

**Actions of the Forty-fourth General Assembly of the
Presbyterian Church in America**
L. Roy Taylor, Stated Clerk

Mobile, Alabama Site of 44th General Assembly

The Forty-fourth General Assembly met June 20-23, 2016 in the historic port city of Mobile, Alabama, at the Mobile Convention Center. Gulf Coast Presbytery hosted the meeting, with Teaching Elder **Mack Griffith** serving as the Host Committee Chairman. A total of 1,316 commissioners attended: 1,029 Teaching Elders (TEs) and 287 Ruling Elders (REs). Building on the theme “Refreshed: in and for the Cross,” the three nightly **worship services** were high points of the Assembly. Speakers were Retiring Moderator, **RE Jim Wert, Dr. Tim Keller**, Pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in NYC and **Dr. Thurman Williams**, Associate Pastor of Grace and Peace Fellowship of St. Louis. Musicians **Keith and Kristyn Getty** presented a concert and led the music in worship on Wednesday evening. In addition to usual business, the Assembly dealt with several **key issues**: 1) racial reconciliation, 2) the role of women in the PCA, 3) sexual brokenness in a fallen world, and, 4) a logo for the PCA. The Assembly formed study committees on the first two issues.

Dr. George W. Robertson, Moderator

The Reverend George Robertson, PhD, Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Augusta, Georgia (org. 1804), was elected Moderator without opposition. Having been discipled in the faith through the ministry of the First Presbyterian Church of Tusculumbia, Alabama, he graduated from Covenant College, Covenant Theological Seminary, and Westminster Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Jacqueline, are the parents of a son and three daughters. Dr. Robertson served as pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church of St. Louis from 1991 to 2005 and as pastor of First-Augusta since 2005. Under his ministry both churches recovered from discord, experiencing revitalization and both spiritual and statistical growth. In Augusta, the site of the formation of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America, Dr. Robertson has led the Church in modeling racial reconciliation through several community outreach efforts and holistic ministries, building relational bridges to the surrounding community. Half of a recent adult new members’ class was African-American. The Church is deeply involved in campus ministry and hosts an extension campus of Erskine Theological Seminary. Dr. Robertson moderated the Assembly with a perceptible humility, fairness, and a disarming humor.

Racial Reconciliation

Last year, in response to a personal overture offered by Dr. Sean Lucas and Dr. Ligon Duncan the General Assembly invited Presbyteries to express their opinions on the issue of racial reconciliation. This year a total of **forty-three overtures** dealing with the issue of racial reconciliation came to the Assembly from Presbyteries. Overture 4 from Missouri Presbytery served as a model for many of the overtures, which used either the same or slightly changed language. In the Overtures Committee, **Overture 43 from Potomac Presbytery** was used as a framework and **amended**, including elements from the Missouri overture (4), the Northwest Georgia overture (53), and the Mississippi Valley overture (55) for presentation to the Assembly as Recommendation 1, which was **adopted as amended**. The amended overture is attached to this report. The remaining overtures on racial reconciliation were answered by reference to the amended Overture 43 from Potomac, which is appended to this report. One commissioner filed a respectful dissent: “With respect to the otherwise laudable resolutions adopted by the Assembly, I dissent from the use of the word ‘repent’ in the first two paragraphs. I do not believe one can repent of the sins of another.”

The Assembly also amended and approved Overture 45 from Potomac Presbytery to **form a study committee** to develop specific steps that could be taken to effect racial reconciliation and the advance of the gospel. **The study committee’s** seven voting members are Kevin Smith (convener), Carl Ellis,

Alexander Jun, Sean Lucas, Jonathan Seda, Richie Sessions, and Alex Shipman. Advisory members are Sylvester Brown, Otis Pickett, and Russ Whitfield.

Finally, the Assembly voted to establish a “**PCA Unity Fund**” via designated contributions to and administered by the Mission to North America Committee (MNA) to raise up future generations of African-American and other minority Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders.

The Role of Women in the PCA

The **Cooperative Ministries Committee (CMC)** had recommended to the **Administrative Committee (AC) permanent committee** that the Assembly form a study committee on the role of women in the PCA in local Church, Presbytery, and Assembly levels. The CMC (composed of the chairmen and coordinators or presidents of the ten General Assembly Committees and Agencies along with the six recent moderators of the Assembly as advisory members) does not make recommendations directly to the Assembly. The AC recommended to the Assembly that a study committee be formed to investigate such matters as: 1) the biblical basis, theology, history, nature, and authority of ordination; 2) the biblical nature and function of the office of deacon; 3) clarification on the ordination or commissioning of deacons/deaconesses; and 4) – should the findings of the study committee warrant *Book of Church Order (BCO)* changes – proposed changes for the GA to consider. The PCA ordains men only to the offices of Teaching Elder, Ruling Elder, or Deacon (*BCO* 7-2). **The AC Committee of Commissioners (CoC)** (composed of representatives of Presbyteries who meet at the Assembly to review the year-long work of the permanent committee) recommended to the Assembly by a vote of 31-7 that the Assembly not form a study committee. The CoC recommendation that there be **no study committee was defeated 447-699-8**. The AC permanent committee’s recommendation to form a **study committee was approved 767-375-12**. Twenty-six commissioners filed a protest against the action. The Assembly approved a response that the protest was “a grave mischaracterization of the action.” **The study committee’s** seven voting members are Irwyn Ince (convener), Jeffrey Choi, Ligon Duncan, Kathy Keller, Mary Beth McGreevy, Bruce O’Neil, and Harry Reeder; and advisory members are Nikisha Alcindor, Leon Brown, Dan Doriani, Kimberly Jones, Lani Jones, and Roy Taylor.

Directions for Contributing to Study Committees and PCA Unity Fund

Both study committees and the PCA Unity Fund will be underwritten by designated contributions.

- Clearly designate the object of your gift.
- For either the Study Committee on the Role of Women or the Study Committee on Racial Reconciliation send gifts to The Administrative Committee, 1700 N. Brown Road, Suite 105, Lawrenceville, GA 30043.
- For the PCA Unity Fund send gifts to Mission to North America, PO Box 890233, Charlotte, NC 28289-0233.

Sexual Brokenness in a Fallen World

A number of recent events in our culture regarding sexual issues have concerned parents, church leaders, and other individuals. The Cooperative Ministries Committee included in its report to the General Assembly a report of its subcommittee on Sexual Brokenness in a Fallen World which addressed the issue biblically and pastorally, seeking to speak the truth in love on this controversial subject. The report also included a list of helpful resources. An Assembly-wide seminar was held on Wednesday morning of the week. The three-minister panel consisted of Tim Geiger, Executive Director of Harvest USA, which ministers to people who struggle with various forms of sexual brokenness; Allen Edwards, Pastor of Kiski Valley PCA, who had previously shared his own struggle with the Assembly; and David Strain, Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, MS, who has dealt with people pastorally who have been touched by this issue. The seminar was well attended and well received.

PCA Logo



At the First General Assembly in 1973 the matter of a PCA logo was considered. In 1982, 1983, 2006, 2014, and 2015 it was discussed again. The matter had been referred to the Historical Center (HC) Subcommittee of the AC for report to the AC and recommendation to the Assembly. The HC Subcommittee, after extensive discussion over numerous suggested emblems, engaged the services of Steve Beaver, Principal and Creative Director of the Beaver Design Group. The Design Group initially developed over one hundred options, eventually presenting nine to the HC subcommittee. These were evaluated using national surveys as well as four focus groups held around the country. In accordance with a directive of the Assembly, two designs were presented this year. The Assembly chose the design shown here by a vote of 325-277-11. Matt Smartt, son of a PCA founder, Kennedy Smartt, created the initial design of the chosen logo, working with the Beaver Design Group. The logo will be available in black and white or color (blue) with either the letters PCA or the denominational name, Presbyterian Church in America, and may be used in a number of applications. Check the AC website for access to the PCA logo, www.pcaac.org.

PCA by the Numbers

In his annual report the Stated Clerk reported that in 2015 we had:

- 1,534 churches, an increase of 35.
- 327 Mission churches, a decrease of five.
- A total membership of 370,332, an increase of 11,816
- A Sunday School attendance of 97,719, an increase of 1,096, which is the first increase in SS in a number of years.
- A total of 9,679 professions of faith, an increase of 254.

Giving increased in all categories. With virtually all mainline and some evangelical denominations plateaued or declining, PCA growth, though not as spectacular as in our early years, is noteworthy.

Leadership Changes

- **Dr. James “Jim” C. Bland, III**, retired after seventeen years of service as Coordinator of Mission to North America. During his tenure as MNA Coordinator Reformed University Ministries was spun off as a permanent committee and several new initiatives were begun while retaining the major emphasis on church planting. The Assembly showed its appreciation with a standing ovation. Jim and his wife, Linda, look forward to their next phase of ministry.
- **The Rev. James Paul Hahn, Jr.**, was elected as the new Coordinator of Mission to North America. Paul has served as staff minister in Mississippi, a campus minister at Auburn University, a church planter in Austin, TX and Knoxville, TN and as coordinator of church planting for TN Valley Presbytery. He is fifty-three. He and his wife, Frances, are the parents of four children.
- In recent years **seven of the ten** General Assembly Committees and Agencies (RH, CC, CTS, CDM, RUM, MTW and MNA) have had changes of Coordinators and Presidents, due primarily to retirements.

Progress Reports on Assembly-level Ministries

- The **Administrative Committee** recommended to the Assembly the adoption of a PCA logo, the formation of a study committee on the role of women in the ministries of the church (as suggested by

the CMC), no increases in the fees and charges for which the AC is responsible, and the approval of budgets of the Committees and Agencies.

- The **Committee on Discipleship Ministries** reported that beginning in April 2016 women from all over the PCA will be gathering for regional **Transformed** conferences. The CDM staff has developed children's worship curriculum. See www.teachmetoworship.com.
- **Covenant College** reported that a three-year strategic plan is being implemented. A Visual Arts Facility has been built. A campaign to fund the remodeling of Carter Hall is underway.
- **Covenant Theological Seminary** reported that Edwards Hall Community Center has been refurbished. CTS professors and alumni have participated in numerous major publications.
- **Mission to North America's** newly elected Coordinator, Paul Hahn, indicated that MNA will emphasize **church revitalization** in addition to other emphases to assist the majority of PCA churches. The formation of the PCA's 85th Presbytery, Columbus [OH] Metropolitan Presbytery was approved.
- **Mission to the World** now fields 586 missionaries in 86 countries. Coordinator Dr. Lloyd Kim urged us to pray that 1% of our adult members would become missionaries (a force of 2,800!).
- **The PCA Foundation** reported that they distributed more than \$9 million to Christian causes in 2015 of which \$5.1 million was to PCA churches, ministries and causes.
- **PCA Retirement Benefits, Inc.** reported that 60 Ministerial Relief recipients received \$489,026 including retired pastors, disabled pastors, widows, pastors without call, lay workers, and dependents.
- **Reformed University Ministries** reported that five new campus ministries were launched in 2015. RUM works on 145 campuses in 39 states, in 60 Presbyteries. Nine new efforts are slated for 2016.
- **Ridge Haven Conference Center** reported that for a second year in a row RH welcomed over 3,500 Summer Camp guests. Winter Camps and Special Camps are growing as well.

Other Assembly Actions

- **Gave initial approval** to and sent down to Presbyteries proposed amendments to the *Book of Church Order* 13-2 to require ministers without call to report annually or in writing to their Presbyteries; 5-3 to add a requirement that mission church temporary governing body minutes be reviewed by Presbytery.
- **Referred back to Chesapeake Presbytery** a proposed amendment to *BCO* 15-3 to allow Presbytery Judicial Commission minority reports.
- **Referred to the AC** Overture 7 from Grace Presbytery regarding petitioning the government to insure religious liberty in light of the SCOTUS Obergefell ruling on same-sex marriage.
- **Did not approve** proposed amendments to *BCO* 15-5 a. to allow the Assembly to give advice to the Standing Judicial Commission on specific cases; 38-1 and 42-2 to change nomenclature from complaint to appeal in a case without process; 43-1 to allow a pre-judgment complaint; and 35-1 to require an officer to testify in his own trial, if it regards doctrinal views.

Suggested Prayer, Offerings and Events

- Prayer for Covenant College as determined by local sessions.
- November 2016, a Month of Prayer for Global Missions (MTW).
- A special offering for MTW Compassion Ministries on a date chosen by local sessions.
- November 6, 2016 a Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church Worldwide (MTW).
- Annual Relief Ministry Offering (PCA-RBI, Inc.).
- 2017 Love Gift for PCA Women in the Church (CDM) is for Covenant College.
- *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).*
- **The Forty-fifth General Assembly will convene June 13-16, 2017 in Greensboro, NC.**

Attachment

OVERTURE 43

from Potomac Presbytery

As Amended and Approved by the 44th General Assembly

"Pursuing Racial Reconciliation and the Advance of the Gospel"

- Be it resolved**, that the 44th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America does recognize, confess, condemn and repent of corporate and historical sins, including those committed during the Civil Rights era, and continuing racial sins of ourselves and our fathers such as the segregation of worshipers by race; the exclusion of persons from Church membership on the basis of race; the exclusion of churches, or elders, from membership in the Presbyteries on the basis of race; the teaching that the Bible sanctions racial segregation and discourages inter-racial marriage; the participation in and defense of white supremacist organizations; and the failure to live out the gospel imperative that “love does no wrong to a neighbor” (Romans 13:10); and
- Be it further resolved**, that this General Assembly does recognize, confess, condemn and repent of past failures to love brothers and sisters from minority cultures in accordance with what the Gospel requires, as well as failures to lovingly confront our brothers and sisters concerning racial sins and personal bigotry, and failing to “learn to do good, seek justice and correct oppression” (Isaiah 1:17); and
- Be it further resolved**, that this General Assembly praises and recommits itself to the gospel task of racial reconciliation, diligently seeking effective courses of action to further that goal, with humility, sincerity and zeal, for the glory of God and the furtherance of the Gospel; and
- Be it further resolved**, that the General Assembly urges the congregations and presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church in America to make this resolution known to their members in order that they may prayerfully confess their own racial sins as led by the Spirit and strive towards racial reconciliation for the advancement of the gospel, the love of Christ, and the glory of God; and
- Be it further resolved**, that the 44th General Assembly call the attention of churches and presbyteries to the pastoral letter¹ contained in Overture 55 as an example of how a presbytery might provide shepherding leadership for its churches toward racial reconciliation; and
- Be it finally resolved**, that the 44th General Assembly remind the churches and presbyteries of the PCA that *BCO* 31-2 and 38-1 provide potent and readily available means for dealing with ones who have sinned or continue to sin in these areas.

¹ Find the Pastoral Letter, Attachment 1 to Overture 55 from Mississippi Valley Presbytery to the 44th General Assembly, here: <http://www.pcaac.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Pastoral-Letter-Overture-55-MS-Valley.pdf>