowler LaBerge, will help you identify the Enemy, his nature and tactics, how to prepare for battle every day and understand the victory in Christ promised by God.

Satan is invisible, however ...

The prevailing images of Satan in our culture are of a personified demon, a participant in the evil acts of humanity, the being in charge of hell or a mythical joke in a red suit with horns. What is your image of the Enemy? How do you see Satan? Is your image drawn from the Scriptures, Dante's *Inferno* or the world?

In Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic, the Bible bears witness to the very real presence of the Enemy of God.

In addition to the texts already referenced, read I Chronicles 21:1; Job 1:6-9, 12, 2:1-7; Zechariah 3:1-2; Matthew 4:10, 12:26, 16:23; Mark 1:13, 3:23 and 26, 4:15, 8:33; Luke 10:18, 11:18, 13:16, 22:3 and 31; John 13:27; Acts 5:3, 26:18; Romans 16:20; I Corinthians 5:5, 7:5; II Corinthians 2:11, 11:14, 12:7; I Thessalonians 2:18; II Thessalonians 2:9; I Timothy 1:20, 5:15; Revelation 2:9, 13 and 24, 3:9, 12:9, 20:2 and 7.

Each name that Satan wears teaches us something about his personality and his work. (For a list of Satan's many aliases, see page 10.) The name Satan means "adversary." Devil means "slanderer." (there is only one Devil/Satan, but there are legions of demons; he is their prince). While Christ is at work in the world seeking to

"gather," Satan is hard at work scattering. Christ puts things together. Satan tears things apart. Jesus came to seek and save the lost; Satan is here to kill and destroy.

On five occasions in the Psalms, the Hebrew word "satan" is translated as "adversaries" or "accusers" and refers to those people who oppose the Lord. Read Psalm 38:20, 71:13, 109:4, 20 and 29.

"Satan" is also translated as "resist" in referring to those who resist the work or action of God in the world. That on-going battle will be the subject of the next lesson.

Read and Reflect:

The Bible contains many other passages that are commonly understood to refer to Satan. Read and reflect on the character referenced in Genesis 3:1,4,5,14,15; Psalms 109:6; Ephesians 2:2, 4:27, 6:11-16; Colossians 1:13, 2:15; 1 Thessalonians 3:5; 2 Thessalonians 2:9; 1 Timothy 3:6,7; 2 Timothy 2:26; Hebrews 2:14; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8,9; 2 Peter 2:4; 1 John 2:13, 3:8,10,12, 5:18; Jude 6-9.

What do these passages tell you about the reality of the Enemy of God?

EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Lesson 2: There is a war going on

When considering the war in which we find ourselves we need to consider three distinct but interconnected levels:

- ✚ On the metaphysical level there is a war going on in the cosmos. This is the celestial battle between Good and Evil, God and the Enemy of God;
- ✚ On the physical plane there is a war going on in the world, within the context of human history, between nations, states and governments;
- ✚ On the personal level, there is a war being waged in every human heart. That is the battlefield of the mind and heart where it is determined which Lord we will serve and which Kingdom we will seek to advance.

War was declared in Genesis 3:15 when the Adversary of God took on the form of a serpent, talked Eve into exchanging the truth about God for lies, and sin distorted that which God called “good.” We will not seek to deal here with the theological issue of how evil came to be, but seek instead to equip ourselves to deal with its reality.

This is one war in which it is impossible to be neutral: We either side with God or we side with Satan; we are either for Christ or we are anti-Christ.

Christ crossed the boundary and invaded Satan’s territory

Consider Luke 11:14-26. Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed. But some of them said, “By Beelzebub, the prince of demons, He is driving out demons.”

The picture given in this parable is one of Jesus invading Satan’s domain, walking right into his supposed seat of power and setting free those who had been held captive. Hebrews 2:14-15 notes that the Enemy makes gains by taking people captive to do his will out of a fear of death. Those taken captive by Satan become enemies toward God (Romans 8:7-8). Ensnared, they do not know the truth and are not in their right senses (II Timothy 2:23-26). Reasoning with them is futile as they cannot hear (John 8:43-47). These are the captives Christ came to set free.

When the religious leaders accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan, Jesus refuted them with a two-pronged argument.

1. He pointed out that if Satan is fighting against himself it would spell the end of his kingdom. This would obviously not be a good game plan for anyone who wanted to secure victory. Jesus points out the flaw in their logic.

2. He also pointed out that if casting out demons is evidence of Satanic agency, then the charge they are leveling against Jesus must also be applied to other Jewish exorcists, including their own “sons” – something, of course, the scribes were not willing to admit.

Jesus reveals in His response that Satan has both a kingdom and a house. This present world system, this plane of reality, is the playground and the kingdom of Satan. When Satan is cast out of the heavenly realm he falls to the earth – the *world* that constitutes the good Creation of God – the world of matter and humanity that God so loved that He would die to redeem it; and the *world system* that Paul refers to when he says that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world.”

However, when Jesus called Satan the *prince of this world*, He did not say that the sum of Creation, the whole world, is in Satan’s hands. Quite the contrary, Psalms 147 and 148 assure us that God is supremely sovereign; God has the world in His hands. But Satan has his hands in, and rules in the lives of, those who follow the ways of this world and who deny the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Paul put it this way in Ephesians 2:1-3: “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.”

Satan’s playground is the human heart but it is also human history

There are evil empires and political systems that are designed to work at cross purposes with the goodness and grace of God. The history of the world is not only a record of man’s inhumanity to man, it is also a record that reflects what is going on in the spiritual realm in the battle between God and the Adversary.

Christ has set us free!

When Jesus took on human flesh, He was taking the eternal cosmic battle between God and Satan to another level – our level. At the Incarnation, Jesus permanently became a part of the battle upon the earth and here He proved the supremacy of His power. Read and celebrate Colossians 1:13-14, 21-22; 2:13-15.

Christ proved the supremacy of His power

Returning to the parable from Luke 11, Jesus describes Satan as “a strong man armed to the teeth.” Let us not be fooled into thinking that Satan is silly or weak. Satan will do everything in his power and use every weapon within his reach to protect what he sees as his kingdom from the invasion of Christ.

Jesus instructs His disciples in Matthew 10:28 about fear: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

He is speaking here of the enemy. Listen to Jesus’ description of that same enemy from John chapter 10, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” Satan comes only to rob us of our joy, kill our spirits and destroy our hope; Jesus comes to give us life, abundant, full and eternal.

Satan is real; he is strong; he is powerful; he is the tempter and the father of all lies. Jesus met him in the wilderness and confronted him in order that we might know how to do the same – with the very Word of God on our lips and the very power of God within us.

The beginning of the victory

If the Incarnation of Jesus Christ was the beginning of the battle on this earthly plane, then the defeat of the tempter in the wilderness was the beginning of the victory. During His earthly life, Jesus overcame Satan’s power at work in this world through His physical presence, through the proclamation of the truth, by uplifting the paralyzed, healing the sick, setting at liberty those who were possessed, raising people from the dead, and lifting their eyes to the hope of salvation.

And even though the hours upon the cross belonged to the power of darkness, Christ won the victory, stepping forth from the grave in resurrection glory to give people resurrection hope. And now, right now, He is seated in heaven – right where Satan longed to sit!

Read and reflect

1. Where do you see and experience the three dimensions of the spiritual battle going on right now?
2. How has Christ given you victory over the power of sin through transforming your thoughts, desires and behaviors?
3. Read Revelation 11:15-19 and 12:7-12 and 19:1-9. How do these texts provide hope for those persecuted in the world and how do they give you a hope for victory in Christ?

Lesson 3: Christ shattered Satan’s arsenal

Having crossed the boundary and invaded Satan’s territory, and having proved the supremacy of His power over the Enemy, Christ then shattered Satan’s arsenal of pride, fear, lies and hatred.

Satan’s favorite weapons:

- **Pride:** I Timothy 3:6 reminds us that it was pride, in the form of vain conceit, that led the angel Lucifer to fall from his position in Heaven to the earth below.
- **Fear:** Hebrews 2:14-15 says that Jesus shared our humanity and died on the cross in order to destroy the one who holds the power of death, the Devil, and free all those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.
- **Lies:** John 8:44 reveals that when it comes to Satan, there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.
- **Hatred:** I Peter 5:8 again reminds us that the Devil is after us – that he hates God so much that he becomes the enemy of those who love God and is even now prowling around like a lion looking for someone to devour.

Christ shatters them all

It was pride that turned Lucifer the angel into Satan, the adversary, and he knows that pride works to produce idolatry in us as well. Satan tried the weapon of pride on Jesus, seeking to tempt Christ to bow down and worship him (Matthew 4:9). Jesus resisted. At every turn, Jesus rebuked pride. In His birth, in His living, and in His death, Jesus exalted humility.

Hear anew the declaration from Philippians 2:5-11 with the pride of Satan in mind. I imagine that nothing chaps Satan’s hide like the reality of Christ’s humility. Satan who DID consider equality with God as something to be grasped; Satan who sought to exalt himself; Satan who longs for everyone to bow the knee; Satan who longed to sit in the very throne of God; who considers humility weakness and the self-promotion as the way to the top! Lucifer, the creature

wanted to become the Creator; Jesus, the Creator willingly became a creature.

Beyond disarming Satan of the weapon of pride, Jesus also cast aside the weapon of fear.

Fear is one of the strongest human emotions. Fear puts us in a cold sweat, makes our pupils dilate and our hearts race. Fear makes us fight and fear makes us flee. Certainly there is healthy fear that keeps us out of danger and alert to the realities that there are those who would seek to do us harm, but Satan uses fear to lead to a bondage of the spirit and a life of suffering in the dark.

The fear of death is one of the arrows in the enemy’s quiver of fear. 2 Timothy 1:10 assures us that Jesus has abolished death. To abolish means to deactivate, to render useless. Death is still a reality but, because of Jesus’ resurrection, it no longer has any sting. Satan should not be able to use this weapon against those who believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Fear and faith cannot live in the same head and heart. “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.” (2 Timothy 1:7)

Having demolished pride and fear, Jesus also deals with Satan’s lies. Satan is a liar and the father of all lies. Jesus came to bear witness to the truth. By the way He lived and by what He taught, Jesus exposed Satan’s lies and revealed God’s truth.

We should note that Satan’s lies are often religious – remember, he masquerades as an angel of light and sends his false prophets to lead people astray. Satan is even able to twist the Scriptures, leading people to interpretations that are false.

The final weapon in Satan’s arsenal examined here is hatred. Satan hates God and Satan hates God’s people. We are called to love and to be people of love; but do not be deceived! Psalm 97:10 reminds us that those who love the Lord are called to hate evil.

Truth be told, most of the hatred in the world is not directed toward evil but against good and the agents of good. Why is that? Because people love the darkness and hate the light. The world hated Christ when He was here and it hates His followers. Satan uses the weapon of lies to blind people to

the truth and once blinded, people become afraid of that which they cannot see and do not understand.

Jesus has but one way to destroy Satan’s arsenal of hated: Love. Consider the words of John 3:16, Romans 5:6-8, John 15:12-14 and Matthew 5:43-48.

Christ claimed Satan’s spoils

The war is a battle for good, a battle for love, a battle for righteousness, but like all war, in the end, the spoils belong to the victor. We should capture and use for God’s glory everything Satan has previously possessed. The spoils of this war are human beings – the most precious part of God’s creation.

Colossians 1:13 reminds us that God “has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves.” A transfer has taken place. A transformation is under way. A good work has begun – a good work that will be brought to completion on the day of Christ Jesus.

At His birth Jesus invaded Satan’s territory; in His life Jesus overcame Satan’s power and destroyed his weapons; in His resurrection Jesus put to death Satan’s stronghold over us, and in His ascension Jesus claimed the spoils for Himself. In sending the Holy Spirit, Jesus empowers us to withstand the flaming arrows of the Evil One and promises to be with us always even to the very end of the age. And then, yes, then, He will stand once again upon the Earth and declare final victory. Maranatha!

Read and reflect

Read Colossians 1:13 and discuss the reality of being rescued.

Where do you see evidence of the “dominion of darkness?” Who do you know that is presently held captive there? Where do you see evidence of the “Kingdom of the Son God loves?” Describe your personal experience of “transfer” from the one to the other? Where do you still struggle with pride, fear, lies or hatred? Pray that Christ will take every thought captive to Himself and help you to abolish the strongholds of the Enemy in your life.

EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Lesson 4: The battle plan for here and now

Ephesians 6:11-13 reminds us that there's a battle raging over us, around us and within us even now. This warfare is ultimately eternal and spiritual but it has very real temporal, physical and relational consequences. John Donne observed that "Satan hates me, yet is loathe to lose me." However, God loves me, and died to save me.

Learning to recognize the schemes of the Enemy

Luther said, "The best way to drive out the devil, if he will not yield to texts of Scripture, is to jeer and flout him, for he cannot bear scorn." And Thomas More agrees, "The devil ... the proud spirit ... cannot endure to be mocked." So mock him.

An attack from all sides is a strategy that the Enemy employs against each one of us. He feeds us lies, tempts us with the world, speaks to our desires and our lusts, accuses us, and then, if all else fails, he plants the seeds of doubt in our minds – doubts about ourselves and doubts about the goodness and grace of God.

God is always straightforward. God always approaches us in the fullness of light, with no hidden agendas. Satan's flaming arrows, however, are delivered from a quiver of contradictions. One minute he may inflate your pride and the next he may debase you with shame. He's only interested in one thing: drawing your attention away from God, getting to you drop your gaze and drop your guard, enticing you into a "reasoned" conversation that is designed to destroy your faith, steal your joy, squelch your hope, and fill your mind with doubt, fear, shame and lies.

We must develop strategies for resisting the Enemy's advances. He is armed, but so are you! God has not left you defenseless. Available to you are the Holy Spirit, God's Word, the full armor of God, comrades in arms and, when necessary, the very host of heaven.

Following the pattern of Jesus Himself, when we are tempted by Satan with half-truths and bold-faced lies, we not only reject him, but we send back arrows in the form of the Word of God. No matter what lie he may aim at you, the Word of God is broad enough to deflect it. If he tries to make you feel unworthy or unwanted, the Word of God reminds you that you are a beloved child of God, an heir of the Kingdom of God, bought with the price of Christ's blood. Although we are not worthy, He is fully worthy. If he tries, on the other hand, to pump up your ego and make you feel invincible, the Word of God will humble you, reminding you that apart from Christ you can do nothing.

The weapons for this war are God's

II Corinthians 10:3-5 reminds us that the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. God's

weapons in our hands are designed to demolish strongholds, arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God. Satan takes captives but so do we! "We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

Satan tempts us to mental laziness and distracts us from the Word of God by the worries of the world. He fills our time with countless lesser pursuits. He wants us too busy or too tired or too pre-occupied to meditate on the Word of God. Having distracted us from the Word itself, Satan then begins to distort our understanding of the Word. And the longer he has to work on us in an environment that is free from the fresh infusion of the real Word, he will twist and turn and manipulate our minds into believing his lies.

God knows this. That's why God places such a high importance on our loving Him with all of our mind. If this mental component of our faith is left neglected, or untended, we will find ourselves needing to be delivered from the Tempter's snare.

Read and Reflect

There is a battle plan and you have a part to play in it.

- 1. Take refuge!** God is present and ready to shelter you. *Psalm 11:1-3, Psalm 32:7, Psalm 46*
- 2. Stand your ground.** Guard your heart and defend your faith.
I Peter 5:8, Ephesians 6:18: Be self-controlled and alert.
I Peter 5:9, Ephesians 6:11-14: Resist the devil and stand firm in the faith.
Ephesians 6:10-17: Put on the full armor of God.
Proverbs 4:23: Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.
- 3. Protect others.** You know the Victor and you know the plans of the Enemy. Others do not. Protect the wandering, the weak, the lost and the fatherless.
- 4. Reclaim lost ground.** Snatch people out of the fire – by overcoming evil with good.
Romans 12:17-21
We have a responsibility to love and pray for those held captive (*Matthew 5:43-44*). We are also instructed not to engage with them in foolish or stupid arguments (*II Timothy 2:23-24*).
- 5. Remember the victory in advance.** The battle is not over, but it is already won.
Job 19:25, John 11:25-26, Romans 8:31-39

Sing: "Because He Lives" and "A Mighty Fortress is our God," reflecting on the words, theology and truth expressed.

Satan's many aliases

Abaddon (Hebrew: Destroyer),
Revelation 9:11
The accuser of our brethren,
Revelation 12:10
The adversary, 1 Peter 5:8
The angel of the bottomless pit,
Revelation 9:11
Apollyon (Greek: Destroyer),
Revelation 9:11
Beelzebub, Matthew 12:24;
Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15
Belial, 2 Corinthians 6:15
The Devil, Matthew 4:1;
Luke 4:2,6; Revelation 20:2
Our common enemy,
Matthew 13:39
Evil spirit, 1 Samuel 16:14
The father of all lies, John 8:44
Gates of hell (Hades),
Matthew 16:18
Great red dragon, Revelation 12:3
The liar, John 8:44
Lying spirit, 1 Kings 22:22
The murderer, John 8:44
That old serpent,
Revelation 12:9; 20:2
Dominion of darkness
Colossians 1:13
The prince:
• Of this world, John 12:31;
14:30; 16:11
• Of demons, Matthew 12:24
• Of the power of the air,
Ephesians 2:2
Ruler of the darkness of this
world, Ephesians 6:12
Satan, 1 Chronicles 21:1; Job 1:6;
John 13:27; Acts 5:3, 26:18;
Romans 16:20
The serpent, Genesis 3:4,14;
2 Corinthians 11:3
The spirit that works in disobedient
people, Ephesians 2:2
The Tempter, Matthew 4:3;
1 Thessalonians 3:5
The god of this world,
2 Corinthians 4:4
Unclean spirit, Matthew 12:43
The wicked one,
Matthew 13:19,38

Peachtree City church splits into two congregations

By Nathan Key
The Layman

"If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand." Those words found in Mark 3:25 ring true for First Presbyterian Church of Peachtree City in Georgia, which has split into a pair of congregations.

The Easter Sunday service for First Presbyterian Church of Peachtree City was the first with separated congregations, one remaining at the Willow Bend Road location with the other meeting at an alternate site.

A large faction of the Georgia church broke away to form as a new member of ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians.

That group, comprising the bulk of the nearly 700-member congregation, had its first service on Easter, March 31, at the Peachtree City United Methodist Church Annex located at South Peachtree Parkway.

About 425 people attended the 9 a.m. service at the facility shared with the congregation of All Saints Anglican Church, which came in later for a 10:45 a.m. service. All Saints was formed almost six years ago when it broke away from the Episcopal Church.

The new Presbyterian church has been incorporated and is operating under the name of The New Church, Peachtree City, according to its web site. It was accepted into ECO during a May 1 denominational gathering and will continue meeting at the Methodist Annex for the time being.

While those members were beginning life anew, those remaining at FPC-Peachtree City had their Easter service with a smaller congregation under the direction of the Rev. Joan Gray, one of two interim pastors appointed by the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta following the retirement of Pastor David Miller, effective March 27.

The Rev. Stephen Kolderup, who confirmed the pastoral appointments by the presbytery, also was sent to serve as an interim pastor at the church.

Kolderup said a number of leaders have emerged at FPC-Peachtree City, which has helped the transition that has been made. He added that he and Gray are working with the congregation as they look to the future of the church.

"God's hand works sometimes with us and in spite of us, but His hand works," Kolderup said.

"We need to be attentive to God's leading and do the right thing as we go forward. Joan and I are preaching that everyone needs to get their focus back on their baptismal vows and promises to be disciples of Jesus Christ, reminding them they need to be fully involved in the life of the church."

A joint statement from the Special Committee of the Congregation (SCC) and Presbytery Engagement Team (PET) outlined the division of the church.

The two bodies met March 26 to discuss and negotiate the gracious separation process, and after a week the sides reached a compromise.

According to the joint statement, it was agreed that FPC-Peachtree City (PCUSA) retain the real property and the rights and responsibilities of the property. The parties also agreed that the remaining assets of the church to be divided in accordance with a mutual agreement of the parties, including a \$150,000 gift made to those leaving the PCUSA to support their ministry.

In the aftermath of the split, the presbytery severed the duly called and installed associate pastor, Drew Elling, who had remained with the FPC remnant.

Members of Virginia church have parting of ways

By Nathan Key
The Layman

Divisiveness has become more and more common within the Presbyterian Church (USA), and a Virginia church experienced it in such a way that it led to a fracturing that resulted in two congregations.

First Presbyterian Church, located west of Charlottesville in Waynesboro, Va., broke into a pair of congregations after an Administrative Commission (AC) from Presbytery of Shenandoah assumed original jurisdiction following the resignation of session members on March 17.

Pastor Glen Holman tendered his resignation in February. During a March 17 meeting, the congregation unanimously approved his resignation, effective April 1, as well as a six-month severance package.

During that same meeting, the Administrative Commission proposed that session members resign, allowing the AC to function as the session of the church. Session members unanimously approved the motion and resigned immediately, giving the AC control of church operations.

"We voted to allow the AC (to assume original jurisdiction for the presbytery), though thinking back, we did so regrettably," said Maury Davis,

one of the former FPC-Waynesboro elders who now is part of a transitional leadership team for the newly-formed Waynesboro Mission Church (WMC) that was commissioned by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) on April 21.

Regardless, there was tension within the church of approximately 375 members. The session had voted by a 10-2 margin in November 2012 to seek dismissal from the PCUSA only to have the AC intervene and determine that a majority of the congregation wanted to remain in the PCUSA.

With the AC assuming control of the property and operations of the church, those seeking to leave the PCUSA did so, forming as a mission church of the EPC.

They worked out an agreement to meet at 10 a.m. on Sundays in the fellowship hall of Church of the Brethren not far from their former home. Their first service was April 7 with 142 people in attendance. The numbers have dropped off some since then, but they have been steady as the new church begins to take root. Davis indicated plans to elect permanent church leadership and said pastoral care duties are a shared responsibility at this time.

"It's sad to see this situation, and we never

meant for it to be a harsh split," Davis said. "But it was a matter of conscience. We can't be part of the PCUSA any longer. There is so much infighting that it has been hard to focus on the ministry of reaching out."

"We've had a great turnout so far from a good group of spiritually-minded people. We're committed to this new calling, and we will see it through as we continue healing from this turn of events."

Now, a church that once was united finds itself fractured into separate entities seeking to serve the Lord.

"It's time to put the bickering and battling behind us. Both churches need to heal and move forward," Davis said.

That is Holman's prayer for two groups of people he grew to know and love so much during the last eight years.

"While I'm saddened, I know God holds a future for them, those remaining at FPC-Waynesboro and those beginning new work with the Waynesboro Mission Church," Holman said. "I'm a pastor, and I love the people regardless of the decisions they made. I'm confident God will lead them and provide for them. I'm praying for both churches."

Presbytery affirms ECO

By Nathan Key
The Layman

ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians has been recognized as a Reformed body by the Presbytery of Santa Barbara.

The presbytery took action during its stated meeting May 4 to recognize the newest Presbyterian denomination as one that congregations leaving the Presbyterian Church (USA) can join.

The issue of recognizing ECO as a Reformed body came up during a recent presbytery meeting when Santa Barbara's gracious dismissal process was being formalized, and ECO was one of 11 denominations accepted for dismissal by PSB, evidenced by precedence established by actions of other PCUSA presbyteries.

Information from Presbytery of the Pacific showing its stance on ECO as a Reformed body also was provided at the meeting for informational purposes as was a reference to documents from Presbytery of San Gabriel.

According to presbytery documents, the list includes, but is not limited to Christian Reformed Church in North America, ECO, Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Hungarian Reformed Church in America, Korean Presbyterian Church Abroad, Lithuanian Evangelical Reformed Church, Reformed Church in America, United Church of Christ and United Methodist Church. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church was not among those approved Reformed bodies.

The decision to acknowledge ECO as an approved Reformed body paves the way for at least eight churches to depart the PCUSA.

"We filed our request in November before the gracious dismissal process was finished and approved," said the Rev. Dr. Mark Patterson, pastor at Community Presbyterian Church in Ventura, Calif. "Now we have a Presbytery Response Team working with us, and we feel like we have a really good team. Our hope is to be out by the fall or at least the end of the year,

Presbyteries that have taken formal action to recognize and/or approve ECO and those that have dismissed churches to ECO include:

1. Alaska
2. Beaver Butler
3. Carlisle
4. Cascades
5. Central Florida
6. Central Washington
7. Charlotte
8. Cherokee
9. Elizabeth
10. Flint River
11. Foothills
12. Grace
13. Greater Atlanta
14. Indian Nations
15. Kendall
16. Muskingum Valley
17. New Covenant
18. New Harmony
19. Northeast Georgia
20. Northumberland
21. Olympia
22. Pacific
23. Peace River
24. Prospect Hill
25. Pueblo
26. Redstone
27. San Gabriel
28. Santa Barbara
29. Shepherds & Lapsley
30. South Alabama
31. St Augustine
32. Shenango
33. Stockton
34. Tropical Florida
35. Western North Carolina
36. Yukon

and we're willing to slow down and leave with several other churches."

Other churches that already have notified Santa Barbara Presbytery of their intent to seek dismissal are Trinity Presbyterian (Camarillo), Emmanuel Presbyterian (Thousand Oaks), Cottonwood Community Fellowship (Los Alamos), Orchard Community Church (Ventura), Morro Bay Presbyterian (Morro Bay), Community Presbyterian (Cambria) and Malibu Presbyterian (Malibu).



Is the Presbytery of Alaska still a presbytery?

By Nathan Key
The Layman

Six churches located along the panhandle of Alaska were dismissed from the Presbyterian Church (USA) during a Presbytery of Alaska meeting that took place April 6, and their departure leaves the presbytery below the required minimum number of churches.

All six of them were dismissed to join ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians. The churches that have left the presbytery and PCUSA are Chapel by the Lake in Juneau, Haines Presbyterian, First Presbyterian in Skagway, Frances Johnson Memorial in Angoon, Kake Memorial and Hoonah Presbyterian.

Under dismissal requirements, the churches were required to pay per capita for 2013 and make contributions of \$9 per member toward 2014 per capita for the synod and General Assembly.

The dismissal of the six churches leaves the Presbytery of Alaska with just nine congregations, one less than the minimum number of 10 for a presbytery as designated by the *Book of Order*.

As a result, the Seattle-based Synod of Alaska-Northwest has assumed jurisdiction and charged the presbytery with continuing to oversee day-to-day operations of the remaining churches and mission work for now.

Dr. David Dobler, pastor to the Presbytery of Alaska, said the presbytery continues to function as is for the moment after the Synod of Alaska-Northwest – comprised of seven presbyteries, approximately 260 churches and 58,000 members in Alaska, Washington and northern Idaho – passed a resolution during an April 24 meeting that gave it jurisdiction over the presbytery.

After passing the resolution to assume jurisdiction, the synod directed the presbytery to serve as an Administrative Commission, taking care of the day-to-day operations of the presbytery.

Additionally, synod leaders instructed the general council to work with the Presbytery of North Puget Sound to compose a plan for continuing the ministry of Presbytery of Alaska. That plan is to be formulated by Oct. 31, 2013.

"It's really quite a happy resolution. The synod is throwing a blanket over us and allowing the presbytery to keep operating," Dobler said. "The synod asserted its authority and put the presbytery in charge. For that we are appreciative."

The remaining congregations in the presbytery are Craig-Klawock, Hydaburg, Juneau, Ketchikan, Metlakatla, Petersburg, Sitka, Wrangell and Yakutat.

"We tried to make (the dismissal process) as generous as possible, and we explored ways to remain in missional partnerships," Dobler said, noting there were some robust discussions regarding dismissal. "There was some pain but a lot of good will."

He said plans are in the works to develop an Association of Presbyterian Churches in Southeast Alaska to continue such relationships.

Churches that have left the PCUSA recently

To access articles on each of the churches on the list below, visit www.layman.org and type the church's name in the "search box."

For a complete list of churches, visit www.layman.org/discern/faqs-and-urgent-issues

(EPC: Evangelical Presbyterian Church; ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians)

CHURCH NAME	CITY, STATE	MEMBERS	PRESBYTERY	DETAILS	JOINED
Clark Memorial	Hurley, Va.	43	Abingdon	Congregation dismissed to EPC, voted on by presbytery 6/14/12	EPC
Hurley	Hurley, Va.	12	Abingdon	Congregation dismissed to EPC, voted on by presbytery 6/14/12	EPC
Mary's	Tazwell, Va.	46	Abingdon	Congregation dismissed to EPC, voted on by presbytery 3/14/13	EPC
Walker's Creek Chapel	Stone Memorial, Va.	71	Abingdon	Congregation dismissed to EPC by presbytery	EPC
Norton	Norton, Va.	36	Abingdon	The presbytery announced at its 6/14/12 meeting that the settlement agreement had been reached with congregation, totaling \$64,050, including a payment of 15% of the averaged appraised value of the property and \$15,000 of unpaid per capita and declaration of intent that was owed to presbytery.	EPC
Thompson Valley	Tazwell, Va.	46	Abingdon	Congregation dismissed to EPC, voted on by presbytery 3/14/13	EPC
Mars Hill	Acworth, Ga.	350	Cherokee	In July 2012, a congregational vote showed support to depart the PCUSA by a margin of 182-2 with three abstentions. The vote to affiliate with the EPC had the same results. The church was not required to make any additional financial compensation to the presbytery. It was dismissed by the presbytery effective 12/1/12.	EPC
Fairview	Fairview, Pa.	180	Donegal	The congregation voted 95-6 to seek dismissal and join the EPC, a request that was upheld by the presbytery in September without any objection. Congregation agreed to pay three years of per capita totaling \$15,000.	EPC
Kingman	Kingman, Ariz.	91	Grand Canyon	Church was dismissed at the 4/27 presbytery meeting. Congregation agreed to pay a cash settlement of \$60,000 plus all costs of the Administrative Commission.	EPC
Edgington	Taylor Ridge, Ill.	170	Great Rivers	Congregation was dismissed during a 3/5/13 presbytery meeting. Church offered \$24,000 to represent five years of per-capita giving and \$13,000 over five years to missions programs of the church's choosing for a total amount of \$37,000.	EPC
Westminster	Gulfport, Miss.	225	Mississippi	On 10/21/12, the church voted 92-36 to recommend to the presbytery that it be dismissed to the EPC. On 10/25/12, the presbytery dismissed the church, with its property, and with no financial payment. Congregation voluntarily agreed to provide per-capita and benevolences support through the end of the calendar year.	EPC
West Isle	Galveston, Texas	70	New Covenant	More than 90 percent of the active voting membership concurred with the decision. Congregation was dismissed from the PCUSA during a 3/16/13 presbytery meeting. West Isle was required to pay about \$7,000, and the church decided to present an additional monetary gift of \$5,000 to the presbytery. Both amounts have been paid.	ECO
Bishopville	Bishopville, S.C.	128	New Harmony	Church was dismissed with property at 5/17/13 presbytery meeting. The congregation will pay mission shared giving until its dismissal and its 2013 per capita.	EPC
Ardara United	Ardara, Pa.	80	Redstone	Presbytery voted to dismiss congregation at its 3/23/13 meeting. Ardara pledged an annual contribution of \$2,400 per year for four years to Pine Springs Camp, a Christian summer camp affiliated with the Presbytery of Redstone and the PCUSA.	EPC
First	Redding, Calif.	140	Sacramento	In September 2011, 70 percent of the congregation voted to leave. Congregation was dismissed from the PCUSA in Oct. 2012. FPC-Redding paid \$20,000 to retain its property. Because the pastor opted to stay in the PCUSA, the congregation also was required to pay an additional \$60,000 to cover a year's worth of salary and benefits.	EPC
East Main	Grove City, Pa.	694	Shenango	Congregation voted 89% to leave PCUSA. Presbytery dismissed church at its 2/26/13 meeting. According to minutes from the presbytery meeting, the church was dismissed without a financial compensation requirement.	ECO
Mountville	Portersville, Pa.	127	Shenango	A congregational vote in January 2012 revealed that 96 percent of the eligible voting congregation was in favor of leaving the PCUSA. Church was dismissed by presbytery at its Nov. 2013 meeting. It made a payment of \$6,000 to the presbytery to fulfill two years of per-capita giving.	EPC

EPC, ECO continue to see increase in numbers

By Nathan Key
The Layman

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) experienced growth during the first three months of 2013, adding 26 congregations to its increasing list of church affiliates.

With the addition of the new churches and others seeking dismissal from the Presbyterian Church (USA) to align with the EPC, the denomination now has 444 churches and 135,000 members in 11 presbyteries across the nation.

"Obviously, we continue to have churches interested in the EPC that like what they see," said the Rev. Dr. Jeffrey J. Jeremiah, stated clerk of the EPC Office of the General Assembly (OGA). "Our presbyteries continue doing a good job equipping, examining and securing these churches interested in joining."

The EPC more than doubled its number of congregations in a five-year span. From 2007 to 2012, the EPC grew from 182 congregations to 364 following the addition of 61 from the 31st General Assembly in 2011 to the 32nd in 2012.

Jeremiah said planning showed the EPC's congregational membership could reach 450 in 2013, but updated data reveals that as many as

500 could be part of the denomination by the end of the year.

ECO also seeing growth

The newest Presbyterian denomination also is seeing growth as it moves along in its second year of existence.

ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians was formed in January 2012. The list of local congregations affiliated with ECO is growing. There are 49 congregations (totaling more than 20,000 members) that have left the PCUSA to join ECO since its formation. The number of clergy and congregations already associated with ECO represents 19 states for the two presbyteries (East and West) that comprise the synod.

"We have been very pleased with the response that we have seen from congregations seeking dismissal," said the Rev. Dana S. Allin, ECO synod executive. "Being a new denomination has its pros and cons for churches considering dismissal. Some congregations early on were concerned with the newness and viability of the denomination. We don't hear this concern nearly as much anymore ... The advantage of being new

is that many congregations are excited about the vision and direction of ECO. They are excited to be with us rather than to just get away from a bad situation."

Forty-nine other congregations have submitted applications for acceptance to ECO and are either awaiting acceptance or involved in the dismissal process from the PCUSA, and another 100 have requested applications.

Allin said church renewal, leadership development and church planting are goals ECO wants to accomplish in meeting a vision to "baptize more than we bury by 2018."

The PCUSA remains the largest of the Presbyterian denominations, but its membership has declined. According to statistics from the Office of the General Assembly (OGA), total membership at the end of 2011 was 1,952,287, down from 2,016,091 the previous year – a decrease of 63,804 members. The number of PCUSA congregations at the end of 2011 was 10,466.

The General Assembly moderator recently acknowledged that churches were leaving the PCUSA at a rate of five per week. (*See page 15*)

The denomination lost more than 500,000 members from 1998-2009.

A church resurrected

continued from page 1

provided help to the congregation that was invaluable in moving ahead with plans to continue ministry in Mayfield.

Orth said additional land was purchased to make the new facility bigger than the previous one. Construction started last summer and was completed in late March, just in time for the building to be occupied for Easter.

The single-level facility has 7,444 square feet and includes the sanctuary and space for a fellowship hall as well as classrooms, a nursery, choir room, conference room, food pantry, kitchen and offices at a cost of around \$1 million.

The congregation initiated a fundraising campaign to meet the costs of the facility. They were given tremendous assistance from other churches and the surrounding community.

Orth said the facility is energy-efficient and totally handicapped-accessible.

"It's bigger and really is a beautiful facility," Orth said of the new church building. "It's really unbelievable. It's still hard for a lot of our members because it's different from what we had before and were accustomed to. We are so

blessed to come out of such a tragedy as we have. God pushes you to move forward, and He walks with you along the way."

Items from the church's longtime structure were recovered and are now used in and around the new facility. Twenty-foot beams taken out of the former building were constructed into a cross by members of a nearby Amish community, who then joined Mayfield's membership for an old-fashioned cross-raising ceremony.

The fire destroyed six of the eight stained glass windows in the old building, but members recovered shards of glass from those windows and have put them to use. They were constructed into a mosaic glass top for the communion table, with each member receiving a shard and placing it on the table as they took communion.

"The concept is that you come broken and are made whole at the table," Orth said. "It's another part of the process to help us grieve and heal."

Occupancy for the new facility actually could have taken place on March 28, but members of



A fire sparked by lightning on April 28, 2011, destroyed the church.

the congregation decided that Easter Sunday was more appropriate, further depicting their own resurrection and that of their place of worship after it was destroyed.

"We could have gone in on Maundy Thursday, but it made more sense to us to have our first service on Easter," Orth said.

"You could see the resurrection all around us. Everywhere you looked, you saw it. The opportunity for ministry opened right before our eyes. It was a joyous service."

Vice moderator comments on the state of the church

By Carmen Fowler LaBerge
The Layman

The Rev. Dr. Tom Trinidad, vice moderator of the Presbyterian Church (USA), is making the rounds at presbytery meetings and sharing his perspective on the state of the church. On May 21 the setting was Charlotte Presbytery in North Carolina and the packed house at Paw Creek Presbyterian Church was eager to engage the denominational official.

After sharing the story of how he came to serve in the position of vice moderator of the 220th General Assembly of the PCUSA which originally elected another person to the post, Trinidad shared his perspective on churches leaving the denomination for ECO and the EPC.

"In my presbytery we have dismissed seven churches representing 60 percent of the operating budget of our presbytery," he said. "But more than the money, they also represented seasoned leadership. The void created by their departure is the divinely orchestrated opportunity for smaller churches and people in the presbytery who might not otherwise have been called upon to lead."

A question and answer session on "The state of the PCUSA" between Trinidad and the Charlotte presbyters then commenced for nearly an hour.

The first question came from 2012 GA Commissioner the Rev. Kate Murphy who said, "I feel called to serve a congregation that grows disciples of Jesus Christ. If we don't do it, no one else will. We are shrinking and shrinking and shrinking – and I for one think it matters if the Presbyterian Church exists in the world. It is enormously hard for me to understand why we don't have an evangelism or discipleship committee at GA ... I want to speak up for what I think matters most, which is local congregations."

Trinidad answered with a reference to Ecclesiastes, "There is a time and a place for everything. The GA is a time and place for certain conversations that we need to have face-to-face as a denomination. It is the time and place where together we give direction to justice ministries ... to bear witness to the wider community ... There are places in the world that we would never go as a local congregation but places where we together must be. The GA affords us that opportunity."

Later in the conversation, an associate pastor of a large metropolitan church asked, "How might our seminaries and GA do a better job of producing resources for helping us in the life of the local church?"

Trinidad directed her to "Seek and ye shall find – spend some time on the PCUSA website."

Then he acknowledged that "nothing can be adopted without being adapted. ... You cannot look to the GA to give you answers. Grow up is Christ's command and follow me – there's some work to do. Seek, find and adapt."

A retired pastor, referring to the systemic and dramatic decline in the PCUSA and the denomination's adoption of ordination practices that include non-celibate lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, asked pointedly, "Are we losing members because of the change in ordination?"

Trinidad answered "Yes," then pausing dramatically, added, "and we're gaining members."

Referring to the embrace of LGBTQ ordination, Trinidad said, "When you speak the truth you lose some people. I'm not afraid to walk in the darkness because we have Christ with us. I'm not afraid to walk into the darkness and proclaim that light."



Tom Trinidad

Reflections on a presbytery's meeting with PCUSA moderator

continued from page 1

presbytery staff). The feeling of being out of place in an exclusive club gave me a real sense of disconnect, although Presa himself was warm, witty and engaging.

He opened his remarks by describing a bell-shaped curve that illustrates the natural course seen in the demise of a denomination and which is marked by consecutive phases of "acknowledgement," "anxiety" and finally "advent." He felt that members must move through these phases, and warned that refusal to acknowledge necessary change or failure to move past anxiety into advent will spell missional death.

Apparently recognizing the anxiety felt by PCUSA members over declining membership, he admitted that five churches per week are leaving the PCUSA for other denominations. He reassured the group that this type of loss has been present for the past 50 years, and such a loss pattern is typical of a denomination in decline which is changing due to changes in the world.

Rather than dwelling on internal problems and declining numbers, Presa's real passion and focus

is what he terms "unity with difference." Unlike the "unity in diversity" we've heard about for the last few years, unity with difference is based on Ephesians 4 and Ephesians 1. He urged us not simply to tolerate differences, but rather to "dignify" difference so that we can understand each other and how we have come to our respective conclusions on various issues.

There was ample time in the meeting for question and answer. Whether the questioner asked about same-sex marriage, abortion, homosexual ordination or departure from Scripture, Presa clearly saw the problem as being two sides wrangling over scraps while the Gospel is being ignored, and took great pains to reiterate that "both sides" must come to the table and declare the "glory of the Gospel," despite our "differences." In fact, preaching the Gospel was a topic that seemed to energize and illuminate Presa, and he dedicated a significant amount of time to describing how we "live faithfully in the tension," declaring, "that's what the Reformed tradition has always been – since Pentecost – I say this as a theologian!"

He went on to say that "there have been multi-

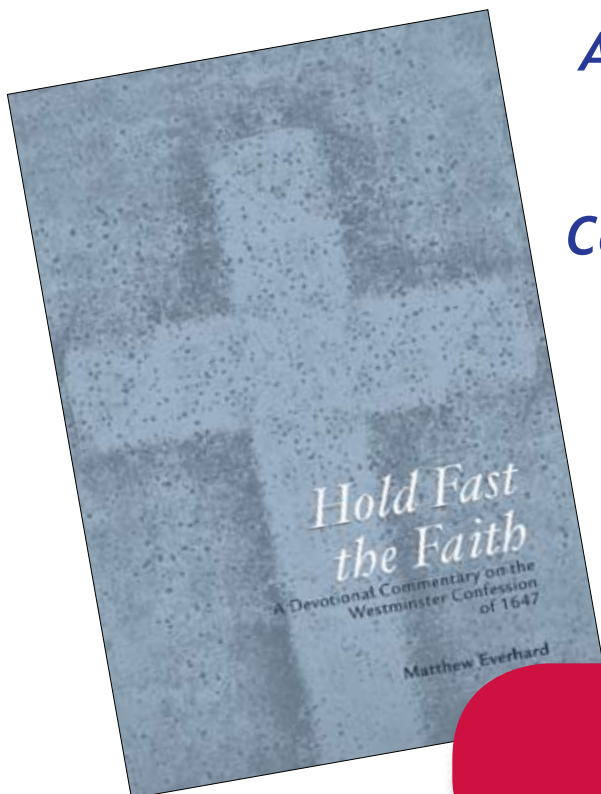
ple controversies over the centuries. The people of God are certain about certain things, and uncertain about others."

Despite controversy, he encouraged members to stay in the denomination, saying, "It doesn't matter the vote! No matter what it (i.e. the vote) is, I'm not moving one bit because I'm saved in Jesus Christ."

In Presa's opinion, he sees no Biblical or theological reason to leave the denomination with two exceptions: 1) the confessions are vitiated and "completely discarded," or 2) if anyone is compelled not to preach the Gospel, and said that the "day a judicial action compels me to do otherwise, then I'll leave." Otherwise, he is concerned that we are being judgmental, and asks if we "dare label a fellow disciple?"

Overall, my impression was of a very nice, sincere man who truly loves the gracious forgiveness of Jesus Christ, and who is comfortable with evangelizing the atoning blood of Christ for our sins, but not comfortable with orthodox principles.

Martha Leatherman of San Antonio, Texas, is a PCUSA ruling elder.

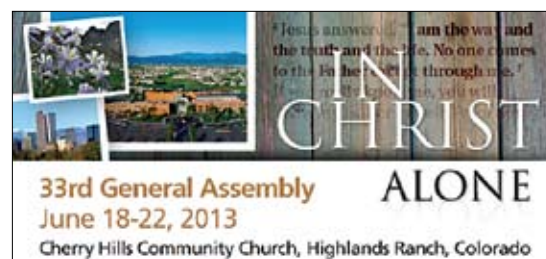


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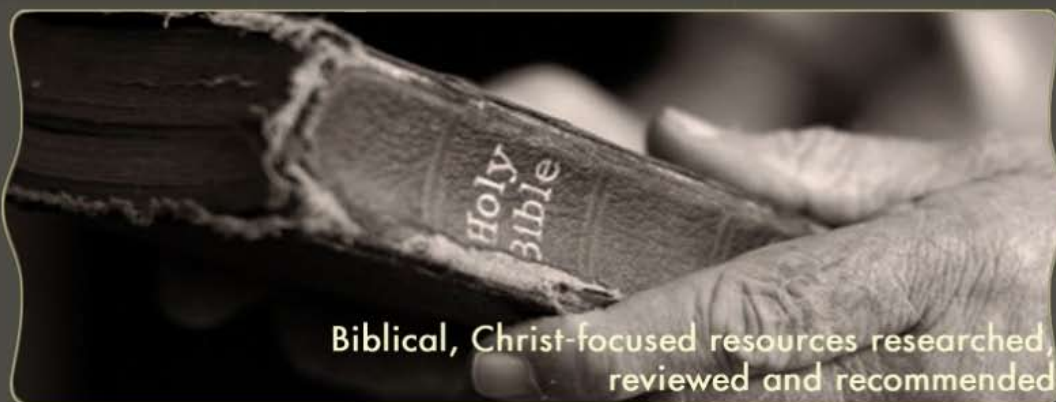
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Colossians 1:28 ESV



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