

REPORT ON THE ACTIONS OF THE 30TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PCA
L. Roy Taylor, Stated Clerk PCA

Dr. Joseph F. “Skip” Ryan, Moderator

The thirtieth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America met June 18-21, 2002 at the Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama. Teaching Elder, Dr. Joseph F. Ryan, Pastor of the Park Cities Presbyterian Church of Dallas, Texas was elected as moderator, succeeding Ruling Elder Steve Fox. Dr. Anees Zaka, pastor of the Church Without Walls, Philadelphia, PA, was also nominated. Dr. Ryan was elected by a vote of 761-449. There was a record attendance of 1,602 commissioners, of which 1,122 were Teaching Elders (70%) and 473 were Ruling Elders (30%), representing 783 churches.

Overtures and Resolutions

- Initially approved and sent down to the Presbyteries for their advice and consent (*BCO* 26-2) a proposed amendment to the *Book of Church Order (BCO 21-4)* on “Good-Faith Subscription”. Ninety Teaching Elders and thirty-five Ruling Elders recorded their negative votes. Doctrinal Subscription concerns how one, as a requirement for ordination, receives and adopts the *Westminster Confession and Catechisms* as containing the system of doctrine taught in Scripture, to what degree he may hold differing views within the parameters of the *Westminster Standards*, and how or whether he may teach and preach his allowable differences. Eight overtures on subscription from over twenty Presbyteries had been submitted to the Assembly.
- A proposed amendment to the *Book of Church Order (BCO)* was approved by the Assembly and sent down to the Presbyteries for their advice and consent (*BCO* 26-2) concerning changing the number of Presbyteries required to assume original jurisdiction over a minister (*BCO* 34-1) from the number two to ten percent of the Presbyteries. When the PCA began in 1973, there were 17 Presbyteries; we will soon have 64.
- The Assembly adopted a statement on racial reconciliation, as an answer to Overture 20 from Nashville Presbytery, “Racial Reconciliation,” and several personal resolutions. In reflecting upon chattel slavery of the past and racism in both the past and present, the statement expressed regret that the Church had not acted more swiftly on the issue. Further, the Assembly said, “We will strive, in a manner consistent with the Gospel imperatives, for the encouragement of racial reconciliation, the establishment of urban and minority congregations, and the enhancement of existing ministries of mercy in our cities, among the poor, and across all social, racial, and economic boundaries, to the glory of God.”
- The Assembly adopted a statement concerning “Today’s New International Version” of the Bible (TNIV); 1) expressing disapproval of making gender-related or other alterations to the authorially-intended meaning of Scripture in Bible translation, 2) cautioning against the use of the TNIV, and 3) imploring the International Bible Society to refrain from further gender-neutral or other “corrective” efforts in Bible translation.

Book of Church Order Changes

The Assembly gave final approval to five proposed *BCO* changes that had been sent to Presbyteries for advice and consent; 1) *BCO* 14-1 (12) changing terms of service on Permanent Committees to five years, 2) *BCO* 32-3, 32-4, 43-1, regarding sequence of meetings in judicial process, delivery requirements for indictments and citations, and allowing a complaint after an appeal is ruled out of order, withdrawn or abandoned, 3) *BCO* 35-7, 32-18, requiring all testimony on judicial proceeding be recorded, 4) *BCO* 13-1, allow at least two ruling elders to represent each congregation in Presbytery, and 5) *BCO* 12-5 e., states that the session has oversight of preaching “only by such men as are sufficiently qualified.”

PCA Foundation Affirmed

Westminster Presbytery had sent to the Assembly Overture 7, "Allow Inspection of PCAF and All Other Committee and Agency Records by Individuals or General Assembly Divest Itself of Committees and Agencies." A church session in Westminster Presbytery had sent a letter to all ministers and sessions on the matter prior to the Assembly. The Assembly overwhelmingly approved the unanimous recommendation of the PCAF Committee of Commissioners to answer the overture in the negative and noted that there is already a system of oversight and accountability for Committees and Agencies to the General Assembly itself via Assembly-elected Permanent Committees and Boards of Trustees or Directors. The Assembly also adopted a statement, "A letter that was disseminated this year has brought harm to the PCAF and impeded its ability to do ministry. This should be avoided."

Interchurch Relations

The Assembly voted to enter into corresponding relations with the United Reformed Churches of North America. The Assembly adopted a recommendation from the North American Presbyterian And Reformed Council (NAPARC) that the Christian Reformed Church of North America be removed from NAPARC membership because; 1) by circumventing the CRCNA constitution to allow for the ordination of women as ministers and elders the CRCNA violated its own constitution and the NAPARC constitution as well and 2) the CRC has had opportunity to reverse its controversial decision of 1995 in this matter, but reaffirmed its decision in 2000.

Mission to North America

The Assembly approved the formation Blue Ridge Presbytery in the western sector of Virginia, effective September 1, 2002. It will be the 64th Presbytery of the PCA. The boundaries of Rocky Mountain, Ascension, and New York State Presbyteries were revised. MNA reported their Church Planting Priorities; 1) From Centralization to "Grass-Roots" Leadership, 2) From Networks to Church Planting Movements, 3) From Being Primarily Mono-Cultural to Multi-Cultural, 4) From Emphasizing the Suburbs to Planting Churches within the City, and 5) From Complacency to Compassion. The MNA committee will study means of more effective PCA ministry in a multi-ethnic setting in North America and report back to the 31st Assembly.

PCA Retirement and Benefits, Inc. (PCA-RBI)

The agency reported that it had changed its name from Insurance, Annuities and Relief when it was separately incorporated recently. The "Rules of Assembly Operation" (4-3) allows Committees or Agencies to incorporate separately for civil purposes. A proposed *BCO* change (14-1.12.b.4) was initially approved to reflect the name change. A proposal to make participation in the PCA health insurance plan mandatory was amended so that the Assembly *highly recommends* that all active full-time PCA ministers and church lay employees in the USA participate in the PCA health insurance plan, if they are not covered under a spouse's health plan. The Director, Jim Hughes, will be retiring December 31, 2002 after twenty years of service. The Board of Directors will name a new director prior to that.

Mission to the World

In 2001 MTW had 551 career missionaries, 158 two-year missionaries, and 154 intern applicants for a total of 863. As well there were 6,540 short-term workers. Provisional Presbyteries are functioning in the Ukraine, Cote D' Ivoire, Chile, and the Czech Republic. Ministries to Street Children in Brazil, the Philippines, Mexico, the Ukraine, and Kenya have been initiated. In 2001 MTW sent out 31 short-term medical teams to 11 countries. Disaster response teams were deployed seven times in 2001. The international AIDS ministry was enlarged by making it a separate program.

Reformed University Ministries

RUM and its local campus ministries, Reformed University Fellowship, serve 62 campuses in the USA. Eight new campuses were added in 2001. It is hoped that RUM will be serving on 68 campuses by the end of 2002. Two of the new campuses include the University of North Florida and Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama. Four campus ministers devote their ministries to international students from some forty nations. The Assembly recognized the Rev. Billy Joseph for his twenty-two years of campus ministry at the University of Alabama.

Christian Education and Publications

CE&P has twenty regional trainers who interact with teachers of children youth and adults. Over 3,000 people were trained over the last year. Over 150 people attended the annual Children's Ministry Conference. The youth ministry department assisted over fifty churches in acquiring staff for youth ministries. About 200 PresWIC leaders attended the Women in the Church Leadership Training Seminar. About 200 youth attended PYA conferences in Georgia and Colorado.

Covenant College

Dr. Frank Brock retired as president, effective June 30, 2002, after a fifteen-year tenure during which time the college experienced spiritual, physical, numerical, and financial growth. Dr. Brock will continue to serve the college in a development ministry. Enrollment increased by 105% since 1990 to 1,254 in 2001. Graduation rate increased 89% during the same period. RUM now has a campus minister serving CC. The board reported that it had elected Dr. Neil Neilson as the new president of the college. Dr. Neilson was ordained as a Ruling Elder in the PCA. He holds a Ph.D. in philosophy from Vanderbilt University. His experience includes teaching at Wheaton College, serving as a financial investment advisor, and service on a local church staff leading evangelism and outreach ministries. He will take office July 1 and will be formally inaugurated October 4, 2002.

Covenant Theological Seminary

The cap on the number of incoming M.Div. students in effect since 1994 has been raised to 100. The cap will not be raised further until it is clear that doing so will not jeopardize the quality of education and community dynamics. Enrollment increased for the thirteenth consecutive year to about 1,100 from forty-four states and nineteen other nations. Every 2001 M.Div. graduate seeking an ordained ministry position and having Seminary recommendation was placed in ministry. This is the third year in a row for 100% placement.

Ridge Haven

Some 1,000 summer campers are expected in this summer and 8,500 guests for the entire year. Conversions are regularly reported in the camps and conferences. RH was the recipient of the WIC Love Gift for 2001, making possible significant improvements in the Center's facilities, playground, Iverson and Dean Lodge renovations, and other improvements. Significant progress has been made on the water system improvements mandated by the state of North Carolina. \$135,645 of the \$300,000 water project is still needed. A new web site, www.Ridgehaven.org, has been launched.

***Ad Interim* Committee on Women in Military**

The Assembly adopted four recommendations of the majority report; 1) any policy that places pregnant women into combat is unbiblical, 2) the Assembly declares that it is the biblical duty of men to defend women and therefore disapproves on women as combatants or women being conscripted, 3) the Assembly commends its declarations on the matter as pastoral counsels to PCA members, officers and military chaplains, 4) the Assembly supports the decision of individual members of the PCA to

object as a matter of conscience to the conscription of women or the use of women as combatants. A minority report, advocating the above recommendations as wise counsel rather than biblical duty was defeated.

Strategic Planning

The Assembly received the report from the PCA's Strategic Planning Steering Committee and has asked that each Presbytery review this work and provide their comments back to the Steering Committee by March 31, 2003. The Steering Committee suggested each Presbytery devote three hours to such a discussion, ideally separate from a stated presbytery meeting. They have prepared supporting materials to assist Presbyteries in planning and holding these discussions. These materials include an overview of objectives for presbytery comments, a possible agenda and design for a discussion meeting, and set of target end products. Planning Steering Committee members will also be available to facilitate these discussions in interested Presbyteries. Contact Harry Pinner (706-419-1251) or Jim Wert (770-661-7847) for further details.

Administrative Committee/Office of the Stated Clerk

The Assembly approved the AC/SC's beginning a PCA News printed magazine, if the way is clear. The magazine will be produced for PCA members and persons interested in the PCA, reporting primarily on ministries being done by PCA members, churches, Presbyteries, and General Assembly Committees and Agencies. Overture 35 from Westminster Presbytery, "Clarify Relationship of Separately Incorporated Agencies to Assembly," was referred to the AC for study and report to the 31st Assembly. The AC reported its study on the types of venue for the site of the General Assembly and noted that, due to the number of commissioners and accompanying family members, a hotel-convention center site is most workable. Guidelines for "Biblical Conflict Resolution" will be printed as an informational appendix to the *BCO*. The assembly adopted a recommendation that the AC, through the Local Arrangements Sub-committee be responsible for all worship services at the General Assembly. *The AC/SC provides the necessary structure and services for churches to share in the cooperative ministry of General Assembly Ministries. Since all PCA churches benefit in some ways from the services of the AC/SC, it is suggested that all churches support the AC/SC by per capita giving through Partnership Shares or proportional giving of 1/2 of one percent of local church offerings.*

Special Days, Offerings, and Events Recommended to PCA Churches

- October 13, 2002 - Day of Prayer for the ministry of Covenant College.
- October, 2002 – A Month of Prayer for the "10/40 Window" and World Evangelization (MTW). The "10/40 Window" is the area of the globe between 10° north latitude and 40° north latitude, which contains people groups that have historically been the most resistant to the Gospel.
- Sometime in 2002-2003 – A Special Offering for suffering people (Compassion Ministry- MTW).
- November 10, 2002 – Day of Prayer and fasting, according to the custom of the local churches, for the Persecuted Church Worldwide (MTW). Other Evangelical churches in the USA will observe the Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church Worldwide also.
- November, 2002 – Thanksgiving Offering for Urban and Mercy Ministries (MNA).
- December, 2002 – Offering for Ministerial Relief (PCA-RBI).
- February 9, 2003 – Day of Prayer for Ridge Haven Conference Center
- May 4-10, 2003 – Week of Prayer coordinated by CE&P.
- The Annual WIC Offering will be for Reformed University Ministries