

PREFACE

In 1980, the General Assembly of the PCA adopted the following directive to the Stated Clerk: "[That] the General Assembly instruct the Stated Clerk to prepare a Digest of Assembly Actions taken which provide guidance in the interpretation and application of our *Book of Church Order*" (M8GA, page 123). The *Digest of the Minutes of the General Assembly* is in keeping with the tradition started back in 1809 when the America Presbyterian Church charged the Stated Clerk "with the business of preparing a book, and having entered therein such decisions of the Assembly as relate to the general government and discipline of the Church, and the duties of judicatures, that such decisions may hereafter be selected and printed for the general use of the churches, if a future Assembly shall so order" [*Minutes* (1809), page 424].

Until recently the *Digest* has been printed in a loose leaf volume which has been updated every year. However, it has become extremely bulky and costly. Hence the two bound volumes. Volume I contains the first four parts of the *PCA Digest*. It contains an extensive Table of Contents which also doubles as an Index for the whole *Digest*, Parts I through V. Part I deals with the digest of General Assembly actions organized under alphabetical topics. Part II includes the "Interpretations of the Constitution": i.e. *Westminster Confession of Faith, Shorter and Larger Catechisms* as well as the *Book of Church Order* with its Form of Government, Rules of Discipline and Directory of Worship. Part III is a summary of the "Judicial Cases." Part IV is "Bylaws, Manuals and Guidelines" for the various committees and agencies of the PCA.

A second volume was printed in 1993 containing *Part V: Position Papers of the Presbyterian Church in America*. The Table of Contents in that volume reflects the topics chosen and placed in alphabetical order. However, pride of place belongs to the "Message to All Churches of Jesus Christ throughout the World" which was adopted at the First General Assembly in December, 1973. This "Message" is at the heart of why the Presbyterian Church in America was established. Each article is introduced by a blocked heading which gives the original source. These include the page numbers for the original article.

It needs to be pointed out that when quoting the *PCA Digest*, caution should be exercised as to whether the quoted section was merely received or if it was adopted as the action of General Assembly. Even when adopted, these papers and decisions reflect the pious advice of that particular General Assembly and have no constitutional force unless changes were adopted in the *Book of Church Order* or other standards of the Church.

There often are cross references to actions of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod which joined the Presbyterian Church in America on June 12, 1982. One year earlier at the 9th General Assembly of the PCA (1981), the General Assembly adopted the report of the Ad Interim Committee to Discuss which included the following paragraph:

"In receiving these denominations, the Presbyterian Church in America recognizes the history of the respective denominations as part of her total history and receives her historical documents as valuable and significant material which will be used in the perfecting of the Church."

Since these volumes of the *Digest* are bound, it is the intention that supplementary sheets will be printed every year. The hope then would be to publish a revised *PCA Digest* every five years, or so.

May the Sovereign Lord of the Church be pleased to use this volume to bring glory to His name through the perfecting of this branch of His Church.

Paul R. Gilchrist
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