

**ACTIONS OF THE THIRTY-SECOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA**

L. Roy Taylor, Stated Clerk

Irenic and Expeditious Assembly

- The 32nd General Assembly was slated to meet in Pittsburgh, PA, June 15-18, at the invitation of Pittsburgh and Ascension Presbyteries. Commissioners numbered 1,355 (390 Ruling Elders and 965 Teaching Elders) from 708 churches. As usual, Committees of Commissioners met and ministry seminars were held prior to the Tuesday night convening of the Assembly. A number of commissioners attended a pre-Assembly conference on the History and Theology of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, sponsored by the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary.
- The docket this year scheduled all the informational reports of permanent Committees and Agencies to be presented in a bloc Wednesday morning and early afternoon to give Committees of Commissioners (CoC) more time to complete their work, to have reports printed well in time for consideration, and to give ample time for debate on the report of the Bills and Overtures (B&O) Committee. That, along with the B&O Committee's successful work to present an agreeable proposal to the Assembly regarding the five overtures and two personal resolutions regarding Marriage and Sexuality, helped the Assembly to complete its work early and adjourn following the Thursday evening worship service.
- The Assembly often paused for the singing of psalms and hymns, and for prayer, not only for the usual opening prayers at the beginning of reports, but also for specific prayers for PCA members, some of whom are battling serious illnesses. The Assembly prayed for a member of a PCA church, a former Muslim who became a Christian in the USA. He has been denied asylum in the USA and will be returned to his native country. His Muslim family has stated that they will kill him upon his return because of his becoming a Christian. The Assembly also had an extended period of prayer for racial reconciliation and the progress of the Gospel after adopting a Pastoral Letter on Racism and the Gospel.

Teaching Elder Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III Elected Moderator

The tradition is that Ruling Elders and Teaching Elders be elected as Moderators of the Assembly in alternating years. Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, Mississippi, since 1996, was elected Moderator. Prior to his pastorate in Jackson, he served on the faculty of Reformed Theological Seminary, teaching Systematic Theology, and still serves RTS as an Adjunct Professor of Theology. He is a graduate of Furman University, Covenant Theological Seminary, and the University of Edinburgh (Ph.D. in Historical and Systematic Theology). A prolific writer, he has authored several books, contributed to other books, written many articles, and edited numerous books. He serves on the boards of several Evangelical and Reformed organizations and institutions. He and his wife Anne are the parents of two children. At age forty-three, he is the youngest minister to serve as Moderator. He moderated the Assembly capably, fairly, cordially, and effectively.

Growth of the PCA

The General Assembly approved the creation of two new Florida Presbyteries: Suncoast Presbytery out of Southwest Florida Presbytery and Gulfstream Presbytery out of Southern Florida Presbytery. Florida has been one of the most productive areas for PCA church planting. When the PCA began in 1973, we had few churches in Florida. Today one-sixth of the membership of the PCA is in Florida. The two new Presbyteries bring the total

number of Presbyteries to sixty-eight. In the last statistical year (2003) the PCA grew by 2.68%, again being one of the fastest growing denominations in North America. As 2003 closed, the PCA had 1,565 churches and 320,400 members. Total local church disbursements exceeded \$530,000,000.

Marriage and Sexuality and Proposed Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

Five overtures and two personal resolutions regarding Marriage and Sexuality and an Amendment to the U.S. Constitution were before the General Assembly. Unlike some mainline denominations that ordain homosexuals to ecclesiastical office and allow homosexual marriages, the PCA holds to biblical marriage between one man and one woman only (the *Westminster Confession of Faith* 24.1-2). The PCA does *not* ordain homosexuals to ecclesiastical office. The Assembly amended and adopted Overture 16 from Missouri Presbytery, "Marriage and Sexuality," and answered all other overtures and personal resolutions on the subject by reference to action on Overture 16. Link to the Statement on Marriage and Sexuality:

http://www.byfaithonline.com/partner/Article_Display_Page/0,,PTID323422|CHID670978|CIID1811458,00.html

The Assembly acted:

- Humbly to call on the civil governments of Canada and the United States and all nations of the earth to act within their lawful powers and use whatever legislative and judicial instruments they deem most useful to ensure that marriage is legally defined and interpreted throughout their jurisdictions as existing exclusively between one man and woman. . . .
- To call upon the Presbyteries and Sessions of the PCA to strengthen the marriages in their own churches and exhort their elders to be bolder and more caring shepherds of Christ's flock that we might help stem the scandalous rising tide of divorce in the church.
- To call upon the Presbyteries and Sessions of the PCA to encourage all men and women, boys and girls within the PCA to live chastely for the sake of the Savior who bought them, whether in marriage or in singleness, whether they must do battle against heterosexual or homosexual temptation in seeking to be faithful to their Lord who loves them.
- And to call upon its members to be "the salt and light of the earth" in this context by exercising their full responsibilities as citizens including:
 - The communication of the Biblical faith of the PCA in this matter.
 - To protect and defend the Biblical teaching of marriage, according to their own best judgment as citizens in all spheres of public and private discourse.
- And [directed] that these "calls" be communicated by the Stated Clerk to all who have inquired and may inquire concerning these matters.

Other Overtures

There were sixteen overtures submitted to the Assembly this year (fifteen from Presbyteries and one by a Session) as compared with twenty-eight overtures in 2003. The Assembly:

- Answered in the negative Overture 1 from Heritage Presbytery ("Add Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures to Ordination Requirements for Ruling Elders and Deacons").
- Approved Overture 2 from Eastern Canada Presbytery ("Amend *BCO* 24-3 Regarding Election of Ruling Elders and Deacons"), substituting parenthetical reference to *BCO* 24-

3 instead of *BCO* 24-2. The proposed amendment will be sent to Presbyteries for their vote (*BCO* 26-2).

- Answered in the negative Overture 6 from the Session of Ellisville (MS) Presbyterian Church (“Amend *BCO* 13-1, 14-2, 23-2, 24-9 *et altera* to Restrict Teaching Elders Voting in Presbyteries and General Assembly to Pastors and Associate Pastors Only”).
- Answered in the negative Overture 7 (“Amend *BCO* 57-5 Regarding Adding a Congregation’s Vow at a Profession of Faith”) to require the congregation to vow to support and encourage new members.
- Answered in the affirmative Overture 8 from North Texas Presbytery (“Amend *BCO* 24-9 to Delete Age Requirement of Ruling Elders or Deacons Emeriti”). The proposed amendment will be sent to Presbyteries for their vote (*BCO* 26-2).
- Answered in the negative Overture 9 from Grace Presbytery (“Regarding Doctrinal Subscription, Amend *BCO* Preface, Section II, Preliminary Principles [by addition], Chapter 16 [by addition], and 21-4 [by deletion]”). Overture 9 would have undone the amendment to *BCO* 21-4 approved last year [so-called “Good Faith Subscription”].
- Answered in the negative Overture 10 from Nashville Presbytery (“Amend *BCO* 15-4 to Allow One TE and One RE from the Same Presbytery to Serve on SJC”). The rule remains that only one elder of either type from a given Presbytery may serve on the SJC.
- Answered in the negative Overture 5 from Westminster Presbytery (“Revise Makeup of the Ridge Haven Board of Trustees”). RH continues to be exempted from the requirement of a numerical balance of Ruling Elders and Teaching Elders.

Action on Proposed *BCO* 58-5 Amendment

A proposed amendment was sent down to Presbyteries for vote by the last Assembly, namely an amendment to *BCO* 58-5 in the Directory of Worship regarding the version of the Bible the presiding minister may use in stating the words of institution by adding a parenthetical statement “(Some other biblical account of the institution of this part of the Supper may be inserted here).” No Presbyteries voted against the amendment and the 32nd Assembly approved it (*BCO* 26-2).

Pastoral Letter Racism and the Gospel

Last year the General Assembly directed MNA to draft a Pastoral Letter on Racism and the Gospel. The pastoral letter was presented to the Assembly and approved (*BCO* 14-7). The letter condemned racism and urged the Church to spread the Gospel among all ethnic groups.

http://www.byfaithonline.com/partner/Article_Display_Page/0,,PTID323422|CHID670978|CIID1810742,00.html

Review of Presbytery Records

The General Assembly voted to include the following Committee on Constitutional Business recommendation from the RPR report in the Stated Clerk’s letter: “In regard to *BCO* 21-4, the action of a presbytery is reviewable by the Committee on Review of Presbytery Records (CRPR) to the extent of its authority in that the CRPR is charged to examine presbytery records for conformity with Scripture and the Constitution (*BCO* 40-2). If the Committee finds an entry that it believes does not conform, it is to report that apparent violation in accordance with RAO 14-6.c.”

General Assembly Ministries Annual Reports

- The *Administrative Committee and Office of the Stated Clerk (AC/SC)* reported that “PCANews.com” has been merged into “byfaithonline.com.” A print version of *byFaith* will begin publication upon the securing of the remaining funding necessary. TE John Kinser is now working with AC/SC in conflict prevention and management in local churches. The Strategic Planning Committee will function another year as a sub-committee under the AC.
- *Committee on Christian Education and Publications (CE&P)* provides teacher training, youth leader training, and Women in the Church (WIC) training regionally. CE&P provides national and regional conferences on children’s ministry, mercy ministry, Christian schools, racial reconciliation, and women’s ministry, as well as Equip conferences.
- *Covenant College (CC)* reported that enrollment for 2002-2003 in all programs was about 1,300 students. Student population has more than doubled since 1990. The long-term plan is to accommodate 2,000 students in residence.
- *Covenant Theological Seminary (CTS)* reported that the M.Div. continues to be the flagship program of the seminary. An M.A. in Educational Ministries is being added. A \$2 million grant was received from the Lilly Endowment for “Sustaining Pastoral Excellence” for nurturing pastors and ruling elders. CTS will cooperate with Reformed and Westminster Seminaries in this ministry.
- *Mission to North America (MNA)* conducts three Church Planter Assessment Centers as well as providing coaching ministry for church planters. Multi-cultural ministries are being expanded to accomplish the goal that the face of the PCA reflect the face of North America.
- *Mission to the World (MTW)* reported 560 long-term missionaries, 176 two-year missionaries, 293 missionary interns, 6,801 two-week mission trip participants, and 352 national church-planting partners. Sixty-three percent of MTW missionaries are involved in church planting. MTW is working with RUM to develop campus ministries abroad.
- *PCA Foundation (PCAF)* reported total assets in 2003 of \$31.6 million. \$4,262,000 was disbursed for Kingdom work. Over \$2 million was channeled to PCA local churches.
- *PCA Retirement & Benefits (PCA-RBI)* reported that the PCA Health Plan experienced a 42% growth in participation in 2003. The Long-term Disability plan grew in participation by 5%. Retirement Fund assets in 2003 were \$201.6 million with 4,846 participants.
- *Ridge Haven Conference Center (RH)* reported 1,428 campers and 604 conference participants in 2003 (new high). Renovations continue on existing buildings. A new West Trek Trail is under construction.
- *Reformed University Ministries (RUM)* will have ministries on over 90 campuses this fall. Students from over thirty countries are involved in Reformed University Fellowship International in the USA.

Special Days, Offerings and Events Recommended for PCA Churches

- The month of October 2004, a month of Prayer for global missions.
- October 19, 2004, Covenant College Sunday. Prayer for CC.
- The 2004 WIC Offering for MNA Hispanic-American ministry development.
- A special offering for MTW Compassion Ministry to be taken in 2005, date set by Sessions.
- November 14, 2004, A Day of Prayer and Fasting for the Persecuted Church worldwide.
- November 2004, Thanksgiving Offering for MNA Urban and Mercy Ministries.

- December 2004, Offering for Ministerial Relief (PCA-RBI).
- February 13, 2005, Ridge Haven Sunday, Day of Prayer.
- May 1-7, 2005, Week of Prayer coordinated by CE&P.

- The 33rd General Assembly will convene June 14-17, 2005, in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

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