

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHMEN UNITED

Contact

Number 10

July, 1971

REPORT ON THE 111th GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

(Reported by Ruling Editor W. Jack Williamson, a member of PCU and Commissioner to 111th General Assembly.)

The Assembly met at Massanetta Springs, Virginia. This is the camp grounds of the Synod of Virginia in the beautiful Shenandoah Valley. 448 out of a possible 450 commissioners were enrolled.

MODERATOR

Dr. William A. Benfield, Jr., the retiring Moderator, preached the opening sermon on the subject of "Unity in Diversity" using as his text the statement of Jesus—"Any one who isn't against us is for us" (Mark 9:39). He developed as a theme—"the truth that in the Christian fellowship we can have unity in diversity, can be applied to the diversities that exist within a single denomination and certainly within our own Presbyterian Church in the United States."

Later, Dr. Benfield gave his report as retiring Moderator—almost half of his report dealt with his justification of the Consultation on Vietnam which he recently attended in Paris. He reported that during his moderatorial year he had visited in 60 of our 73 Presbyteries and spent at least 80% of his time in travel and work as Moderator.

The opening business session dealt with the election of the new Moderator. Nominated were Dr. Ben Lacy Rose, professor at Union Theological Seminary; Dr. D. James Kennedy, pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.; Dr. Harry A. Fifield, pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Atlanta, Ga.; and Mrs. Jane Stitt, the wife of the recent president of Austin Theological Seminary, Austin, Texas. The balloting was as follows:

	First Ballot	Second Ballot
Rose	219	271
Kennedy	132	170
Fifield	75	
Stitt	16	

Dr. Rose than moderated the meetings. He performed in a fair and efficient manner.

ELECTION TO PERMANENT NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Under the rules the retiring Moderator has the privilege of nominating three individuals for the permanent nominating committee. In past years these have been elected without opposition. This year the conservatives decided to nominate in opposition. The balloting was as follows:

Place No. 1

Moderator's nominee—Mrs. C. L. Winkler	219
Other nominee—Mrs. Billy Graham	212

Place No. 2

Moderator's nominee—Mr. Alex Booth	239
Other nominee—Mr. Walter D. Shepherd	191

Place No. 3

Moderator's nominee—Rev. L. B. Horn	246
Other nominee—Dr. C. Darby Fulton	170

When this Assembly failed to elect Mrs. Ruth Graham, the wife of the most noted evangelist of our times, it became obvious to this observer that the establishment had the votes to win the crucial issues. And so they did. The votes were closer than in recent years; but the conservatives did not have the strength to win the important issues. For instance, the vote on the National Council of Churches was 53% to stay and 47% to get out (213 to 189). Only 24 votes kept us in the National Council. This is closer than at any time in recent memory. But we still remain a member.

ACTIONS AFFECTING FORM OR STRUCTURE

1. Restructuring—

(a) Approved restructuring of Synods by vote of 217 to 207. Synods will be reduced from 15 to 7 effective July 1, 1973. In the meantime, these new Synods are to appoint committees and consider restructuring of presbyteries to also be effective July 1, 1973.

(b) Refused by vote of 266 to 153 to delay enactment of restructuring until after final determination of PCUS-UPCUSA union.

2. UPCUSA Union

(a) Refused by vote of 266 to 118 to dismiss our committee of 12 negotiating a plan of union with UPCUSA.

(b) Held that General Assembly does **not** have the power to provide for a division of the church by realignment; and thus ruled that it would be unconstitutional to give this committee of 12 authority or instructions to develop an alternate plan for realignment.

(c) Held that it would be unconstitutional for PCUS to join UPCUSA in union discussions currently being carried on with Second Cumberland Presbyterian Church, The African Methodist Episcopal Church, The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. General Assembly said that 3 of these 4 churches were non-reformed bodies; and it was therefore impossible to discuss union with them as our BCO now reads.

(d) Voted to enlarge committee of 24 by addition of one conservative member to be appointed by the Moderator from each denomination.

3. New Confession:

Heard a report that the proposed new Confession of Faith would probably be divided as follows:

Chapter 1	God
Chapter 2	God and His People
Chapter 3	God was in Christ
Chapter 4	The Holy Spirit
Chapter 5	God and the World
Chapter 6	God and the Future

4. Theology:

Adopted with minor changes a paper presented by The Permanent Theological Committee on "The Person and Work of The Holy Spirit." To many, this paper moves our church away from the historical position of reformed theology toward the penecostal position of contemporary ecstatic utterances as evidence of the "baptism of the Holy Spirit."

5. Amendments To BCO:

Approved and enacted the following amendments to BCO, the same having been approved by a majority of the presbyteries, to wit:

(a) Made office of deacon optional.

(b) Reduced number of presbyteries required for making a synod from 3 to 2.

(c) Provided for optional organization of synods by either former method of choosing commissioners from each church or by a new method of sending commissioners to synod as chosen delegates by each presbytery.

6. Voting Structure:

(a) Sent to presbyteries for advice and consent an amendment to BCO 16-1 giving each church a Ruling Elder representative at presbytery for each 750 communicants.

(b) Asked Permanent Judicial Commission to study imbalance between number of Ministers and Ruling Elders having rights to attend presbytery meetings and make recommendations for correction.

(c) Turned down all proposed forms of unit voting by presbyteries; but asked Permanent Judicial Commission to prepare, draft and present to the 1972 General Assembly its recommendations for weighing votes of presbyteries on changes in BCO according to number of commissioners each sends to the General Assembly.

7. Union Presbyteries:

Referred to Permanent Judicial Commission for study a recommendation by the Standing Committee on Judicial Business to declare unconstitutional the union presbyteries amendment to the BCO (Chapter 32) on the grounds that the previous General Assemblies erred in enacting the same without the advice and consent of ¾ths of the presbyteries.

ACTIONS AFFECTING PROCEDURE

1. By a vote of 228 to 139 refused to enact the proposed amendment to BCO 220-1. This amendment had received the approval of 51 presbyteries. It provided that it would be the responsibility of sessions, presbyteries and synods to lead churches to understand and to **participate** in the work and mission of the church as expressed by the higher courts. Many felt this could be used as a disciplinary tool; and it failed to pass.

2. By a vote of 270 to 126 adopted a minority report on E. C. O. E. which (a) "viewed its **method of operation** as a grave departure from orderly processes and as a serious threat to the peace and unity of the church" and (b) recommended to presbyteries that no disciplinary action be taken against anyone for activity in E. C. O. E. prior to July 1, 1971.

3. Noting that PCUS now has 4063 churches and 4595 ministers, approved an Ad Interim Committee to convene a massive consultation to explore and recommend ways PCUS may marshal its total resources in a **systems approach** to solve the problem of over supply of ministers and their pastoral re-location.

4. Changed procedure on moderator's election at General Assembly to allow one nominating speech of 5 minutes and give each nominee 15 minutes to state position on 3 major issues chosen by program committee.

5. Refused to appoint Ad Interim Committee to survey the investment policies, objectives, guidelines and decision-making procedures of all General Assembly Boards and Agencies.

6. Enacted BCO amendment requiring 10 days written notice to each minister and clerk of session before a presbytery votes on any amendment to BCO.

7. Refused to adopt a resolution which would have permitted, through creation of provisional synods and presbyteries, churches to **now** join the UPCUSA and take their property with them.

ACTIONS AFFECTING PROGRAMS

1. Refused by vote of 209 to 176 to disassociate from magazine Colloquy.

2. By only 24 votes (213 to 189) voted to continue our membership in National Council of Churches. And by a vote of 216 to 185 voted to continue our membership in World Council of Churches. Adopted a statement that this vote to stay in these bodies "is not an agreement with all of the statements and actions of these two bodies but is an attempt to substantiate the overriding good which is done through dialogue with representatives of other Christian bodies . . ."

3. Instructed the Presbyterian Survey that it "should not be a one sided news medium but one of its main functions is to present honestly and impartially the major issues facing members of the Body of Christ in the world today."

4. Instructed the Board of National Ministries to investigate a possible affiliate relationship with Rev. Larry Haygood's vocational school in Tuskegee, Alabama, and to report back to 1972 General Assembly.

PRONUNOCEMENTS

1. Refused to adopt resolution on Vietnam War calling for an immediate ceasefire and for a set date for withdrawal of all troops. Instead, by a vote of 209 to 189 adopted a resolution stating that we believe the war in Indo China should be stopped but commending and supporting the President in his efforts to bring an end to this war and for the disengagement and return of our forces.

2. Urged all "to support and strengthen in every way possible the unified, racially inclusive public school system in their communities and not to support any group or educational institution which opposes a unified, racially inclusive public school system."

OBSERVATIONS

1. The conservatives and moderates were able to cooperate toward common objectives at this General Assembly. The strongest effort at any time in my recollection was made to elect conservative commissioners in the presbyteries, to locate and evaluate the commissioners elected, to acquaint them with the issues, to prepare and direct them at the Assembly, and to give organization and leadership at the Assembly. These goals were accomplished in a remarkably effective and efficient manner. Much thought, effort and preparation had been given by so many prior to the Assembly; and this fine spirit of effective cooperation followed through the Assembly. There were between 10 and 20 leaders who were not commissioners and who came to this assembly and devoted their time and efforts toward these goals of preparation and organization. In past years I have left the Assembly wishing that we had done more in preparation and had better organization at the meetings. But this year, I came away satisfied that a maximum effort had been made. It was not perfect; but it far exceeded anything that has been done in the past. Yet, with all this, we were not able to win any significant victories. This observer questions whether such an effort can be mounted again in subsequent years. There is the lingering feeling that this year was the test. The question now is—"Where do we go from here?"

2. We are entering a period when the issues will not be so clearly delineated. COCU is dormant. UPCUSA Union will be delayed indefinitely. In the meantime an effort will be made to create a mood of reconciliation in an attempt to quiet and ease the tensions within the church. It is obvious to and admitted by all that UPCUSA Union cannot pass in PCUS at this time. It is also in deep trouble in the UPCUSA Church. Strong elements in the UPCUSA Church are fighting such union. All of which means that the proponents of such union must delay or be defeated. There is not any slackening of the zeal of the proponents of such union (Dr. Rose declared in his acceptance speech that this was the principal item he would seek and promote) but it is a simple recognition by such proponents of the realistic facts and a willingness to wait and work for a more advantageous time. During this delay, there will be efforts to change the voting structure in PCUS. **Unit voting** was turned down by this assembly; but it is not dead. The Permanent Judicial Commission was instructed to look into and report to the next assembly on some method of **weighted** voting by

presbyteries based on the number of commissioners each sends to the General Assembly. During this delay, massive restructuring of presbyteries will take place. Proponents of union will be willing to wait until this restructuring has been accomplished to re-evaluate their possibilities with the new presbyteries. The length of the delay will depend on their evaluation of these factors and their determination of a propitious time for the vote. To this observer, this delay in the UPCUSA Union vote will be a minimum of 4-5 years and possibly longer. If these observations be true, then those who desire a church true to the Reformed Faith and Order face real crucial decisions as to their future course. Can an effective witness be maintained within the present structure or must another be sought? Will there now be massive fragmentation by individuals and churches unless some satisfactory alternative is given? Realignment was ruled out as a viable alternative at this assembly as it was held to be constitutionally impossible. Shall we fight through this period of indefinite delay or shall we choose another course? This is the decision that is immediately upon us. Who knows the answer? We need to be in much and constant prayer that God will lead us in His way and we will be willing to follow.

3. The emotional cause in the church is no longer civil rights. It is women's liberation and youth rule. Anything suggested by or for either group carries such an emotional swell of approval that it is guaranteed of immediate adoption without any questions or rational evaluation.

END

ANNUAL MEETING OF PCU

Asheville, N. C., August 11, 1971

For All Ministers and Session Representatives
Who Have Subscribed to The Declaration
of Commitment

Business Meeting, Buncombe County High School
3:00-5:00 P. M.

Banquet for Members and Wives
SHERATON MOTEL 6:30 P. M.

Banquet Tickets \$3.50

For Motel Reservation for Night of July 11 and
Banquet Tickets Write:

PCU, 263 CANDLER DR.

Macon, Ga. 31204

THE DECLARATION OF COMMITMENT

To the membership of the Presbyterian Church, U. S., in the light of the questions and concerns being expressed in the Church as to the nature of our faith and order, I(we), the undersigned, do solemnly declare my(our) conviction:

—That the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ turns men from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. By coming to faith in Him alone is there genuine reconciliation between man and God and man and man.

—That the Holy Scriptures are the infallible Word of God, and that these Scriptures commit the Church to a mission whose primary end is the salvation and nurture of souls.

—That Christian faith must bear fruit if it is to remain virile. These fruits vary from believer to believer. But common to them all are evidences of love, concern, and neighborliness, toward all races of men without partiality and without prejudice, especially to the poor, the oppressed, and the disadvantaged. The man of faith views all men as neighbors and himself as debtor, for Christ's sake.

—That for the implementation of the above principles, in obedience to our ordination vows, we must strive to preserve a confessional Church, thoroughly Reformed and Presbyterian. Thus our support of or opposition to any proposed union will be determined by these considerations.

—That being fully committed by our ordination vows to the system of doctrine set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, we must oppose all efforts to change in substance or otherwise debase our historic doctrinal commitment.

—That we are, in the same context, by vow committed to historic Presbyterian polity with its representative system and its parity among teaching and ruling elders. Thus, we are forced to oppose the effort to take our Church into the massive organization envisioned by COCU.

—That, should the basic theology or polity of the Church be altered or diluted, we shall be prepared to take such actions as may be necessary to fulfill the obligations imposed by our ordination vows to maintain our Presbyterian faith.

Signature

HERE WE STAND

NOTICE TO ALL

Your Executive Committee is constantly at work and prayer to assist you in how best to meet the immediate crisis in the Church. Ministers and Session representatives should be present at the August 11th meeting without fail.

PRAY WITHOUT CEASING!

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHMEN UNITED CONTACT is an occasional publication of Presbyterian Churchmen United, an organization of ministers and sessions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. Issued from the office of the executive secretary, John E. Richards, 263 Candler Drive, Macon, Georgia 31204.

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REPORT OF
111th GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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