

**Actions of the 41st General Assembly of the
Presbyterian Church in America**
L. Roy Taylor, Stated Clerk PCA

41st General Assembly in Greenville, South Carolina

The 41st General Assembly of the PCA met in Greenville, South Carolina, June 17-20, 2013 hosted by Calvary Presbytery. There were 319 Ruling Elders and 1,008 Teaching Elders from 705 churches as registered commissioners. The General Assembly “constitutes the bond of union, peace and correspondence among all its congregations and courts” (*Book of Church Order* 14-1). It is primarily a meeting to conduct and review the work of the denomination. The Assembly, however, is more than just a business meeting. It is an annual church family reunion, an occasion for corporate worship, an opportunity for fellowship, networking, information and training through seminars, renewal of friendships, and learning about ministry resources from exhibitors.

Preachers for the three worship services were Dr. Michael Ross, retiring Moderator; Rev. Brian Habig, pastor of Downtown Presbyterian Church, Greenville; and Dr. David Sinclair, pastor of Clemson Presbyterian Church. Major seminars offered this year were: “Commending and Defending the Total Truthfulness of Scripture,” led by Dr. Ligon Duncan, Pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS, and Dr. Al Mohler, President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; and “Working Together in the PCA to Address Our Cultural Moment,” led by Dr. Ligon Duncan and Dr. Tim Keller, Pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church of New York.

RE Bruce Terrell, Moderator

The tradition in the PCA is to elect a Ruling Elder or Teaching Elder as Moderator in alternating years. This year **Ruling Elder, Bruce Terrell, Executive Director at Redeemer PC of New York** was elected. He was nominated by Dr. Tim Keller. Terrell served the denomination for some twenty years as chief operating officer of the General Assembly’s Committee on Mission to the World. While in Atlanta, he was a Ruling Elder at Intown Community Church. He moved to New York City in 2006 to serve at Redeemer. He currently serves on the General Assembly’s Standing Judicial Commission (SJC). He and his wife, Missy, are parents to two grown children. Though, by his own admission, he is not an expert in the intricacies of *Robert’s Rules of Order*, he moderated the Assembly well with humility, graciousness, and humor. RE Dr. Jay Neikirk was also nominated for Moderator.

Interchurch Relations

- The Assembly received greetings via communications and personal addresses from other denominations, the National Association of Evangelicals, and the World Reformed Fellowship.
- The Assembly voted to approve the application of the Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin) for membership in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC).
- The Assembly instructed the Interchurch Relations Committee further to define its guidelines for reporting regarding the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE).
- The Assembly approved entering into an Assembly-level ecclesiastical relationship with the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico. MTW has been working alongside them for decades in Mexico.

Book of Church Order Changes

- The Assembly **gave final approval** to the following *BCO* amendments: *BCO* 19-2 to require licentiates to state their differences with our doctrinal standards; *BCO* 20-3, 24-2 and 25-4 to specify that a Ruling Elder may moderate a congregational meeting of a church other than his own; *BCO* 42-4

to specify that an appeal must be filed within 30 days of notification; *BCO* 43-2 to specify that a complaint must be filed with the court of original jurisdiction within 60 days of the action of the court; *BCO* 43-3 to specify that a complaint against a higher court must be filed within 30 days of notification.

- **Presbyteries did not approve an amendment** to *BCO* 58-5 that would have prohibited intinction (dipping of bread into the cup in communion). So the amendment was not before the Assembly.
- The Assembly **gave initial approval** to proposed amendments to *BCO* 34-8 and 37-6, to specify that an indefinitely suspended or deposed minister may be restored to office by a three-fourth's majority vote of his Presbytery; and to *BCO* 43-10, to require the higher court to accept a judicial reference from a lower court when a complaint has been sustained for failure to indict. Two-thirds of Presbyteries must approve the proposals for the next Assembly to take final action (*BCO* 26-2).

General Assembly Ministries Reports

1. The **Administrative Committee** (AC) has transitioned *byFaith* Magazine from a subscription model to free distribution to PCA families and upgraded byfaithonline web magazine. The AC has been considering Ruling Elder participation in the Assembly and invites input on its initial suggestions.
2. **Christian Education and Publications** (CEP) has a new Coordinator, Dr. Stephen Estock, who is seeking to lead CEP in retooling its ministry of connecting and equipping God's people for discipleship. The Assembly honored the memory and ministry of Rev. Tom Patete (1941-2012), who served Great Commissions Publications as Executive Director for 34 years.
3. **Mission to North America** (MNA) assists churches and Presbyteries in establishing church planting initiatives. The Assembly approved the **formation of Tidewater Presbytery effective October 19, 2013**, as the 81st Presbytery. MNA responded to nine disasters in 2012 to provide relief.
4. **Mission to the World** (MTW) Coordinator, Dr. Paul Kooistra, announced that MTW is seeking to find his successor as he anticipates retirement. MTW now ministers in eighty-five countries.
5. **Reformed University Ministries** (RUM) Coordinator, Dr. Rod Mays, announced that RUM is seeking to find his successor as he anticipates retirement. RUM now ministers on over 140 campuses in 38 states and 60 Presbyteries.
6. **Covenant College** (CC) again was listed as one of the top ten regional colleges in *U.S. News and World Report* and noted as one of America's Best Colleges by *Forbes*. An MAT degree program in teaching has been initiated.
7. **Covenant Theological Seminary** (CTC) has a new President, Dr. Mark Dalbey. Curriculum for the M.Div, the ordination preparation residential degree, has been revised. The redesigned MA in Theological Studies via distance education has been accredited.
8. **Ridge Haven** (RH) Conference Center is experiencing unusual growth in its camps and conferences. RH is improving its facilities and is purchasing a contiguous property that will enhance its ministry.
9. **PCA Foundation** (PCAF) distributed \$6,739,000 in 2012 from churches, individuals, and families to PCA General Assembly Ministries, PCA churches and other Christian Ministries.
10. **PCA Retirement-Benefits, Inc.** (PCA-RBI) is seeking to raise \$10 million for assistance to impoverished widows of ministers, to assist ministers and church employees in preparing for retirement, and to enable all retirement plan participants to achieve the best investment program possible.

Major Issues of Debate

- **Judicial Matters** – the General Assembly has a 24-man Standing Judicial Commission (SJC), to which it has committed all judicial matters (complaints and appeals) arising from Presbyteries (*Book of Church Order [BCO]* 15-4). Each SJC member takes a vow to make his decisions “according to the Constitution of the PCA, through my best efforts applied to nothing other than the record of the

case and other documents properly before me” (*RAO* 17-1, vow 4). The SJC reports its decisions on cases. The General Assembly does not vote on a judicial decision unless there is a minority report submitted by at least one-third of the voting members of the SJC (*BCO* 15-5 c.) The General Assembly may direct the SJC to retry a case, if the Committee on Constitutional Business (CCB) takes exception to the minutes of the SJC citing alleged violation of procedures specified in the *Operating Manual of the SJC (OMSJC)* (see *BCO* 15-5; *Rules of Assembly Operations [RAO]* 17-1). However, under *RAO* 17-1, the CCB may not delve into “judicial decisions, cases or reports” of the SJC. Pacific Northwest Presbytery and Missouri Presbytery had each tried and acquitted one of their ministers on allegations of holding to several aberrant theological views known as “**Federal Vision Theology.**” Complaints were filed with the SJC on both cases. The SJC, with two dissenting votes, denied the complaint arising from Pacific Northwest (**Case 2012-05, Hedman v. PNWP**). There was no request for a rehearing by the complainant (*OMSJC* 17.9 a.), nor was there a minority report of the SJC submitted (*BCO* 15-5 c). One dissenting opinion and two concurring opinions were filed by SJC members. The SJC ruled the Missouri complaint (**Case 2012-09, Bennett v. MOP**) administratively out of order on the ground that the complainant, having left the PCA, did not have standing to file a complaint (*BCO* 43-1). There were two negative votes within the SJC.

- In addition to a dissenting opinion within the SJC, **Case 2012-05 Hedman v. PNWP**, prompted: Overture 19 from Illiana Presbytery asking the General Assembly to rehear the case; a minority report from CCB taking exception to the SJC’s decision and asking the Assembly to retry the case; a minority report from the Review of Presbytery Records (RPR) objecting to the Presbytery’s original decision on the case; and Overtures 20, 21, and 22, asking the General Assembly to assume original jurisdiction over the minister in question and retry him. Overture 19 was ruled out of order under *BCO* 15-4, 15-5, *RAO* 17-1, and *OMSJC* 17.9 a. A minority report on Overture 19 was ruled out of order because Overture 19 itself had been ruled out of order. The RPR minority report and the CCB minority report were ruled out of order under *BCO* 40-3, 15-4, 15-5, 31-2, *RAO* 16-8, 17-1 and *Roberts Rules of Order (RONR* [11th ed.] p. 589, ll. 17-18). The three overtures requesting original jurisdiction were referred to the SJC under *BCO* 34-1 and *RAO* 17-2 for the SJC’s consideration. The SJC dissenting opinion, the overtures, the CCB minority report, the Overtures Committee minority report, and the RPR minority report on this matter advanced similar arguments.
- There was an overture (Overture 23 from Great Lakes Presbytery) to direct the SJC to find **Case 2012-09, Bennett v. MOP** in order and hear the case. Overture 23 was ruled out of order on the essentially same grounds as was Overture 19. A minority report on Overture 23 was not in order because Overture 23 itself was not in order.
- **Presbytery Actions** – In recent years the Assembly has dealt with the matter of **Paedo-communion** (when and under what circumstances baptized children may properly receive communion).
 - In 1986-1988 an *ad interim* committee of the General Assembly studied the issue of paedo-communion. The Assembly adopted the recommendation “That the PCA continue the practice defined in our standards and administer the Lord’s Supper ‘only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves.’” Some Presbyteries have allowed ministers to hold to paedo-communion as a theory, but they may not practice paedo-communion in the PCA.
 - The 41st Assembly accepted as satisfactory Pacific Northwest Presbytery’s response to an exception of substance on the issue. An RPR minority report that the response be rejected failed.
 - The 41st General Assembly cited Central Florida Presbytery to respond to an exception of substance that the Presbytery allowed a candidate to take an exception to the *Westminster Standards* on paedo-communion that appears to be unconstitutional.

Ad Interim Committee on Insider Movements in Islam

The 39th Assembly formed a committee to study Insider Movements in Islam and Bible translation. The so-called Insider Movement is composed of people who assert that they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, but remain in the Muslim religious community. The Bible translation challenge is how to present the Lord Jesus Christ as God the Son without any idea of sexual union between God the Father and Mary.

- The Ad Interim Committee presented a partial report in 2012 entitled **“Part One – Like Father, Like Son: Divine Familial Language in Bible Translation.”** *The Assembly does not adopt the extensive narrative text of reports which are for information and study. The Assembly adopts only the recommendations of a report, (RONR [11th ed.] pp. 507-508).* The 40th General Assembly adopted a recommendation that, “since social familial terms fail to capture the biblical meaning of ‘Son’ (*huios*) and ‘Son of God’ (*huios tou theou*) applied to Jesus and ‘Father’ (*pater*) applied to God, Bibles should always translate divine familial names using common biological terms.”
- The Committee presented to this year’s Assembly the second part of its report entitled **“Part Two – Theology, Gospel Missions, and Insider Movements.”** A minority report sought to add more study materials. There was debate over the use of the Arabic term *allah* (God) by Arabic-speaking Christians. The Assembly recommitted the report to the committee to submit a final report in 2014.
- The Assembly continued the committee for another year, to be funded by designated gifts sent to the Administrative Committee. The **report is available** at www.pcaac.org.

PCA Statistical Changes Reported as of December 31, 2012

- 50.8% of PCA churches submitted an Annual Statistical Report for 2012.
- Churches and Missions – 1,777, a net increase of six after six dissolutions and five transfers out. The PCA now averages organizing one new church per month. Forty-two new PCA mission churches were begun in 2012. Over 300 PCA reported church planting projects are in process.
- Professions of faith – 9,145, a decrease of 922 from the previous year.
- Total membership – 364,019, an increase of 12,613
- Total Family Units – 138,010, an increase of 502
- Sunday School Attendance – 101,809 a decrease of 819
- Per capita Giving – \$2,580, an increase of \$119
- Per capita Benevolences – \$440 an increase of \$4
- Total Reported Congregational Disbursements -- \$743,643,457 an increase of \$35,960,789

Suggested Prayer, Offerings and Events

- Prayer for Covenant College as determined by local sessions
- November 2013, a Month of Prayer for Global Missions (MTW)
- A special offering for MTW Compassion Ministries on a date chosen by local sessions.
- Global Missions Conference (MTW & RUM), November 8-10, Greenville, SC.
- November 10, 2013, a Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church Worldwide (MTW).
- Annual Thanksgiving Offering for MNA Mercy Ministries and Ethnic Training
- December 2013, Offering for Ministerial Relief (RBI)
- 2013 Love Gift for PCA Women in the Church (CEP) is for Ridge Haven Conference Center
- 50 Days of Prayer prior for the General Assembly to the 42nd Assembly (CEP & MNA)
- **The 42nd General Assembly will meet in Houston, Texas June 17-20, 2014**