

## **Actions of the 35<sup>th</sup> General Assembly**

### **L. Roy Taylor, Stated Clerk, PCA**

#### **First Assembly under New Rules of Procedure**

The 35<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America met at the Cook Convention Center, Memphis, Tennessee, June 12-14, 2007, ably hosted by Covenant Presbytery. The 1,288 commissioners (917 teaching elders and 371 ruling elders) heard progress reports of the ten General Assembly Ministries and five Special Committees, the corporate report of the Board of Directors of the PCA (A Corporation), reviewed the work of the seventy-five Presbyteries, participated in ministry training seminars, and received the reports of the Standing Judicial Commission and one study committee. In 2006 the 34<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, as part of the Strategic Planning Committee Report, adopted some new rules of procedure that were designed to give more deliberative consideration to substantive issues coming to the Assembly via overtures, increase the participation of ruling elders in the deliberative process, and streamline procedures on the floor of the Assembly. *The Assembly concluded a half-day early due, in part, to the new procedures.* Several changes enacted at the 34<sup>th</sup> Assembly were:

- The Bills and Overtures Committee was restructured to have a ruling elder and a teaching elder representative from each Presbytery. The committee, renamed the “Overtures Committee” (OC), began its deliberations a day before the Assembly convened.
- The procedure for handling all committees of commissioners (CoC) reports was changed, allowing the Assembly only to approve, disapprove, or refer the respective reports without amendments (though a loophole and a glitch soon became evident). Minority reports from committees of commissioners are not now allowed. Only a majority vote of the CoC is now required to consider a series of motions “in gross,” i.e., all together in one motion.
- Another rules change was to make explicit that all personal resolutions are treated as “new business” and require a 2/3 majority vote to be received. One personal resolution was proposed but not received.
- A Cooperative Ministries Committee (CMC) was formed, composed of the present Moderator and five immediate past Moderators of the General Assembly, and the chairmen of the ten Assembly Committees and Agencies along with their Chief Administrative Officers. The purposes of the CMC are to effect long-range planning, facilitate cooperative ministries among the Committees and Agencies, monitor and evaluate standards of effectiveness, and resolve issues of inter-agency cooperation, collaboration, or conflict. The CMC’s goal is to increase the missional effectiveness of the General Assembly Committees and Agencies.

#### **RE E. J. Nusbaum Elected Moderator**

The 35<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the PCA elected as Moderator E. J. Nusbaum, a ruling elder in the Village Seven Presbyterian Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado. A native of Colorado, Mr. Nusbaum graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1979 and was commissioned as an infantry officer. He left active duty in 1985, moving to Colorado Springs to open a State Farm Insurance Agency. Ordained as a ruling elder at Village Seven in 1988, he has served as the clerk of the Village Seven Session, on the MNA committee of Rocky Mountain Presbytery, and on a number of General Assembly committees of commissioners. He currently serves as a member of the Committee on Constitutional Business (CCB). He is married to the former Joan Majors. They have two daughters, Emily and Becky.

## PCA Growth

The PCA has grown to a reported<sup>1</sup> membership of 338,873, with 1,639 churches (including mission churches) in seventy-five Presbyteries. Twenty churches were added to the denomination in 2006. The PCA now has churches in all fifty states in the USA and in five provinces of Canada, as well as individual congregations in Germany and the British West Indies. Over 10,600 professions of faith were reported. Contributions reported in 2006 totaled \$636,351,843. MTW has 590 long-term missionaries, 150 two-year missionaries, 326 interns, and sent out 6,892 people on short-term mission trips in 2006. MTW works with 450 national partners. MNA reported 55 mission churches in operation in 2006. There are now 162 PCA-endorsed chaplains, 34 of whom served in the Iraq-Afghanistan war zones in 2006. Reformed University Ministries (RUM) now works on 102 campuses in the USA. Eight new campus ministries were added in 2006; six are slated for 2007. Covenant College reported a record enrollment of 937 undergraduate students in 2006. Covenant Theological Seminary also reported record enrollments and new ventures in continuing education and distance educational ministries via the Internet. The Administrative Committee reported that *byFaith* magazine had won several awards again from the Evangelical Press Association. Ridge Haven Conference Center reported that RH now serves some 8,000 people per year. Covenant College, Covenant Theological Seminary and Ridge Haven are all in Capital Fund Campaigns to improve their ministries and facilities. CE&P reported that some 4,000 women attended the CE&P/WIC Conference in Atlanta in September 2006. PCA Foundation reported asset growth to \$41.5 million with ministry disbursements of \$9,316,000. PCA Retirement & Benefits, Inc., reported asset growth to \$304 million, with \$345,605 disbursed in Ministerial Relief. An array of new retirement investment options for PCA Retirement Plan participants is in the offing.

## Federal Vision Study Committee

The 34<sup>th</sup> General Assembly approved the creation of an ad interim committee to study “Federal Vision, New Perspective on Paul, and Auburn Avenue Theologies.” It was tasked to determine whether these views are “in conformity with the system of doctrine taught in the Westminster Standards” and to “present a declaration or statement regarding the issues raised by these viewpoints in light of our Confessional Standards” (*M34GA*, 34-57, pp. 229-30).

TE Dominic Aquila, Moderator of the 34<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, appointed the following as committee members: TE Paul Fowler, Ph.D., TE Sean Lucas, Ph.D., TE Ligon Duncan, Ph.D., TE Grover Gunn, RE Robert Mattes, RE William Mueller, and RE John White. For the entire report in various formats, see <http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/07-fvreport.html>, <http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/07-fvreport.pdf>, or <http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/07-fvreport.doc>. Proponents of the Federal Vision/Auburn Avenue Theology think their conversations on the implications of Covenant Theology in relation to the sacraments and other doctrines related to ecclesiology (doctrine of the Church) and soteriology (doctrine of salvation) are necessary to rid Covenant Theology of the influences of American revivalism and individualism, to return to the theology of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Reformers, and to incorporate insights of Biblical Theology developed since the Reformation. Critics hold that Federal Vision conversationalists have gone too far in the quest for continuing theological reformation.<sup>2</sup> The New Perspective on Paul is an attempt of several British and European theologians to understand and interpret Paul’s statements on the righteousness of God and the doctrine of justification in

<sup>1</sup> Only 49% of the churches submitted annual reports in 2006. Some of the larger churches, whose figures would affect our statistics, have not reported in a decade.

<sup>2</sup> See E. Calvin Beisner, ed. *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision* (Ft. Lauderdale: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004).

the light of Second Temple Judaism (rabbinic writings from the sixth century B.C. forward).<sup>3</sup> Critics of the New Perspective hold that Paul's New Testament writings should be interpreted in light of the Old Testament scriptures rather than in light of rabbinic writings and think that the New Perspective discounts the historic Protestant theological consensus on justification as a legal declaration of God's imputing our sin to Christ and imputing Christ's righteousness to believing sinners. The report was a primary focus of the Assembly's work ("the main event," as the Moderator described it). Debate on the report centered on two factors: (1) the composition of the committee as appointed by the Moderator,<sup>4</sup> and (2) the report, in the opinion of some, being strong on Historical Theology and weak on detailed exegesis of key biblical texts. A motion to expand the committee and continue it for another year failed. The committee's five recommendations, which included nine theological declarations (see links above), were approved by about a 90% majority.<sup>5</sup>

### Book of Church Order Changes

- A proposed amendment to the *Book of Church Order (BCO)* 15-4 to limit terms of service on the Standing Judicial Commission (SJC) received the required positive votes of 2/3 of the Presbyteries but did not receive a majority vote of this year's Assembly and, therefore, failed (*BCO* 26-2).
- Several overtures proposing amendments to the *BCO* failed.
  - A proposed amendment to *BCO* 13-1 and 14-2 (Overture 13) to prohibit churches that make no financial contribution to any Presbytery or General Assembly ministries whatsoever from voting at Presbytery or General Assembly ("no pay, no say") failed.
  - A proposed amendment to *BCO* 35-7 (Overture 1) to remove the requirement for transcription of witness testimony in judicial cases failed.
  - A proposed amendment to *BCO* 21-1 (Overtures 4 and 21) to re-affirm Presbyteries' rights to deny approval of pastoral calls was defeated. The OC reasoned that the right already exists.
  - A proposed amendment to *BCO* 21-4 (Overture 15) regarding procedures for ministers' teaching approved exceptions to the *Westminster Standards* was not approved, but the matter was commended to the Church for further study, debate, and perfection.
  - A proposed amendment to *BCO* 56-4 (Overture 2) to define baptism as "the sprinkling and washing with water" failed. (In the PCA effusion [pouring] and aspersion [sprinkling] are the preferred modes of baptism and immersion is acceptable).
- Overture 10 to amend *BCO* 12-1 and 12-2 to Change Quorum Requirements for Session meetings was approved and sent to Presbyteries for their consideration and vote (*BCO* 26-3).

<sup>3</sup> For a representative explanation from an advocate see *N.T. Wright. Paul: A Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> *Roberts Rules of Order* § 50, p. 481, recommends, but does not require, that such committees have members of various points of view in order to gain wide acceptance of the report and to prevent extended debate. No formal point of order was raised, however.

<sup>5</sup> Study Committee reports are "deliverances" of an Assembly (*BCO* 14-7); the opinion of the majority of the commissioners on a specific subject (*in thesi*) at a particular point in time. Study Committee Reports are *not* amendments to the constitution. The PCA does not have the "authoritative interpretation of the constitution" process of other denominations that is tantamount to changing the constitution. Binding changes to the PCA constitution (*The Book of Church Order* and the *Westminster Standards*) may only be made by following the process for amending the constitution specified in *BCO* 26-2; 26-3. According to *BCO* 14-7, church courts are to give deliverances of the General Assembly "due and serious consideration when deliberating matters related to such action."

## Overtures

Overtures are requests for Assembly action on specific issues arising from Presbyteries or Sessions. This year there were twenty-one overtures, fewer overtures than usual.

- Seven overtures, referred to MNA, dealt with changes in Presbytery boundaries. Six were approved (Overtures 3, 5, 11, 12, 17, 18).
- An overture to revise the boundaries of Tennessee Valley and Northwest Georgia Presbyteries (Overture 20) was not approved inasmuch as TVP had not acted on the request.
- An overture (Overture 19) to divide Heartland Presbytery into two, **creating the 76<sup>th</sup> PCA Presbytery, named Platte Valley Presbytery in Nebraska**, was approved.
- Overtures to honor PCA Founding Fathers TE Paul Settle and RE W. Jack Williamson for their faithful service to the Lord and the PCA were approved (Overtures 14, 16).
- An overture to commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of John Calvin's birth in 2009 (Overture 6) in seminars at the 37<sup>th</sup> General Assembly was approved.

## Interchurch Relations

The Assembly voted to establish fraternal relations with Eglise Réformée de Quebec (the Reformed Church of Quebec) in light of its being received into the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC). The PCA had been instrumental in beginning the Reformed Church of Quebec in previous years. The Assembly also voted to approve the application of the Heritage Reformed Churches to NAPARC.

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

- September 9, Seniors Ministry (Grandparents and Senior Citizens Day) (CE&P).
- October 2007, a Month of Prayer for Global Missions (MTW).
- October 14, 2007, Covenant College Sunday. Prayer for CC.
- The 2007 Women in the Church Offering is for CE&P.
- A special offering for MTW Compassion Ministry to be taken in 2007, date set by Sessions.
- November 11, 2007 A Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church Worldwide (MTW).
- November 2007, Thanksgiving Offering for MNA Urban and Mercy Ministries.
- December 2007, Offering for Ministerial Relief (PCA-RBI).
- February 10, 2008, Ridge Haven Sunday, Day of Prayer.
- May 4-10, 2008, Week of Prayer coordinated by CE&P.
- **The 36<sup>th</sup> General Assembly will convene June 10, 2008, in Dallas, Texas.**

### 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