

ACTIONS OF THE 37TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
L. Roy Taylor, Stated Clerk, PCA

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America met in Orlando, Florida, June 16-18, 2009, hosted by Central Florida Presbytery. A total of 1,081 commissioners attended, of which 819 were Teaching Elders and 262 were Ruling Elders, representing 620 churches. The Assembly includes not only annual reports from the ten Committees and Agencies, election of members of Committees and Agencies, and action upon overtures from presbyteries, but also three worship services, over fifty ministry-related seminars, networking opportunities, and fellowship events. With 2009 being the 500th anniversary of the birth of John Calvin, several seminars focused on Calvin's influence. For example, Dr. Douglas F. Kelly, Richard Jordan Professor of Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary (Charlotte), presented a two-hour seminar on "The Catholicity of John Calvin's Theology." Worship services included not only the preaching of the Word and the celebration of communion, but also testimonies to the power of God's grace.

RE Bradford L. Bradley Elected Moderator

Ruling Elder Bradford "Brad" Bradley of Park Cities PCA, Dallas, Texas, was elected moderator. He and his wife Ann were charter members of PCPC. Brad grew up in two of the PCA's founding churches, First-Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and First-Jackson, Mississippi, and graduated from Mississippi State and Midwestern State Universities. He has an extensive business background. He is Executive Director and one of the founders of the Southwest Church Planting Network, which not only assists in church planting efforts but also helps fund Reformed University Ministry start-ups in four states. He is a member of the General Assembly's Committee on MNA and a trustee of Redeemer Theological Seminary of Dallas.

Role of Women in the Life of the Church

The topic of the role of women in the life of the Church came to the Assembly by various routes, via seminar discussions, overtures, judicial cases, and the review of Presbytery records. Again this year there were two overtures asking the General Assembly to form a study committee to study the role of women in the life of the Church, specifying that the committee be appointed by the moderator and that it represent a breadth of views on the issue in the Reformed tradition (Overture 5 from James River Presbytery and Overture 10 from Susquehanna Valley Presbytery).

The Overtures Committee (OC) recommended to the Assembly that a study committee *not* be erected. A minority report recommended that the committee be formed. The Assembly had moved through its customary business on Committee and Agency reports with dispatch, allowing for ample time for deliberation on the Overtures Committee report. An overture (#2 from Potomac Presbytery) had been approved to revise the Rules of Assembly Operation to allow for more uninterrupted consideration of the Overtures Committee and minority reports.

Prior to the OC report about half of the Assembly had attended a seminar led by Ligon Duncan and Tim Keller on the issue of deaconesses. The gracious manner in which the two well-known PCA pastors discussed the matter, agreeing to disagree agreeably, set the tone for the OC report when it came to the floor of the Assembly. The seminar leaders discussed whether women should be involved in mercy ministry without being designated as "deaconesses" and without being commissioned (Duncan) or whether women could be called deaconesses, being publicly commissioned, but not ordained (Keller).¹

¹ The practice of "commissioning" persons through public prayer and admonition has been practiced in the PCA on all levels in the Church for such functions as Vacation Bible School workers, Sunday School teachers, Women in the Church officers, women appointed to do mercy ministry, mission trip participants, short-term

The committee report was presented by TE David Coffin; the minority report by RE E. J. Nusbaum. After a period of debate, the minority report on Overture 10 failed to be adopted by the Assembly by a vote of 427-444.²

In other actions relating to the role of women in the life of the Church:

- Grace Presbytery sent an overture calling on the Assembly to adopt the Danvers Statement (see below);
- Overture 15, from Crossroads Community Church [rejected by Philadelphia Presbytery, RAO 11-10] was ruled out of order;
- the Standing Judicial Commission adjudicated three cases (Cases 2007-13 Kneisley v. Rocky Mountain Presbytery, 2008-01, 2008-10 Crossroads Session v. Philadelphia Presbytery) bearing on the matter; and
- the Review of Presbytery Records Committee (RPR) under a recently enacted rule (*Rules of Assembly Operation* 16-10.c) referred to the Committee on Constitutional Business the responses of Northern California and Philadelphia Presbyteries regarding exceptions taken to the Presbyteries' minutes for the advice of the CCB to the RPR Committee for 2010.

Other Overtures

In other actions the General Assembly:

- Declined to adopt Overture 13 from Grace Presbytery (Adopt the Danvers Statement on Gender Issues [as revised by Grace Presbytery]) on the specified ground that, "The overture seeks to deal with matters of controversy with a lengthy statement whose complex propositions have not been examined in detail by the Church."
- Declined to adopt Overture 18 from Eastern Pennsylvania Presbytery (A Declaration concerning Homosexuals in the Military) on the stated ground that, "The proposal fails to meet the standard of *Westminster Confession of Faith* 31.4: the case is not extraordinary and no civil magistrate has required such advice."³

unordained missionaries, and long-term ordained or unordained or missionaries (*WCF* I-6). The First General Assembly commissioned six missionaries at a public worship service December 5, 1973. Of the six: two were ministers, one was a Ruling Elder, and three were women (*Minutes of the First General Assembly*, 1973, item 1-56, page 37). The RPCES practice of commissioning deaconesses was also carried over into the PCA (*156th General Synod Minutes of the RPCES*, 1978, pp. 133-134; *Minutes of the Ninth General Assembly, PCA*, 1981, p. 305).

² The PCA does not ordain women as Teaching Elders, Ruling Elders, or Deacons (*BCO* 7-2). *BCO* 9-7 allows for the appointment of "godly men and women to assist the deacons" in mercy ministry. The Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod (RPCES) had studied the issue of deaconesses (1974-8) prior to their coming into the PCA in 1982. The last action of the RPCES was:

Resolved: that in the light of the action of the 155th General Synod, we do not recommend allowing each particular church within the denomination to determine whether its diaconate shall include men as well as women, nor that they be allowed to ordain a woman as a deacon. We also remind churches that they are free to elect Spirit filled women as deaconesses and to set them apart by prayer (*156th General Synod Minutes of the RPCES*, 1978, pp. 133-134).

Part of the Joining and Receiving process when the RPCES joined and was received into the PCA was that:

The Presbyterian Church in America, on the other hand, would further strengthen its life and witness by welcoming the insights and experience represented by the entering churches and seeking profit from differences in striving for a more perfect Biblical faith and practice.

In receiving these denominations, the Presbyterian Church in America recognizes the history of the respective denominations as part of her total history and receives their historical documents as valuable and significant material which will be used in the perfecting of the Church (*Minutes of the Ninth General Assembly, PCA*, 1981, p. 305).

For additional historical information see the PCA Historical Center website, <http://www.pcahistory.org>.

³ *Westminster Larger Catechism* 139 expounds the Seventh Commandment (thou shalt not commit adultery) as forbidding both opposite-sex and same-sex sexual relations outside of biblically lawful marriage. Previous PCA and

- Adopted Overture 12 from Ohio Valley and Overture 19 from Great Lakes Presbytery to form two new Presbyteries, Central Indiana and Ohio Presbytery. The PCA will then have seventy-nine Presbyteries.
- Adopted Overtures 11, 16, 17, 20, 21, and 22 to revise the boundaries of Platte Valley, Iowa, Central Carolina, Eastern Carolina, and Northern California Presbyteries.

PCA Changes

In calendar year 2008, PCA churches reported both increases and decreases. Approximately 45% of churches submitted statistical reports. Reported increases included total number of churches in the PCA (1,693, up 27), total professions of faith (100,335 up 135), total giving, (\$716,870,911, up \$28,298,352). Reported benevolent giving, local expenses, and building projects all showed increases. Reported decreases included total membership (340,852, down 4,730),⁴ total family units (135,539, down 4,748), total Sunday School attendance (110,652, down 1,259), adult baptisms (2,488, down 170), infant baptisms (5,434, down 33).

General Assembly Ministries Reports

The General Assembly's ten Committees and Agencies, like our churches, have had to grapple with the economic downturn. Committees and Agencies reported that they had taken such measures as reducing 2009 budgeted expenditures, instituting hiring freezes, reducing the number of staff positions, reducing staff salaries, eliminating projects, and/or submitting 2010 budgets lower than 2009 budgets in most instances.

The **Administrative Committee** reported that the Historical Center expects to propose a PCA logo to the Assembly next year. *ByFaith* Magazine has 20,000 readers per issue and is averaging over 10,000 unique visitors per month to *byFaith* online. In the coming months **Christian Education and Publications** will hold a number of training conferences: YXL Youth Leadership, mercy Ministry, Women in the Church, and Great Expectations Children Conferences. **Mission to North America** reported that presbyteries and churches had deployed 52 church planters and six apprentices in 2008. **Mission to the World** reported that the 2010 PCA Global Missions Conference will be held at the Chattanooga Convention Center Nov. 5-7, 2010. MTW's Street Child ministry in southern India will honor the late Jan Kooistra by naming a proposed home for street children, "Jan's Home." **Reformed University Ministries** reported that eight new campus ministries were started in 2008, bringing the total number of campus ministries to 123. Four new campus ministries will be launched in the 2009-10 school year.

Covenant College reported a record enrollment of 1,346, the completion of two new buildings and a college garden, and a ten-year reaffirmation of regional accreditation. **Covenant Theological Seminary** reported a successful Capital Campaign of \$14,000,000, a record Master of Divinity entering class in the fall of 2008, and a burgeoning Internet ministry through www.worldwide-classroom.com and www.livingchrist360.com. The **PCA Foundation** reported distributions and grants of \$11.2 million in 2008 (\$5 million to PCA churches, \$3.5 million to PCA General Assembly Ministries, and \$2.7 million to other Christian causes). **PCA Retirement Benefits Inc.** reported that though asset values are down due to market conditions, RBI funds are sufficient to meet the service needs of constituents. About \$700,000 altogether was provided Ministerial Relief activities. **Ridge Haven Conference Center** reported that the board is searching for a new Executive Director

RPCES General Assemblies (1977, 1980 [RPCES], 1993, 1996, 1999) have expressed concerns over homosexual issues. Overture 18 asked that the moderator of the General Assembly have a letter of concern personally delivered to the President of the United States.

⁴ Some decreases are due to the major membership roll revision by one large church, which removed 6,539 members. Several large churches have not reported in several years.

following the resignation of Rev. Morse Up De Graf in January. RH facilities usage was up 50% throughout the fall and winter months.

Book of Church Order Changes

- The Assembly answered in the affirmative an amended form of Overture 6 from Central Carolina Presbytery to revise *BCO* 59-1 and 59-6 on the *Solemnization of Marriage*⁵ to specify Christians are obligated to conform to civil laws concerning marriage insofar as such civil laws are consistent with the laws of God as interpreted by the Constitution of the PCA.⁶
- A proposed amendment to *BCO* 57-5 to reword membership vows that was given initial approval in 2008 and sent down to Presbyteries for a vote (*BCO* 26-3) *failed* to receive the required approval of Presbyteries.
- The Assembly gave initial approval to Overture 1 from Missouri Presbytery (in amended form) and sent down to Presbyteries for a vote (*BCO* 26-3) to amend *BCO* 37-7 regarding the removal of censures from persons who have moved away from church court by which they were censured.
- The Assembly gave initial approval to Overture 9 from Ascension Presbytery and sent down to Presbyteries for a vote (*BCO* 26-3) to amend *BCO* 13-6 to clarify procedures for receiving ministers from other denominations.

Special Days, Offerings and Events Recommended for PCA Churches

- September 13, Seniors Ministry (Grandparents and Senior Citizens Day) (CE&P).
- October 2009, a Month of Prayer for Global Missions (MTW).
- October 18, 2009, Covenant College Sunday. Prayer for CC.
- The 2010 Women in the Church Offering is for MNA.
- A special offering for MTW Compassion Ministry to be taken in 2009, date set by Sessions.
- November 8, 2009 A Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church Worldwide (MTW).
- Annual Thanksgiving Offering for MNA Mercy Ministries and Ethnic Training
- December 2009, Offering for Ministerial Relief (PCA-RBI).
- February 21, 2010, Ridge Haven Sunday, Day of Prayer for RH.
- May 6-13, 2010, Week of Prayer coordinated by CEP.
- **The 38th General Assembly will convene June 29, 2010, in Nashville, Tennessee.**

A Word of Thanks and Request

The Administrative Committee/Office of the Stated Clerk provides the support services and legal structure for the PCA to minister cooperatively as a denomination. The PCA is unique in that we fund essential support services (AC/SC) by separately designated contributions. All churches, presbyteries, and denominational ministries benefit from the ministry of the AC/SC. Therefore, we request that all PCA churches support the AC/SC through the Ministry Ask or *proportional* giving (for example, one-half of one percent of local church offerings).

The **2009 WIC Love Gift will go to the AC/SC**. Copies of the nine-minute DVD are available from the AC/SC Office. **We appreciate your support!**

L. Roy Taylor, Stated Clerk PCA

⁵ Chapter 59 is the part of the *BCO* adopted by the Church, but does not have full constitutional status. It is, “an approved guide and should be taken seriously as the mind of the Church agreeable to the [Westminster] Standards.” *Westminster Confession of Faith* 24.1, 2 & 3 and *Westminster Larger Catechism* 139 clearly specify the Scripture’s and Church’s teaching on marriage and sexual ethics.

⁶ *Westminster Confession of Faith* 24.1, 2, & 3 defines marriage as being between one man and one woman, thus disallowing polygamy, polyandry, and same-sex marriages. *Westminster Larger Catechism* 139 defines sexual sins to include illicit sexual relations of both opposite-sex and same-sex liaisons. So the teaching of Scripture, and therefore of the Church, is fidelity within marriage and chastity outside of marriage.