

## ACTIONS OF THE THIRTY-THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY

L. Roy Taylor, Stated Clerk

### **Year of the Ruling Elder & 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Covenant College**

- The 33<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America met June 13-17 at the Chattanooga Convention Center in Chattanooga, Tennessee. The theme of the Assembly, “The Year of the Ruling Elder,” was fitting for the PCA, which was begun in 1973, to a large degree, through the efforts of faithful Ruling Elders. In the first years of the PCA, Ruling Elders (RE) outnumbered Teaching Elders (TE, ministers) at the annual General Assembly. Soon, however, Teaching Elders outnumbered Ruling Elders in ratios from 2-1 to 3-1. Final registration this year indicated 1,049 Teaching Elders (66%) and 531 Ruling Elders (34%) present for a total of 1,580 commissioners, representing 841 churches and 63 Presbyteries. The ratio last year was 72% TEs to 28% REs.
- The format of the Assembly was arranged with “The Year of the Ruling Elder” in mind. Over sixty seminars held on Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday and Thursday mornings covered a broad range of subjects designed to be of interest to Ruling Elders, not just to Teaching Elders. Preachers for the three evening services were Dr. J. Ligon Duncan, III, retiring Moderator, Dr. Sinclair B. Ferguson, Professor of Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary-Dallas, and Dr. John S. Piper, pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota.
- Covenant College celebrated its Fiftieth Anniversary during the week. Dr. Niel Nielson, president of the college, coordinated the Assembly seminars and a festive dinner was held at the college for the commissioners on Wednesday night.
- The Assembly heard annual progress reports from the ten General Assembly Committees and Agencies (Administrative Committee, Christian Education & Publications, Mission to North America, Mission to the World, Reformed University Ministries, PCA Foundation, PCA Retirement & Benefits, Inc., Ridge Haven Conference Center, Covenant College, and Covenant Theological Seminary).

### **RE Howard Q. Davis Elected Moderator of 33<sup>rd</sup> PCA General Assembly**

Traditionally Ruling Elders and Teaching Elders are elected as Moderators of the Assembly in alternating years. The 33<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly elected RE Howard Q. Davis, Jr. as Moderator. Mr. Davis, a ruling elder in the First Presbyterian Church in Indianola, Mississippi, and a native of Indianola, graduated from the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) with both his undergraduate and law degrees. He served in the army for three years, attaining the rank of Captain and served a stint in Vietnam where he was awarded the Bronze Star. A third generation lawyer in Indianola, Mr. Davis began his legal practice after completing his military service. From 1988 to 1994, he was a circuit court judge with the Fourth Circuit Court District of Mississippi. He also served in a number of other judgeships, including being appointed as a Special Circuit Judge by the Mississippi Supreme Court. He has served as moderator of Covenant Presbytery several times. On the General Assembly level, he has served on the Mission to North America Committee, the Administrative Committee, and the Board of Directors of the PCA. Mr. Davis and his wife Fran, who have been married for 36 years, have three grown children and four grandchildren. One son, Howard Q. Davis III, is the pastor of Grace PCA in Shreveport, LA.

### **Growth of the PCA**

For the statistical year of 2004 the PCA had a reported total membership of 330,182, a net increase of 9,782 over the previous year. The PCA ended 2004 with 1,553 churches, a net decrease of 22 churches. Though our church planting activities continued apace in areas of population stability or growth, several Presbyteries dissolved a number of struggling churches in areas of population decline. There were 10,978 professions of faith in PCA churches in 2004, an increase of 479. Total reported local church disbursements were \$546,317,651, an increase of \$15,815,849. The General Assembly approved overtures from Pacific Northwest Presbytery, Northern Illinois Presbytery, and Philadelphia Presbyteries to form a total of five new Presbyteries (Western Canada, Wisconsin, Chicago Metro, Eastern Pennsylvania, and Philadelphia Metro West Presbyteries). With the formation of the new Presbyteries, the total number of PCA Presbyteries will reach seventy-three.

### **Value of Human Life Study Committee Appointed**

Ohio Valley Presbytery overtured the General Assembly to erect an *ad interim* committee to study the issue of the value of human life. The 16<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in 1988 adopted the "Report of Heroic Measures Committee." Since that time technological advances and changing medical ethics have called for decisions unforeseen in 1988. The Assembly adopted the overture of Ohio Valley. The Moderator will appoint a committee of seven to study the issue and report to the 35<sup>th</sup> Assembly in 2007. The committee is to be funded by designated gifts to the Administrative Committee/Office of the Stated Clerk.

### **Christian Education and Public Education**

A minister of Westminster Presbytery, TE Steven Warhurst, along with several other ministers and ruling elders presented a personal resolution (that was not adopted by Westminster Presbytery) calling on the General Assembly to encourage "all her officers and members to remove their children from the public schools and see to it that they receive a thoroughly Christian education, for the glory of God and the good of Christ's Church." Some who favored the resolution argued that public schools do not teach children to think biblically about all of life and, that the parents' vows taken at the baptism of their children (*BCO* 56-5) require them to remove their children from public schools. Some who opposed the resolution argued that PCA members (on the bases of principle and financial considerations) utilize various means of educating their children (via church-based Christian schools, parent-led Christian schools, home schooling, secular private schools, and public schools) and that teaching children to think biblically about all of life is essentially the responsibility of the family and the church. The Assembly did *not* adopt the resolution.

### **Other Overtures**

The Assembly took the following actions on other overtures:

- Answered in the negative Overture 1 from Iowa Presbytery to define the term "papists" in *Westminster Confession of Faith* XXIV.3 by adding a footnote.
- Answered in the negative Overture 3 from Central Carolina Presbytery to revise *BCO* 19-12 to change interns' filing frequent progress reports.
- Answered in the negative Overture 7 from Chesapeake Presbytery to amend *BCO* 21-5, 6, 7, 8, 10 and footnotes to revise the role of assistant pastors.

- Answered in the negative Overture 9 from Presbytery of the Ascension to amend *BCO* 21-4 to specify a procedure of teaching and preaching allowable doctrinal differences. On the same issue, procedures for Presbyteries determining what are allowable doctrinal differences were proposed by the Review of Presbytery Records Committee (proposed revision to the “Rules of Assembly Operations” 14-3 e. 5) and consideration was postponed until the Wednesday morning session of the 2006 General Assembly.
- Answered in the affirmative Overture 10 from Ascension Presbytery to amend *BCO* 24-1 to require an examination in Bible content for the ordination of Ruling Elders and Deacons.
- Answered in the negative Overture 11 from Illiana Presbytery to establish a PCA Adoption Assistance Fund.
- Answered in the negative *without prejudice to its content* Overture 14 from Mississippi Valley Presbytery (MVP) to distribute to all Presbyteries the MVP “Report on the New Perspectives on Paul, the Theology of N. T. Wright, the Theology of Norman Shepherd, and the Theology of the so-called ‘Federal Vision’ in the PCA.”
- Answered in the affirmative a personal resolution from TE Peter Lillback of Philadelphia Presbytery that the 2006 General Assembly commemorate the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Presbytery meeting in America (Philadelphia, 1706), if at all possible and that individual Presbyteries do the same where possible and appropriate.

#### **Amendments to the Book of Church Order**

- *BCO* 26-2 requires an affirmative vote of two-thirds of the Presbyteries as part of the amendment process. Two *BCO* proposed amendments were sent down by the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly to Presbyteries for their vote: 1) to Amend *BCO* 24-3 Regarding Election of Ruling Elders and Deacons, substituting parenthetical reference to *BCO* 24-3 instead of *BCO* 24-2; and 2) to Amend *BCO* 24-9 to remove a specific age requirement for emeritus Ruling Elders and Deacons. Both items received the required majority vote of two-thirds of the Presbyteries and, the 33<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly approved both *BCO* amendments.
- Three *BCO* amendments were given initial approval by Assembly-2005 and will be sent to Presbyteries for a vote: 1) to amend *BCO* 15-4 to broaden the work of the Standing Judicial Commission, 2) to amend *BCO* 40-5 to simplify the language of that section, and 3) to amend *BCO* 24-1 to require an examination in Bible content for the ordination of Ruling Elders and Deacons. The affirmative vote of forty-nine of the seventy-three Presbyteries will be needed for the 2006 Assembly to take final action.

#### **Strategic Planning**

The Assembly heard the report of the Strategic Planning Committee, that for five years has operated as a sub-committee of the Administrative Committee. The committee reported that it divided itself into various task forces to expedite its work: Survey (Opinions and Perceptions in the PCA), Statistics (statistical analysis of the PCA), Ruling Elder Engagement, Reaching the Rising Generation, Inter-Agency Collaboration and Funding, General Assembly Structure and Procedures, and External Benchmarking (how other denominations gauge progress). The SPC recommended two *BCO* changes, which will be sent to Presbyteries for a vote, 1) to amend *BCO* 15-4 to broaden the work of the Standing Judicial Commission, 2) to amend *BCO* 40-5 to simplify the language of that section. The

SPC was constituted an *ad interim* committee to report its final recommendations directly to the Assembly in 2006. Among its recommendations will be: 1) the expansion of the Bills and Overtures Committee to include two representatives from each Presbytery to increase deliberation and debate on vital issues and 2) the formation of a Cooperative Ministries Committee to improve inter-Agency collaborative ministry and funding. The Assembly will hold discussions in Presbyteries in the coming year prior to a vote on the SPC recommendations in 2006. See the Website, [www.pcaac.org/strategicplan.htm](http://www.pcaac.org/strategicplan.htm), for details.

### ***byFaith Magazine***

The Editor RE Dick Doster, reported on the progress of *byFaith*. The 30th General Assembly (2002) authorized the Administrative Committee/Office of the Stated Clerk to proceed with plans to publish a news magazine to report on the ministries of PCA churches, PCA members, Presbyteries and PCA Committees and Agencies, as well as to deal with matters of interest to the members and friends of the PCA. Most of the ten General Assembly Committees and Agencies have periodic publications regarding their respective ministries. The new magazine, *byFaith*, is intended to cover the entire PCA. Start-up funds were sought before bi-monthly publication was begun in January, 2005. Initial response from readers, advertisers, and supporters has been overwhelmingly positive. A subscription effort is underway to increase circulation. Individual annual subscriptions are \$19.95 Sessions may take advantage of an every-family subscription plan for \$14, if all families in a local church are enrolled. See Website, [www.byfaithonline.com](http://www.byfaithonline.com), for details.

### **Special Days, Offerings and Events Recommended for PCA Churches**

- The month of October 2005, a Month of Prayer for global missions.
- October 16, 2005, Covenant College Sunday. Prayer for CC.
- The 2006 WIC Offering for MTW Street Children Ministry.
- A special offering for MTW Compassion Ministry to be taken in 2006, date set by Sessions.
- November 13, 2005, A Day of Prayer and Fasting for the Persecuted Church worldwide.
- November 2005, Thanksgiving Offering for MNA Urban and Mercy Ministries.
- December 2005, Offering for Ministerial Relief (PCA-RBI).
- February 12, 2006, Ridge Haven Sunday, Day of Prayer for RH Conference Center.
- May 7-13, 2006, Week of Prayer coordinated by CE&P.

**The 33<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly will convene June 20-23, 2006, in Atlanta, Georgia.**

### **A Word of Thanks and Request**

The Administrative Committee/Office of the Stated Clerk provides the administrative services and legal structure for the PCA to minister cooperatively as a denomination. All churches, presbyteries, and denominational ministries benefit from the ministry of the AC/SC. Therefore, we request that all PCA churches consider supporting the AC/SC through the *per capita* giving of Partnership Shares or *proportional* giving (for example, one-half of one percent of local church offerings). **We appreciate your support for this needful ministry.**

*L. Roy Taylor, Stated Clerk PCA*