



ASSEMBLY IN BRIEF 2012

June 30-July 7 • Pittsburgh, Penn. • PC(USA)

Walking, Running, Soaring in Hope—Isa. 40:31

Contemplative Caution

In an interview with Presbyterian News Service just prior to the 220th General Assembly, outgoing moderator Cindy Bolbach urged caution, saying, “I’m not sure we can absorb anything that’s another huge change.” She was referring to the new Form of Government and the new standard for ordination which were both approved by the 219th General Assembly and ratified by the presbyteries a year ago.

A deeply divided Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) was facing numerous more controversial issues June 30-July 7 in Pittsburgh, but the 688 commissioners and more than 200 advisory delegates that comprised the 220th General Assembly seemed determined to follow Bolbach’s advice. Repeatedly throughout the week, they prayed, worshiped, discussed and debated such volatile questions as whether to:

- change the PC(USA)’s definition of marriage;
- divest from three companies benefitting from “non-peaceful pursuits” in Israel-Palestine; eliminate synods and allow creation of non-geographic presbyteries;
- overhaul the denomination’s four special offerings;
- revise ordination standards for church officers;
- lift a boycott of Arizona because of that state’s immigration law.

In each case and many others among the more the 800+ items of business, these commissioners and advisory delegates deliberated carefully and at length—Friday evening’s session, for instance, did not conclude until 1:30 a.m.—and at the end of the day opted for actions that seemed least likely to plunge the PC(USA) into further turmoil.

They were steered adeptly through their work by the Rev. Neal D. Presa of Elizabeth

Presbytery, who was elected moderator Saturday evening on the fourth ballot over three other candidates—the Rev. Sue Krummel of Great Rivers Presbytery, the Rev. Robert Austell Jr. of Charlotte Presbytery and the Rev. Randy Branson of Palo Duro Presbytery—and by General Assembly Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons, who on Sunday was re-elected to a second four-year term without opposition.



The Rev. Dr. Neal D. Presa, Moderator of the 220th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).
Photo by Michael Whitman



Middle East peace

After heated but civil debate Thursday evening, the Assembly—by a razor-thin margin—said no to divestment as part of its position on peace in the Middle East. The Assembly Committee on Middle East Peacemaking Issues had proposed that the PC(USA) divest from three companies that the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) says are profiting from non-peaceful business pursuits in Israel and Palestine—Caterpillar, Motorola Solutions and Hewlett-Packard. Instead, by a vote of 333-331 the Assembly adopted a minority report that calls for the church to “pursue a positive and creative course of action” in Israel-Palestine, including “a plan of active investment in projects that will support collaboration among Christians, Jews and Muslims and help in the development of a viable infrastructure for a future Palestinian state.” Also, the Assembly rejected by a vote of 463-175 an overture that would have branded Israeli law and practices “apartheid” against Palestinian people. And the Assembly called for a boycott of “all products made by enterprises in Israeli settlements on [occupied] Palestinian land.”

By a vote of 531-127, the Assembly voted to support a diplomatic solution to tensions between the United States and Iran over that country’s nuclear program. The action calls for direct unconditional negotiations between the two countries and opposes “pre-emptive military action by any nation against Iran and by Iran against any nation.” The Assembly also voted 621-19 to “stand with the Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon, our partner church, and other churches who are facing unprecedented challenges now and are attempting to respond through new forms of witness.” The action supports “full public congressional debate” of any potential U.S. military intervention in Syria and careful examination of the humanitarian impact of any intervention.

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The Rev. Gradye Parsons. Photo by Danny Bolin

Leaders

In addition to the election of Presa as moderator and the reelection of Parsons as stated clerk, the Assembly confirmed the reelections of the Rev. Jay Hudson as president and CEO of the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program and of Marc Lewis as president and publisher of the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. The Assembly also confirmed the election of two seminary presidents: the Rev. Frank Yamada at McCormick Theological Seminary and the Rev. Jim McDonald at San Francisco Theological Seminary.

The Assembly was stunned Wednesday morning when its vice moderator, the Rev. Tara Spuhler McCabe, resigned. McCabe, a member of National Capital Presbytery, cited controversy surrounding her recent signing of a marriage license for two lesbian women in Washington, D.C. Same-gender marriage is legal in the nation’s capital. The Assembly had confirmed her appointment Sunday by a vote of 55-44%. Later Wednesday, the Assembly confirmed Presa’s choice of the Rev. Tom Trinidad of Pueblo Presbytery to replace McCabe as vice moderator.



220th GA commissioners and advisory delegates pray during the GA Breakfast on Monday morning. Photo by Danny Bolin

Same-gender marriage

After several hours of debate on Friday, the Assembly defeated a motion from its Assembly Committee on Civil Union and Marriage Issues to propose an amendment to the *Book of Order* that would change the definition of marriage from “a man and a woman” to “two people.” The vote was 308-338. Along the way the Assembly declined to issue an authoritative interpretation that would have allowed ministers at their own discretion to perform same-gender marriages in states where those marriages are legal.

And by a vote of 489-152, the Assembly “in a desire to promote the peace, unity and purity of the church” voted to “move the whole Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) into a season of serious study and discernment concerning its meaning of Christian marriage “between now and the General Assembly in 2014. The Office of Theology and Worship was asked to prepare educational materials for the effort that include “the relevant Scriptures, key methods of biblical interpretation, current understandings of our Constitution, and some suggested guidance for prayerful and reconnecting ways of listening to one another.”

Riverside Conversation with the Nature of the Church in the 21st Century Committee. Photo by Danny Bolin



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Ordination standards

By a vote of 437-169, the Assembly refused to restore “fidelity in marriage or chastity in singleness” to the *Book of Order*. That language was removed a year ago in voting by the presbyteries. The defeated language would have added to G-2.0104b “the commitment to live a chaste and disciplined life, whether in holy marriage between a man and a woman or in single life.”

By a vote of 329-275 the Assembly voted to propose an amendment to the ordination standard in G-2.0104a that the manner of life of church officers should “include repentance of sin and diligent use of the means of grace.”

The Assembly also adopted a statement that “acknowledges that faithful Presbyterians earnestly seeking to follow Jesus Christ hold different views about what the Scriptures teach concerning the morality of committed, same-gender relationships” and that “the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) does not have one interpretation of Scripture in this matter.”



Young Adult Advisory Delegates lead an energizer on Thursday night. Photo by Danny Bolin

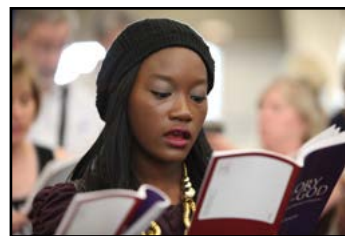
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Special offerings

By a vote of 395-147, the Assembly voted to retain the PC(USA)’s four special offerings in their current form. The Assembly’s Special Offerings Advisory Task Force had recommended wholesale changes in the offerings—the Pentecost Offering, the Peacemaking Offering, the Christmas Joy Offering and the One Great Hour of Sharing offering—designed to reverse the decline in offering receipts over the last 10 years. The task force had also proposed that the distribution of the offerings be redirected from specific programs to more general causes to be determined by the General Assembly Mission Council.

Other proposed changes by the task force included eliminating the Peacemaking Offering and replacing it with an offering to benefit world mission, while moving peacemaking ministries to the One Great Hour of Sharing offering. The One Great Hour currently funds Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, the Presbyterian Hunger Program and the Self-Development of People program. A proposal from the Assembly Committee on Mission Coordination suggesting a combined peacemaking and world mission offering was also rejected.

The Assembly approved the renaming of the General Assembly Mission Council to the Presbyterian Mission Agency. The name change was triggered by the new Form of Government, which replaces the term “governing body” with “council.” The GAMC (now Presbyterian Mission Agency) is an entity of the General Assembly, not a governing body (now council).



Worshippers use a sampler edition of “Glory to God,” the new Presbyterian hymnal that will be published in 2013. Photos by Danny Bolin



Governance

Thursday morning, the Assembly by a vote of 480-169 rejected a proposal from its General Assembly Commission on Mid Councils Issues that would allow the creation of non-geographic presbyteries “for particular missional purposes.” The Assembly added a comment “that the congregations be encouraged to engage in collaborative missional endeavors, irrespective of their locations within particular presbytery geographic boundaries.”

The Assembly referred another recommendation regarding the future of synods. The Commission on Mid Councils had recommended that synods be eliminated as ecclesiastical units of the PC(USA) and “repurposed” for mission activities determined by their member presbyteries. The Assembly Committee on Mid Councils Issues sought a task force composed of two representatives from each synod to redraw synod boundaries in ways that will make them more effective. Instead the Assembly voted 364-293 to refer the matter of synods to a task force that is charged to further discuss, refine and bring to the next Assembly recommendations that consider the composition and organization of synods and presbyteries in support of missional congregations.

Thursday afternoon, the Assembly affirmed by voice vote its Assembly Committee on Church Polity’s recommendation that the PC(USA)’s property clause—that holds that all church property is held in trust for the denomination—be upheld. Two presbyteries had submitted overtures that would have declared that sessions own the property of PC(USA) congregations. The Assembly also approved the Presbyterian Mission Agency’s 2013-2016 “Mission Work Plan.”



The Rev. J. Herbert Nelson, director, PC(USA) Office of Public Witness, addresses the Peace Fellowship Breakfast. Photo by Danny Bolin



Baritone Warren Cooper, with the Presbybop Quartet, sang during opening worship. Photo by Danny Bolin

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Doctrinal statements

On a voice vote, the Assembly sent to the presbyteries for their votes a new translation of the 1563 Heidelberg Catechism. The new translation from the original German-language version corrects numerous errors in translation from the original, expunges later additions to the catechism that were not in the 1563 original and restores scriptural citations that were included in the original but have never been included in PC(USA) translations.

Also on recommendation of its Assembly Committee on Confessions of the Church, the Assembly voted 395-264 to initiate the study process that could lead to the inclusion of the Belhar Confession in the PC(USA)'s *The Book of Confessions*. The Assembly in 2010 took the same action, but Belhar fell eight votes short of the required two-thirds affirmative vote by the presbyteries. The Assembly action included funds for education across the church about the confession, which was developed by South African theologians in the 1980s as their response to the sin of racism and the practice of apartheid in that country.



Wendell Freeman, a Tuskegee Airman and bombardier, addressed the National Black Presbyterian Caucus Dinner. Photo by Michael Whitman

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Teaching elder commissioner Rex Espiritu studies a business item for the Middle East Peacemaking Issues Committee. Photo by Danny Bolin

Social justice

Thursday afternoon the Assembly passed a list of 23 proposals from its Assembly Committee on Social Justice Issues. They included;

- support of the Environmental Protection Agency; support for a “50 Year Farm Bill” that seeks long-term goals of renewability and sustainability, environmentally sound farming practices, participatory research and decision-making and revitalized rural communities and food economies;
 - several proposals on economic justice, including the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy’s report, “World of Hurt, Word of Life: Renewing God’s Communion in the Work of Economic Reconstruction”;
 - advocacy efforts for victims of sexual assault;
 - a statement on affordable housing and the mortgage crisis;
 - a call for trade reform; and
 - an investigation of the corporate practices of for-profit prisons.
- In its closest social justice issues vote, the Assembly voted 334-306 to call for an end to corporal punishment in homes, schools, pediatric facilities, hospitals, orphanages, clinics, state institutions and childcare facilities.

Church growth and evangelism

On Friday night, the Assembly declared “a churchwide commitment to ignite a movement that results in the creation of 1001 new worshiping communities in the next 10 years.” Pittsburgh is a hotbed for the creation of experimental new churches and several of them were visited by Assembly-goers on July 1, when Sunday worship was held in local churches rather than the convention center.

The Assembly approved the report of its Special Committee on the Nature of the Church in the 21st Century. The report’s plethora of recommendations include finding new ways to start new churches and revitalize existing churches, to affirm bi-vocational ministry, encouraging seminaries to offer courses that help prepare students for emerging cultural realities, urging presbyteries to develop better strategies for reaching immigrant communities, expanding distribution of resources in multiple languages, revamping the church’s compensation system, reaffirming the parity of ministry between teaching elders and ruling elders, training church leaders about white privilege and how it diminishes the church’s witness, developing better resources to help councils of the church move into the future, and mobilizing the church’s public witness.

And the Assembly asked the Presbyterian Mission Agency to provide “basic accessibility of essential GAMC information to major non-English language groups, specifically Korean and Spanish.



Commissioners spent long hours studying, discussing and praying about important issues before them. Photo by Michael Whitman

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Above: Members of the Committee on Local Arrangements (COLA) prayer team with coordinator the Rev. Tammy Wiens, center. COLA volunteers met regularly throughout the assembly to pray. Left: George Brevard and Jeremiah McBride take advantage of a spirituality center that offered a variety of practices and multi-sensory approaches to prayer. Photo by Kim Coulter

Immigration

The Assembly declined to lift a prohibition on holding national church meetings in Arizona. The ban was put in place by the Assembly in 2010 after the Arizona legislature passed an immigration law the church said would jeopardize the rights and safety of Presbyterians of color. Three-fourths of the law was recently thrown out by the U.S. Supreme Court, but the Assembly considered what remains of the legislation still a threat to people of color.

On recommendation of its Assembly Committee on Immigration Issues, the Assembly also renewed its call for comprehensive immigration reform and called on all Presbyterians to “take actions concerning the place and plight of immigrant people, regardless of status.”

Peacemaking

Given the lateness of the hour on Friday night, the Assembly adopted all the recommendations of its Assembly Committee on Peacemaking and International Issues by consent. They included:

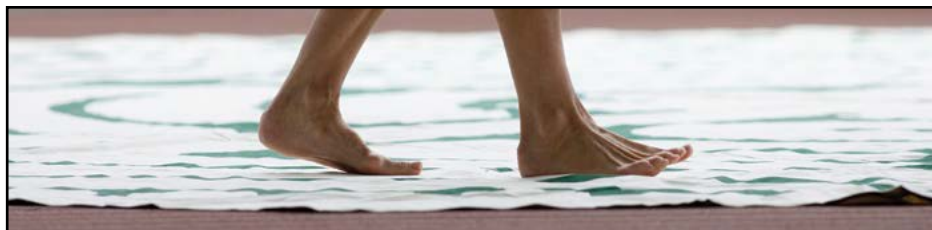
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- affirming the PC(USA)’s “historic commitment to the United Nations”;
 - reaffirming “the important role of Congolese women and children” in that country’s peace-building and reconciliation efforts;
 - advocating for human rights and democratization in the countries affected by the “Arab Spring” by adopting a statement from the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy;
 - approving ACSWP’s biennial “Human Rights Update” and directing that the next report include the subjects of “forced abortions, gender and disability selection-based abortions, and infanticide.”



Speakers: Bishop Reuel Marigza, General Secretary of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines; noted historian of the Presbyterian mission in Egypt, Heather J. Sharkey; Rear Admiral Mark Tidd.



A sample of the variety of booths featured in the 220th GA Exhibit Hall. Photo by Danny Bolin



An Assembly-goer walks the labyrinth at the 220th GA. Photo by Michael Whitman

Jesus isn't concerned with who the heavy lifters are. Jesus is concerned with what these heavy lifters do.—the Rev. Margaret Aymer, associate professor of New Testament and biblical hermeneutics, Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta. Photo by Danny Bolin



Worship

Preachers at the 220th General Assembly were asked to preach from Mark 2:1-12. What some of them had to say:

“No walls or crowds were able to deny the paralyzed man entrance to the building and access to Jesus. His friends gave him a new mode of access and Jesus blessed these efforts, much to the chagrin of the murmuring scribes.”—Ruling Elder Tony De La Rosa, interim executive, New York City Presbytery

“Jesus Christ directly linked himself to the coming of justice, righteousness and peace. For us to do any less is to live a partial and incomplete gospel.”—the Rev. Jerry Pillay of South Africa, president of the World Communion of Reformed Churches



Combined mass choir provides glorious music during the opening worship for the 220th General Assembly. Photo by Danny Bolin



Pastoral resident Noe Juarez adds a Peruvian musical touch to Monday morning worship at the 220th GA. Photo by Danny Bolin

“At the heart of the gospel, at the heart of each community of faith that seeks to proclaim the gospel, is not structure or the Form of Government. At the heart of the gospel lie disciples like these in Mark who are willing to take risks, willing to do whatever it takes to help others see Jesus. Not just carry those whom they like, but maybe even carrying those they don't know, those they don't like. Willing to go up to the roof, willing to cut a hole in it.”—Cindy Bolbach, moderator of the 219th General Assembly



Ruling elder Cindy Bolbach, outgoing moderator. Photo by Danny Bolin

Awards

Women of Faith Awards: the Rev. Ann Rhee Menzie, Redwoods Presbytery, Calif.; Judith Henry, Jamaica, Queens, N.Y.; and Rosemary Rice McMahan, Owens Crossroads, Ala.

Peacemaker Awards (Presbyterian Peace Fellowship): the Rev. Victor Makari, former area coordinator for the Middle East; and the Rev. Alice Winters, who served as a PC(USA) missionary in Colombia for more than 30 years.

Excellence in Theological Education Award (Committee on Theological Education): the Rev. John B. Trotti, librarian at Union Presbyterian Seminary, Richmond, Va., for 34 years.

Bell-McKay Prize (Presbyterians for Renewal): the late Joyce McMillan, missionary to Taiwan for 47 years.

Lydia Fund Scholarship (Presbyterian for Renewal): Kris Johnson, a student at Gordon-Conwell Seminary; and Kari Olsen, a student at Princeton Theological Seminary.

David Steele Distinguished Writer Award (Presbyterian Writers Guild): the Rev. John Buchanan, editor of *The Christian Century* and retired pastor of Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago.



The Rev. John Buchanan.
Photo by Michael Whitman



Laura S. Mendenhall receives the E.T. Thompson Award from *Presbyterian Outlook* Editor Jack Haberer. Photo by Michael Whitman



Women of Faith Award recipients: Judith Henry, Rosemary Rice McMahan and Ann Rhee Menzie.
Photo by Danny Bolin

Fahed Abu-Akel Award (National Middle East Presbyterian Caucus): the Rev. Raafat Zaki, transitional synod executive, Synod of the Covenant.



The Rev. Raafat Zaki. Photo by Danny Bolin

C. Fred Jenkins Constitutional Services Award (Association of Stated Clerks): Ruling Elder Alyson Janke.

E. T. Thompson Award (Presbyterian Outlook): the Rev. Laura Mendenhall, pastor, former president of Columbia Theological Seminary and senior advisor to the Texas Presbyterian Foundation.



The Assembly Hall for the 220th GA. Photo by Danny Bolin



Commissioners stayed busy throughout the day studying materials.
Photo by Danny Bolin



Barbara Campbell, teaching elder commissioner, speaks to the Assembly. Photo by Danny Bolin



Commissioners and advisory delegates line up to debate. Photo by Danny Bolin

2012 ASSEMBLY IN BRIEF

Writer/Editor: Jerry L.

Van Marter

Designer: Sue Poss

Publisher: Office of the
General Assembly

With special thanks
to the reporting
and photography
staff of the

General Assembly
Communications

Center: Sharon

Youngs and Barry

Crech, co-managers

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THANKS TO OUR HOSTS—

Pittsburgh
Presbytery and
surrounding
presbyteries
in western
Pennsylvania.

G220th GA by the numbers

- 1:** candidates for stated clerk: Gradye Parsons—a first since reunion
- 4:** candidates for moderator and number of ballots it took to elect
- 6.87:** (\$) General Assembly per capita apportionment for 2013
- 7.02:** (\$) Per capita apportionment for 2014
- 8:** Missionary Advisory Delegates
- 9:** colors of badges denoting various Assembly participants
- 12:** apostles
- 15:** Ecumenical Advisory Delegates
- 21:** Assembly committees
- 22:** ecumenical representatives
- 24:** Theological Student Advisory Delegates
- 45:** anniversary of the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Cuba
- 47:** (\$) daily meal allowance
- 50:** anniversary of the National Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Guatemala
- 52:** translation errors corrected in the new edition of the Heidelberg Catechism
- 100:** anniversary of Presbyterian mission in Korea; corresponding members
- 112:** overtures submitted by presbyteries and synods
- 115:** Office of the General Assembly staff and volunteers
- 160:** Young Adult Advisory Delegates
- 265:** staff and stated clerks from presbyteries and synods
- 280:** Presbyterian military chaplains serving under denominational endorsement
- 300:** (approximately) Authoritative Interpretations issued since 1983
- 500:** staff, elected members, consultants, guests
- 688:** commissioners to the 220th General Assembly
- 800:** (approximately) items of business
- 849:** hymns and songs in *Glory to God*, the new Presbyterian hymnal, and published by the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation

More General Assembly news and photos available at:
www.pcusa.org/GA220