

REPORT ON THE ACTIONS OF THE 31ST GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

L. Roy Taylor, Stated Clerk

Ruling Elder Joel Belz Elected Moderator

The 31st General Assembly met in Charlotte, NC June 10-13, 2003. Joel Belz, a Ruling Elder in the Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church of Asheville, NC, was elected moderator. Mr. Belz is the CEO of God's World Publications in Asheville. Joel, the son of a minister, is one of seven siblings in a family that is well known in PCA circles. His parents founded the Cono Christian School in Iowa. Belz is a graduate of Covenant College and has served several terms on the Board of Trustees, in 1977 he was named alumnus of the year. He also holds an M.A. from the University of Iowa. He presided over the Assembly with competence, fairness, and good humor.

Doctrinal Subscription

■ One of the main issues before the Assembly was the proposed amendment to the *Book of Church Order [BCO] 21-4* to require candidates for ordination as ministers to state the specific instances in which they may differ with any statements or propositions in the *Westminster Standards*. The presbytery would be allowed to approve candidates whose stated differences are not out of accord with any fundamental of our system of doctrine, are not hostile to the system of doctrine, or do not "strike at the vitals of religion." The 30th Assembly had approved the proposed amendment and sent it down to the presbyteries for vote. Forty-three of the sixty-four presbyteries were required to affirm the proposal in order for the matter to be before the 31st General Assembly for vote on ratification (*BCO 26-2*). Forty-five presbyteries approved the proposal; nineteen disapproved. The Assembly revised its docket to set aside two hours Wednesday morning for prayer regarding the decision the court was facing. Debate was earnest but respectful as proponents and opponents of the measure argued their respective positions. When the vote was taken, the Assembly approved the amendment by a 60% majority, 816 to 545.

■ The Assembly approved additions to the "Rules of Assembly Operations" ("RAO"): a) 14-3e.5 requiring presbyteries record ministers' and ministerial candidates' stated differences with the Westminster Standards that the presbytery approves as doctrinal exceptions, and b) 14-8 stating that neither the report of the Review of Presbytery Records Committee nor the Assembly's approval or disapproval of the report sets doctrinal precedent.

■ Mississippi Valley Presbytery and Western Carolina Presbytery had proposed overtures to the Assembly, that an *ad interim* committee be erected to study the issue of doctrinal subscription and report to a later Assembly. After another heartfelt but courteous discussion, the church court decided against establishing such a committee.

Final Action on Proposed BCO Amendments

■ A proposed amendment to increase the number of presbyteries required for the General Assembly to assume original jurisdiction over a minister whose presbytery fails to act in discipline against him (*BCO 34-1*) failed to receive the approval of forty-three presbyteries and therefore was not before the Assembly.

■ An amendment to *BCO 21-4* regarding doctrinal subscription was approved. (See above.)

■ An amendment to *BCO 21-5* was approved adding the words "and unity" to ministers' ordination vows.

■ An amendment to *BCO 14-1.12.b.4* was approved changing the name of the denominational agency, "Insurance, Annuities and Relief to "PCA Retirement & Benefits, Inc."

Marriage Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

Philadelphia Presbytery and Rocky Mountain Presbytery overtured the Assembly, as the highest court of the Church, to endorse House Resolution 56, the Federal Marriage Amendment (prohibiting legal recognition of homosexual marriages). The overture also encouraged PCA members, pastors, churches, and institutions to support adoption of the Marriage Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The Federal Marriage Amendment states, "Marriage in the United States shall consist only of a union of a man and a woman." The General Assembly took the following action on Overture 19:

The Church now declares to the world the teaching of God's word concerning the family as summarized in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* 24.1-2.

1. Marriage is to be between one man and one woman: neither is it lawful for any man to have more than one wife, nor for any woman to have more than one husband at a time (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5-6; Proverbs 2:17).
2. Marriage is ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with legitimate issue, and of the Church with an holy seed; and for the preventing of uncleanness (Genesis 2:18; Malachi 2:15; I Corinthians 7:2, 9). Furthermore the Scriptures warn of the danger of any nation that defies God's law regarding the family (Proverbs 14:34).

Racism and the Gospel

Both Nashville Presbytery and Missouri Presbytery sent an overture (Overture 17) asking that the Assembly form an *ad interim* committee to study the issue of Racism and the Gospel. Previously, the 30th Assembly adopted a statement urging racial reconciliation. The 31st Assembly assigned the matter to Mission to North America, which will prepare a draft of a pastoral letter for action by the next General Assembly.

Assembly Action on Other Overtures

- In response to overtures from Chesapeake and Potomac presbyteries, the Assembly said, "Nothing done by the previous General Assembly compels any court of original jurisdiction to exercise discipline on issues pertaining to the report of the *Ad Interim* Committee on Women in the Military." (See *M30GA*, p. 283 ff.)
- Initial approval was given to an amendment to *BCO* 58-5 in the Directory of Worship regarding the version of the Bible used by the presiding minister when stating the words of institution. Addition of the following parenthetical statement will be sent down to presbyteries: "(Some other biblical account of the institution of this part of the Supper may be inserted here)."
- The Assembly turned down several overtures to change procedures for electing members of General Assembly Permanent Committees, particularly in regard to floor nominations.
- An overture was rejected that would have restricted voting by TEs in presbyteries or General Assembly to pastors and associate pastors only (thus disenfranchising assistant pastors, campus ministers, missionaries, seminary professors, etc.).

Church Union Discussions to Begin

The PCA is a member of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), a council of conservative Presbyterian and Reformed denominations. Other denominations include the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Korean American Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, and the Reformed Church in the United States. L'Eglise Reformee du Quebec (the Reformed Church of

Quebec), is in process of joining NAP ARC. The ARPC is the oldest denomination in NAP ARC (est. 1782); the PCA is the largest. The Assembly authorized the Interchurch Relations Committee (IRC) to begin conversations with other NAP ARC denominations with a view toward possible Church union. The Assembly directed the IRC to develop a profile of each NAP ARC denomination to include items such as their origins, unique beliefs and practices, growth, etc. for the information of the Assembly.

Annual Reports of General Assembly Ministries

The ten General Assembly Committees and Agencies made their annual reports.

- The *Administrative Committee and Office of the Stated Clerk (AC/SC)*: The Strategic Planning Committee has received input from interested presbyteries and reported a revised working draft of "A Framework for Planning." The committee was continued until 2005 to continue its work. The AC reported on its study of the relationship of civil and ecclesiastical structure of the PCA, i.e., that the ecclesiastical constitution supersedes the bylaws of incorporation.
- *Committee on Christian Education and Publications (CE&P)* provides regional training events for teachers, youth leaders, and Women in the Church (WIC). CE&P also provides teaching workshops (Equip conferences) and national and regional conferences on children's ministry, women's ministry, mercy ministry, Christian schools, and racial reconciliation.
- *Covenant College (CC)* enrolled 255 new students for the 2002 fall semester. Current applications are 20% ahead of last year. A new Campus Center to include the Frank and Dorothy Brock Library is planned.
- *Covenant Theological Seminary (CTS)* reported that its Youth In Ministry Institute held its first conference for Youth Pastors with over one-third of all PCA youth pastors attending. A record enrollment of 944 students for the 2002 fall semester was registered. Contiguous land has been purchased for campus expansion. A retreat center for pastors is also being planned.
- Mission to North America (MNA) reported that Ron and Judy Haynes will lead the MNA Disaster Relief ministry. MNA, in conjunction with CE&P, provided a Mercy Ministry Conference March 13-15, 2003. MNA is emphasizing a stronger church planting presence in city centers. Two new presbyteries were approved by the Assembly: Houston Metro Presbytery (TX) and Savannah River Presbytery (GA).
- Mission to the World (MTW) reported the PCA missionary force includes 568 career missionaries, 154 two-year missionaries, and 270 missionary interns. MTW works with 204 indigenous church planters. Additionally, 6,511 PCA people were involved in two-week missions trips.
- PCA Foundation (PCAF) created, in 2002, the PCA Endowment Fund which, when funded, will benefit all PCA Committees and Agencies. In 2002, PCAF distributed \$3,802,000 for Kingdom work.
- PCA Retirement & Benefits, Inc. (RBI) has implemented a new PCA Health Insurance Program that is partially self-funded with full reinsurance protection resulting in no rate increase for 2003.
- Ridge Haven Conference Center (RH) reported 1,016 campers and 573 conference participants for 2002. An additional 6,176 persons used the facilities.
- Reformed University Ministries (RUM) began ministry on .five new campuses in 2002: Samford University, University of Arkansas, University of North Florida, University of Utah, and Wake Forest University. Seven new ministries are slated to be launched in the fall of 2003: Davidson College, Colorado State University, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Stanford University, University of Oregon, Virginia Commonwealth University, and Washington University.

PCA *byFaith* Magazine Launched

The first edition of the PCA's denominational magazine was distributed at the General Assembly. It is projected initially to be a bi-monthly publication (every other month). The mission of *byFaith* is to draw readers into the full life of the Church by informing, edifying, and encouraging them with news of God's Kingdom. Through feature stories, news reports, editorial opinions, readers' comments, practical information and relevant biblical and spiritual discussion, the magazine will seek to motivate and equip readers to serve Christ in the Presbyterian Church in America and His Kingdom. Until December 31, 2003, subscriptions are \$14.95 per year. You may order online at www.pcanews.com or from the AC/SC Office, 1700 N. Brown Road, Lawrenceville, GA 30043.

Special Days, Offerings and Events Recommended for PCA Churches

Prayer

- The month of October 2003 - set aside as a month of Prayer for the " 10/40 Window" and World evangelization. The 10/40 Window is the area of the globe between 10° north latitude and 40° north latitude that contains most of the world's unreached people groups.
- Sunday, October 19 - designated to pray for Covenant College
- November 9, 2003 - set as a Day of Prayer and Fasting for the Persecuted Church worldwide
- Sunday, February 8, 2004 - recommended as a Day of Prayer for Ridge Haven
- May 6, 2004 and following - 50 Days of Prayer coordinated by MNA and CE&P

Offerings

- 2003 WIC Offering - will be for Reformed University Ministries
- November 2003 Thanksgiving Offering - for MNA Urban and Mercy Ministries
- December 2003 Offering - for Ministerial Relief (RBI)
- Special Offering for MTW Compassion Ministry - taken in 2004 and distributed by MTW

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 benefit in various ways from the ministry of the AC/SC. We serve the entire PCA. Therefore, we request that all PCA churches consider supporting the AC/SC through the *per capita* giving (Partnership Share) or through *proportional* giving *QA* of one percent of local church offerings). The 2004 Partnership Shares budget is enclosed for your action.

We appreciate your support for the needful ministry of AC/SC.

L. Roy Taylor

Stated Clerk, PCA

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA