

# 222nd General Assembly

*Worship and Work of the Presbyterian Church (USA)  
In the General Assembly Council*

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# 222nd General Assembly

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Worship and Work of the Presbyterian Church (USA) in the General Assembly Council

## Overview—What is GA? Why do we have it?

**The General Assembly constitutes the bond of union, community, and mission among all its congregations and councils, to the end that the whole church becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness. As it leads and guides the witness of the whole church, it shall keep before it the marks of the Church (F-1.0302), the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed communities have identified themselves through history (F-1.0303) and the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304). (Book of Order; G-3.0501)**

Within our Presbyterian and Reformed tradition, distinctive features have included both theological emphases and our polity. One of the key principles of our polity is that we are led and governed by groups of ruling and teaching elders as they gather together for prayer, discernment and action. This is true at all levels of the church, whether in your session, our presbytery, the synod or the General Assembly.

As a national meeting, the General Assembly gathers together to set priorities for the church as a whole, to promote our national and international mission and ministry whether in renewal or in justice and to consider revisions in our constitution and in our practices. While most of the attention post-General Assembly is given to the particular actions or “business items,” good portions of the meetings involve fellowship, worship, and hearing reports and updates on the ministry and mission of the church.

## Overtures “from the people”

Those items that are considered by this gathered body come from the “ground up” within our denomination. Particular persons may approach their own sessions about presenting an overture. If endorsed by the session, it would be considered by the local presbytery. Overtures that receive presbytery approval and also receive a concurrence from another presbytery are submitted and considered by the General Assembly. Between when the overture is submitted and the GA meeting, it is reviewed for comments by relevant groups and for financial implications. Upon review, it is delegated to a particular committee of the General Assembly. Each commissioner who attends General Assembly is

assigned to one of the committees to review and revise, amend or approve/disapprove each overture. Coming out of each committee, each overture as acted upon by the committee is considered by the entire General Assembly as either part of the consent or action agenda. Any overtures that pass that require an amendment to the constitution (Book of Order or Book of Confessions) will also return to the individual presbyteries for a vote of ratification or not.

### **Who are these commissioners? How do they decide?**

Each presbytery elects commissioners to the General Assembly with equal number of ruling and teaching elders. In the Presbytery of Redstone, we elected four commissioners (2 ruling elders, 2 teaching elders) based upon the provisions in our Presbytery Manual. We also elect a Young Adult Advisory Delegate who participates in a committee and on the floor of General Assembly with “voice,” but without a “vote” other than a collective “vote for advice” to the commissioners.

Although commissioners are elected from each of the presbyteries, they come to a General Assembly not as “representatives” of presbyteries. They come to seek God’s desires and will together as a gathered body with other commissioners and to act upon their consciences as the Lord leads them in response to the matters presented before them.

Any actions of the General Assembly are the result of voting by these commissioners who attend and participate from the presbyteries across the country. They are pastors and Sunday School teachers, presbyters and session members alike. In this biennial gathering, it is their decisions that constitute the actions of the General Assembly.

## Update for June 17, 2016 - Prelude

### Getting started-

In this beautiful city (*many may not know that I attended college here a "few" years back*), Presbyterians have descended upon the Oregon Convention Center and downtown hotels. On this day before everything gets "started," exhibitors, commissioners, executives, and clerks have begun arriving.



Volunteers, clad with black vests representing the Committee on Local Arrangements, are scattered on every corner providing directions, insights, and helpful encouragement.

By tomorrow, all of the 594 commissioners, the 198 advisory delegates, and a host of other participants, observers, and friends from around the country and around the

world, will gather to join in the "worship and work" of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). If you would like to observe some or all of the General Assembly gathering in plenary, I would encourage you to connect to the "live stream" (particularly for the opening worship on Saturday @11:00 a.m. (2:00 p.m. Eastern time zone)). See the link below:

<http://oga.pcusa.org/section/ga/222nd-general-assembly-2016/>

Besides the commissioners and me, some of the other "Redstone people" sighted at this year's General Assembly include:

- Rev. Sylvia Carlson(Recording Clerk)
- Rev. Michael Shepard  
(Fayette City; Little Redstone)
- Rev. Bill King(First, Murrysville)
- Rev. Sue Washburn(Presbyterians Today)

If you desire to "track" the ongoing process of overtures, you are able to follow it through the website ([www.pc-biz.org](http://www.pc-biz.org)).



PC-Biz

Yet, each and every day over the General Assembly, I will offer to you some reflections on some of the people, events, and actions of the day. It is my hope that through my lens and words that you receive a glimpse into what God is doing during this gathering of God's people who are the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Such perspective may not be sensational or make the headlines, but it will be my honest and candid description of God's work among and with us in its context.

Through this General Assembly council, we ask for your prayers and support for all of us from Redstone Presbytery in order that we might know and testify to the hope of Christ. This year's assembly theme draws upon that first prayer offered in the Ephesians epistle and expresses our own prayer for you, for each other, and hopefully you for us.

*"So that, with the eyes of your enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which God has called you, what are the riches of God's glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe. .."(NRSV)*

Particularly, please remember in prayer your commissioners from the Presbytery of Redstone:

- **Ruling Elder Bernice Adams** (Westmont)
- **Teaching Elder Colleen Molinaro** (Third, Uniontown)
- **Young Adult Advisory Delegate Mandi Pascarella** (First, Greensburg)
- **Teaching Elder Curtis Paul** (Newlonsburg)
- **Ruling Elder Tom Shipley** (First, Irwin)



Just as was prayed in that epistle, may we also pray together for **hope**, for **riches**, for **power** that only comes from our Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you in advance for your intercession with our God. Accordingly, we anticipate and will expect God's blessing upon us resulting from your faithful prayers.

## Update for June 18, 2016 - Day 1

### "Hope does not disappoint"....

***"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."(Romans 5;1-5)***

### Opening Worship

With the Moderator Heath Rada preaching a message of reconciliation by God's grace, he built upon the story of Joseph and his brothers and the "prodigal" who returns home. God's reconciliation seems to be a family affair. He reminded those gathered to worship that we have been called to be "one" with God and with each other. This will require risk and courage and opportunity to live it out, but God's grace overshadows even differences and arguments and celebration is our response of gratitude.



Directed and led in worship by the variety of music forms ranging from bell and vocal choirs to more contemporary instruments, our voices joined together in a mighty chorus throughout the convention center ballroom. "Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!" In remembrance of Jesus, we were invited to the Lord's table that we might partake together.

## **First Day "Business"- (reports, orientation and elections)**

**Saying "Amen" - "a willingness to let God lead us on to guide our vision and actions."(Bishop Barnes)**

As the Assembly shifted into its initial "business" meeting this afternoon, participants paused to spend time reflecting upon recent acts of violence within our country. Whether remembering Charleston, San Bernardino, or Orlando, using the words of Bishop Barnes offered at a prayer vigil following the San Bernardino tragedy, we also were asked what comes after our "amen?" Both then and now, we were urged to *"let our 'amen' be a call to merciful discipleship in the name of our Lord Jesus."*

### **INTERNATIONAL "FLAVOR"**

Traditionally, one of the unnoticed but important elements of the gatherings of General Assembly is the opportunity to hear from ecumenical delegates from around the world. This opening session was no exception with the invocation offered by a delegate from Indonesia, followed by greetings from a person from Bangladesh. In the evening session, all of the international Ecumenical Advisory Delegates from Latin America and the Caribbean were introduced. Then, greetings came from the delegate from Guyana and an invocation leading us in prayer by a Dominican representative. Surely, the body of Christ reflects every tribe and nation.

### **MODERATOR REPORT**

As his final report, Moderator Rada emphasized the "results" of the conversations that he has been conducting over the past two years and summarizing the survey responses conducted by COGA in the past year. Speaking from the Romans 5 passage, he emphasized that "hope does not disappoint" and focused on four areas of importance in our current church.

1. Faith formation
2. Congregational vitality
3. Justice for all people
4. Education

In each of these areas, while there have been important historic strengths for us as a denomination, nonetheless, we must remain open to what we might need to change, grow, and innovate. This is our gospel imperative both as we are and as we become the church responsive to God's grace.

## ORIENTATION

Of course, we would not be Presbyterian if we were not acting "decently and in order," so the commissioners received an orientation on the "nuts and bolts" of conducting Assembly business. For those who were new, it may have seemed way too formal, but with a gathering of nearly 600 commissioners, such protocols become necessary to provide fairness in discussion and debate.

Additionally, instruction was given on reviewing the progress and status of bills/overtures using PC-Biz (which you can follow at home as well) as they prepare for committee work and plenary sessions. Sometimes, all of this preparation for orientation can become kind of "dry" stuff. Of course, with our Redstone commissioners, I "offered" to give them all a quiz on the various procedures after they were done.

## ELECTION OF CO-MODERATORS

With the changes in the manual, this General Assembly was afforded the option of considering candidates who were running as "co-moderator" candidates (vs. moderator/vice moderator). Both pairs of candidates chose to "run" as co-moderators and were presented before the General Assembly in plenary session thereby assuring the historic event of electing co-moderators.



Rev. Denise Anderson and  
Rev. Jan Edmiston  
Co-Moderators of #GA222

After a period of presentation and Q&A, the General Assembly voted on the first ballot to elect Rev. Jan Edmiston (Chicago) and Rev. Denise Anderson (National Capital) to serve as the co-moderators of the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly.

## WRAP-UP

So, the first of many days has wrapped up and commissioners head off to hotels or other places of fellowship. The initial necessary responsibilities of orientation and election of moderators have been processed. Now, we will begin to move on to the other concerns before us. Yet, through it all on this first day, the excitement and energy of God's people being able to gather together to worship and to begin the work together laid the groundwork for the many days ahead.

This is and will be our task over the next week in fulfillment of the *"hope in our calling."*



## **Update for June 19, 2016 - Day 2**

### **CHRISTIANITY AND THE WORLD**

Sunday morning (the second full day of the General Assembly) began with breakfast for me and several other mid council leaders to hear a presentation by Dr. Phillip Jenkins (Baylor University). Sponsored by the Presbyterian Foundation, Dr. Jenkins offered an overview of the many changes in Christianity around the world since the Reformation. Based upon conversions, demographic shifts, and cultural changes, he noted the current and projected statistics of Christian churches in both Africa and Asia. The Church, the body of Christ, is tilting toward the increased numbers within other cultures and other parts of the world. For those of us who have become so accustomed to seeing, understanding, and sometimes grieving the rise and decline of Christianity in the west, such news reaffirms the hope that is ours in Jesus Christ who has not abandoned his people or his work even though it may no longer "look" like the Christianity of our American past.

### **SUNDAY WORSHIP**

Participants in the General Assembly were afforded opportunities to join together with Church in local Presbyterian congregations around the greater Portland area. Personally, I attended the Lake Grove Presbyterian Church in Lake Oswego where I was able to run into a person who was a student at Lewis and Clark College during my time and currently serves as an associate pastor in that congregation. Other Redstone commissioners participated in a variety of services. You can hear from a couple of them on their experiences through the [Presbytery of Redstone Facebook page](#).

### **STATED CLERK NOMINATION**

If you did not already know, Gradye Parsons will be retiring from the position of Stated Clerk at this General Assembly after 8 years of service. Because it was announced a number of months ago, a nominating committee was charged with the task of interviewing and recommending a candidate for the position. Earlier this spring, the committee announced their selection of Rev. J. Herbert Nelson. The report of the committee was presented to the plenary session this afternoon. Within our procedures, other candidates who had applied are also

eligible to "stand for election" for this position. As a result, Rev. David Baker (Tampa Bay Presbytery) indicated that he would also participate in the election for the position. Because the next Stated Clerk is elected for a 4 year term by the gathered General Assembly, both candidates made presentations to the Sunday afternoon plenary and answered questions. The General Assembly will vote for the person for this position on Friday morning. Please pray for the commissioners as they elect the person who represents the denomination in ecumenical and interfaith relations.

### **YOUNG ADULT VOLUNTEERS (YAV Program)**

A video presentation on the Young Adult Volunteer program (<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/yav/sites/>) played on the big screens in the convention center in many ways showing the future of the church. Capturing the passion and power of transformation through service in finding God's calling, the video expressed, through words and actions, God's *hope in our calling* in young adult volunteer participants.

Audience members were asked to identify if they were either a former YAV, parent of a YAV, or from a presbytery from which a YAV originated. Nearly every hand went up under at least one of these categories demonstrating the breadth of this program. You may know that within the Presbytery of Redstone, Mara Sawdy has served as a YAV this year in the Washington, DC area. See her blog here...<https://marasawdy.wordpress.com/>

### **COMMITTEES**

With the evening session on Sunday evening, the work of the committees is initiated. In those committee structures, each group will consider the overtures that have been submitted and concurred by presbyteries throughout the denomination. Solicited by the moderator, a Bible study curriculum was developed for shared use among all the committees. In the first study, the focus was on the life of King David and God's use of him with all of his blessing and brokenness.

The responsibility of each committee is to review each overture, deliberate on it, revise or not, and vote its approval or disapproval before being passed on to the General Assembly in plenary session. Consequently, each of our Redstone commissioners and our YAAD solicit your prayers for each of them and their committees. The particular person and committee are listed below.



**Bernice Adams**---Social Justice

**Colleen Molinaro**---Ecumenical/Interfaith Relations

**Mandi Pascarella**--- Polity and Ordered Ministries

**Curtis Paul**---Peacemaking and International Affairs

**Tom Shipley**---GA Procedures

## Update for June 20, 2016 - Day 3

### COMMITTEES, COMMITTEES, COMMITTEES

In the context of the General Assembly, much of the early work on proposed overtures takes place through the assigned committees. While it does take hours of time, to hear from one another and be challenged by each other in the body of Christ cannot be rushed.

Just as a reminder, overtures are submitted to the General Assembly by a presbytery or synod. Each overture also requires a concurrence of at least one other presbytery. Overtures are discussed and voted upon in the various committees for approval or disapproval before being offered to the General Assembly in plenary session with a recommendation to approve or disapprove. If an overture requires a constitutional change in the Book of Order or the Book of Confessions, the approved overture would still require approval by the presbyteries.

Today, in morning, afternoon, and evening sessions, your commissioners and others like them participated in presentations, questions & answers, and small group discussions regarding the overtures assigned to their committees. In my own observations, committee chairs worked hard to make these "meetings" genuinely times of openness and discernment.



Often, we forget the "way" we "do" discernment within our tradition. For us, the process of discernment takes place through dialogue, discussion, and even debate. Ultimately, in prayerful listening, reflection, and finally voting, we express our own sense of the leading of the Holy Spirit through such action.

So, it is "how" we do things. It may not always happen that way in your session or even within the presbytery, but in this context within a national gathering more structure and following an orderly process becomes imperative both for having voices heard and still reaching conclusions.

As mentioned before, you can follow the progress of various overtures through the PC-Biz website ([www.pc-biz.org](http://www.pc-biz.org)). Please take a few minutes over the next couple days to see the work of your commissioners and people like them from around the country within these committees.

As you read below, my own guest blog entry for Presbyterians Today focuses on this day and the processes we use for discernment.

### **PRESBYTERIANS TODAY**

Besides my own eNews daily updates, perhaps you have been following GA news through other sources on various social media. If not, please permit me to suggest the blog entries generated through the magazine, Presbyterians Today which is edited by our colleague Rev. Sue Washburn. You can read entries offered by Sue and other guest bloggers about impressions and reflections of the General Assembly.



<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/today/category/general-assembly/>

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Some of us had the opportunity to attend a luncheon presentation on addressing the issues of human trafficking. Perhaps, you have been aware of this issue for some time, but somehow thought it did not happen in our area. The reality is that forced labor occurs all over the world, including even here. For the report that was submitted and approved by the committee today, please see PC-Biz.

If you are interested in learning more, I might suggest the following websites as just a selection of some that provide more information.

[freedomnetworkusa.org/](http://freedomnetworkusa.org/)

[www.sharedhope.org](http://www.sharedhope.org)

[polarisproject.org/](http://polarisproject.org/)

Additionally, there is a denominational resource as a toolkit at:

[www.pcusa.org/humantrafficking](http://www.pcusa.org/humantrafficking)

And an app and game to learn more:

<http://lifeboat-act.com/>

Of course, more things happened today than I could ever adequately represent in this eNews. All of us from Redstone thank you for your prayers and your support. Serving our Lord in this way stretches us to think beyond the immediacy of our own daily concerns.

For this intensive period of time, virtually every waking moment is spent in "being the church" in this type of setting. Here the big concerns that face our church and our world are placed before us in ways we can no longer ignore, but need to address in one way or another.

I encourage you to continue to pray for your commissioners. Tonight and tomorrow can be the days when people begin to wear down. When plenary sessions resume on Wednesday, a renewal of energy occurs for a period of time. So, we continue to covet your prayers for "energy, intelligence, imagination, and love" as we serve the church in this way.

## Update for June 21, 2016 - Day 4

### PRACTICE OF LISTENING....PRACTICE OF VOTING

On this day of the General Assembly, the intensive work of committees becomes the focal point for commissioners and observers alike. Much of the discussion and deliberation which began on Sunday evening must come to closure as committees vote on the overtures (or amendments to them) that were assigned to their committee.

Each committee has heard presentations from relevant resource people and "overture advocates" who are fellow ruling/teaching elders interested (for/against) in the particular issue. For most of the commissioners, this is a long day within the formalities of debates and parliamentary procedures.

Ultimately, each person finds himself/herself in the position of having to vote one way or another based upon God's leading of his/her conscience. More about some of the overtures and their results in committee are listed below under the committee section.

### COMMISSIONER REACTIONS

Part of understanding the General Assembly is also to "see" it through the eyes of the commissioners who are here representing the Presbytery of Redstone. Some of the comments from these people include the following:



***Mandi Pascarella (Young Adult Advisory Delegate)...."I was impressed with the two women who would be elected co-moderators. When they spoke to the YAADs, they talked about their view on how to bring young people to the church. I was pleased to find out that they believed churches should be less focused on the quantity of people and more focused on educating and pouring into one another."***

***Curtis Paul...*** "The conversation this morning revolved around how the outside world may interpret our nonviolent practices of using boycotts, divestment, and sanctions. Nonetheless, we affirmed nonviolent ways to stop human oppression."

***Tom Shipley....*** "Serving on the General Assembly procedures committee has focused on areas of operations for the General Assembly. Among other items, we approved Columbus, Ohio as the site for the 2022 GA and were engaged in substantial discernment on new wording to ensure that all perspectives and sides on issues are heard. I found the discussion to be educational. Although representatives of the OGA appeared opposed to such openness, yet, I'm glad to say we moved toward ensuring more open and honest discussion and the presentation of diverse positions. Although we did not go as far as I would have liked, but it was movement in the right direction. Additionally, I would not that the YAADs are real assets to our committee and provide valuable perspectives."



## WORLD MISSION

As part of the gathering, I had the opportunity to attend a luncheon sponsored by the Presbyterian World Mission. With the opportunity to hear from Hunter Farrell, Director of Presbyterian World Mission, he spoke of the partnership in world mission initiatives. We also engaged in table conversations based upon the following quote from Matorofa Mutonganavo, Moderator of the Presbytery of Zimbabwe (Ecumenical Advisory delegate to GA).



***"The most significant thing is the exchange of cultures... [There is] a whole lot of cultural learning. And we have been changed. We have been transformed. You know there is a saying: "When you meet the other, you get "othered." That is very important. The fact that we met the other and we were influenced in one way or another by the other. They were influenced. I don't think Denver is as Denver was before they were in partnership with Zimbabwe. Because they got "othered." And we also, we are not the same, because we got "othered" by our partnership with Denver."***

You may recall that Redstone has a partnership with the Sudan/South Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church. While we were here in Portland, we received confirmation on the three visitors from South Sudan that we will have in our presbytery in July. I believe that in many ways we also have been "othered" by our partnership with the South Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church.

## **MORE COMMITTEE WORK**

For the commissioners, most of Tuesday was also spent in conference rooms working through the series of overtures for which they had heard presentations. The "harder" work of both discussing and deciding has begun. Not every vote was easy (some were much divided rather evenly), but the deliberations were always both passionate and civil. Maintaining both simultaneously becomes a very difficult task. Sometimes, we know and experience the same difficulty within our own session and congregational meetings, so it is not a surprise in a much larger and diverse gathering.

As a result, by tomorrow (Wednesday) afternoon, the General Assembly will begin working in plenary session in considering the overtures as they come forward with recommendations for either approval or disapproval. While it becomes necessary for efficiency, many of the overtures which have broad consensus and even unanimous votes within committee will be placed on the consent agenda. The unintended consequence of this necessity makes the focus of plenary sessions on the issues and concerns about which we are more divided (hence, needing more time).

The recommendations of the committee do not bind the General Assembly, so each overture will be decided by this year's General Assembly.

## **SELECTED COMMITTEE RESULTS**

(REMEMBER: these and other overtures are recommendations upon which the full General Assembly will need to vote)

- Revised language in the General Assembly manual for ensuring "equitable presentation of different perspectives" in materials and resources to be presented to committees and available as resource material to the full assembly.
- Voted to rescind the action of the 221<sup>st</sup> General Assembly (2014) that mandated a process for consolidating and/or modifying synods into 10-12 synods.

- Retained the provision on former teaching elders who have renounced jurisdiction, but added language to include measures by which restoration may occur. Encouragement of councils to include a question about renunciation in sexual misconduct or child protection policies.
- Recommended the approval of the Confession of Belhar (approved 2014 GA and by more than 2/3 presbyteries) and its inclusion in the Book of Confessions starting with the 2016 printing.
- Recommended a call for RE/MAX to do everything within its legal and moral power to stop facilitating the sale and rental of property in Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Commend RE/MAX for responding favorably to discussions of this matter with representatives of the PC (USA).
- Because of profound concern about destructive effects of climate change on all God's creation, recognize the need to shift to a sustainable energy. Call upon the Board of Pensions and the Presbyterian Church (USA) Foundation to stop any direct investment in fossil fuel companies and move within three years away from investment in fossil fuel companies.
- Recognize the importance of the continued presence of Christians and churches in the Middle East. Affirm and encourage the Christian presence in the area through strengthened ties between the PC (USA) and the historic and reformed churches of the region. Call for expanded partnership relationships between PC (USA) congregations and those of our partner churches in the Middle East.
- Approved a report and statement on human trafficking, including an emphasis on restoration and human rights.

As we move to the plenary session, these overtures and countless others will be debated and voted upon by the entire assembly. Additionally, when we gather once more as an entire group, there will be opportunities for worship, electing a stated clerk, and hearing reports of God's work among us.

Stay tuned for updates not only on votes, but on other aspects of this national gathering of the church.

## **BENEDICTION**

I will offer to you the words in closing that we sang together for the benediction at the World Mission luncheon (authored by Janet Saunders).

*Go into the world with faith, trusting God to lead you.*

*Go into the world with hope, see God's presence everywhere.*

*Go into the world with love, loving those who Christ loves.*

*Go in faith and go in hope, and go out in love.*

## Update for June 22, 2016 - Day 5

***"The bad news is there are no maps for where we are in the Church today and where we are going.....The good news is there are no maps for where we are in the Church today and where we are going....therefore, we have to rely upon our God and upon each other in the body of Christ."***

In one of the sessions that I attended today, the person introduced our time with the quote above. It reminded me of the book Canoeing the Mountains that I have mentioned several times. The nature and rapidity of change in our world and for the Church no longer permit us to plan for the future based upon the patterns of the past.

Consequently, we must look to our God to lead us and direct us to where God has gone before us. We must look to who we will be as God's people together, hearing from one another, sharing our gifts with one another, and growing together in Christ as congregations, as a presbytery, and as a denomination.

### **PLENARY SESSIONS**

#### Church Gathering as a Whole (through representative commissioners)

Beginning the time with one of the "speak outs," small groups formed within the larger convention hall to engage in discussing the questions:

1. In what ways have your views of the report's findings and insights changed during your time at the Assembly?
2. In what ways will your views of the report's findings and insights affect your consideration of the business before the Assembly?

Even within the span of five days and because of the shared conversations during that time, commissioners (and others) find themselves thinking, rethinking, and thinking again. Now, each will find himself/herself needing to make concrete

decisions in hearing additional debate and voting on the overtures brought forward from the committees.

## **"BUSINESS" ACTIONS**

### **Consent Agenda**

In order to streamline business activity, an extensive "consent agenda" was presented. In order to be included on this consent agenda, overtures needed at least 75% approval rate within the committee voting. After commissioners requested the removal of eight items, the consent agenda was approved by voice vote with fifty-six items and reports included on that list.

### **Theological Seminaries**

New seminary presidents were approved, including David Esterline who is serving as the President of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. The covenant with the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico was renewed (*on a side note, I visited this seminary as part of an accreditation team several years back and in another lifetime*).

A memorial minute was conducted by Rev. Craig Barnes in remembrance of the untimely death of Dr. Steven Hayner, former president of Columbia Theological Seminary. He emphasized Steve's recognition of the pursuit of grace that empowered him to live joyfully, even in the midst of cancer. The Committee on Theological Education also recognized Dr. Craig Dykstra (Lilly) and Dr. Katharine Sakenfeld (Princeton T.S.) for lifetime achievement of Excellence in Theological Education.

### **Directory of Worship**

The Revised Directory of Worship was presented. The last major revision was in 1989, after the reunion. As part of the Book of Order, the document serves as a "compass" which helps us "navigate" between form and freedom in worship.

The revision seeks to integrate theology and practice as well as accommodating new changes in the church. Beginning with the General Assembly in 2006, a directive for revision was offered. A first "draft" was presented in 2014 to the General Assembly. It was recommended for study and comment. In 2015, a second consultation generated a second draft which was presented to this General Assembly. A number of changes have been made including shortening the document while retaining central Reformed emphases.

Although amended in committee, the amended version was approved by the Assembly. Additional amendments were offered on the floor, with only a couple of them being approved. As a Book of Order change, this Revised Directory of Worship will be presented for approval by a majority of presbyteries. I encourage you to read it and consider its usefulness for our future worship lives and practices.

### **Statements on Creation, Evolution and Science**

An "Affirmation of Creation" was presented from the committee on Theological Issues and Institution. Some commissioners expressed the concern that some of the language was too specific. In a tallied vote, the statement passed (after several votes resulting from difficulty with the voting devices) in a close vote. The Assembly also voted to endorse the Clergy Letter Project and the Christian Clergy Letter expressing the view that "the timeless truths of the Bible and the discoveries of modern science may comfortably coexist."

### **Prayer for Persecuted Christians**

In response to a commissioner's resolution, the Assembly approved by voice vote a call to pray for persecuted Christians within the world. At the conclusion of the vote, Juan Samarsiento led the congregation in prayer.

### **Belhar Confession**

Many of you will recall that the 2014 General Assembly passed the inclusion of the Confession of Belhar within our Book of Confessions. This confession focused on reconciliation and unity as both a "gift and obligation" for the church. It was written in the context of racial apartheid in South Africa.

As a revision to the Book of Confessions, such action also required approval by 2/3 of the presbyteries (achieved in 2015) and ratification by the next ensuing General Assembly (2016). The overwhelming vote today confirms this confession which will be included in the next publication of the Book of Confessions (2016).

We were greeted and thanked and joined in celebration by Godfrey Betha and Alan Boesak from the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa. As the Assembly broke out in song, it was an emotional moment throughout the convention hall.



### **CELEBRATING MINISTRY OF STATED CLERK GRADYE PARSONS**

*Reflections on the Nature and  
Future of the Church*  
with Paul Raushenbush:  
**A Celebration of the Ministry of  
The Reverend Gradye Parsons**  
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) 2008 – 2016  
June 22, 2016



Among other events at this General Assembly, there were several acknowledgements of the imminent retirement of Gradye Parsons. Tonight, I was privileged to attend a dinner celebrating the ministry of this servant of Christ and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Additionally, Gradye was recognized by the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations for his work as the ecumenical representative of the PCUSA and received an ovation from the Assembly.

While no doubt, there is some status in fulfilling such a role on a national stage, the reality is that in many ways it can be a "thankless" job where there is always somebody displeased no matter what you say or decide. In my own view, while I have not always agreed with him, I believe that Gradye has served the church well with grace and humility.

## ECUMENICAL SERVICE

As an ecumenical service, we were privileged to hear the proclamation of the word from Bishop Reginald Jack, Prelate of the Twentieth District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. His message focused on the "conflicting voices" even among faith leaders. Rev. Jack called for us as faith leaders to be faithful through prayer, to not be fooled by the numbers, and continue to speak truth to power and to know God. As with each worship service within the Assembly, the Lord's Supper was celebrated.



## PRESBYTERIAN WORLD MISSION

Earlier this morning, the Mid Council leaders (EP's and Stated Clerks) met together with some of the staff members of the Presbyterian World Mission. In that gathering, we shared best practices and innovations about the ways in which both local and world mission is promoted and implemented in presbyteries across the country. As a presbytery, we remain committed to supporting both shared and designated mission and to encourage congregations directly to engage in support and partnership with mission - local, national, and international.

So, I close this day's description of our work with a quote from the document, "Presbyterians Do Mission in Partnership (2003)" that characterizes not only our understanding of mission, but our understanding of unity and being connected to

one another (whether in this Assembly or with brothers/sisters around the world).

***"We understand "Mission" to be God's work for the sake of the world God loves. We understand this work to be centered in the Lordship of Jesus Christ and made real through the active and leading power of the Holy Spirit. Recognizing our human limitations and because of our fundamental unity in Jesus Christ, we believe we are called to mission through the discipline of partnership....."***

***As heirs to God's grace in Jesus Christ, and joint heirs with all who confess him Lord, we affirm our place as Presbyterians in the whole Body of Christ, the Church. We give visible recognition of our belonging to one another as one denominational family. We give this recognition as Presbyterians through our connectional system of congregations, presbyteries, synods, General Assemblies and related institutions. The one table around which we gather is God's table and the one mission to which we are called is God's mission.....Whenever and wherever one engages in that mission, one bears witness to the saving love of God in Jesus Christ. Through this love, empowered by the Holy Spirit, all are made one. This unity is a gift of God's grace that extends across cultural, linguistic, economic and other barriers that divide us within the Body of Christ and across the human family."***

## Update for June 23, 2016 - Day 6

### INTRODUCTION

On this Thursday evening, the "business" of General Assembly continues to "roll on" with plenary sessions in the morning, afternoon, and now into the late evening. These are the days when concentration on the part of commissioners becomes critical as one overture and issue follows upon another. The structure of each session is well planned between reports and debates, separating more controversial issues into different sessions and including videos and music.

Nonetheless, all of the commissioners remain in need of your prayers as they seek to be diligent in fulfilling their responsibilities on behalf of the church.

One of those commissioners, Colleen Molinaro (TE) offered her own remarks about impressions of the General Assembly.

***"What a pleasure it is to experience the vast diversity among the members of our church, all the while serving one Lord. As a member of Ecumenical and Interfaith committee, I had the privilege to hear greetings from brothers and sisters from several countries in South America and Africa. The Spirit has been present in worship, plenary, and in committees. We concluded our work as a committee in the sharing of the Lord's Supper. Truly, the Church in action."***



### ECUMENICAL DELEGATES

As mentioned by Colleen, one of the highlights for me is the participation of the Ecumenical Advisory Delegates. Invited by the denomination to come and participate, I have had the opportunity to personally meet a few of these brothers and sisters and have been impressed that they have taken the time to become familiar with our Presbyterian polity and the issues in preparation for this General Assembly.

Additionally, there are ecumenical and international observers who have also come to this General Assembly to represent their home churches and to witness

the discussions and actions of the PCUSA. At each plenary, there are greetings and an invocation offered by members of these other faith communities and we are the beneficiaries of their willingness to contribute to our gathering.

### **AGENCY REPORTS**

Reports on some of the other agencies were presented this morning. They included the Presbyterian Investment Loan Program (PILP), Board of Pensions (BOP), Presbyterian Publishing, and Presbyterian Foundation. Sometimes, we can think of these as some distant group serving someone else, but each of these agencies has served our congregations or presbytery in some ways. Just some examples include;

- Westmont Presbyterian Church recently took out a loan (PILP).
- Redstone teaching elders who received emergency assistance grants (BOP).
- Presbytery investments in New Covenant Funds (Presbyterian Foundation).
- Apportionment increases for teaching elders, active or retired (BOP).
- Curriculum and books in our Resource Center (Presbyterian Publishing)

### **"BUSINESS" ACTIONS**

**(Just some of the many items considered/decided)**

#### **General Assembly Procedures**

Some of the more mundane, but necessary matters approved included approving the location and date of the 225<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (June 25-July2; Columbus, Ohio). The Assembly elected Beth Hessel (TE) as Associate Stated Clerk. Beth is the Executive Director of the Presbyterian Historical Society.

Additional measures were taken to continue to ensure adequate representation in our agencies. New business also directed the provision of guidance on child protection policies and procedures.

#### **Mid Council Issues**

After much debate and numerous attempts at amending the proposal, the Assembly approved an alternative resolution from the committee on dependent care policy (as opposed to including it in the BOO). The assembly also voted to disapprove an overture that would have required development of a national child

development policy. Last night, the child protection policy of the GA and its agencies was approved and could serve as a model to others.

In 2014, the General Assembly passed an overture urging synods to consider shared mission and boundaries in order to reduce to 10-12 synods (currently 16). After two years of meeting about mission, ministry, and possible configurations, the synods came back with a report indicating that they did not see a way to change the boundaries without compromising the mission and ministry.

This year, an overture calling for a rescinding of that action was approved out of committee. A minority report was also presented on appointment of a group to consolidate synod boundaries. On the floor of the GA, the majority committee position was affirmed by a vote of 421-158. So, the current configuration and number of synods will remain for the foreseeable future.

### **The Way Forward**

With the number of overtures submitted this year that either addressed major structural and procedural issues related to the functioning of the General Assembly or the two agencies of the Office of General Assembly (OGA) and Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA), a new committee entitled "The Way Forward" was assigned the task of taking up these issues.

As a result, coming from the committee was a proposal created as “new business.” This proposal called for a representative 2020 Vision Team. In an effort to address the sentiment of many of the concerns, this group was charged with the task of developing a guiding statement for the denomination and make a plan for its implementation with all deliberate speed. This process will help us to name and claim our denominational identity as we seek to follow the Spirit into the future. The Committee shall build upon both the work begun in “When We Gather at the Table” and the Moderator’s report to the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly.

Using targeted listening exercises with various constituencies throughout the PC (USA), conversations should center on the calling of the church. Responding to both the vision of constituencies and the best practices outside the walls of the church for being relevant to the changing landscape, the committee will develop recommendations that shall be the only business for the “The Way Forward” committee to review at the 223<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly. The intention is that there will be a new vision for the denomination by the 224<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.

Additionally, while acknowledging the hard work of many PCUSA staff, nevertheless there was a desire to address structural concerns and issues that were raised of the two agencies (OGA/PMA). The Committee proposed the appointment of an Administrative Commission who would be able to conduct comprehensive analysis (including using an examination team) and make recommendations and implement changes within the boundaries of the current constitution. Mission and structural changes that exceed that authority would be recommended to the next General Assembly. Included in the Administrative Commission will be the current co-moderators and the previous moderator/vice moderator.

No doubt, both of the above responses are attempts to simultaneously address immediate concerns of function, but also to address major questions of our time and how we might pursue "a way forward" as a national church. While acknowledging the great value the "Foothills overtures" provided in stimulating a comprehensive conversation on reform within the denomination, nonetheless, the Committee and the General Assembly believed that they addressed these proposals through the two above measures.

### **Mission Coordination**

A commission resolution requesting the withdrawal from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice was disapproved in both the Committee and the plenary session of the General Assembly.

An overture was submitted by Pittsburgh Presbytery seeking a pilot project to address the plight of African-American males in targeted cities in the United States. This overture was affirmed by the Committee and approved by the General Assembly.

The Committee and the General Assembly approved an overture to establish a maximum ratio of 5:1 compensation from highest to lowest paid employees in the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

### **Social Justice**

A number of initiatives intended to report on, educate, and address issues of race, ethnicity, and racism were passed by the Committee and the General Assembly.

As part of the process of pursuing reconciliation, an overture was approved by the Committee and the General Assembly offering apology to Native Americans, Alaskan Natives, and Native Hawaiians for dishonoring actions of the past and to seek forgiveness, healing grace, and guidance toward mutually respectful relationships.

Other items were still being discussed and debated from this Committee as the commissioners worked into the night.....

### **Overall Perspective**

While any one or more of these issues may not seem important to any one of us, nonetheless there are those for whom these concerns are significant. Within our church as we seek to serve and be faithful to Jesus Christ together, we hear from one another and respond collectively. In so doing, we sharpen each other to be open to what God is saying and doing among us even as the context and circumstances of our lives differ widely.



### **WORSHIP**

Interrupting the Mid Council issues agenda in the morning, the Assembly paused in planned fashion to focus our attention in corporate worship. With beautiful music, both instrumental and vocal, our praises were lifted before our God. Using the "Good Samaritan" parable, the Rev. Alice Ridgill (Trinity Presbytery) challenged us to hear the call of Jesus to "neighbor" and to be "difference makers." As is our pattern in GA, we came to the Lord's Table to be fed and nourished by the grace of Jesus Christ.

## **MISSION CO-WORKERS**

Hunter Farrell, Director of World Mission, told of a practice in Haiti where the words of honor and respect are communicated to one another as one comes to another's property. He spoke of the notions of honor and respect which form the rhythm of our partnership in mission.

In this way, mission co-workers are sent in partnership with the greeting of honor and received with respect. Eleven mission co-workers who were retiring from active mission service in the PCUSA were honored. Their dedication and service to the Lord through mission partnership service with other brothers/sisters around the world serves as a testimony to the way in which God's kingdom comes not merely for us, but the world.

At the same time, nine new mission co-workers were commissioned to service as part of Presbyterian World Mission. A litany of commissioning was used to send out these mission co-workers in the name of Jesus Christ and on our behalf. In that litany, we promised to support them with prayer, encouragement, and resources.

## **GA.....STILL TO COME?**

While the coming together of the church in reunion and education is accomplished in other gatherings like "Big Tent," the General Assembly always consists of a mixture of policy and fellowship, legislation and mission, worship and education. Sometimes, agenda items don't go as efficiently as some would desire. Sometimes, people feel like we are too focused on the tasks at hand.

Although there was much "business" completed today, there remains much to be reviewed and decided. The Assembly will need to take up these matters expeditiously. I suspect that tomorrow will be another long day.

In any ecclesiastical meeting, there is a delicate balance between completing the items submitted for review, progress reports, and the equally important times of fellowship and worship. Each of these types of activities exhibits God's grace among us, upon us, and through us. Please continue to pray for us and for those responsible for the organization and implementation of the remaining components of this General Assembly.

## Update for June 24, 2016 - Day 7

### INTRODUCTION

With a late night session followed by a morning session this morning, you would have thought that most people would be "dragging." As I entered the convention center meeting, I expected naturally to see commissioners entering with "dread" on what awaited them. Yet, no matter the lack of sleep, they filed in ready to take the charge, smiling and greeting their table mates as they arrived. Certainly, the coffee lines were longer, but the renewed energy was evident as they came to express the "hope of their calling."

Throughout the day and into the late evening again on Friday, the dedication and commitment of these commissioned volunteers is impressive. Their desire to serve Jesus Christ and their church in this way warrants the honor and respect of all of us.

### "BUSINESS ITEMS"

#### Election of the Stated Clerk

After a period of speeches by both candidates, questions were posed for both candidates from the floor of the Assembly. Both candidates spoke of their visions for the denomination as well as their previous experience that would qualify them. As a result, Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson was elected by a vote of 447 to 112. J. Herbert noted that to "only think about the survival of the church is to set our aim too low." His reference was to the kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus the Christ which transcends preservation of an organization. At the same time, he expressed hope for the PCUSA with the words of affirmation, "we are not dead, we are reforming."



#### Social Justice

Late in the evening on Thursday, the General Assembly considered an action initiated by the New York Presbytery of expressing an apology to the LGBTQQ as

a result from past actions. The Committee disapproved that overture and instead offered an alternative resolution that changed the language from apology to regret over the pain caused to those based upon sexual orientation. On Friday (next morning), there was a motion to reconsider the action and to restore "stronger" language, but this motion failed.

## **Church Polity and Ordered Ministry**

The Church Polity and Ordered Ministry committee attempted to expedite matters by consolidating a number of their actions under a "consent agenda." A couple of these matters were "pulled," but the rest were approved. Those approved by consent included: being a little less prescriptive on ratios of teaching and ruling elders on committees of councils higher than sessions, addition of the Administrative Personnel to possible Certified Church Service, and additional sections on Ecclesiastical Officers.

An overture was submitted and was approved by the Committee to change the labeling and language in the BOO from "teaching elder" back to "minister of word and sacrament." While there was an affirmation of the parity in the ordered ministry, there was discussion about the confusion that this caused our ecumenical partners. As a result, an amendment was included and passed to include both terms. This will be proposed to presbyteries for ratification.

In 2014, the GA passed a proposed revision in the Book of Order that made clear that a person who had "renounced jurisdiction" could not become part of a congregation and serve in a volunteer or paid capacity. As a BOO revision, it required approval of a majority of presbyteries which subsequently, it did receive.

In this GA, the Committee responded to an overture to rescind that action, by disapproving it, but offering additional language (06-07) that retained this, but provided the means by which restoration might occur. Their motion failed in the General Assembly. After efforts to refer it to the next GA were defeated, language was approved that would require teaching elders who "renounce jurisdiction" during disciplinary proceedings to resubmit to the disciplinary process of the church in order to serve in voluntary or paid ministry under the jurisdiction of the PCUSA.

An overture to alter the BOO on preparation for ministry for seminaries to teach evangelism was disapproved by the Committee and the Assembly. There was a possible comment on the proposed, but it failed by just a few votes.

There was substantial debate on the proposal from the Synod of the Northeast concerning making clear the option of electing and commissioning ruling elders without necessarily participating in session. In the end, not only was the committee motion to disapprove not approved, neither was the original proposal from Northeast approved. Consequently, the Assembly referred the matter to the Committee on General Assembly for consideration.

### **Middle East Issues**

A controversial area through several iterations of the General Assembly has revolved around issues in the Middle East. Although disagreements still remain on how to pursue peace and justice in this area as in the past, this General Assembly did pass some statements including advocating and witnessing for the human rights of children in Palestine and Israel.

Also, a report from the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy offering a summary assessment on Israel-Palestine and a just peace had been submitted. This report was augmented by an amended preface included below with the ongoing affirmation of the two-state solution.

**“As disciples of Jesus Christ, the Prince of peace, of the people of Abraham and the lineage of David, we stand with the people of Israel, affirming their right to exist as a sovereign nation, and we stand with the Palestinian people, affirming their rights to exist as a sovereign nation. Therefore, the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly (2016) affirms Footnote 8, which emphasizes a preference for a two-state solution. The assembly also affirms our desire to stay in conversation with our partners in Israel who work for peace. Finally, the assembly expresses its opposition to any efforts to deny or undermine the rights of the Palestinian people or the Jewish people to self-determination.”**

The Committee on Middle East recommended disapproval of an overture calling for a boycott of all HP products. This disapproval was confirmed by the General Assembly by an overwhelming vote.

### **Immigration and Environmental Issues**

Approved by voice vote, a collaborative agenda on environmental stewardship among the six agencies of the PCUSA was advanced. "Our Common Call to Care for God's Creation" notes the current practices, but also calls for additional action by both individuals and agency practices within the denomination.

Approval was granted of the overture to revise G-1.0304 in the Book of Order under the category of the "Ministry of Members" to also include "Caring for God's creation" within this list of faithful responsibilities. This constitutional change will be forwarded to presbyteries for voting in order to approve this change.

Of the more controversial items, the overture from San Francisco called for beginning the divestment from fossil fuel companies over the next three years while retaining a small investment for shareholder privilege. In a relatively close vote, the Committee had approved this overture. Yet, also coming out of the Committee was a minority report which focused on diversifying the investment portfolio within the energy sector. This Minority Report was amended to direct the MRTI continue an engagement process on climate change issues with corporations, particularly coal and gas companies, and report back to the next General Assembly.

### **Peacemaking and International Issues**

By consent, the Assembly affirmed the new vistas and realities possible with the new realities in the relationship between United States and Cuba. Looking forward to a free and open relationship between peoples and churches, the PCUSA rejoices at the prospect of deepening our communion with the La Iglesia Presbiteriana-Reformada en Cuba (IPRC). The Assembly received greetings and comments from Daniel Izquierdo, General Secretary of the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Cuba.

Also, by consent, the Assembly received the "Statement on Peace and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula" adopted by the 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) meeting in South Korea in November, 2013 and commend it for study and reflection. The Assembly also heard from Lee Hong Jung---General Secretary, Presbyterian Church of Korea.

The Committee affirmed the historic means by which the Presbyterian Church (USA) has engaged in nonviolent witness for the sake of identifying and calling a stop to forms of human oppression in American society and throughout the world.

At the conclusion of a six-year process, this General Assembly voted on the Peacemaking Affirmations as amended by the Committee. You might recall these five Affirmations that we deliberated on and gave comment during our Presbytery meeting last November. Some of the amendments address a few of the concerns that we had as well as others.

## **WORSHIP**

In the midst of all our actions and declarations in this General Assembly, we were helpfully reminded of that foundational starting point of it all. Rev. Jerry Andrews drew our attention to the Pauline words that declare our reconciliation to God in Jesus Christ as announcement. Such pronouncements place our own reconciliation within the larger context of God's reconciling work in the world. We are privileged to be invited to participate in this work as God's co-workers, yet it is never dependent upon us. It is that vertical reconciliation that frames and motivates our reconciliation with each other and the world.

## **GROWING IN "GRACE AND GRATITUDE"**

Certainly, each of us knows that it is our central desire to know and live by God's grace. We know that gratitude is our primary response to that saving, sustaining, and sanctifying grace. Yet, as one small part of today's session, we heard a testimony of a young woman who was using the "Growing in Grace and Gratitude" curriculum with her 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade Sunday School class. Both in its

theological substance and in the accommodating lesson plans, she testified firsthand of the stories of impact on these kids. If you have not checked out this curriculum for your kids, I would encourage you do so. It is available through the PCUSA store, as well as we have a sample copy in the Resource Center.

### A COMPLETE ROTATION



In the Oregon Convention Center, suspended from the ceiling is a 750-pound ball attached to a pendulum cable. It is labeled the Foucault Pendulum. In 1851, the French physicist discovered that a pendulum's swing plane would change according to the earth's rotation. It appears that the pendulum is rotating, but actually the earth is rotating under it. The full 360 degrees varies according to the latitude at which the pendulum is located. In Portland, this rotation is accomplished in 33.5 hours.

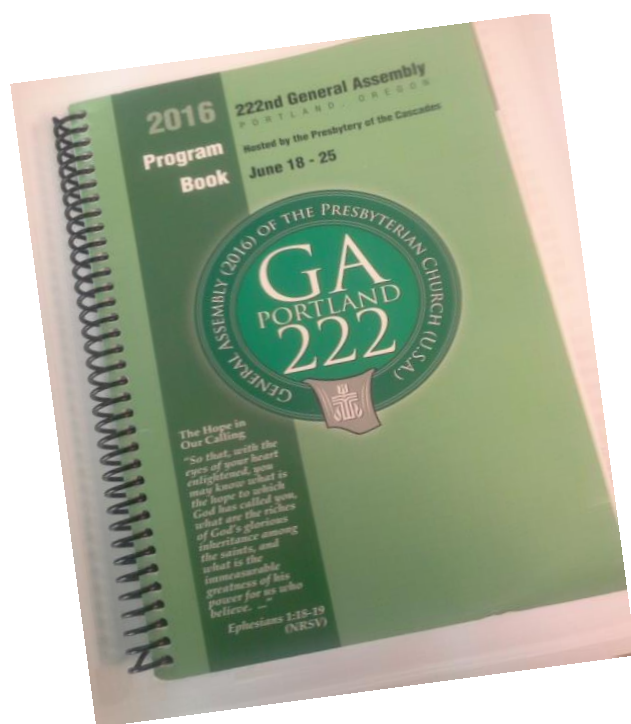
When we began this journey, we began with great optimism. Yet, there were times during these past several days when it appeared the pendulum swung back and forth without really moving. As debates waned on, we could easily "tire" of hearing each other, but graciousness was the "norm" and was demonstrated on almost all occasions.

Slowly, but surely, the commissioners worked hard to exhibit and communicate their own commitments to participate in God's reconciling work in the church and in the world. At times, progress seemed noticeably absent. Yet, beneath all of our actions and conversations, the church rotated along, moving the plane of the pendulum cable until the fullness of business was accomplished. When the "business" was done, applause of relief and thanksgiving rang through the hall.

Tomorrow morning is reserved for closing worship before everyone departs for return flights home. Through these everyday updates, I have not been able to capture all of the moments and activities of this General Assembly, but you will be able to review the disposition of all overtures and action items through [pc-biz.org](http://pc-biz.org).

With the "business" actions taken by this General Assembly having "wrapped up," I can testify that your prayers for our commissioners and others have been answered. The answers may not have always been reflected in votes that any one of us would have wanted or desired, but in the larger perspective, the "eyes" of their hearts were enlightened, to:

***"know the hope to which God has called you, what are the riches of God's glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe.."(Ephesians 1:18-19)***



## Update for June 25, 2016 - Day 8

### CLOSING PLENARY

With a flurry of “business” completed through the day and into the night on Friday, Saturday morning brought a “calm” to the General Assembly. The commissioners and those who resourced them had worked hard for seven straight days. Although there was a final session to be completed, it was a much anticipated celebration with reports and a closing worship service.

In review of the actions of the General Assembly, the GA COMMITTEE presented the impact upon the per capita in upcoming years. While the per capita in 2016 remains at \$7.12, for 2017, it will require a 38 cent increase, followed by an 18 cent increase for 2018.

In addition, assembly actions added \$282,744 in 2017 and \$162,500 in 2018 to the Presbyterian Mission Agency budget, over and above the proposed budgets of \$63,530,297 in 2017 and \$63,450,591 in 2018. These increases result from the specific actions taken by the 2016 General Assembly. The Presbyterian Mission Agency is funded from mission gifts provided by congregations and presbyteries. Consequently, Tony De La Rosa, (Interim Executive Director) made an appeal to the Assembly for their financial support and solicitation among their congregations.

Tony also reported on the progress of the 1011 Worshipping Communities initiative. Currently, there are 344 active worshiping communities, but more importantly were some of the demographics that he shared about who the participants are:

**64% are under 40**

**53% are racial/ethnic members**

**78% are “new” to the PCUSA**

**71% of the presbyteries have at least one new worshiping community**

In anticipation of the 223<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly (June 16-23, 2018) to be held in St. Louis, Missouri, the Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy offered a video presentation and welcome to their city. If you really want to plan ahead, you might want to know that the 224<sup>th</sup> (2020) General Assembly will be in Baltimore and the 224<sup>th</sup> will be in Columbus, Ohio.

In many ways, this General Assembly has been different from many of the past. While we will continue to “sort out” and reflect over the next few months upon what has transpired in these intense days, this gathering was transitional. For the first time in many years, it was not dominated by the discussion and debate

for issues of sexuality. While there were certainly issues of passion and difference within the assembled commissioners, the conflict never seemed to result in clear polarization between “winners” and “losers.” Of course, votes were taken and some positions prevailed, while other failed, but the “tone” was not so divisive.

With this General Assembly, there were transitions in leadership. For the first time, co-moderators were elected. A new stated clerk was elected to succeed Gradye Parsons who had served for eight years. These elected leaders also signify changes in the diversity of leadership within our own denomination.

Another significant step was realized with the adoption of the Confession of Belhar. Written within the context of apartheid in South Africa, this addition to our Book of Confessions represents a commitment to unity in the Church that transcends barriers of race. By its inclusion, we also will have one of the confessions that originates from a different part of the world than Europe or North America.

Some actions that were taken (constitutional changes) will require approval by the presbyteries and will become part of the discussion over the next year or two. Others may be lesser known, but do signify the revision or approval of overtures that began with a presbytery over the past two years. Some of those statements reflect policies, while others represent public statements.

In all of these actions, those gathered as commissioners at the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly sought God’s leading and guidance. In our trust in the Lord’s sovereignty, we believe and trust in God’s providence in directing our paths through this collective discernment and decision making process.

Through it all, your Redstone commissioners were diligent in their work leading up to the assembly and throughout the many, many committee meetings, sessions, and presentations. As a group who were willing to serve the Lord, the PCUSA, and Redstone Presbytery, we owe them our gratitude. Personally, I hope that you will join me in thanking each of them as you have the opportunity.

**Ms. Bernice Adams, Ruling Elder**

**Rev. Colleen Molinaro, Teaching Elder**

**Rev. Curtis Paul, Teaching Elder**

**Ms. Mandi Pascarella, YAAD**

**Mr. Tom Shipley, Ruling Elder**

The 222nd General Assembly theme was based upon the “Hope in Our Calling” taken from Ephesians 1:18-19. Throughout this Assembly, commissioners, participants, and even Executive Presbyters have wrestled with its meaning. Whether in plenary debates, long committee meetings, challenging presentations, or inspiring worship, the “eyes” of our heart have been enlightened and that “Hope” has become known a little better this week.

**“So that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which God has called you, what are the riches of God’s glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe...”(Ephesians 1:18-19; NRSV)**

## “How was GA?”—GA Reflections

**How was GA?** .....Usually, this the opening question that I receive upon my return from the biennial adventure that we call the General Assembly council. Yet, the story is not in the words of the inquiry, but rather portrayed in the “tone” of the questioner. As you might imagine, while there may be various nuances, often the question reflects the “ends” of the continuum.

Some will ask with more than a “touch” of either skepticism or suspicion. Others inquire as if I have been to the “mountaintop” or participated in a spiritual pilgrimage. For the first group, “GA”(as we call it) represents all that is “wrong” with the church. For the latter, “GA” reflects our highest ideals and what is “right” with the church.

My answer to those two “ends” and others in-between.....It was and is the church. Every other year a group of sinners redeemed by grace gather on a large scale. Commissioned by presbyteries, they come together in the name of Christ sanctified by the Holy Spirit together to talk, to pray, to debate, and to pursue faithfulness together. And, when they gather there is both a fellowship of like-mindedness in Christ AND a stirring one another up to love and good works. ***It is the church.***

Think of your congregation or session or the presbytery, but think bigger. People agree and disagree with each other. Usually, they are gracious, but not always. In general, each one desires what is best for the church in following Christ, but each one may also be subject to the seduction of rationalization of a personal agenda. It appears to be much like every congregation I have ever served, every session I have moderated and every presbytery I have participated.

Yet, think bigger. With the size and scope of this meeting of the church, the comfort and homogeneity of our particular “place” is no longer present. By definition, the meeting brings together the diversity of the church. Whether reflected in geography, types of congregations, ethnicity or theological perspective, it is there.....***And, it is the church.***

As a national church, we are discovering that God is leading us through some

transitions. Some of our congregations have been dismissed to “places” where they feel comfortable with where the theological boundaries are drawn. Yet, who we are, in those similarities and in differences in Christ remains, for ***we are the church.***

In this Assembly, the historic “fights” over sexuality with each side jockeying for either change or tradition were absent for the most part. Overall, there was a calm spirit within the Assembly. Not that there were not disagreements or strongly-held convictions on display, but there appeared to be an anticipation concerning what is next for we are the church.

Transitions were reflected in leadership choices, in wrestling with vision and structure, and what would be “The Way Forward.” Celebration took place with the addition of a new confession seeking to break down further barriers in which the church has permitted (and sometimes rationalized) division. Issues of social justice, Middle East conflict and peacemaking were debated with each resulting in measured responses that noted our own failures of the past and our desire to engage with others in transformation not only for us as individuals, but for our world. ***It was the church.***

Signs of vitality were present in tangible ways. Whether it was the investment of the Young Adult Advisory Delegates or in the report on 1001 Worshiping Communities, God was present. Whether it was the way in which opposing “sides” treated each other in debate about proposed actions concerning divestment, the report of Presbyterian World Missions, or a moving moment of reconciliation with the affirmation of a new confession, the Lord was there exercising grace in, through and sometimes, in spite of us.

***How was GA?.....It was the church.***

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## PC(USA) leaders issue post-General Assembly letter to the church

**“FOR EVERYTHING THERE IS A SEASON, AND A TIME FOR EVERY MATTER UNDER HEAVEN.” ECCLESIASTES 3**

**JUNE 25, 2016; PORTLAND**

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Brothers and sisters in Christ, there is a new season in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), as witnessed by the actions of the 222nd General Assembly (2016). The body of 594 commissioners who gathered June 18-25 in Portland, Oregon, elected Co-Moderators Denise Anderson and Jan Edmiston, and J. Herbert Nelson as the Stated Clerk. Both were historic, and both signal a new way forward for our church.

The business decisions made by the body also were transformative for the 1,572,660 members and 9,642 churches of the PC(USA). The work wasn't easy, and involved careful deliberations. Collectively, the body acted on nearly 100 overtures by discerning the will of Christ.

Among other things, we now have a new addition to our Book of Confessions – the Confession of Belhar. It is the first of our confessions that comes from the global south. And, the PC(USA) has a new Directory for Worship; and Child/Youth/Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy and Procedures. God is truly guiding us to be more faithful and just to all of God's creations.

Much discussion has been taking place around the identity and purpose of the denomination, and this week the assembly voted to create a 12-member Way Forward Commission “to study and identify a vision for the structure and function of the General Assembly agencies of the PC(USA),” and a 15-member 2020 Vision Team to “develop a guiding statement for the denomination and make a plan for its implementation.” To quote Stated Clerk-elect J. Herbert Nelson, “We are not dead ... we are alive, we are reforming and we are transforming this world, one person at a time.”

Looking outward, the assembly voted to engage in selective, phased divestment from fossil-fuel companies through the PC(USA)'s Mission Responsibility Through Investment committee, and re-affirmed a two-state solution for Israel-Palestine.

Please know this is only a snapshot of the actions taken, and just a glimpse at where God is leading this denomination. Complete business actions can be viewed at [www.pc-biz.org](http://www.pc-biz.org).

We are, brothers and sisters, in a new season. It's exciting, but also a little scary. Yet in the midst of it all, take comfort that God is still guiding and controlling all – and we need not fear. God is calling us to hope, and to God be the glory!

**The Reverend Gradye Parsons**  
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly

**The Reverend Denise Anderson and the Reverend Jan Edmiston**  
Co-Moderators of the 222nd General Assembly (2016)

**Ruling Elder Tony De La Rosa**  
Interim Executive Director, Presbyterian Mission Agency

Committee	Overture/ Resolution/ Report #	Action(vote)	Summary	Presbytery action required (BOO/BOC)
<b>General Assembly Procedures</b>	03-01	Recommendation 1 - Approved as Amended by Consensus Recommendation 2 - Referred with Comment	Amending standing rules E.2.d.(2) and E.2.f.(3)	
	03-02	Referral with Comment	Racial Ethnic Composition Component of the Session Annual Report of Church Statistics	
	03-03	Recommendation 1 - Disapprove Recommendation 2 - Disapprove with Comment	Directing COGA to Bring to the 223rd General Assembly (2018) Proposals Regarding Changes in the Moderator's Election and Assembly Committee Meetings Process	
	03-05	Disapprove by Consensus	Amending the Annual Statistical Report to Include a New Category "Partners in Ministry"	
	03-06	Approve	Adding New Standing Rule B.5.b., Assembly Committee Moderators	
	03-07	Approve	Amendment to Standing Rule B.3.a., Presbyterian Women	
	03-08	Approve	Election of Associate Stated Clerk	
	03-09	Approve	Site Selection for the 225th General Assembly (2022)	
	03-10	Recommendation 1 - Approve Recommendation 2 - Approve with Comment	Recommended Benchmarks for OGA and PMA	
	03-11	Disapprove	Amending Standing Rules B.4. and F.5.d. Concerning the Role of the ACC and PJC When Constitutional Questions are Considered by the General Assembly	
	03-12	Approve	Approve "A Standard Definition of Supplier Diversity."	
	03-13	Approve as Amended	Joint COGA/PMA Budget Proposals for General Assembly Per Capita Budgets 2016-2018	

	03-14	Approve with Comment	Approve Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Child/Youth/Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy and Procedures	
	03-A	Approve with Comment	Minutes, Committee on the Office of the General Assembly	
	03-B	Approve with Comment	Minutes, Presbyterian Historical Society	
	03-C	Approve with Comment	Minutes, General Assembly Committee on Representation	
<b>The Way Forward</b>	04-01	Disapprove with Comment	Amending G-3.0503 and G-6.04 Regarding Meetings of the General Assembly and Amending the Constitution	
	04-07	Approve Alternate Resolution	Merging the Presbyterian Mission Agency and the Office of the General Assembly into a Single Entity	
	04-11	Answer with Action on another Resolution	Report of the Committee to Review the Presbyterian Mission Agency	
	04-12	Approve - Recommend approval of OGA review recommendations	Report of the Committee to Review the Office of the General Assembly	
<b>Mid Councils</b>	05-01	Approve with Comment	Rescinding the Actions of the 221st General Assembly (2014) That Directed the Establishment of a New Configuration of Synod Boundaries (Item 05-04)	
	05-06	Disapprove	Developing a National Child Protection Policy Model	
	05-08	Approve as Amended with Comments	Replacing the Current Authoritative Interpretation of G-3.0403c with New Text	
	05-09	Approve as Amended with Comments	Resolution to Ensure Adoption and Implementation of Child/Youth Protection Policies and Resources in the PC(USA)	
	05-10	Approve as Amended with Comments	Resolution to Require and Expand Family Leave Policies	

	05-11	Approve as Amended with Comments	Task Force for Korean speaking congregations report	
	05-12	Approve with Comment	Request for Constitutional Interpretation of Resolving Tensions between F-1.0403, F-1.0404, and F-3.0202	
	05-14	Approve	Merging the Presbyteries of Central Washington and Northwest Coast	
	05-A	Approve	Review of Synod Minutes	
	05-Res.		GAPJC Remedial Complaint 222-05 MacKellar v. Synod of the Northeast	
<b>Church Polity and Ordered Ministry</b>	06-02	Disapprove	Amending G-2.0607c. to Add Training in Evangelism	
	06-03		Item 06-03 became Item 09-11. There is no Item 06-03	
	06-04	Disapprove with Comment	Amending G-3.0203 to Allow for Virtual Attendance in Session Meetings When Appropriate Technology Is Available	
	06-05	Approve as Amended	Amending the Second Paragraph of G-3.0109 Regarding Parity in Committees of Councils Above the Session	
	06-06	Disapprove	Adding Section G-2.1104, Administrative Personnel Association (APA)	
	06-08	Approve as Amended	Amending the Book of Order to Clarify Titles to Ordered Ministry	
	06-09	Disapprove with Comment	Amending G-2.0301, "Ruling Elder Defined," to Allow for Individually Commissioned Ruling Elders	
	06-10	Approve as Amended	Amending G-2.0509 and D-10.0401 to Clarify the Relationship to the PC(USA) of a Person Who Has Renounced Jurisdiction of the Church	
	06-11	Disapprove	Amending G-3.0104 to Clarify the Role of Ecclesiastical Officers	

	06-12	Disapprove	Amending Book of Order, G-6.02, Concerning the Role of the ACC and PJC When Constitutional Questions Are Considered by the General Assembly	
	06-13	Disapprove	Amending Section G-2.1001 to Clarify the Discretion Given Presbyteries to Utilize Commissioned Ruling Elders	
	06-14	Approve	Creating a Rules of Discipline Task Force Charged with Revising the Rules of Discipline	
	06-15	Approve by Consensus	Recommendation to Amend G-2.1101, Forms of Certified Church Service, in the Book of Order and also Approve National Certifying Bodies	
	06-16	Referral with Comment	Resolution to Extend Time Limits on Abuse Reporting in Instances of Gross Negligence	
	06-17	Approve as Amended	Commissioners' Resolution - seeking support for settlements of disputes regarding church property	
<b>Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations</b>	07-01	Approve by Consensus	Delegation to the General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches	
	07-02	Approve by Consensus	Churches to Invite to Send Ecumenical Advisory Delegates to the 223rd General Assembly (2018)	
	07-03	Approve	Recommendation to Approve Belhar	
	07-04	Approve as Amended	Commissioners' Resolution: "Prayer for the Persecuted Church."	
	07-05	Approve	Commissioners' Resolution. Recognition of the 500th Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation.	
	07-06	Approve with Comment	Review of the General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations 2016 Self-Study	
<b>Middle East Issues</b>	08-01	Disapprove	Boycott of All HP Inc. and Hewlett Packard Enterprise Products	
	08-02	Approve as Amended	Advocating for the Safety and Well-being of Children of Palestine and Israel	

	08-03	Approve by Consensus	Upholding Peoples and Partners in the Middle East and in the United States	
	08-04	Approve as Amended	Calling for the RE/MAX Corporation to Cease Selling Property in West Bank Settlements	
	08-05		Not referred for lack of a concurrence	
	08-06	Approve with Comment	Israel-Palestine: For Human Values in the Absence of a Just Peace	
	08-07	Approve as Amended	Prayerfully Studying the Palestinian Civil Society Call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS)	
<b>Immigration and Environmental Issues</b>	09-01	Approve alternate resolution	PC(USA) Fossil Fuel Divestment	
	09-05	Approve as Amended	Communicating Gratitude for and Study of the Encyclical "Laudato Si"	
	09-06	Approve as Amended	Responding to Our Sisters and Brothers Who Are Refugees or Internally Displaced	
	09-08	Approve as Amended	Witnessing Against Environmental Degradation and Affirming Public Policy to Support Good Stewardship of Natural Resources	
	09-10	Approve	Collaborative Agenda on Environmental Stewardship	
	09-11	Approve	Amending G-1.0304, "The Ministry of Members," by Adding "Caring for God's Creation"	Yes
	09-12	Approve as Amended	Advocacy Against Factory Farming	
<b>Mission Coordination</b>	10-01	Approve as Amended	Seeking to Eradicate Slavery from the Supply Chains of Vendors and Other Businesses That the PC(USA) and Its Various Bodies Do Business	
	10-03	Approve as Amended with Comments	Taking Specific Action to Address the Worsening Plight of the African American Male	

	10-04	Approve by Consensus	Approve the Revised Presbyterian Mission Agency Manual of Operations	
	10-05	Approve	Rescind the 1990 "General Assembly Mission Program Budget Policy and Procedures."	
	10-06	Approve	Amendments to the Organization for Mission	
	10-07	Approve	Proposed Changes and Updates to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Churchwide Plan for Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action	
	10-08	Approve	Report of the Special Offerings Review Task Force	
	10-09	Approve	"Empowered & Hopeful" – Women of Color Consultation Report	
	10-10	Approve	Living Missionally Recommendation	
	10-11	Approve	Resolution to Contribute to a Proactive, Health-Giving Ministry to and Relationship with Our Clergywomen	
	10-12	Approve by Consensus	Resolution to Ensure Just Compensation Practices for Those Employed via Third Party Contractors	
	10-13	Approve as Amended	Achieving a 5:1 Ratio Between the Highest-Paid and Lowest-Paid Employees of PMA	
	10-14	Approve by Consensus	2017–2018 Presbyterian Mission Agency Work Plan	
	10-15	Approve	Recommendations Pertaining to Budgetary and Financial Concerns of the Church	
	10-16	Disapprove	Commissioners' Resolution. To Withdraw the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) from Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC)	
<b>Social Justice Issues</b>	11-03	Approve as Amended with Comments	Choosing to Be a Church Committed to the Gospel of Matthew 25	
	11-05	Approve Alternate Resolution	the Admission of, and Apology for, Harms Done to the LGBTQ/Q Members of the PC(USA), Family and Friends	

	11-08	Approve as Amended	Offering an Apology to Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians	
	11-09	Approve by Consensus	Celebrating a Significant Social Witness Anniversary	
	11-10	Approve as Amended with Comments	Reconciliation and Engagement in a New Civil Rights Movement	
	11-12	Approve as Amended	PC(USA) Continuing Its Efforts to Dismantle Racism within Our Denomination and the Larger Society	
	11-13	Approve	Election Protection and Integrity in Campaign Finance	
	11-16	Approve as Amended	Equipping and Mobilizing Member Congregations to Better Serve Those Living with HIV/AIDS	
	11-18	Approve	Review of Efforts Regarding Cultural Proficiency and Creating a Climate for Change in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)	
	11-19	Approve by Consensus	ACRED Recommendations to the General Assembly	
	11-20	Approve	Recommendations Regarding "Gospel from Detroit: Renewing the Church's Urban Vision"	
<b>Peacemaking and International Issues</b>	12-01	Approve Alternate Resolution	Acknowledging and Reconciling for Killing Korean Civilians in July 1950	
	12-04	Approve by Consensus	Overture Pertaining to the Congo	
	12-05	Approve with Comment	Affirming Nonviolent Means of Resistance Against Human Oppression	
	12-06	Approve as Amended	Risking Peace in a Violent World: Five New Peacemaking Affirmations	
	12-07	Approve	New Hopes and Realities in Cuban-American Relations: A "Nuevo Momento"	

	12-09	Approve as Amended	Supporting the Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Regarding Protecting Individuals from Violence and Discrimination	
	12-10	Approve as Amended	Committing to Play an Active Part in the Global Response to the HIV/AIDS Epidemic	
	12-11	Approve by Consensus	Commissioner's Resolution. Reaffirming the Ministry of Sanctuary by Congregations	
	12-12	Approve as Amended	Commissioners Resolution. On Affirming Principles of Sanctuary in Response to the Global Escalation in the Number of Displaced Person/Refugees	
	12-13	Approve as Amended	Commissioners' Resolution. Peace, Justice, and Reunification in the Korean Peninsula	
<b>BOP, PILP, PPC, and Foundation</b>	13-02	Approve	Recommendation from the Board of Directors of the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation	
	13-03	Approve by Counted Vote	Recommendation to Confirm Election of Directors of New Covenant Trust Company, N.A.	
	13-04	Approve by Counted Vote	Churchwide Gifts Program	
	13-05	Approve by Consensus	Confirm Individuals to PILP Board of Directors	
	13-07	Approve by voice vote	Confirm the Election of the President of the PC(USA) Investment and Loan Program	
	13-08	Disapprove with Comment	Commissioners' Resolution. On Creating a Special Committee to Conduct an Administrative Review to Assure Compliance with Donor and General Assembly Restrictions on the Administration of the Jarvie Service	
<b>Theological Issues and Institutions</b>	14-01	Disapprove	Amending W-4.9000 by Replacing with New Text	

	14-02	Approve	Regarding Endorsing the Clergy Letter Project	
	14-03	Approve Alternate Resolution	Amending W-2.4011 by Adding Language Regarding Who Can Access the Lord's Supper	Yes
	14-04	Approve as Amended	Revised Directory of Worship	
	14-05	Approve by Consensus	Mountain Retreat Association Board of Directors	
	14-06	Approve by Counted Vote	Approve New Trustees Elected by Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Theological Institutions--From the Committee on Theological Education	
	14-07	Approve by Voice Vote	Approve the Presidents of Columbia Theological Seminary and Pittsburgh Theological Seminary	
	14-08	Approve by Consensus	Grant Permission to Theological Institutions to Celebrate the Lord's Supper	
	14-09	Approve as Amended	Covenant Between the General Assembly of the PCUSA and El Seminario Evangelico de Puerto Rico	
	14-10	Approve by Voice Vote	Request for Time in Plenary for a Memorial Minute for Steven Hayner, Former President of Columbia Theological Seminary	
	14-11	Approve by Consensus	Recognize Persons for Outstanding Lifetime Contributions to Theological Education	
	14-12	Approve with Comment	Recommendation to Create a Special Committee to Study the Reformed Perspective of Christian Education in the 21st Century	
	14-13	Approve as Amended	Approving an "Affirmation of Creation"	
	14-14	Approve as Amended	Resolution on Abiding Presence: Living Faithfully in End of Life Decisions	
	14-15	Approve as Amended	Commissioners' Resolution: "The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity	

## **Confession of Belhar** **September 1986** <sup>1</sup>

**1. We believe** in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit. This, God has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end.

**2. We believe** in one holy, universal Christian church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family.

### **We believe**

- that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another;
- that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain;
- that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted;
- that this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways: in that we love one another; that we experience, practice and pursue community with one another; that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another; that we share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind; have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope; together come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ; together are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity; together know and bear one another's burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ that we need one another and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another; that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world; and together fight against all which may threaten or hinder this unity;
- that this unity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the

reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God;

- that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church;

**Therefore, we reject any doctrine**

- which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation;

- which professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace while believers of the same confession are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation;

- which denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin;

- which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.

**3. We believe**

- that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ; that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells.

- that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world;

- that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity;

- that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

### **Therefore, we reject any doctrine**

- which, in such a situation sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and color and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.

### **4. We believe**

- that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people;
- that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged
- that God calls the church to follow him in this; for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry;
- that God frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind;
- that God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly;
- that for God pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering;
- that God wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek the right;
- that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;
- that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

### **Therefore, we reject any ideology**

- which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.

**5. We believe** that, in obedience to Jesus Christ, its only head, the church is called to confess and to do all these things, even though the authorities and human laws might forbid them and punishment and suffering be the consequence.

Jesus is Lord.

To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the honor and the glory for ever and ever.

**Note**

1. This is a translation of the original Afrikaans text of the confession as it was adopted by the synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa in 1986. In 1994 the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa united to form the [Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa](#) (URCSA). This inclusive language text was prepared by the Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (USA)