

Actions of the Forty-sixth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America

L. Roy Taylor, Stated Clerk

Atlanta, Georgia, Site of 46th General Assembly June 13-15, 2018

The Assembly convened on Wednesday afternoon June 13, rather than on the usual Tuesday evening, due to a condensed schedule planned in response to indications that RE attendance might increase if the Assembly were one work-day shorter. Attending were 1,202 Teaching Elders and 335 Ruling Elders, for a total of 1,537 commissioners, representing 902 churches. Ruling Elder attendance for this year's shortened format increased approximately ½ % over last year.

The theme of the Assembly, hosted by Metro Atlanta Presbytery, was “**Love God and Love Neighbor.**” Co-chairing the Host Committee were **RE Jim Wert**, a former Moderator, and **TE Walter Henneger**, pastor of Atlanta Westside Presbyterian Church. Retiring Moderator **RE Dr. Alexander Jun** spoke at the opening service on “Gospel Neighboring.” Preachers for the other two services were **Rev. Joe Novenson** of Lookout Mountain Presbyterian Church of Chattanooga and **Rev. Randy Pope** of Perimeter Church in Greater Atlanta. The Assembly received greetings from ten ecumenical guests from North America and abroad, heard progress reports from the ten General Assembly Committees and Agencies, heard reports from Special Committees, acted on forty overtures, acted upon the final report of the Ad Interim Committee on Racial Reconciliation and Diversity, and elected members to service on General Assembly Committees and Agency Boards.

Dr. Irwyn Ince, Moderator

As the 2017 Assembly was historic in electing RE Dr. Alexander Jun as the first Korean-American Moderator of the General Assembly, the 2018 Assembly was historic in unanimously electing Rev. Dr. Irwin Ince as the first African-American Moderator. Dr. Ince obtained his undergraduate degree in Electrical Engineering from City University of New York and worked for Motorola. After early experience in Methodist and Baptist churches, he came to Reformed views through the influence of the late Dr. R. C. Sproul. He attended Reformed Theological Seminary in DC for his theological training. After being mentored by Rev. Kevin Smith, pastor of Mt. Zion PCA in Bowie, Maryland, Ince planted City of Hope PCA in Columbia, Maryland, in 2007. He earned a Doctor of Ministry degree at Covenant Theological Seminary in 2016. Since January of 2018, he has served as Director of the GraceDC Network Institute for Cross-Cultural Mission. He served the Assembly by chairing the Overtures Committee in 2016, chairing the ad interim Committee on the Role of Women 2016-2017, and preaching at an Assembly worship service in 2017. Dr. Ince moderated the 2018 General Assembly with the efficiency of an engineer, the wisdom of a diplomat, and the grace of a humble Christian.

Racial Reconciliation and Ethnic Diversity

In 2016 the General Assembly authorized the Moderator, Dr. George Robertson, to appoint an ad interim committee on Racial Reconciliation and Ethnic Diversity in the PCA as the denomination seeks to come to grips with the multi-generational effects of slavery, segregation, and discrimination, and the growing ethnic diversity of North America so that churches on earth may more truly reflect the Church in heaven on the Last Day (Revelation 7:9-10). The committee included Kevin Smith (chairman), Carl Ellis, Alexander Jun, Sean Lucas, Jonathan Seda, Richie Sessions, and Alex Shipman. Advisory members were Sylvester Brown, Otis Pickett, and Russ Whitfield. Composed of men from various ethnic backgrounds, the committee, which was continued by the 2017 Assembly for a second year, had several tasks:

- Assess the current situation in the PCA concerning racial and ethnic reconciliation;

- Identify specific problems the PCA needs to address to promote racial reconciliation and ethnic diversity;
- Develop constructive guidelines and suggest concrete steps for the use of the PCA, including all Presbyteries and Sessions, in order to make progress toward the work of racial reconciliation.

In order to assess the current situation, the Assembly authorized the committee to engage LifeWay (a research department of the Southern Baptist Convention) to undertake a research study with the primary objective of obtaining “a quantitative baseline measure of where the Presbyterian Church in America stands on racial reconciliation and to identify areas that need practical guidance that the Racial Reconciliation Study Committee can recommend to encourage progress.” The study was to “focus primarily at the local church level to understand the attitudes, desires, teaching, actions, and progress in discipling people of all ethnicities.” A secondary objective was “to understand where the Assembly-level ministries are in terms of similar dimensions.”

In an Assembly-wide seminar prior to the 46th GA Thursday morning business session, committee members reflected on their work and ended with a Q&A. The committee had produced a sixty-six page report which included Guiding Principles: Affirmations and Denials, Biblical and Theological Foundations, Pastoral and Missional Considerations, Research Results (LifeWay) and Analysis, Specific Suggestions for Racial Reconciliation (for congregations, Presbyteries, and Assembly-level Committees and Agencies), and four recommendations for action by the General Assembly. The Assembly received the report with appreciation and adopted all four recommendations (including direction for CDM to publish and distribute the report along with other relevant GA actions and direction for MNA to undertake and report in five years on a follow-up survey to measure progress).

Progress Report of the Ten Assembly-level Ministries

- **Administrative Committee/Office of the Stated Clerk** – Stated Clerk Roy Taylor reported that the next three Assemblies would be in Dallas in 2019, Birmingham in 2020, and St. Louis in 2021. The AC recommended no increase in the contributions to the AC from other Committees and Agencies, the General Assembly Registration Fee, Annual Administrative (voluntary) Fee for Ministers, and the Building Occupancy Cost for Committees and Agencies.
- **Committee on Discipleship Ministries** – CDM Coordinator Stephen Estock reported on CDM’s connecting of people to resources through its website (pcacdm.org), conferences, training events, blogs and social media. CDM has launched an *enCourage* podcast to highlight topics of interest to women and has published *Children’s Ministry 101*.
- **Covenant College** – CC President Dr. Derek Halvorson reported that the four-phase renovation of Carter Hall has been completed. Some 295 new students were enrolled 2016-2017. *U.S. News and World Report* again ranked Covenant College in the top tier of national liberal arts colleges.
- **Covenant Theological Seminary** – CTS President Dr. Mark Dalbey reported that the seminary is adjusting to the increase in online theological education by creating two new degree programs, an M.A. in Biblical and Theological Studies and a Master of Arts in Ministry, along with a hybrid-format M.Div. that combines online and six on-campus visits. A Church Planting Track M.Div. is offered.
- **Mission to North America** – MNA Coordinator Paul Hahn reported that MNA’s emphases are church planting, church renewal, and missional partnerships (such as Disaster Relief, Refugee and Immigrant Ministries, Urban and Mercy Ministries, Prison Ministries, Special Needs Ministries, Ministry to State, Chaplain Ministries, and Second Career Ministries). Fifty-four Church planters and sixteen church planting apprentices were placed.
- **Mission to the World** – MTW Coordinator Dr. Lloyd Kim reminded the Assembly of MTW’s goal that every PCA church send out 1% of its adult members for world missions. Of the 636 MTW long-term missionaries working in eighty-five countries, 454 are church planters, 56 are theological

professors, eleven are on leave of absence, and 115 are involved in other ministries. MTW works with 822 national partners. Church-planting hubs are being established in major cities in Mexico, Argentina, Chile, and Brazil.

- **PCA Foundation** – PCAF President Randy Stair reported that gifts to PCAF totaled \$11.2 million. In 2017, PCAF distributed \$10.7 million; \$3.4 million to PCA churches, \$2.6 million to PCA Committees and Agencies, and \$4.7 million to other Christian ministries. Total assets in 2017 were \$93.1 million. PCAF serves PCA churches and members in stewardship and benevolence.
- **Reformed University Fellowship** – RUF Interim Coordinator Rod Mays reported that RUF worked with Presbyteries to start eight new campus ministries (six RUF and two RUF-I [international]). RUF works with 60 Presbyteries, on 145 campuses, in 38 states. New campuses in 2018 will include UT-Dallas RUF-I, Columbia RUF-I, and Indiana University-PA. RUF-G (Global) works with MTW in Mexico City; Prague, Czech Republic; Bogota, Colombia; and Kiev, Ukraine. The Assembly expressed its appreciation for the service of former RUF coordinator TE Tom Cannon.
- **PCA Retirement & Benefits, Inc.** – PCA RBI President Gary Campbell reported that the expense ratio of 0.92% is the lowest in seventeen years. Assets under management exceeded \$600 million in January of 2018. ServantCare, a ministry of care and counseling for ministers and their wives has been launched, and the annual Ministerial Relief Offering continues to be a major ministry.
- **Ridge Haven Conference Center** – RH Executive Director Wallace Anderson announced that all the Capital Campaign projects were completed in 2017. Ridge Haven continues its ministry at the North Carolina location and is launching a new ministry in July in the Mid-west at the newly acquired Cono Campus in Walker, Iowa, to be called Ridge Haven Cono.

Overtures

Presbyteries submitted forty overtures for action by the General Assembly. The Stated Clerk refers overtures to appropriate committees under the *Rules of Assembly Operations*.

The following recommendations by GA committees were adopted by the Assembly:

- MNA recommended approval of three overtures regarding Presbytery boundaries, one overture for the formation of a new Presbytery dividing Metro New York into two Presbyteries, and two overtures to train, encourage, and coach pastors' wives.
- AC recommended disapproval of an overture to reduce the General Assembly Registration Fee from \$450 to \$100 on several grounds including that the calculations are not feasible and that the GA fee is not the major cause for non-attendance of Ruling Elders, according to a survey of Ruling Elders.
- The AC recommended approval as amended of overture to plan for celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the PCA.
- The AC recommended approval of overtures for translating the *Book of Church Order* into Spanish and Portuguese to be funded by designated gifts to the AC.

The Overtures Committee (OC), which makes recommendations to the General Assembly, may be composed of one Ruling Elder and one Teaching Elder from each Presbytery. Seventy-five Presbyteries were represented on this year's OC.

- The Assembly adopted the OC's recommendations to send down to Presbyteries for their vote seven proposed amendments to the *Book of Church Order* which would:
 - Amend *BCO* 8-1 and 8-3 regarding Qualifications of Elders.

- Amend *BCO* 25-11 to require a thirty-days' notice for a congregational meeting to disaffiliate from the PCA.
- Amend *BCO* 30-1 regarding definite suspension from office.
- Amend *BCO* 30-3 regarding indefinite suspension from communion or office.
- Amend *BCO* 32-19 to allow counsel by any communing member of the PCA in all levels of church courts.
- Amend *BCO* 35-11 not to disqualify automatically a member of a court who is called as a witness.
- Amend *BCO* 59-3 by addition and reordering the wording to emphasize that marriage is only to be between one man and one woman and that PCA ministers may only solemnize such marriages. Give full constitutional status to *BCO* 59-3.
- The Assembly adopted the OC's recommendation that six overtures memorializing deceased ministers be ruled out of order due to inconsistencies in *Rules of Assembly Operations* 13-6, adopted in 2017.
- The Assembly adopted the OC's recommendations to answer *in the negative* overtures that would have:
 - Allowed unordained persons (including women) to serve on the Board of Covenant College, and all other General Assembly Committees and Agency Boards.
 - Addressed an unordained diaconate.
 - Amended *BCO* 46-8 to require that a deposed minister only be assigned to a church within the Presbytery that deposed him.
 - Amended *BCO* 36-5 to add an explanatory paragraph before imposing a censure.
 - Amended *BCO* 9-7 and 24-11 to forbid assistants to deacons to be called deaconesses.

PCA by the Numbers

The Stated Clerk reported statistics to the Assembly for 2017.

- The number of churches increased by twenty-three to 1,568.
- The number of mission churches decreased by three to 344.
- The number of ministers increased by 121 to 4,882.
- Sunday School attendance declined by 1,330 to 93,670.
- Total professions of faith increased by four to 9,733.
- Total membership increased by 575 to 374,736.
- Total giving increased by \$8,050,232 to \$837,105,612

Suggested Prayer, Offerings, and Events

- Prayer for Covenant College as determined by local sessions during the month of October.
- November 2017, a Month of Prayer for Global Missions (MTW).
- A special offering for MTW Compassion Ministries on a date chosen by local sessions.
- November 4, 2018, a Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church Worldwide (MTW).
- Annual Relief Ministry Offering around Thanksgiving or Christmas or churches making periodic contributions (PCA-RBI).
- 2018 Love Gift for PCA Women in the Church (CDM) is for PCA Retirement & Benefits, Inc.
- *The Assembly approved the request that churches contribute to the Administrative Committee based on 0.35% of total tithes and offerings (excepting capital campaign projects).*

The Forty-seventh General Assembly will convene June 25-28, 2019, in Dallas, Texas.