

Actions of the 42nd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America

L. Roy Taylor, Stated Clerk PCA

42nd General Assembly in Houston, Texas

The 42nd General Assembly of the PCA met in Houston, Texas, June 17-19, 2014, hosted by Houston Metro Presbytery, with 1,123 commissioners attending (256 Ruling Elders, 867 Teaching Elders), representing 624 churches from 79 of the 81 Presbyteries. The annual gathering is a church business meeting that serves as a church family reunion where corporate worship, fellowship, training, networking, and resourcing are also important factors.

Preachers for the three evening services were Rev. Ray Cortese, pastor of Seven Rivers Presbyterian Church, Lecanto, Florida, who preached on “A Beautiful Orthodoxy” from Matthew 12:14; Dr. Derek Thomas, Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, South Carolina, who preached on “Crucifixion x 3” from Galatians 6:11-18; and Rev. Bill Sim, pastor of New Church of Atlanta (Georgia), who preached on “Grace-filled Conviction” from Acts 20:17-30.

An Assembly-wide seminar on “The PCA: Past, Present, and Future” was led Dr. L. Roy Taylor, PCA Stated Clerk, Dr. Bryan Chapell, Pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church of Peoria, Illinois, and Rev. Murray Lee, Pastor of Cahaba Park Church Presbyterian Church of Birmingham, Alabama. The panel, representative of the early years, middle years, and recent years of the PCA, discussed 1) how and why the PCA was begun in 1973, reflecting the common experiences of evangelicals coming from other mainline denominations, 2) the present unity and variety of the PCA as an evangelical Reformed denomination, and 3) the future challenges and opportunities of the PCA in a culture that has changed considerably over the first four decades of the PCA ministry and that is becoming even more diverse and secularized.

Overall, the 42nd General Assembly proved to be an irenic meeting, even though several controversial matters were considered. The goodwill demonstrated may be attributed to the Overtures Committee’s helpful work, the Moderator’s wisdom and grace in moderating, and the Christian spirit evinced by commissioners both in committee and Assembly sessions, as a genuine meeting of the minds was accomplished.

Dr. Bryan S. Chapell, Moderator

Dr. George Robertson, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Augusta, Georgia, nominated as Moderator Teaching Elder Bryan S. Chapell, who was elected without opposition. Dr. Chapell became the pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church in Peoria, Illinois, in 2013, after ministering from 1986 until 2013 at the PCA’s denominational seminary, Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, where he served as Professor of Practical Theology, Dean, President, and then Chancellor. Prior to that, he served as a pastor in Illinois. A prolific author, his most well-known book is *Christ-Centered Preaching*, which has become a widely used textbook on preaching and has been translated into several languages. He moderated the meeting capably, graciously, and fairly. Dr. Chapell and his wife, Kathleen, are the parents of four children.

Changes

- The Assembly approved changing the name of the permanent Committee on Christian Education and Publications to the Committee on Discipleship Ministries (CDM).
- TE Thomas K. (Tom) Cannon was elected to serve as Coordinator for the Committee on Reformed University Ministries, succeeding Dr. Rod S. Mays, Coordinator, 1999-2014, who has become Executive Pastor of Mitchell Road Presbyterian Church in Greenville, South Carolina.

- The Committee on Mission to the World reported that they have not yet selected a successor to Dr. Paul Kooistra, who has served as Coordinator since 1994. TE Kooistra was re-elected, to serve until a new Coordinator is found.

Protecting Children in the PCA

Preventing the sexual abuse of children and dealing with instances of sexual abuse compassionately, wisely, and in accordance with the law, is a significant issue. Georgia Foothills Presbytery sent Overture 6, “Child Protection in the PCA,” asking the Assembly to address the matter. Twenty-three other Presbyteries endorsed the overture. Several seminars on Protecting Children were held at the Assembly. The Assembly approved the recommendation of the Overtures Committee that the overture be answered in the affirmative as amended.

- The Assembly exhorted church leaders to become informed about and take an active stance in preventing child sexual abuse.
- The Assembly reminded churches that the heinous crime of child sexual abuse must be reported to duly appointed, proper representatives of the God-ordained civil authorities in accordance with local laws and that we must cooperate with those authorities.
- The Assembly urged all church leaders to use their influence, by any and all godly means, for the protection of children and to offer compassionate support for victims of abuse.
- The Assembly directed the ten General Assembly Permanent Committees and Agencies to review their child protection policies, procedures, and practices, including disclosures and reporting and to report to the 43rd General Assembly.
- The Assembly urged all PCA members to love our children as Christ loves children, “for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven” (Mark 10:14).

To read the full text of the overture as amended and approved, go to www.pcahistory.org.

Ad Interim Committee on Insider Movements in Islam

The 39th General Assembly formed a committee to study Insider Movements in Islam and related Bible translation issues. The so-called Insider Movement is composed of people who assert that they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, but remain in the Muslim religious community. The Bible translation challenge is how to present the Lord Jesus Christ as God the Son without any idea of sexual union between God the Father and Mary. The committee gave partial reports in 2012 and 2013, and a final report in 2014. *The Assembly does not adopt the extensive narrative text of reports which are for information and study. The Assembly adopts only the recommendations of a report, (RONR [11th ed.] pp. 507-508).* There were minority reports in both 2013 and 2014. The Assembly did not approve the minority reports. The Assembly approved the 2012 and 2014 recommendations of the committee.

- **“Part One – Like Father, Like Son: Divine Familial Language in Bible Translation.”** The 40th General Assembly *adopted a recommendation* that, “since social familial terms fail to capture the biblical meaning of ‘Son’ (*huios*) and ‘Son of God’ (*huios tou theou*) applied to Jesus and ‘Father’ (*pater*) applied to God, Bibles should always translate divine familial names using common biological terms.”
- **“Part Two –Theology, Gospel Missions, and Insider Movements”** emphasized that full obedience to the Great Commission includes baptism and identification with the Church. The report offers guidance to Presbyteries, Sessions, and local church Missions Committees in applying the insights of the committee in dealing with those who seek to share the Gospel.

The Assembly *adopted a recommendation* that the complete Ad Interim Committee report be made available. Please find the report at www.pcahistory.org.

Judicial Procedures

- The General Assembly has a 24-man Standing Judicial Commission (SJC), to which it has committed all judicial matters arising from Presbyteries (*Book of Church Order [BCO]* 15-4). The SJC acts on behalf of the General Assembly and SJC decisions are final unless: 1) there is a minority report submitted by at least one-third of the voting members of the SJC (*BCO* 15-5.c) or 2) the General Assembly directs the SJC to retry a case, if the Committee on Constitutional Business (CCB) takes exception to the minutes of the SJC citing alleged violation of procedures specified in the *Operating Manual of the SJC (OMSJC)* (see *BCO* 15-5; *Rules of Assembly Operations [RAO]* 17-1).
- Grace Presbytery sent Overture 3, “Revise *BCO* 15-5.a and b,” which would have changed the present procedures so that SJC decisions would not be final until each case is reviewed and approved by the General Assembly as a whole. Several other overtures (8, 11, 13, 15, 17, and 20) either endorsed Overture 3 as first written or added more provisions. Overture 9 from Southwest Presbytery, “Revise *RAO* 17-1 to Allow the Committee on Constitutional Business to Take Exception to SJC Decisions,” would have allowed the CCB to call into question the actual case decisions made by the SJC. By a substantial majority the Assembly approved the recommendation of the Overtures Committee that Overtures 3, 8, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, and 20 all be answered in the negative, thus retaining present judicial procedures.
- Overture 40, “Amend *BCO* 15-1 and 15-3 regarding Presbytery Judicial Commission Decisions,” submitted by TE Chris Keidel of Philadelphia Metro West Presbytery, was returned to the author without prejudice for further consideration and perfecting by the Presbytery. The overture, if adopted, would have made Presbytery judicial commission decisions the final decision of the Presbytery in the same way that SJC decisions are the final decisions of the Assembly.

Assembly Action on Other Overtures

- The Assembly approved a minority report on Overture 43 from Savannah River Presbytery, for the Assembly to express gratitude to the Lord for his sustaining Christians who face ostracism, persecution and penalties for standing for the sanctity of human life and for declining to participate in the cultural redefinition of marriage.
- Overtures 2 and 5 to reaffirm the PCA position on marriage were ruled out of order because under *Roberts Rules of Order* (11th ed.), §10, p. 104, lines 24ff, a motion to reaffirm, whether it passes or fails, does not change the PCA Constitution (see *BCO* Chapter 26). The PCA’s position on marriage is already clearly stated in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* XXXIV, *Westminster Larger Catechism* Qq. 137-139, and *Westminster Shorter Catechism* Qq. 70-72. The PCA holds that from creation God ordained the marriage covenant to be a bond between one man and one woman, and that the divinely sanctioned standard for sexual activity is fidelity within a marriage between a man and a woman or chastity outside of marriage.
- The Assembly declined to add biblical proof texts to *BCO* 59-3 regarding marriage. Such proof texts are already included in the relevant portions of the *Westminster Standards*.
- The Assembly declined to approve Overture 32 to issue a warning regarding erroneous views of creation because *in thesi* statements do not change the constitution (*BCO* 14-7; *BCO* 26) and the Twenty-eighth General Assembly approved the recommendations of a study committee on the issue addressed in the overture. The PCA position that God created the universe out of nothing and that Adam is a divinely created, historical person, and the federal head of humanity is already affirmed in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* IV, VI, *Westminster Larger Catechism* Qq.15, 17, 20-30, and *Westminster Shorter Catechism* Qq. 9-20.

- The Assembly declined to approve the formation of a study committee regarding the third ordination vow of *BCO* 21-5, which states that the polity of the PCA is “in conformity with the general principles of Biblical polity.” A study committee was deemed unnecessary.
- The Assembly referred to MTW Overture 29 regarding a provisional Presbytery in Paraguay.
- The Assembly referred to the AC Overture 52 regarding a PCA logo/seal.

Book of Church Order Amendments – The General Assembly:

- Gave final approval to amendments to *BCO* 34-8 and 37-6 to require a three-fourths (3/4) vote of a Presbytery to restore to office a deposed minister.
- Gave final approval to an amendment to *BCO* 43-10 regarding procedures to follow in a complaint regarding a Session or Presbytery failing to indict someone in a doctrinal case or matter of public scandal when the case is referred to a higher court for trial.
- Approved sending to Presbyteries proposed amendments to *BCO* 43-3; 43-8; and 43-9 regarding complaint procedures.
- Approved sending to Presbyteries a proposed amendment to *BCO* 18-7 regarding procedures for removal of Candidates and Interns.
- Approved sending to Presbyteries a proposed amendment to *BCO* 5-2 regarding mission churches.
- Approved sending to Presbyteries a proposed amendment to *BCO* 8-6 regarding evangelists.

PCA Statistics for 2013

Some statistics for 2013 as reported to the Office of the Stated Clerk and compared with 2012 are:

- Churches and missions – 1,808 an increase of 31
- Total professions of faith – 9,237 an increase of 92
- Ministers – 4,416, an increase of 95.
- Candidates for ministry – 366, a decrease of 202
- Licentiates – 88, a decrease of 40.
- Total membership (Communicants, ministers & non-communicants) – 367,033, an increase of 3,014, (0.82%), a positive gain, but not as strong as earlier years.
- Total Family Units – 139,634, an increase of 1,623
- Sunday School Attendance – 101,003, a decrease of 806
- Total Reported Contributions to Churches – \$ 763,985,123, an increase of \$26,817,256

Suggested Prayer, Offerings and Events

- Prayer for Covenant College as determined by local sessions
- November 2014, a Month of Prayer for Global Missions (MTW)
- A special offering for MTW Compassion Ministries on a date chosen by local sessions
- November 9, 2014 a Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church Worldwide (MTW)
- Annual Relief Ministry Offering (RBI)
- 2014 Love Gift for PCA Women in the Church (CDM) is for PCA Women’s Ministry
- 50 Days of Prayer prior to the 43rd General Assembly (CDM & MNA)
- **The 43rd General Assembly will meet in Chattanooga, Tennessee, June 9-12, 2015**

The Assembly approved the request that churches contribute to the Administrative Committee on the basis of 0.35% of total tithes and offerings (excepting capital campaign projects). Churches that give \$10 per member to Covenant College qualify for the college’s Church Scholarship Promise program.