

Letter of Invitation

from Kears Pollock, Moderator of Pittsburgh Presbytery

On Thursday, February 19, 2009 Pittsburgh Presbytery will hold an informative convocation, Our Freedom of Religion at Risk – A Presbyterian Crisis. The convocation will explore two critical issues: 1) the danger that evolving civil law is eroding the historic United States Constitutional protection of our religious practices preserved in Presbyterian polity and 2) the disintegration of our connectional life and values in our day. From the perspective of Presbyterianism's confessional theology, the convocation speakers will cover a comprehensive range of subjects:

Westminster Assembly: Biblical Roots by Dr. Joseph Small
Covenant and Freedom of Conscience by Dr. Beau Weston
Religious Liberty: A Legal History by Rev. Jeff Tindall and Rev. Mark Tammen, J.D.

The unity of the church is at risk from within and from without. The current activities of some congregations and ministers encouraging division within the church can lead to subordination of the church to the state particularly when congregational sessions/trustees file civil suits against Presbyteries. The religious practices of the Presbyterian Church (USA) are specifically threatened when court orders are sought to prevent Presbyteries from exercising their ecclesiastical obligations pursuant to the Book of Order as they relate to dealing with division, disorder, dismissal, determination of the true church and Christian support of remnant congregational minorities. The evolving civil law in many jurisdictions appears intent on adopting a default condition of requiring all non-hierarchical denominations to be treated as congregational in character ignoring the Biblical and historical nature of Presbyterian ecclesiology.

The Pittsburgh Presbytery recognizes that for too long Presbyterians have acquiesced in the humanly appealing concept of "me" centered religious practices. We have not emphasized fully that Christ's church is not the building where one worships. Nor is the church the congregation of one's membership. Rather, we are one church united by the shared covenant through Christ and ultimately, through ecumenism, connected with the whole church, catholic. The failure to adequately encourage God centered religious practice has left a void to be filled by ideas that treat congregational organization as no different from any non religious nonprofit corporation fully subject to the invasion by the state into its internal affairs.

The convocation will also include time for small group discussion and discernment respecting individual issues presented.

The full convocation will be webcast over the internet. Plans are being made for Q and A participation in the convocation by those viewing from remote sites. The webcast may be viewed live – a detailed schedule will be forthcoming on the Pittsburgh Presbytery website. We encourage you to schedule group viewing and discussion throughout your Presbytery.

Because of production and webcast expense Pittsburgh Presbytery would greatly appreciate a contribution of approximately two hundred dollars from each of our sister presbyteries that participate in the simulcast to assist in defraying these expenses. If you choose to support this effort financially your contribution should be made payable to "Pittsburgh Presbytery" with "Convocation" indicated on the memo line of the check.

We are hopeful that this convocation will lead to greater understanding of the connected church, the elegance of Presbyterianism and a greater commitment by our ministers, elders and laity to a God centered practice of our faith based upon the covenant that unites us in Christ as Presbyterians.

Blessings and Peace,
Kears Pollock, Moderator