

**Last Call to Sessions, Teaching Elders, Commissioned Ruling Elders, Presbytery Council and Staff, and Corporation Trustees,  
– For Counsel on GA Business Items by the beginning of the 222GA,  
June 18, 2016 –  
For our GA Commissioners and YAAD**

**A Primer of Mature Christian Counsel (III) for its  
Commissioners, Alternate Commissioners, and Young Adult  
Advisory Delegate (YAAD), regarding the  
Communications, Overtures, and Committee  
Recommendations that form the Business Items**

for consideration by the

**222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church  
(U.S.A.)**

**Part 4: Miscellaneous Information Related to the 222  
General Assembly Business Items**



Call for Presbytery Session and Teaching Elder Consideration – 31 March, 2016

By Ruling Elder Arthur W. Ritter,  
Past Moderator of the Presbytery of Nevada

For the Presbytery of Nevada  
Committee on Equipping the Saints

## **Format for offering counsel on Business Items identified as coming to the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly, 2016;**

Dear Commissioner and Delegate,

After prayerful consideration of the information related to Business item number \_\_, titled: \_\_\_\_\_, the Holy Scriptures, my/our review of the counsel of the church and both parts of its Constitution as exists on this item, my/our assessment of the circumstances surrounding our denomination, my/our review of the appropriate religious press coverage of this item, as exists, and my/our discussions with other mature Christians who are also knowledgeable of this business item, my/our counsel to you is to (please pick and elaborate upon one of the following):

\_\_\_ support the content of this business item in such form as it may appear before the General Assembly or its committee(s), because:

\_\_\_ oppose the content of this business item in such form as it may appear before the General Assembly or its committee(s), because:

\_\_\_ modify or support the modification of the content of this business item in such form as it may appear before the General Assembly or its committee(s), as follows:

... because:

Please sign and date your counsel.

For your response to this call for counsel, please send your counsel in an email to: **Art Ritter (Art@AGRitter.com)**, by **March 25, 2016**, for inclusion in Primer II, which is scheduled for distribution by Equipping Ministries on April 1 (no fooling), 2016.

Additionally, you may wish to communicate the following:

To the Presbytery Council,

Please consider concurring with Overture number \_\_, titled \_\_\_\_\_ to ensure that it gets considered by the 222<sup>nd</sup> GA because: .

Send such in an email directly to our **commissioners, alternates, and delegate:**

**Teaching Elder Commissioner:** The Reverend Robert Kelly, Spanish Springs PC, Sparks. 'Robert Kelley' [bob@the-kelleys.net](mailto:bob@the-kelleys.net) Bob is assigned to the **Middle East Issues** Committee (08).

**Ruling Elder Commissioner:** Marshall Hanson, Henderson PC, Henderson. 'Marshall Hanson' [mhanson@interact.ccsd.net](mailto:mhanson@interact.ccsd.net)

Marshall is assigned to the **Mission Coordination** committee (10).

**Alternate\* Teaching Elder Commissioner:** The Reverend Ed Lockett, Jr.  
[b.e.lockett.jr@gmail.com](mailto:b.e.lockett.jr@gmail.com)

**Alternate\* Ruling Elder Commissioner:** Elaine Noble, [the.nabob@sbcglobal.net](mailto:the.nabob@sbcglobal.net)

And please send a copy to: DeLois Basnett ([deloismb@cox.net](mailto:deloismb@cox.net)), chair of Equipping Ministries, copy to Rebecca Watkins, Chair of Council ([Rwatkins54@aol.com](mailto:Rwatkins54@aol.com)), Joan Jeffers, Stated Clerk of Presbytery ([statedclerknevada@gmail.com](mailto:statedclerknevada@gmail.com)), and Art Ritter, assembler of the Primer ([Art@AGRitter.com](mailto:Art@AGRitter.com)) as soon as possible, as the General Assembly fast approach.

# PC(USA) News on Committee preview:

From: <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2016/5/25/pcusa-general-assembly-committee-3-preview/>

## PC(USA) General Assembly **Committee 3** Preview

GENERAL ASSEMBLY PROCEDURES COMMITTEE TO CONSIDER  
CHANGES IN THE ELECTION OF THE MODERATOR  
MAY 25, 2016



*Special to Presbyterian News Service*

ERIN S. COX-HOLMES  
*General Assembly news team*

### LOUISVILLE

Whether the time has come to change the timing of the election the Moderator of the General Assembly will be on the agenda of the [Committee on General Assembly Procedures](#) at the 222nd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) meeting June 18-25, 2016 in Portland, Oregon.

The Presbytery of St. Andrews is proposing moving the election of the General Assembly Moderator and Vice-Moderator (or Co-Moderators) to the end of the meeting, rather than the beginning. Their rationale is that this

would permit the Assembly to elect those who have demonstrated leadership throughout the week, rather than electing on the basis of campaign speeches and a brief question and answer period as the Assembly kicks off. The General Assembly would then send the newly elected Moderators to “serve as its ambassadors for the next two years, working to build the next assembly’s agenda and business, over which they would then preside.”

The overture additionally asks that a system be established for General Assembly committees to convene at least six months prior to the assembly, using electronic meeting technologies. Proponents believe this would improve upon “the current process of coming together for a total of one week with the expectation that commissioners will reach good and well-reasoned decisions on a myriad of matters enumerated in thousands of pages of overtures, responses, reports, and recommendations.” If the overture passes, the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly (COGA) would be directed to bring proposals for the constitutional changes and implementation recommendations to the 223rd General Assembly.

Several overtures seek to help the General Assembly better address racial, ethnic and cultural diversity in the PC(USA). The Presbytery of Greater Atlanta proposes adding the category “multiracial” to the annual statistical report submitted by sessions. The Presbytery of Elizabeth proposes a task group to revise the entire classification system to avoid confusion and

misrepresentation. The Presbytery of Arkansas asks that a new category called “Partners in Ministry” be added for those who are not members, but are full participants in the ministry of a congregation.

Other business before the committee includes:

- A proposal to introduce more breadth of perspectives in resource materials and oral presentations provided to General Assembly committees.
- Acceptance of the invitation of the Presbytery of Scioto Valley to hold the 225th General Assembly (2022) in Columbus, Ohio, June 25–July 2, 2022.
- The recommendation that the General Assembly per capita rate be 7.33 per active member for 2017, and a rate of \$7.55 to be effective for 2018. This is an increase from the previous rate of \$7.02, which had remained the same for several years.
- Benchmarks for the representation of women and people from minoritized racial groups in the employment of personnel by the Office of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency.
- Approval of a standard definition of “Supplier Diversity” for use by all six agencies of the PC(USA).
- A recommendation that when the General Assembly is in plenary session, that action upon any items with constitutional implications shall be suspended until the Advisory Committee on the Constitution renders an opinion to the Moderator.

*Erin Cox-Holmes, executive presbyter for the Presbytery of Donegal and regular contributor to Presbyterian News Service, will cover the committee for the General Assembly Communication Center.*

From: <http://www.pcusa.org/news/2016/5/16/pcusa-general-assembly-committee-4-preview/>

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## PC(USA) General Assembly **Committee 4** Preview

THE WAY FORWARD COMMITTEE TO CONSIDER OGA-PMA  
MERGER, GA CHANGES  
MAY 16, 2016

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*Special to Presbyterian News Service*

JERRY VAN MARTER  
*General Assembly news team*

LOUISVILLE

After a two-year period of denominational soul-searching, the 222nd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is poised this June to consider dramatic changes to the ways the 1.66 million-member church conducts its ecclesial and mission work.

The aspiringly-named [Assembly Committee on The Way Forward](#)(Committee 4) will:

- Distill feedback from conversations initiated over

the last two years by GA Moderator Heath Rada and from affinity groups such as NEXT Church, the Covenant Network of Presbyterians and The Fellowship.

- Examine GA-mandated evaluative reviews of the Office of the General Assembly (OGA) and the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA) and recommendations coming out of those reviews.
- Study research contained in a “PC(USA) Snapshot” compiled by the denomination’s Research Services office and the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly from nearly 3,500 Presbyterian respondents.
- Consider 10 prescriptive overtures submitted by presbyteries.

Out of all that material, the Way Forward committee and the Assembly itself will attempt to fashion solutions to counter the denomination’s decline, which includes:

- A 40 percent loss of members since Presbyterian reunion in 1983.
- Reduction of the General Assembly mission budget by half in the last 20 years.
- Reduction of national staff by two-thirds since 1994.
- Reduction of mid-council (presbyteries and synods) staffs.
- A 79 percent reduction in unrestricted mission support contributions (as opposed to investment income) over the last 18 years—\$24 million in 1999 compared to \$5 million in the proposed 2017 mission budget.

Perhaps the most dramatic change the Way Forward committee will consider is a proposal to merge the Office of the General Assembly—the ecclesial agency of the denomination—and the Presbyterian Mission Agency—the mission arm. Proposals to that effect are coming from several places.

In its report (item 04-11), the Committee to Review the Presbyterian Mission Agency seeks the creation of a 15-member committee “to explore the possibility of a merger” between OGA and PMA. In the meantime, the report calls for an eight-member committee to provide a plan to restructure the PMA to provide corrective oversight to mitigate recent administrative issues including creation of an unauthorized corporation in which to channel “1001 New Worshiping Communities” funds, the cancelation of One Great Hour of Sharing promotional materials deemed racially insensitive and their subsequent redesign, and a sizable cost overrun for the 2013 Presbyterian Youth Triennium.

The Committee to Review the Office of the General Assembly report (item 04-12), while taking no position on the merger, “commends to the church the merits of deliberate and thoughtful conversation on the subject.”

An overture from Santa Fe Presbytery (item 04-07) is more matter-of-fact. It calls for merger of OGA and PMA, effective at the end of the 2018 General Assembly. The Presbyterian Mission Agency Board and the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly would be dissolved and succeeded by a Council of the General Assembly with the GA moderator as chair, the GA vice-moderator as vice-chair and the GA stated clerk as head-of-staff, with the title Stated Clerk/Director of Presbytery Mission Support.

An overture from St. Andrew Presbytery (item 04-08) calls for the GA “to hire a top-tier national consultant ... to assess and make recommendations on the nature, function and relationship of the OGA and the PMA to each other and to the presbyteries and congregations ... including the need for their continued existence as two distinct entities.”

Foothills Presbytery has submitted a package of eight overtures with the aim, it says, “of engaging our denomination in the sustained work of reform, renewal and modernization.” Seven of the eight overtures have been referred to the Way Forward committee:

- Item 04-01 calls for each GA to be organized around one of the Six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304), with the main business of each Assembly “to discuss and to explore ways to enable PC(USA) congregations to fulfill more faithfully and effectively the Great End which is the theme for that Assembly.” Constitutional amendments would only be entertained every third Assembly (every six years) and would have to have the endorsement of 15 percent of the 172 presbyteries to be considered.
- Item 04-02 would add a fifth category of advisory delegates to the GA – Presbyter Advisory Delegates – to the current ones: young adult, theological student, missionary and ecumenical advisory delegates. For each General Assembly, 20 percent of the presbyteries could designate their chief executive to be an advisory delegate.
- Item 04-03 would require the affirmative votes of a two-thirds majority of the presbyteries and approval by two consecutive General Assemblies to amend the Book of Order. Currently, amending the Book of Order requires a majority vote of one General Assembly and then ratification by a majority of the presbyteries. An overture from the Presbytery de Cristo (04-10) proposes much the same rubric.
- Item 04-04 would grant presbyteries the right to “abstain” when voting on proposed amendments to the Constitution.
- Item 04-05 would grant presbyteries and synods the ability to submit overtures to amend or suspend the General Assembly Standing Rules. Currently, the Assembly itself adopts its standing rules and amends them as it so chooses.
- Item 04-06 would grant presbyteries and synods the ability to submit overtures to amend, delete or suspend sections of the Manual of the General Assembly. Currently, the General Assembly has sole responsibility for its manual (of operations).

Item 04-09 calls for the creation of a “General Assembly Reform Coordinating Committee” charged to “reform, renew and refresh the practice of our Reformed polity for the 21st century.” The centerpiece of the committee’s work would be a series of regional gatherings “to study the core principles of our historic polity, to reflect upon the sweeping changes” affecting church and society and to advise the reform committee on “the content and organization of the Constitution and the creation of a 10-year strategic mission plan for the PC(USA)” and to devise “the most effective structures to faithfully and boldly uphold our Reformed polity and practice.”

From: <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2016/5/6/pcusa-general-assembly-committee-5-preview/>

## PC(USA) General Assembly **Committee 5** Preview

### COMMITTEE ON MID COUNCILS CONSIDERS EIGHT OVERTURES

MAY 6, 2016



*Special to Presbyterian News Service*

EVA STIMSON  
General Assembly news team

#### LOUISVILLE

The future of the 16 synods in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will once again be on the docket when the 222nd General Assembly (2016) meets June 18–25 in Portland, Oregon.



The 221st General Assembly (2014) directed synods and presbyteries to collaborate on establishing a new configuration of synod boundaries that would reduce the number of synods from 16 to between 10 and 12. This year's Assembly [Committee on Mid Councils](#) will consider responses from synods and presbyteries to the 2014 action.

A report from the 16 synods (05-13) calls for rescinding the 2014 Assembly action on synod boundaries and urges synods to continue exploring mission partnerships and shared functions. The report is based on feedback from synod representatives who met in various configurations over the past two years to discuss the Assembly's action.

An overture (05-01) from the Presbytery of Santa Fe also calls for rescinding the 2014 Assembly action, contending that reducing the number of synods is not likely to enhance mission endeavors or to save money.

Requiring fewer synods, the rationale says, imposes "an onerous burden upon the synods in the western half of the United States because of our vast geographic reality." Concurrences with overture 05-01 have been filed by 14 presbyteries, all in the western half of the country.

In contrast, two more presbyteries note the lack of progress since 2014 in the reconfiguration of synod boundaries and call for appointment of an administrative commission to move the process forward.

Overture 05-03 from the Presbytery of Scioto Valley asserts, "Further delay in addressing the boundaries of the synods will not serve the church's needs in the 21st century." Overture 05-04 from the Presbytery of Maumee Valley recommends creating seven synods corresponding with the seven regions of the Association of Stated Clerks: Northwest, Southwest, North Central, South Central, Northeast, East Central and Southeast.

PC(USA) mid councils (currently 172 presbyteries and 16 synods) have been under scrutiny since the first of two Mid Councils Commissions began its work in 2010. The 220th General Assembly (2012) rejected a commission proposal that synods be eliminated.

Responding to recommendations from the second Mid Council Commission, the 2014 Assembly affirmed "synods continue to have a vital role within our life as a denomination," but called for a reduction in the number of synods.

### **Family leave, child and youth protection, dependent care**

The committee will also consider issues related to women, children and families. The Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (ACWC) has submitted two resolutions. One of them (05-10) urges congregations, presbyteries and the six General Assembly agencies to create family leave policies for employees to care for a newborn or adopted child or "other family members, such as seniors or those requiring health assistance."

The other ACWC resolution (05-09) calls for amending the fourth paragraph of G-3.0106 in the *Book of Order* to clarify an action taken by the 2014 General Assembly. The amended paragraph would require councils to adopt and implement both a child and youth protection policy and a sexual misconduct policy. The resolution stresses that these "shall be two different policies with differentiated intents."

An overture (05-06) from the Presbytery of Susquehanna Valley urges development of a national child protection policy manual and training resources for presbyteries and congregations. The presbytery states that though the 2014 Assembly called for all church councils to adopt a child



protection policy, many congregations do not have the expertise or resources to develop such a policy on their own.

An overture (05-05) from the Presbytery of Great Rivers proposes an amendment to G-3.0106 of the *Book of Order* requiring all councils of the church to adopt and implement a dependent care policy. Churchwide policies supporting caregivers of children, the elderly and people with disabilities are necessary, the presbytery says, “to create settings of full inclusion that honor the humanity and dignity of *all* God’s children.”

#### **Other issues**

The Assembly Committee on Mid Councils will also consider the following:

- A report from the Task Force for Korean-Speaking Congregations, created by the 2014 Assembly, offers recommendations for strengthening ministry with Korean Americans.
- Eastern Korean Presbytery has submitted two overtures (05-07 and 05-08) calling for revisions to the guidelines for nongeographic presbyteries that would allow a racial ethnic or immigrant congregation—no matter where it is located—to request transfer to a non-geographic presbytery.
- An overture (05-02) from the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii calls for restoration of the boundaries of the Presbytery of the Pacific, which were changed in 2012 to allow two churches to become members of neighboring presbyteries. Both congregations have since left the denomination.

From: <http://www.pcusa.org/news/2016/5/5/pcusa-general-assembly-committee-6-preview/>

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## PC(USA) General Assembly **Committee 6** Preview

### COMMITTEE ON CHURCH POLITY AND ORDERED MINISTRY TAKES UP 14 OVERTURES

MAY 5, 2016

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*Special to Presbyterian News Service*

MIKE FERGUSON  
*General Assembly news team*

#### LOUISVILLE

Overtures on requiring evangelism training for teaching elders and a dozen other proposals await the **Committee on Church Polity and Ordered Ministry** during the 222nd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) The Assembly will be held June 18-25, 2016 in Portland, Oregon.

In business item 06-02, the Presbytery of Tampa Bay asserts that “practical training in evangelism (agile speaking and teaching concise truths about Jesus Christ as confessed in the Nicene Creed)” should be required of teaching elders seeking ordination. The 1001 New Worshiping Communities initiative, proponents argue, “can become reality if we are intentional about evangelism throughout all denominational organizations.”

Three overtures—06-01, 06-07 and 06-10—deal with people who have renounced the jurisdiction of the church.

The first overture, by the Presbytery of the New Covenant, would delete language added by the 221st Assembly prohibiting teaching elders who have renounced jurisdiction from working or volunteering for a congregation or other PC(USA) entity.

The Presbytery of Greater Atlanta's overture, 06-07, adds "and as long as the former teaching elder remains outside the membership and jurisdiction of the PC (USA)" to the language found in G-2.0509, the jurisdiction of the church in the midst of a disciplinary proceeding.

The final overture on the handling of renunciation of jurisdiction, overture 06-10, allows teaching elders who have renounced to become re-employed after they've taken certain steps, including coming forward in self-accusation, pleading guilty to all charges, being censured and completing appropriate rehabilitation. The Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area brought this overture.

### **Virtual attendance, title changes and more**

The remaining nine overtures are scattered over broad areas of ministry.

Item 06-04, brought by the Presbytery of Lake Erie, asks that ruling elders be allowed to virtually attend session meetings when appropriate technology is available. "Virtual session accommodations provide the homebound, those traveling for work, pleasure or family responsibilities, and those with family situations requiring their presence at home" a way to participate, according to the overture's rationale.

In item 06-06, the Presbytery of Central Nebraska asks that a new section be added to G-2.11, Certified Church Service, to include skills and training certification by the Administrative Personnel Association. Certified administrative personnel assistants who have skills and training in such disciplines as church polity, reformed theology and spiritual growth and discipline would be identified and their credentials publicized.

An overture from the Presbytery of Great Rivers, 06-08, changes titles in ordered ministry. The new Form of Government changed "elder" to "ruling elder," "commissioned lay pastor" to "commissioned ruling elder" and "minister of Word and Sacrament" to "teaching elder." This overture would repeal those changes to reduce confusion, especially with other denominations, and more closely match what's going on in churches: "The local church and many churches and pastors have simply ignored the change to the nomenclature," as the rationale states.

Overture 06-09, from the Presbytery of Monmouth, would allow the election of ruling elders who wouldn't immediately begin serving on the session. Those ruling elders could assist in serving the Lord's Supper, exercise spiritual leadership and help balance diversity representation requirements of presbyteries and synods.

The Presbytery of St. Andrew, in item 06-05, seeks to strike language in G-3.0109 requiring committees of councils higher than the session to contain equal numbers of ruling elders and teaching elders. While parity is "essential in decision making," requiring it of all committees—especially study committees and those formed only to make recommendations—is "an unnecessary restriction placed on councils," as argued in the rationale.

The Presbytery de Cristo, which brought item 06-13, wants the General Assembly to clarify presbyteries' use of commissioned ruling elders. The change will allow presbyteries to use commissioned ruling elders to administer the Sacraments or moderate meetings at a list of named congregations.

Item 06-11 would add language to G-3.0104. The overture, brought by the Presbytery of Detroit, defines the stated clerk as “the council’s chief ecclesiastical administrator and relates to other governing bodies and Christian communions, interprets council actions, represents the council, staffs the council’s permanent judicial commission, and is the council’s executive secretary and parliamentarian.” The proposed description of the role of stated clerks “more clearly marks the historic tradition and function of a stated clerk within the Presbyterian tradition, and brings the Form of Government in line with the practice and guidance already given by the Office of the General Assembly.”

One overture, 06-14, brought by the Presbytery of Chicago, would create a Rules of Discipline Task Force to revise the rules to make them what proponents say are more accessible to the church and, among other improvements, provide flexibility in crafting censures and remedies. The only alternative to public shaming under the current Rules of Discipline “is sweeping the problem under the rug. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) can do better than this,” the rationale states.

The final overture, 06-12, from the Presbytery of Grand Canyon, would amend the Book of Order and General Assembly Standing Rules on the roles of the Advisory Committee on the Constitution and the Permanent Judicial Commission when constitutional questions are considered by the General Assembly.

*Ruling Elder Mike Ferguson is a member of St. Andrew Presbyterian Church in Billings, Montana. He’s also a reporter with the Billings Gazette. He’ll be serving in the Communications Office at the 222nd General Assembly in Portland, Ore., covering two committees: Church Polity and Ordered Ministry and Immigration and Environmental Issues.*

From: <http://www.pcusa.org/news/2016/5/17/pcusa-general-assembly-committee-7-preview/>

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## PC(USA) General Assembly **Committee 7** Preview

### ECUMENICAL AND INTERFAITH RELATIONS COMMITTEE TO PROPOSE CONFESSION OF BELHAR ADOPTION

MAY 17, 2016

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*Special to Presbyterian News Service*

GREGG BREKKE  
*General Assembly news team*

LOUISVILLE

Among the business being considered by the Committee on Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations at the 222nd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

meeting June 18-25, 2016 in Portland, Oregon, is the final adoption of the [Confession of Belhar](#). Proposed by National Capital Presbytery to the 220th General Assembly (2012), an overture for Belhar's inclusion in *The Book of Confessions* was affirmed by the required two-thirds, or 116, of presbyteries following the 221st General Assembly (2014)—144 affirmative, 25 negative and 2 no action. The committee is expected to recommend the General Assembly “approve[s] and enact[s] the Confession of Belhar, to be included in *The Book of Confessions*, starting with the 2016 printing.” A previous attempt at adopting the Confession of Belhar was defeated following the 219th General Assembly (2010) when presbytery yes votes were 108 and no votes 63.

In other business, the committee will consider the election of nine allotted PC(USA) delegates to the General Council of the [World Communion of Reformed Churches](#) (WCRC) meeting June 27–July 7, 2017, in Leipzig, Germany. The slate includes the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, Associate Stated Clerk and Director of Ecumenical Relations, Christian Ho Choi, Bruce Gillette, Gun Ho Lee; Emily McGinley, Michelle Sanchez, Anne Weirich and Whitney Wilkinson. The committee will also propose to the Assembly the following list of ecumenical advisory delegates to invite to the 223rd General Assembly (2018):

International invitees – Assembly of Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Iraq, Evangelical Church in the Republic of Niger, China Christian Council, Igreja Reformada Presbyteriana de Guineia Ecuatorial, National Evangelical Church of Guatemala (IENPG), Presbyterian Church of Colombia (IPC), Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK), Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East, United Protestant Church of France, Waldensian Evangelical Church of Rio de la Plata (IEVRP).

United States and/or Canada invitees – Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, Church of God in Christ, Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Moravian Church in North America, United Church of Christ.

Information items for the committee include a summary of the work and working principles of the General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations (GACEIR), links to essential resources for GACEIR committee members and results of a 2016 self-study by GACEIR.

Primary findings of the self-study, as reported by GACEIR, include:

- An overwhelming majority of Presbyterian respondents stated that they are aware of the central mandate of the denomination to be in ecumenical relations with other Christians and concur with the statement that “the church should have an ecumenical policy that helps guide it when working and ministering with other denominations.”
- According to Research Services’ Executive Summary, most Presbyterian respondents are aware of both the Ecumenical Stance and the [Interreligious Stance](#), and yet less than a third are even moderately familiar with GACEIR.
- Among ecumenical and interfaith partner respondents, most are familiar with both the Ecumenical and Interreligious Stances. Approximately half of the respondents believe that the PC(USA) carries out the values lifted up in the stances moderately well.

From: <http://www.pcusa.org/news/2016/5/10/pcusa-general-assembly-committee-8-preview/>

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# PC(USA) General Assembly **Committee 8** Preview

## MIDDLE EAST ISSUES COMMITTEE WILL CONSIDER DIVESTMENT, TWO-STATE SOLUTION AND CHILD-DETENTION

MAY 10, 2016

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*Special to Presbyterian News Service*

EVA STIMSON  
*General Assembly news team*

### LOUISVILLE

Thorny issues involved in the pursuit of peace in the Middle East will be among the topics under consideration when the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) meets June 18–25 in Portland, Oregon.

The General Assembly [Committee on Middle East Issues](#) will review progress on the denomination's divestment from three companies engaged in "non-

peaceful pursuits" in Israel/Palestine. Prompted by several presbytery overtures and a recommendation from the PC(USA)'s Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI), the 221st General Assembly (2014) voted to divest from Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard and Motorola Solutions after a decade of unsuccessful attempts at corporate engagement with the companies.

An overture (08-05) from the Presbytery of Flint River urges this year's Assembly to "remove the divestment mandate" and allow PC(USA) investment in the three companies. The rationale for the overture states "these three companies cannot be responsible for how purchasers use their products."

Overture 08-01 from the Synod of the Covenant calls for a "boycott of all products manufactured and sold by HP Inc. and Hewlett Packard Enterprise until the companies cease to profit from non-peaceful pursuits and violations of human rights in Israel/Palestine." The rationale for the overture notes that Hewlett Packard is the sole provider of computer hardware for the Israeli military. It says the company "is directly involved in widespread human rights abuses and military violence in the Gaza Strip" and also "contributes to and profits from the Israeli military's occupation of the Palestinian West Bank."

A similar overture was voted down by the 2014 Assembly.

The PC(USA)'s Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) is sending to this year's Assembly a 56-page report re-evaluating the denomination's long-time support for a two-state solution in Israel/Palestine. The document, "Israel-Palestine: For Human Values in the Absence of a Just Peace," was prepared by the Study Team on Prospects for a Just Peace in Israel and Palestine, as directed by the 2014 Assembly.

The report (08-06) notes that over the years, the Presbyterian Church "has supported the international consensus favoring a two-state solution with a shared Jerusalem. Yet as situations

change, the church must evaluate its positions accordingly. And in the view of many analysts, the door to a viable Palestinian state is closing rapidly, if it is still open at all.”

The report describes in detail how “Israel’s policy trajectory of continued settlements and brutal occupation” makes it “difficult, if not impossible” to achieve a two-state solution. Acknowledging this reality, the report says the PC(USA) “should advance those efforts that best accord with its values . . . including but not limited to that of two sovereign states —Israel and Palestine.”

The report recommends a list of actions the church should take in order to uphold its values—values such as dignity of all persons, self-determination of peoples through democratic means, solidarity with those who suffer, and others.

An overture (08-02) from the Synod of the Covenant, with concurrences from the Presbyteries of Southeastern Illinois and Cimarron, urges advocacy for the safety and well being of the children of Palestine and Israel, a concern also included in the report from ACSWP. The overture asserts that children “suffer widespread and systematic patterns of ill treatment and torture within the Israeli military detention system.”

An overture (08-03) from the Presbytery of New York City, with concurrences from four presbyteries, urges continuing support for the people of the Middle East. The overture calls for a variety of actions to encourage Christian presence, counter religious radicalism, promote economic development and promote long-term stability in the region.

An overture (08-04) from the Presbytery of the Redwoods, with concurrence from the Presbytery of Santa Fe, calls for the RE/MAX corporation to cease selling property in West Bank settlements.

From: <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2016/5/9/pcusa-general-assembly-committee-9-preview/>

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## PC(USA) General Assembly **Committee 9** Preview

IMMIGRATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES COMMITTEE WILL  
MULL FOSSIL FUEL DIVESTMENT

MAY 9, 2016

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*Special to Presbyterian News Service*

MIKE FERGUSON  
*General Assembly news team*

LOUISVILLE

*[Editor's Note - May 10, 2016] This story has been updated to reflect items added to Committee 9's business page after the report was originally filed: item's 09-09 through 09-11. GB*



Competing overtures—one seeking Presbyterian divestment from fossil fuel companies, the other placing that action on hold—will headline the work of the [Immigration and Environmental Issues Committee](#) during the 222nd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) The General Assembly runs June 18-25 in Portland, Oregon.

In item 09-01, the Presbytery of San Francisco overtures the General Assembly to call upon the Board of Pensions and the Presbyterian Foundation to stop any new direct investment in fossil fuel companies and to work over the next three years not to own such assets. Instead, those entities are charged with “actively seeking out and investing in renewable and energy efficiency related securities.”

Item 09-02, brought by the Presbytery of the New Covenant, seeks postpone complete divestment “because it does not meet the denomination’s long-standing process for consideration of divestment.” Instead, according to the recommendation, the General Assembly should request that the two affected agencies and the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program “study ways that investments can best be leveraged to help care for God’s creation and mitigate the negative effects of climate change.”

Divestment will, according to the pro-divestment overture, place the PC(USA) alongside ecumenical partners, including Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists and the United Church of Christ, which have all committed to divest. It also protects the denomination’s financial interests, because, it is argued, “in the carbon-constrained world we are entering, the value of fossil fuel companies will decline.”

The divestment alternative argues that it’s possible for Presbyterians to address the issue of climate change by continuing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and approving lower-carbon and zero-carbon technologies and lifestyles. “Divestment has no direct effect on climate and makes no difference in individual behaviors,” as argued in the rationale. “In addition, divestment renders a moral judgment on thousands of good, moral Presbyterians who are employed within the fossil fuel sector.”

The Presbytery of New Covenant has two additional overtures on climate change – item 09-03, which is about faithfully engaging climate change, and 09-04, which is labeled “On Faithful Response to Climate Change.”

The first includes 15 recommendations for faithful engagement. Those include repenting “from our inadequate stewardship of God’s creation” and recognizing “the Gospel’s call and the moral mandate for humanity to shift to a long-term sustainable energy regime in ways that are both just and compassionate.” It calls on Presbyterians to work to establish a “consistent, rational and equitable global pricing mechanism for greenhouse gasses” while protecting the poor from “the regressive nature of the pricing mechanism” around emissions pricing. It also asks the foundation, Board of Pensions and PILP to allocate funds that target climate change solutions, such as PILP’s Restoring Creation Loan program.

Item 09-04 contains a seven-part response to climate change. Those include commending Mission Responsibility through Investment (MRTI) “for its long history of engagement with companies on issues related to climate change” and urging MRTI to continue that engagement, “applying the long-standing PC(USA) principles related to consideration of divestment.” It also asks Presbyterians to recognize “that divestment does not excuse us from the requirement for faithful responses that do alter behaviors.”



Item 09-07, an overture from the Presbytery of Boston, asks the General Assembly to approve an “Affirmation of Creation.” After tracing nearly 14 billion years of creation, the affirmation notes that God “has connected all life on Earth in a network of kinship by virtue of descent with modification from common ancestors.” By virtue of “the powers of intellect and creativity called forth in us by God, we bear exceptional responsibility for the future of the Earth and all its constitutive creatures,” the recommendation states.

In item 09-08, the Presbytery of Seattle asks the General Assembly to empower the Office of Public Witness in Washington, D.C., and the Presbyterian Ministry to the United Nations in New York “to witness against environmental degradation and to affirm public policy that supports good stewardship of natural resources.” With “firm biblical foundation and the policies of twenty General Assemblies to build upon,” those agencies can give voice to concerns like water quality; threats from hydraulic fracturing, crude oil transport and storage; and threats from methane that results from industrial processes.

The Presbytery of Santa Fe’s item 09-05 seeks General Assembly approval for encouraging throughout the PC(USA) the study of Pope Francis’ encyclical, “Laudato Si.” It’s available at <https://laudatosi.com/watch>.

Only one overture, 09-06, is on immigration. The Presbytery of New York City seeks to respond to people who are refugees or are internally displaced. It would direct appropriate agencies, office and staff to advocate for and seek to improve “matters related to United States government refugee resettlement policies and related issues.”

Those would include advocating for a shortened overseas processing period for refugees approved for admission to the U.S., increasing federal funding to expand the number of refugees and admitting refugees as lawful permanent residents to increase their personal security.

The overture also urges presbyteries, sessions and pastors to encourage congregations to host, co-sponsor and/or support refugee families. That can include basic support such as clothing, housing, furniture and food as well as “a social connection for refugees to assist their acclimation to the community—including a welcoming voice for Muslims.”

Item 09-09, is the Mission Responsibility through Investment report on divestment from fossil fuel companies.

MRTI’s report calls for the church to commend companies – especially those in the oil, gas and coal sectors – that have addressed climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The report calls on corporations to increase efforts to address climate change through their corporate governance, strategies, implementation, transparency and disclosure, and public policies.

It also commends the PC(USA)’s Foundation for providing, through its New Covenant Trust Company subsidiary, the option of fossil-free managed portfolios to congregations, as well as the efforts of the Board of Pensions and the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program for other fossil-free options and programs.

Rather than divest from fossil fuel holdings, MRTI asks the General Assembly for permission “to pursue its focused engagement process on climate change issues,” especially with companies in the oil, gas and coal sectors. MRTI would then report back to the 223rd General Assembly in 2018 with

recommendations – possibly including divestment, “if significant changes in governance, strategy, implementation, transparency and disclosure, and public policy are not instituted,” the report states.

Item 09-10 is called “A Collaborative Agenda for Environmental Stewardship.” It comes from a variety of agencies, including the Board of Pensions, Office of the General Assembly, PC(USA) Foundation, Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program, Presbyterian Mission Agency and the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation.

The strategy lays out the history of how each agency has helped Presbyterians toward eco-friendly options and indicates the work ahead.

Finally the Presbytery of New Castle, in item 09-11, wants to add a 12th duty—caring for God’s creation—to the ministry of members found in G-1.0304 in the Book of Order. In a concurrence, Lake Michigan and Heartland presbyteries note that human “dominion” as intended in Genesis “is best practiced in care for creation, in stewardship, which according to Genesis Noah fulfills best by implementing God’s first endangered species act.”

Caring for God’s creation “is a critical act of faith in today’s world” and should be included in the Book of Order, the overture states.

But the Advisory Committee on the Constitution notes that the Book of Order is “a constitutional document, not a manual of operations. Although there is no impediment to approving this overture, there is no compelling reason to add this to the Book of Order.”

*Ruling Elder Mike Ferguson is a member of St. Andrew Presbyterian Church in Billings, Montana. He’s also a reporter with the Billings Gazette. He’ll be serving in the Communications Office at the 222nd General Assembly in Portland, Oregon, covering two committees: Immigration and Environmental Issues and Church Polity and Ordered Ministry.*

From:

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## PC(USA) General Assembly **Committee 10** Preview

MISSION COORDINATION COMMITTEE DISCUSSES MISSION PROGRAMS, POLICIES  
MAY 23, 2016

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*Special to Presbyterian News Service*

GREGG BREKKE  
*General Assembly news team*

### LOUISVILLE

More than a dozen items will be debated by the [Mission Coordination](#) committee for referral to the 222nd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) meeting June 18-25, 2016 in Portland, Oregon.

The committee receives overtures and reports on matters related to mission programs authorized by the General Assembly, PC(USA) vision and mission goals, Organization for Mission and Presbyterian Mission Agency Manual of Operations, mission budget, audits, churchwide compensation, initiatives on church growth and the 1001

Worshiping Communities program.

Overture 10-01, "On Seeking to Eradicate Slavery from the Supply Chains of Vendors and Other Businesses That the PC(USA) and Its Various Bodies Do Business," encourages Presbyterian entities to inquire about supply chain practices for vendors and companies in which the church invests or does business with to ensure these companies do not engage in unfair labor practices, including slavery.

Overture 10-03, proposed by the Presbytery of Pittsburgh, with concurrences by the presbyteries of Charleston-Atlantic, Lake Erie, New York City, Upper Ohio Valley and Western Reserve, seeks to, "Take specific action, not just in word, but also in deed, to address and improve the worsening plight of the African American male in five specified cities as a pilot initiative pointing toward future and further nationwide intervention." Pilot cities include Baltimore, Maryland; Charlotte, North Carolina; Cleveland, Ohio; New York, New York; and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Item 10-05 asks the General Assembly to rescind the 1990 "General Assembly Mission Program Budget Policy and Procedures," which includes specific ratios regulating the Presbyterian Mission Program Fund, and replace it with a "Presbyterian Mission Agency Reserve Policy." Two major changes include the provision that the "restricted reserve fund will not be used to manage projected operating budget shortfalls" and granting the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board the approval power over the use, minimum levels and allocations to the restricted reserve fund.

Item 10-07 asks the Assembly to approve the revised Churchwide Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action Plan, now titled "Toward Inclusiveness in Employment: The Presbyterian

Church (U.S.A.) Churchwide Policy for Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action for General Assembly Agencies.” The renamed and revised document offers a broader set of protections and prohibits discrimination based on “race/ethnicity, color, national origin, gender, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, creed, protected disability status, citizenship status, genetic information, uniformed service or veteran status or religious, or any other characteristic protected by law; and to correct any existent patterns of discrimination.”

In consultation with the Advocacy Committee on Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC), where the phrase “equal employment opportunity” was found in the document, the phrase has been revised to read “equal employment opportunity and affirmative action.”

Item 10-08 is the “Report of the Special Offerings Review Task Force.” The report asks the General Assembly to “revise the \$20 million by 2020 [annual] goal for Special Offerings receipts to \$20 million by 2025 as the aspiration of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)” The report also asks the Assembly to affirm the current distribution allocations for each of the offerings, to maintain funding to the remaining historically Presbyterian racial ethnic institutions (HPREIs) at current percentages, and to distribute “funds that have become available from HPREIs that no longer qualify for funding through the [Christmas Joy Offering] to support and advance the work of racial ethnic and women’s ministry in their programs of racial ethnic leadership development.”

Item 10-09, “Empowered & Hopeful”—Women of Color Consultation Report, asks the Presbyterian Mission Agency, through the work of Racial Ethnic & Women’s Ministries to “continue to sponsor racial ethnic and women’s leadership institutes to develop women of color leaders in the church, so that they will have opportunities to serve fully in ministry and leadership; and to continue to provide and support opportunities for women of color to attend trainings and professional development events.”

Item 10-10 asks the General Assembly to acknowledge the work of the Presbyterian Mission Agency’s work in rallying the church around the theme of “Living Missionally” while releasing it from the directives “to develop tangible metrics to determine success and impact,” and “identify strategies for deeper engagement.” Instead, the Mission Agency asks the Assembly to affirm Item 10-14, the 2017-2018 Presbyterian Mission Agency Work Plan.

Item 10-11, “A Resolution to Contribute to a Proactive, Health-Giving Ministry to and Relationship with Our Clergywomen,” sponsored by the Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns, seeks to direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency to sponsor events and provide support for clergywomen. The recommendations include annual gatherings, listening groups, virtual work groups, mentoring, coaching, and provide theological resources to support the ministries of women. It also asks “the six denominational agencies to collaboratively create and share the expense of new leadership development opportunities for all clergywomen.”

Item 10-12, “A Resolution to Ensure Just Compensation Practices for Those Employed via Third Party Contractors,” also sponsored by the Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns, asks “the six agencies of the General Assembly to develop standards that take into account and protect the wages and fringe benefits of outsourced employees based on Presbyterian theology and policy on work and workers.”

Overture 10-13, “On Achieving a 5:1 Ratio Between the Highest-Paid and Lowest-Paid Employees of PMA,” is sponsored by the Newton Presbytery. It asks the General Assembly to “establish the goal of achieving, in a reasonable period of time, a 5:1 ratio between the highest-paid and lowest-paid

employees of the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA), beginning with new PMA positions, understanding this to be a partial return to earlier policy and a practical embodiment of missional solidarity.”

A comment from the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board to this goal says, in part, “[the PMA] compensation range has nonetheless narrowed from 7.5:1 (in 2010) to 6:1 (in 2015)—a level that is very comparable to, or less than, the actual ratios between the lowest paid and highest paid employee for each of the other General Assembly agencies, even though some of the lowest paid positions in the General Assembly offices are within the Presbyterian Mission Agency.”

Item 10-14, the “2017-2018 Presbyterian Mission Agency Work Plan,” establishes a two-year guideline for the work of the Mission Agency based on the mission: “Inspire, equip, and connect the PC(USA) in its many expressions to serve Christ in the world through new and existing communities of faith, hope, love, and witness.”

Key to the PMA Work Plan are the directional goals that are to guide managers, employees and the PMA Board in its work: Evangelism & Discipleship, Servant Leader Formation and Justice & Reconciliation, based on the core values of “Faith, Compassion, Accountability, Teamwork, Dedication, Service, [and] Justice.”

Item 10-04 is a minor revision to the Presbyterian Mission Agency Manual of Operations. Item 10-06 amends the Organization for Mission to include a distinction between “Other General Assembly Corporations,” including agencies of the denomination, and “Corporations Related to the General Assembly,” such as Presbyterian Women. Item 10-A recognizes Commissioned Ruling Elder Lucy Apatiki, Ruling Elder Sarah Noble-Moag, and Ruling Elder Clarissa Walker Whaley as the Women of Faith award recipients at the 222nd General Assembly.

Other committee items include minutes from the PC(USA), A Corp. meeting; the final audit report; a Report of Changes to the Appendices of the Presbyterian Mission Agency Manual of Operations; a Report of the Presbyterian Mission Agency on Current Task Forces, Work Groups, and Ad Hoc Committees; and the Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity Report of Progress.

*From:*

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## PC(USA) General Assembly **Committee 11** Preview

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**Not yet published.** Search [PCUSA.org](https://www.pcusa.org) for “PC(USA) General Assembly Committee 11 Preview”

*From:* <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2016/5/12/pcusa-general-assembly-committee-12-preview/>

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# PC(USA) General Assembly **Committee 12** Preview

## PEACEMAKING AND INTERNATIONAL ISSUES COMMITTEE EXPLORES RECONCILIATION, CONNECTIONS

MAY 12, 2016

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*Special to Presbyterian News Service*

BOB SLOAN  
*General Assembly news team*

### LOUISVILLE

The denomination's role in helping build a bridge of reconciliation between the United States and South Korea regarding the Korean War tragedy in the village of No Gun Ri is the subject of one of seven overtures to be discussed by the [Peacemaking and International Issues Committee](#) during the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) 222nd General Assembly, which takes place June 18-25 in Portland, Oregon.

The Peacemaking and International Issues Committee will also hear an overture regarding the strengthening of

Cuban-American relations, particularly in the faith community.

Overture 12-01, submitted by the Presbytery of Cayuga-Syracuse, calls for acknowledging the U.S. military's role in the killing of nearly 300 Korean civilians near the village of No Gun Ri in July 1950. The overture requests the stated clerk of PC(USA) communicate to the president of the United States and to members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives the denomination's desire for the nation to acknowledge its responsibility in the deaths of those Korean civilians, to provide appropriate compensation to the surviving victims and to the families of those killed or wounded in the incident.

The overture asks the Presbyterian Mission Agency to arrange a meeting between U.S. soldiers who were present at No Gun Ri and Korean survivors of the incident there for the purpose of resolving resentments and feelings of guilt, and to move toward forgiveness and reconciliation. It also calls for the Presbyterian Mission Agency to consult with the denomination's mission partners in South Korea in regards to jointly commissioning and funding the construction of a memorial church on the grounds of or near the No Gun Ri Peace Park in South Korea.

Overture 12-07, submitted by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, calls for the 222nd General Assembly to affirm and receive a report entitled "New Hopes and Realities in Cuban-American Relations: A 'Nuevo Momento.'"

The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy was assigned the task of creating the report during the 221st General Assembly.

The report calls for “a better and fairer relationship than our nations have had both before and after Cuba’s 1959 revolution. The PC(USA) continues to support the self-determination and initiative of the Cuban people, a cause for which they have struggled for more than two centuries.”

More specifically, the report urges the denomination to celebrate and strengthen the ecclesial relationship of PC(USA) and the Iglesia Presbiteriana-Reformada en Cuba (IPRC) as sister churches and to update the partnership agreement between the two. It commends the U.S. government and the Cuban government for reinstating their embassies in the two countries and initiating other diplomatic engagements and calls for the ending of policies of isolation and the threat of regime change and to normalize immigration policies. It also urges the return of the island of Guantanamo to the Cuban nation.

In other business, Assembly Committee 12 will consider:

- Overture 12-02, submitted by the Presbytery of Mission, on the completion of the six-year discernment process initiated by the 219th General Assembly to “seek clarity as to God’s call to the church to embrace nonviolence as its fundamental response to the challenges of violence, terror, and war.” It calls for Presbyterians at all levels of the church to employ the understandings and insights to respond to and prevent violence on the local level, the national level, and the international level through prayer, direct action, and advocacy.
- Overture 12-04, submitted by the Presbytery of Chicago, pertaining to a call for the United States government and other international bodies to join together to promote credible, fair and transparent elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to offer encouragement and financial and technical support to the Congolese government to provide quality education for its children and youth, including civic education in order to enable them to become informed, active, and responsible citizens.
- Overture 12-06, from the Advisory Committee on Social Witness, which calls for the approval of five affirmations as guidance for new directions in the PC (U.S.A.)’s peacemaking witness in congregations, presbyteries, synods, and the Peacemaking Program of the Presbyterian Mission Agency.
- Overture 12-08, submitted by the Presbytery of the Nation’s Capital, which urges all members of the PC (U.S.A.) to promote nonviolent resolution of disagreements, be they of a personal or a national level, to undertake actions consistent with breaking down the barriers between ourselves and persons who might be wrongly considered “the other.”
- Overture 12-05, from the Presbytery of Muskingum Valley, which calls for the affirming of non-violent means of resistance against human oppression in American society and throughout the world.

*Bob Sloan, a commissioned ruling elder from New Harmony Presbytery, will be covering Committees 12 and 13 for the General Assembly Communication Center.*

From: <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2016/5/13/pcusa-general-assembly-committee-13-preview/>

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## PC(USA) General Assembly **Committee 13** Preview

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE TO CONSIDER CONFIRMATION OF  
PRESIDENTS, DIRECTORS, BOARD  
MAY 13, 2016

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*Special to Presbyterian News Service*

BOB SLOAN  
*General Assembly news team*

## LOUISVILLE

Confirming the election and reelection of the presidents of the denomination's loan program and publishing company are among the numerous items to be decided by [Assembly Committee 13](#) during the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) 222nd General Assembly, June 18-25 in Portland, Oregon. The standing administrative committee for The [Board of Pensions](#) (BOP), [Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program](#) (PILP), [Presbyterian Publishing Corporation](#) (PPC) and the [Presbyterian Foundation](#), will be called upon to confirm the election of James G. Rissler

as president of the PILP to a four-year term. It will also be asked to confirm the reelection of Marc Lewis to a third, four-year term as president and publisher of PPC.

Rissler was elected by the PILP Board of Directors in October of 2014 to serve a four-year term as president, effective January 1, 2015. He joined PILP in 1999 as vice president of finance and administration and was elected to the position of senior vice president in 2004. Prior to joining PILP, he spent 17 years in the banking industry, most recently serving as a vice president with PNC Bank, N.A.

Holding a Bachelor of Science degree in Economics and Business Administration from Vanderbilt University, Rissler served as chair of the Board of the Presbyterian Homes & Services of Kentucky, Inc. and on the Board of the Presbyterian Homes & Services Foundation, Inc. He currently serves as a trustee on the Board of Spalding University.

During his two terms of service, Lewis helped the organization make the transition to online bookselling. He also led the organization during the development and publication of the well-received new hymnal for the denomination, *Glory to God*, the first new Presbyterian hymnal since 1990.

Lewis received his undergraduate degree from the University of Tennessee and his master's in business administration from Vanderbilt University. Prior to his role as publisher, he was general manager of PPC from 1999–2007 and, prior to that, served in a variety of management roles with Cokesbury and the United Methodist Publishing House.

In other business, Assembly Committee 13 will consider:

- A recommendation from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Foundation to confirm the election of two directors of its subsidiary, New Covenant Trust Company, N.A.
- A recommendation from the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board to confirm the election of seven individuals to the PILP Board of Directors.
- A recommendation from the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board to confirm the election of Mary C. Baskin to the Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Class of 2020.

Assembly Committee 13 will also hear reports from each of the six agencies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

*Bob Sloan, commissioned ruling elder from New Harmony Presbytery, will be covering Committee 13 for the General Assembly Communication Center.*

From: <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2016/5/11/pcusa-general-assembly-committee-14-preview/>

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## PC(USA) General Assembly **Committee 14** Preview

THEOLOGICAL ISSUES AND INSTITUTIONS COMMITTEE TO GRAPPLE  
WITH NEW DIRECTORY FOR WORSHIP

MAY 11, 2016

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*Special to Presbyterian News Service*

JERRY VAN MARTER  
*General Assembly news team*

LOUISVILLE

Twelve years in the making, the 222nd General Assembly is poised this June to adopt a new Directory for Worship for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

First, the document (item 14-04) will be thoroughly reviewed by the [Assembly Committee on Theological Issues and Institutions](#) before it goes to the full Assembly for adoption and then on to the church's 172 presbyteries for ratification in the coming year.

The Directory—part of the denomination's Constitution—gives standards and norms for the ordering of worship in PC(USA) congregations and councils. It also lays out the theology that underlies Presbyterian worship, “outlines appropriate forms for worship and highlights connections between worship and Christian life, witness and service.”

The long-awaited revision of the Directory for Worship—which was first adopted in 1983 at Presbyterian reunion—was launched by the 2004 General Assembly with the goal of “evaluating [the Directory's] influence and effectiveness in guiding sessions, pastors and higher governing bodies (now called “councils”) in planning and conducting worship that is authentically Reformed and culturally appropriate.”

After conducting research, a staff team from the Office of the General Assembly and the Office of Theology and Worship reported to the 2006 Assembly that a revised Directory for Worship would be “more accessible and helpful” if it were shorter and better organized. That Assembly agreed but delayed work on the new Directory due to ongoing consideration of a new Form of Government (nFOG).

After the nFOG was approved in 2010 and ratified by the presbyteries the following year, work on the new Directory for Worship heated up. A broad consultation was held in 2013 to look at the initial draft of the document. A revised draft was presented to the 2014 Assembly, which commended it to the church for study and comment, with comments due on July 1, 2015.

A further consultation was held in October 2015 and further suggestions were incorporated into the final proposal, which is now before the Assembly. In the spirit of the nFOG, “the revised Directory for

Worship seeks to foster freedom and flexibility, with openness to a broader range of worship styles and cultural expressions.”

Assembly Committee 14 will also consider:

- An overture from Kiskiminetas Presbytery (item 14-01) that seeks to restore the definition of marriage in the Directory for Worship (W-4.9000) from “between two people” to “between a man and a woman.”
- A request from the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly (item 14-12) to create a Special Committee to Study the Reformed Perspective of Christian Education in the 21st Century. The committee would be charged to examine the historic and current roles of Christian educators in the PC(USA) and ecumenically, to study current employment trends for Christian educators and how they can be a more effective resource to the whole church, and to consider how to diversify the corps of PC(USA) Christian educators for the benefit of smaller membership and racial ethnic and immigrant congregations.
- An overture from Southeastern Illinois Presbytery (item 14-03) that would remove baptism as a prerequisite for receiving the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, arguing that children whose parents choose not to have them baptized as infants and people new to the faith who have not yet been baptized, among others, are currently excluded from the sacrament.
- The Committee on Theological Education’s selection of the Rev. Craig Dykstra and the Rev. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld as recipients of the PC(USA)’s Award of Excellence in Theological Education (item 14-11), which was established in 1996 to “honor a person who has made an outstanding lifetime contribution to theological education in and for the PC(USA).”
- Confirmation of new members of the Boards of Trustees of the 10 PC(USA) seminaries (item 14-06) and two new seminary presidents (item 14-07): the Rev. Leanne Van Dyk at Columbia Theological Seminary, succeeding the late Steve Hayner; and the Rev. David Esterline at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, succeeding the retired William J. Carl III.
- An overture from Cascades Presbytery (item 14-02) calling for the PC(USA) to endorse the Clergy Letter Project, a statement by upwards of 14,000 religious leaders, including 13,000 Christian clergy, that affirms the teaching of evolution, insisting that “religious truth is of a different order from scientific truth” and that “as a scientific theory [evolution] does not contradict the existence of God, but can be seen as a natural, creative process in God’s creation.”



From: <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2016/5/18/decently-not-always-good-order-historical-overview/>

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## Decently But Not Always in Good Order: An Historical Overview of Choosing the PC(USA) Stated Clerk

MAY 18, 2016

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Stated Clerks since reunion: James Andrews, Clifton Kirkpatrick, and Gradye Parsons

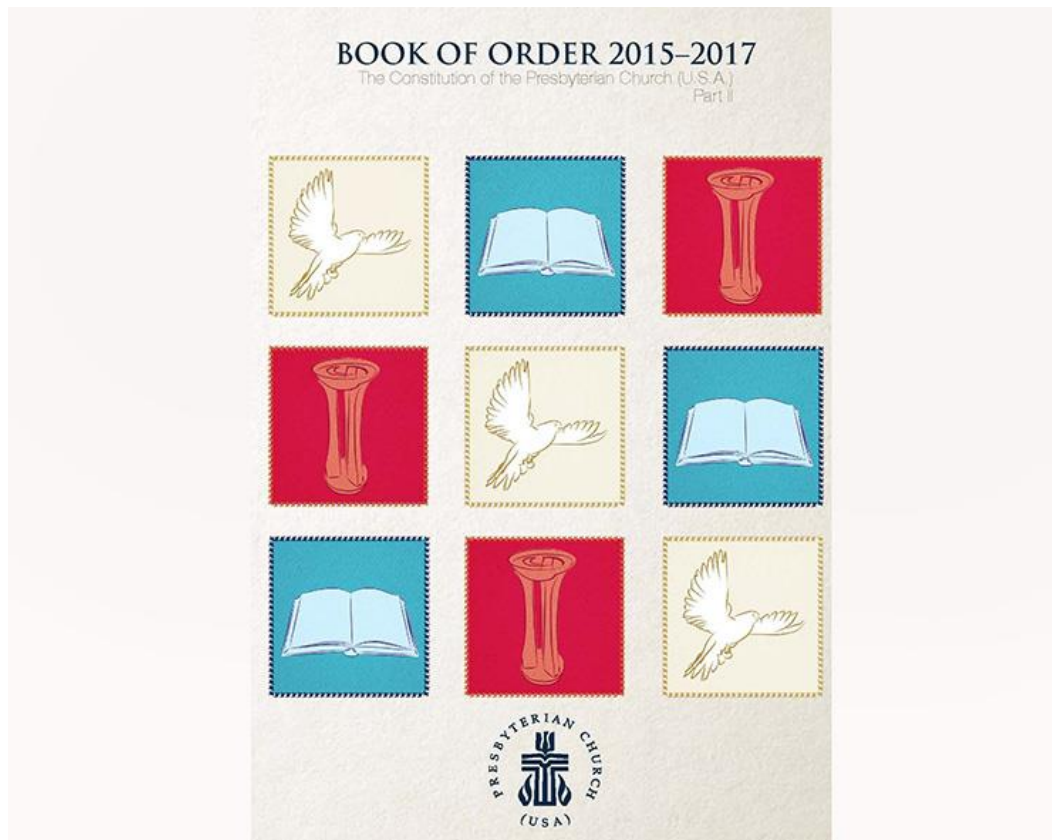
RICHARD REIFSNYDER[1]  
*Guest blogger, Presbyterian Historical Society*

### PHILADELPHIA

While the nation may focus on presidential politics in 2016, there is another contest on the same four-year cycle that captures the attention of many Presbyterians—the nomination and election of a Stated Clerk of the General Assembly to serve, in the words of the current job description, as chief ecclesiastical officer of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). This June, the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly in Portland, Oregon, will elect a Stated Clerk to succeed Gradye Parsons, who is not standing for another term.

According to Carol McDonald, retired Executive of the Synod of Lincoln Trails, and Moderator of the Stated Clerk Nomination Committee, the process of nominating a new Stated Clerk has gone smoothly, with the committee working diligently to discern what the church is seeking now in a new office holder. The nine-person committee, which was elected by the General Assembly in 2014 according to a formula stipulated by the [General Assembly Manual](#), will bring directly to the floor the name of [J. Herbert Nelson](#), Director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency's Office of Public Witness, to stand for election. Nelson will be challenged by one other candidate who made application and was

considered by the committee, [David Baker](#), Stated Clerk of Tampa Bay Presbytery. Nominations will occur on Sunday, June 19 and the election will take place on Friday, June 24.



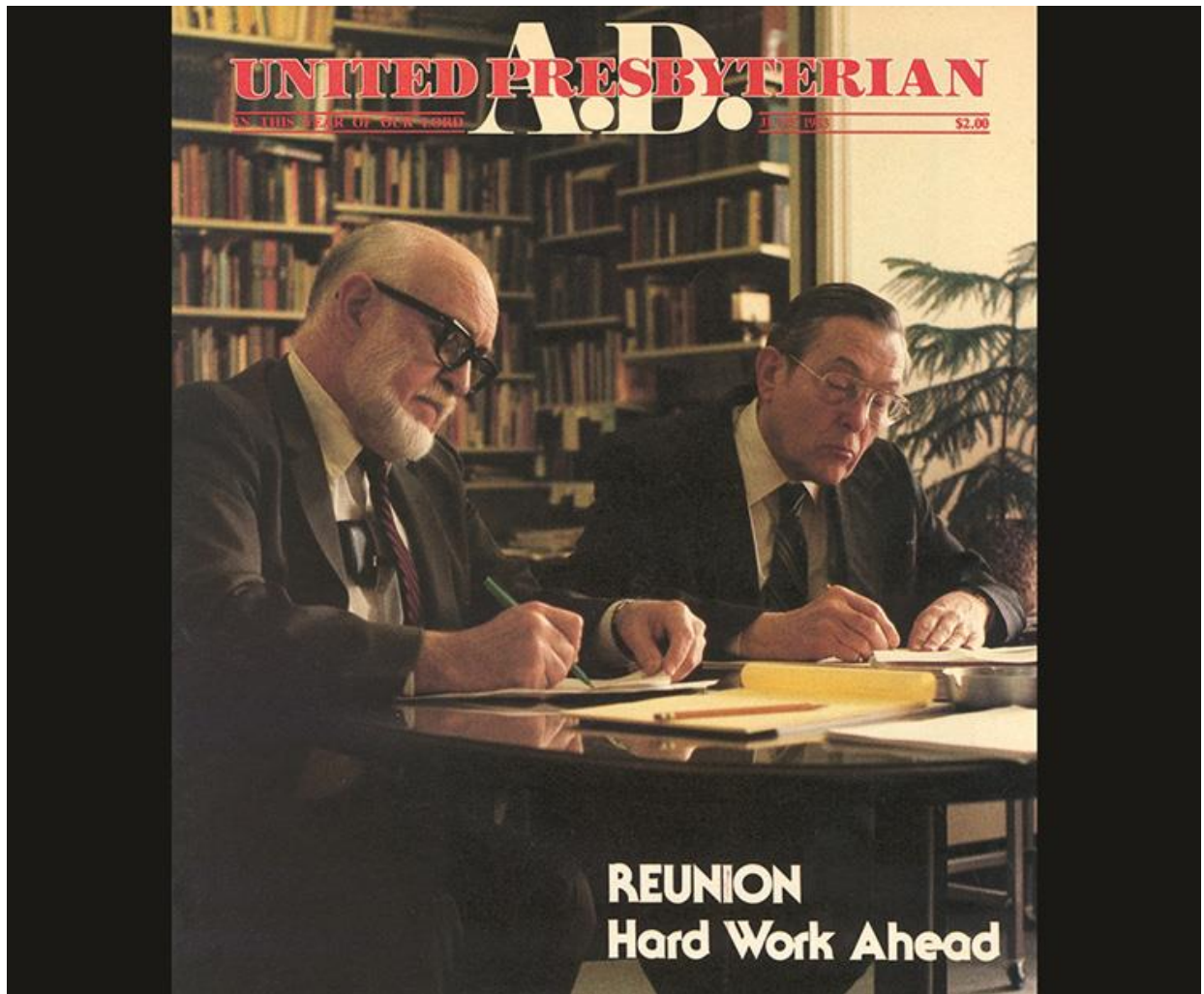
Book of Order, 2015-2017

The most recent Stated Clerk nomination, in 2012, was uncontested, but consensus has hardly been the norm with regards to that process—at least not since reunion in 1983. Indeed, for a church that celebrates doing things in an orderly way, the Stated Clerk nominating process, which has been reworked several times over the past thirty-three years, has often been messy. The elections of a clerk reflect ongoing developments in the church’s understanding of the nature and purpose of the office in the context of changing demographics within the denomination and the reality of the transformed cultural landscape in which the contemporary church, and especially the mainline church, ministers.

A striking feature of Presbyterianism is the way it labels its primary officer “clerk.” Almost nothing is said about the office in the *Book of Order*, except that each council will elect a clerk. Although authority is understood to exist collegially and corporately in Presbyterian polity, the Stated Clerk is the one individual officer in which significant authority is lodged. His or her duties, spelled out in the *General Assembly Manual* and the Stated Clerk position description, include four main areas of responsibility: (1) Administration of the Office of the General Assembly, including serving as chief executive officer and maintaining historical records; (2) Ecumenical and interfaith ministries; (3) Upholding the Constitution; and (4) Chief polity officer at meetings of the General Assembly. All these responsibilities are, for each clerk, important. But each individual prioritizes and carries out the responsibilities in different ways, placing his or her own stamp on the office.

In much the same way a presidential nominating and electing process is defined by the individuals running for office and the issues that loom largest in the public’s consideration, so Stated Clerk nominations and elections are gauges of denominational concern—not only about church actions and theology, but about individual candidates.





James Andrews and William P. Thompson, 1983

The current shape of the Stated Clerk office had its genesis in the 1983 reunion of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. (abbreviated as PCUS and widely referred to as the Southern church) and the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (abbreviated as UPCUSA and widely referred to as the Northern church). Little was said in the *Plan of Union*, adopted in 1983, about the role of the clerk in a reunited church. The issues of greatest contention were other matters—especially property and freedom of conscience. [James Andrews](#), Stated Clerk of the PCUS from 1973-1983, made a lighthearted comparison between reunion and marriage that was reported in the *GA Daily News* of June 11, 1983, saying, “You have not finished the job until you have amicably divided the closet space.” Resolving differences in style with regards to the office of Stated Clerk was one of those dividing issues, even if it was not viewed as the most difficult issue to reconcile.





Arrest of Eugene Carson Blake, 1963

According to the terms of reunion, Andrews and UPCUSA Stated Clerk [William P. Thompson](#) were to serve as co-Stated Clerks until an election was held in 1984. Both men served as key figures in an Advisory Committee charged with the “Development of the General Assembly Manual and a Position Description for the Stated Clerk.” Once that process was completed, the General Assembly Council appointed a Special Committee on Nominations for Stated Clerk to make a recommendation based on the job description—a recommendation that was then sent to the General Assembly Committee on Nomination of a Stated Clerk during the assembly meeting itself. It was a convoluted process, to say the least, and subject to an array of differing opinions. A review of the records of the Advisory Committee at the Presbyterian Historical Society[2] shows that there were spirited discussions about what they were looking for in a clerk, as well as the election process itself.

The tradition in the Northern church had been for a strong, visible Stated Clerk. [Eugene Carson Blake](#), clerk from 1951-1966, pressed for the church to be engaged with social issues, made national news by being arrested during a 1963 [civil rights demonstration in Baltimore](#), and spoke out against the Vietnam War. Thompson—a lawyer by training who was elected clerk in 1966—followed in that activist role, filing important “friend of the court” briefs.[3] His strong advocacy for civil rights and the cause of peace, as well as his work with the National and World Council of Churches, led the *New York Times* to call him “one of the world’s most influential religious leaders.” In the Southern tradition, the clerk had been a less visible figure, and the whole administrative structure less top-down, modeling what one long-time administrator with Southern church roots called a “decentralized personalist” approach to Presbyterian polity. Other than [Joseph Ruggles Wilson](#), whose long tenure as clerk from 1865-1898 made him an influential figure in the Southern church,

and who is widely remembered today as the father of President Woodrow Wilson, most PCUS clerks acted largely behind the scenes. According to one now-retired Presbytery Stated Clerk who was nurtured in the Southern stream, many in the PCUS tradition viewed the General Assembly Moderator as the figure deserving more visibility than the Stated Clerk, whereas the opposite was true for many in the Northern stream.



Joseph Ruggles Wilson

Reunifying the nation's largest Presbyterian denominations was no mean feat. (To compare the clerk nominating process to a presidential one, imagine combining the Republican and Democratic traditions.) To make matters even trickier, societal tensions were mounting during the mid-1980s. Mainline churches, no longer the visible presences of Christianity they had been in the time of great growth during the 1950s and 1960s, were losing members and yielding their public role to other expressions of Christianity, including a resurgent evangelicalism and rejuvenated Catholicism. The widespread emphasis during the Reagan years on smaller, less powerful, and more decentralized institutions was further diminishing to the cultural authority of the mainline churches at the national level.

Historians might debate whether it was the deliberate intention of the Presbyterians who developed the position description for the new Stated Clerk in the early 1980s to temper the power of that office in light of the aforementioned societal forces. But clearly the Special Committee on Nominations for Stated Clerk saw its mandate being the recommendation of a solid but low-key administrator of the

kind defined by the newly developed position description. Working toward that goal, the Special Committee nominated Patricia A. McClurg, a well-regarded administrator of the PCUS General Assembly Mission Board, during the 196th General Assembly in 1984. The Assembly Committee on the Nomination of the Stated Clerk declined to take the committee's suggestion, however, and ended up interviewing four persons before nominating the acting co-clerks Andrews and Thompson to stand for election. (Two other candidates were nominated from the floor, including Robert C. Lamar, former co-chair of the reunion committee.) Thompson held a significant lead after the first ballot, but on the fourth ballot James Andrews prevailed. Perhaps as a way of offering consolation following a stunning defeat, the assembly passed a resolution thanking Thompson for his "dedicated service and gifted leadership" and gave him a standing ovation.

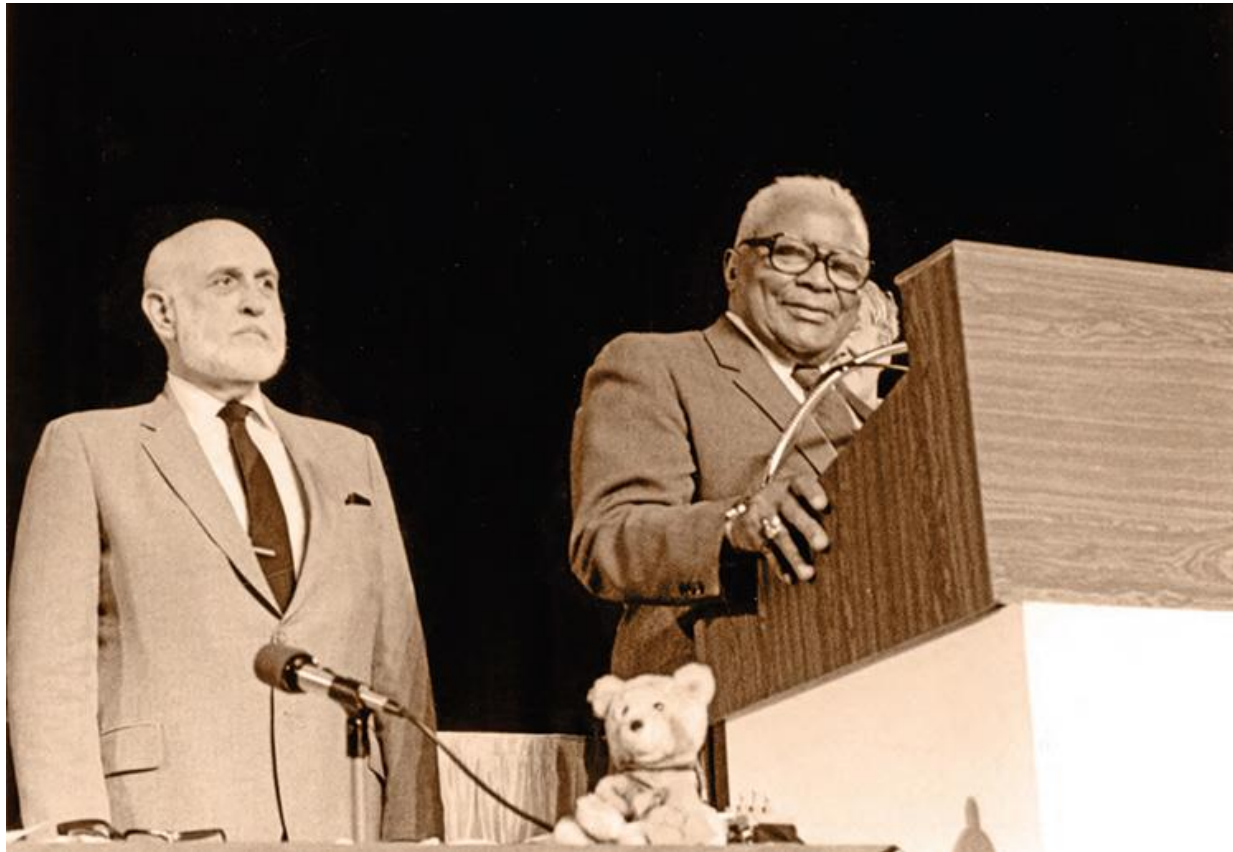


Patricia A. McClurg

The 1984 election was an inauspicious beginning for the Office of Stated Clerk in the reunited church—both to the nominating and electing process, and to the man who assumed the office. That election was the first of three in which Andrews either received no endorsement from the official nominating body or was bested during the initial ballot. All three times (1984, 1988, and 1992) he emerged as clerk.

James Andrews was a competent and personable Stated Clerk, if not the forceful and visionary public figure many wanted. By 1988, there was some desire in the five-year-old united church to replace Andrews, in part because of the church's handling of various matters of litigation. The Search Commission appointed in 1987 received applications from seven persons as well as Andrews's end-of-term review. Apparently, the commission did not recommend a particular person for the job but passed the applications on to the Assembly Committee on the Nomination of the Stated Clerk.<sup>[4]</sup> Because four of the applicants had not yet declared publicly their intention to stand for the office, the Assembly Committee voted to meet in executive session, except for a period of open hearings—a decision that likely contributed to concerns that the process was not open enough. The

Assembly Committee unanimously chose to nominate Harriet Nelson, the Moderator of the 1984 General Assembly. But after Andrews was nominated from the floor, he, and not Nelson, was elected in a tight vote, 323 to 298. Some at the assembly felt cheated—if not by the outcome, then by the process. Several commissioners, including the chair of the Assembly Committee, officially protested reporting in the *GA Daily News* that had suggested the way in which the church nominated the Stated Clerk was “clandestine, top secret, and underhanded.”



James Andrews and Martin Luther King, Sr., 1983

By the time Andrews began considering re-election four years later, in 1992, he was advising his Office of the General Assembly staff that he might not be re-elected and urging their loyalty to the eventual clerk. The church continued to struggle its way toward developing a consistent process that would be open-minded and fair. The Search Commission advertised the clerk position and received three applications. Although the commission members had been asked by the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly to review the entire process leading to the coming election, they reported back that they could not arrive at a consensus, and offered only recommendations about the disposition of commission records.

The Assembly Committee on the Nomination of the Stated Clerk recommended that James Andrews be elected for a third term, but to wide surprise he was defeated on a third ballot by W. Clark Chamberlain, Stated Clerk of the Synod of the Sun. Even more surprising was Chamberlain’s announcement the following day that he could not proceed with installation. It was later revealed that a member of the Office of the General Assembly made assertions regarding sexual harassment that involved Chamberlain. (He would again seek the post, declaring himself a candidate in 1996.) For a short time parliamentary confusion reigned, until it was decided to hold an election between



the remaining two candidates, with Andrews prevailing in gaining a third term. After the vote Andrews addressed the assembly, conveying his understanding of the serious concerns expressed during the gathering. The church moved on to other assembly matters, but once again, there was an obvious need to develop a better process for selecting the PC(USA)'s lead officer.

James Andrews decided not to stand for re-election in 1996, thus opening the opportunity for a fresh start. The recast job description for Stated Clerk stressed that "the position...exists for the purpose of helping the General Assembly as the governing body fulfill its goals." But it was not just an administrative leader the church sought as a new millennium approached. Rather, the job description stressed that "the work of Stated Clerk must be undertaken as a conscious act of discipleship to Jesus Christ. It always bears elements of a pastoral style, both with individuals to whom the clerk relates, and as a spiritual leader for the whole church."

By the 1996 election, the Stated Clerk Review/Nominating Committee understood that its task involved recommending a specific candidate. Culled from a large pool of twenty completed applications, the name it unanimously put forward was Clifton Kirkpatrick, a highly regarded church executive who had administered denominational mission work in the PCUS and then the PC(USA) since 1981. Although the Stated Clerk is elected, the position descriptions make clear it is a job to which one is *called*. Kirkpatrick, in 1996 and during subsequent elections, stressed to the committee his views on the importance of discerning whether or not God was calling him to this task—both personally and through the voice of the church. The committee had kept open the application process beyond the original deadline and Kirkpatrick put in his papers just before the final deadline.

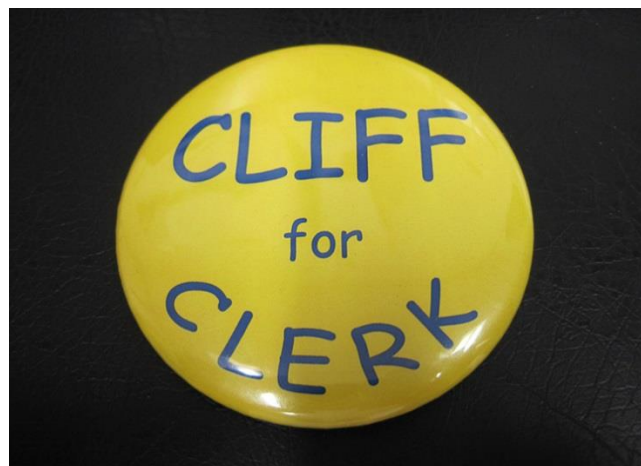


Clifton Kirkpatrick. Via Presbyterian Outlook, 2016

Four other candidates were nominated at the 1996 assembly, requiring the appointment of an Assembly Committee on Candidate Review to establish a process for reviewing materials and providing adequate opportunity for the candidates to present their positions. The committee this time confirmed the judgment of the Stated Clerk Review/Nominating Committee and endorsed Kirkpatrick. Despite that choice, a disagreement on the Candidate Review Committee about their task, and whether it was authorized to recommend its own candidate as most qualified (superseding the month's long process of the Stated Clerk Review/Nominating Committee), led to a request that the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly review the entire process as outlined in the Standing Rules. The request was referred to the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly, which recommended standing rule changes.

Kirkpatrick was elected on the first ballot, and by a substantial majority. Soon afterwards, he signaled his intention to be a highly visible clerk. "The clerk needs to be out in the church proclaiming the gospel," he told the assembly. Internal matters took initial precedence, however, as he and Moderator John Buchanan led a retreat that began the process of easing the somewhat fractious relationships between General Assembly entities. In a church that was even then experiencing budget cuts, membership declines, and division over issues regarding sexuality, Kirkpatrick stressed the importance of unity. Early in his tenure he co-authored the book *What Unites Presbyterians: Common Ground for Troubled Times*. Having deep roots in mission and ecumenism, Kirkpatrick thrived at those parts of the job and received high marks in those areas during performance reviews. A former Moderator wrote, "[Kirkpatrick] has more gifts in the area of ecumenical relationships than any other." A colleague affirmed, "[Kirkpatrick] is a giant in this field and should be a source of pride and inspiration." For the clerk's part, an ecumenical vision was not just an option, but something "needed in the denomination," as Kirkpatrick told me in a recent phone interview. It is too easy, he added, to let the denomination fracture "without considering ecumenical implications."

Reflecting further on his years as Stated Clerk, Kirkpatrick stressed the importance of his role to preserve, defend, and interpret the church's constitution. During his 2000 self-evaluation, he indicated his intention to lead a church that is "more flexible and open to diversity while clearly grounded in Reformed faith and theology." Being engaged in public witness, communicating actions of the General Assembly to church and community, addressing issues of polity—these were all part of the process of capturing "a vision of what the church is to be" and what "it means to be the body of Christ, living out the principles of Presbyterianism."

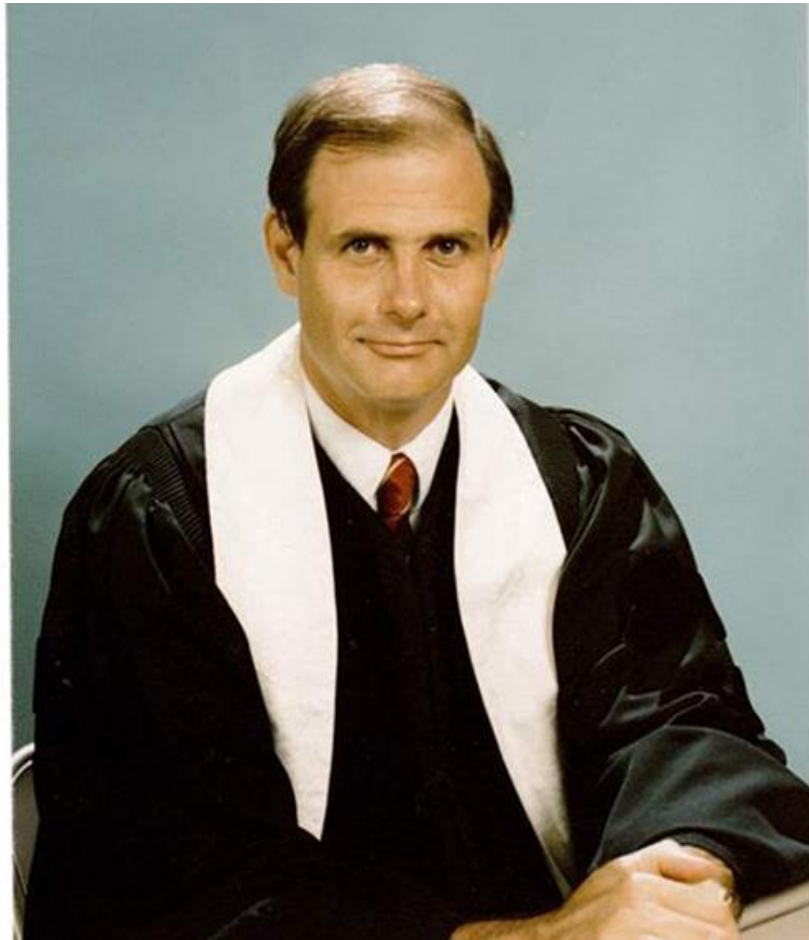


Button supporting Kirkpatrick for Stated Clerk

Kirkpatrick felt a deep sense of call to the office of Stated Clerk and loved the responsibilities of the position, but he admits that standing for election was “an emotionally difficult process.” While acknowledging there is merit in having to face opposition, he hated anything that seemed like self-promotion and still wonders about the wisdom of certain aspects of the nominating and election process.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, those processes continued to undergo refinement, in part because of disturbing developments that occurred during Kirkpatrick’s subsequent elections.

The Stated Clerk Review/Nomination Committee nominated him for a second term in 2000. After an additional nomination was made from the floor, an Assembly Stated Clerk Review Committee—consisting of the Nomination Committee plus ten additional commissioners—was formed again. That body also recommended that Kirkpatrick be elected, which he was by a substantial majority. Despite Kirkpatrick’s continuance in the office, and the sense of continuity his reappointment provided, tensions within the church over the future direction of the PC(USA) complicated matters at the assembly. Winfield “Casey” Jones suggested the church was in crisis and needed a clerk who would deepen the commitment to scripture and confessions and broaden the ecumenical conversation beyond current partners. (Kirkpatrick said he preferred to see the church as a glass “half-full.”) Once again the recommendation was made that the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly “review the entire process of the election of a Stated Clerk,” and report back to the 2001 GA, although the minutes of that assembly do not indicate that this happened.



Winfield “Casey” Jones



The election in 2004 was more contentious than the one in 2000, in part because the Stated Clerk's position became the focus for increasing discontent within the church. The Iraq War had divided the church, as it did the nation, and a commissioner's resolution called on Kirkpatrick to justify his endorsement of a World Council of Church's statement on the war.[5] After receiving the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly's positive assessment, the Stated Clerk Review/Nominations Committee proceeded with its own review, receiving 364 responses, in contrast to only 89 four years before. Although the great majority of responses were positive, affirming Kirkpatrick's ability to "delineate proper authority for the clerk" and his skill at "grasping vision" for the church, a significant minority of responses raised questions about a range of issues regarding the clerk, including his upholding (or failing to uphold) the constitution and his handling of budget cuts and membership losses.

In 2004, the Stated Clerk Review/Nominations Committee nominated Kirkpatrick for a third term, and three other candidates were nominated from the floor. All voiced concerns about leadership, and one declared rather bluntly that the current clerk "has failed us as a constitutional leader, as a denominational leader, and as an ecumenical leader." Although Kirkpatrick was again elected, receiving 65 percent of the ballots, his reelection heightened concerns about the fairness of the process. The committee noted that although there were standing rules governing the election of the Moderator, there were none concerning the Stated Clerk; it then recommended that rules be added for future actions. A request made after the election for an "investigation" of the process passed overwhelmingly.

## Kirkpatrick reelected to third term as stated clerk; election process questioned

By JENNIFER FILES  
*OUTLOOK* Assembly Reporter

Clifton Kirkpatrick, 58, won reelection Friday to a third term as stated clerk of the Presbyterian Church (USA), in a broad affirmation of the denomination's current leadership.

Kirkpatrick received 349 votes, or 65 percent of votes cast, on the first ballot, easily defeating three opponents from the evangelical side of the church who called for tougher enforcement of con-

Rick Ufford-Chase, 40, a buoyant evangelical mission worker popular among liberals in the denomination — Kirkpatrick was widely expected to win.

Candidates submitted written statements earlier this year and were formally introduced before the Assembly Sunday morning. On Friday each candidate made a five-minute speech, and then commissioners posed a series of questions for an hour.

Plainspoken but not inflammatory, Kirkpatrick has used his power as stated

Many saw this as long overdue. The increasingly politicized process was especially visible during the 2004 election. Some raised concerns that “friendly” questions had been planned and fed to candidates in advance, that lists of “endorsements” were circulated, and that advocacy groups were holding strategy sessions and distributing materials (including one decrying Kirkpatrick’s “failed leadership” that was stuffed into commissioners’ boxes). Campaign buttons for and against Kirkpatrick were visible around the assembly. Although such lobbying efforts had long been part of the assembly process in other matters, an article in *Presbyterian Outlook* from August 2004 shows that numerous Presbyterians questioned whether “resourcing the commissioners” in these ways was appropriate for the election of the Stated Clerk.

Despite the Stated Clerk Election Review Committee examining the process at the 2004 General Assembly and determining it to be fair and open, a major overhaul was approved at the 2006 GA. The review portion of the Stated Clerk Review/Nominating Committee was eliminated and that task re-assigned to the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly (which was already conducting a review, in fact). All applicants for the office were required to submit a Personal Information Form or current resume, and an incumbent wishing to be re-nominated was required to let the committee know of that decision 180 days before the start of the General Assembly. The committee would then interview all applicants and select one as its nominee. Other applicants not chosen who wished to be nominated against the committee’s nominee were to declare their intention 45 days before the opening of the assembly, effectively eliminating last minute nominations of individuals who had not been vetted by the committee. Some committee members, concerned about “self-promotion,” objected to the requirement that candidates make personal application rather than being proposed by others. But that concern was deemed a minor one by most committee members and it did not shape the election process overhaul.

Perhaps the most significant changes were the rules established to prevent anything considered “a campaign for the office of Stated Clerk.” Printed materials provided by the candidates were to be distributed by the Office of the General Assembly only and were to be limited in scope—that meant no flyers, buttons, or other materials distributed by the candidate or by those acting on his or her behalf. Even the candidates’ availability at the meeting prior to the election would be curtailed. The intent was to ensure the office be considered a “calling and not a popularity contest.”

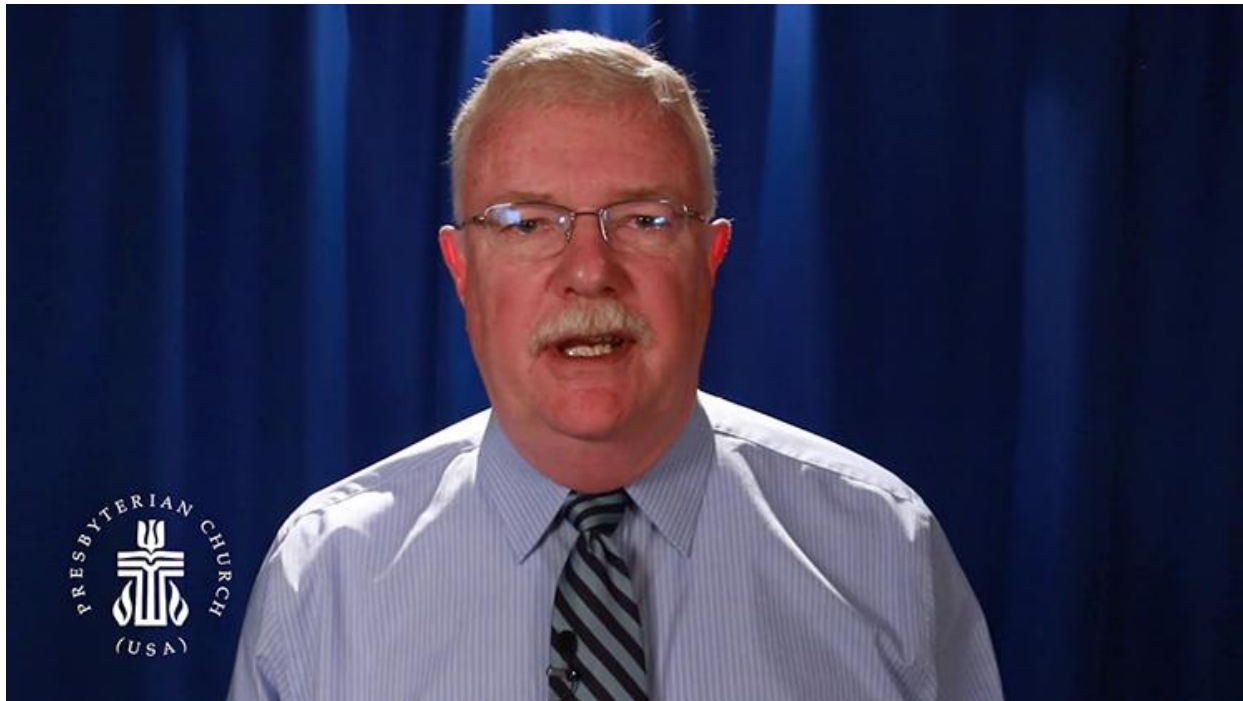


Moderator buttons through the years. From PHS Museum Collection.

While much had been clarified regarding the nomination and election of a Stated Clerk, including the differences between that process and the selection of a Moderator, the 2008 General Assembly showed that significant ambiguities remained to be worked out. Cliff Kirkpatrick's decision not to seek re-nomination opened the door for a new clerk. Fourteen persons initially applied. After Gradye Parsons—the Associate Stated Clerk for eight years and a Presbytery Executive and long-time pastor before that—received the Stated Clerk Nominating Committee nod, three other candidates indicated their desire to challenge his nomination.

The Stated Clerk Nominating Committee spent considerable effort in 2008 defining the new standing rules adopted at the previous GA. Candidates were to “stand” for election, not “run.” No Presbytery endorsements should be sought, no materials distributed (other than the official six pages authorized by the committee), and no candidates were to accept speaking engagements during the assembly or respond to interview requests unless the same opportunities were afforded to all candidates. Parsons commented at the time that “the standing rules are both very clear and very vague about what is allowed and what is not concerning ‘standing for clerk.’” One of the other candidates expressed concerns along those lines, namely that the committee had used its “discretion to interpret the rules in a way that limits information.” Nevertheless, the committee held firm to its interpretation of the rules, and Parsons was elected by a wide margin on the first ballot.

Since 2008, Parsons has served as Stated Clerk. His tenure has been marked by a number of daunting challenges. Membership decline and budget and staff cuts have been ongoing. Beginning especially with the [“Peace, Unity, and Purity” report](#) in 2006 and continuing through the modifications of the constitution eliminating the “fidelity and chastity” clause regarding ordination and permitting same gender marriage, discontent has been registered by congregations desiring to leave the denomination. Parsons told me in a recent phone interview that his office has become a target for much of that discontent, and that it is not easy for him or others in the Office of the General Assembly to deal with such sustained criticism. He understands that being clerk is a “grown up job,” and that “taking a punch goes with the territory.” Despite mounting difficulties, he has demonstrated a pastor's heart while working to encourage the church to utilize new tools of discernment and other ways of decision making. His deep personal faith, strong roots in Reformed theology and practice, appreciation for the differences among church elders, and sense of humor have gained him unwavering support in many areas of the church. Parsons acknowledges that much of his work's effectiveness has depended on developing relationships and building collegiality—areas he considers personal strengths. But he contends that there are certain times when the clerk “needs to be assertive.” The days may be gone when American culture looked to mainline churches as the hub of religious leadership, but Presbyterians still “create leaders.” When issues such as the police shooting in Ferguson emerge, it is important for the church to be a sympathetic voice in national discussions and to engage in actions that are grounded in the policy of the denomination.



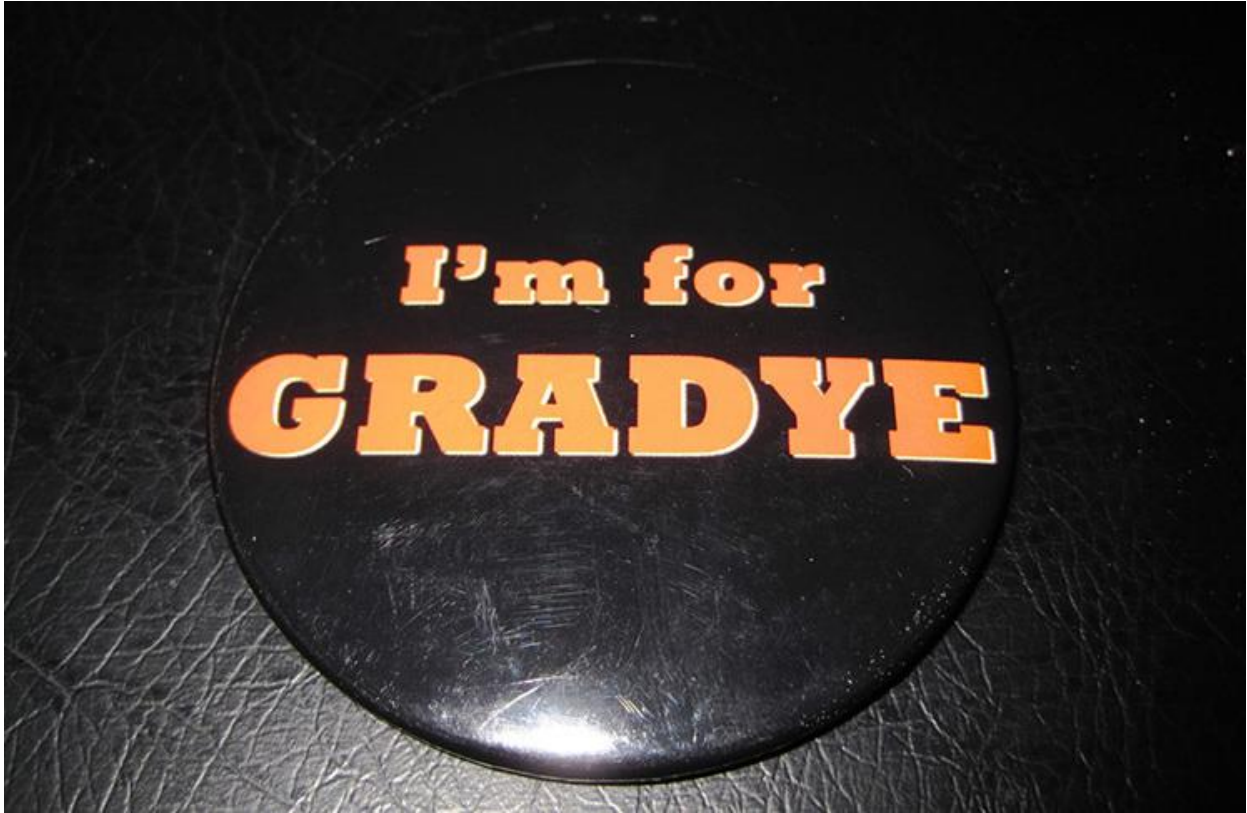
Gradye Parsons

Parsons is keenly aware of the changes facing the church and the need to cast a vision for the future. “We’re going to be a different church in light of recent decisions, certainly more open-minded and welcoming. It’s time we claim that this is who we are and not be embarrassed about our social witness.” Acknowledging the pain that comes from separations, he offers hope from a Carly Simon song, [“There’s more room in a broken heart.”](#)

A more open church requires new possibilities. Parsons suggests that the church’s future ministry will not be top-down, at the national level or the local church, but rather laity-led; it will also require learning how to lead “from the middle.” While some denominations still prefer the idea of a single corporate leader, Parsons does not think that model is right for Presbyterians. What is? The whole church is trying to figure that out. The answer will likely require a Stated Clerk who is open to new possibilities, seeking to lead not according to a style that worked fifty years ago, but in a way that fits the changing contexts of today and tomorrow. “I remain hopeful about the church’s future,” Parson said, “though its shape may be quite different” than that of the past.

That buoyant spirit, in the face of deeply challenging circumstances, is surely one reason Parsons is the only clerk since the 1983 reunion to run for the office uncontested. (He received the unanimous vote of the 2012 General Assembly.) Another reason is the way some Presbyterians no longer see the clerk’s office as a locus for the kind of denominational transformation they have sought and have placed their energies elsewhere. Parsons describes himself as “humbled” by the former reason; he seems understanding but unperturbed by the latter. “It is a healthy sign that people don’t see that the only way to change the denomination is from Louisville,” he said. Many letters to the Stated Clerk Nominating Committee in 2012 from his General Assembly colleagues were laudatory; “[Parsons] is a superb Stated Clerk who is appropriate for his time” offered one. In presenting him for re-election, the Committee praised his calming presence, his “love for the church” and his belief in “the church God wants us to be.” It also noted with satisfaction the clerk’s deep roots in his local congregation, where he teaches regularly an adult Sunday school class.





Button supporting Parsons for Stated Clerk, 2008

Despite some confusion about the clarity of the rules, for the most part the church seems to have settled into a procedure for nominating and electing a new Stated Clerk that works smoothly and meets the commissioners' desire for a fair, open process. The church desired and developed a process for this continuing office that is different from the election for the Moderator and the processes for securing executives for the mission agency of the church. The dignity and historic roots of the office make the procedures by which a new Stated Clerk is called of significant importance.

Parsons's decision in 2015 not to stand for another term generated considerable interest in the office. Thirteen persons submitted applications, including J. Herbert Nelson and David Baker, and six were interviewed. The committee emphasized its desire to consider women and persons from diverse racial, ethnic, and leadership groups. Previous committees had emphasized a similar concern, though only white men have been elected to date, and only one elder.

The committee's most recent application and interview process was detailed. Each candidate was asked to make (1) a video presentation about "why they should be the nominee," (2) answer a series of questions about their experiences, (3) evaluate their gifts in the four areas over which the clerk has responsibility, (4) write a statement of faith, and (5) provide five references. Applying required a definite seriousness of intent.

## Job Description

**Position Title:** The Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

**Revision Date:** Sept 2015

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**Basic Commitment:** The Stated Clerk is a ruling elder or teaching elder of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), with a strong commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and to the mission of the church as informed by the Scriptures and the church's confessions and theological positions.

**Description and Purpose of the Position:** The Stated Clerk is the chief ecclesiastical officer of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), furthering the ministry of Jesus Christ in the world through vision, interpretation, and inspiration. The position exists to carry out the responsibilities and functions outlined in the *Book of Order*, the *General Assembly Organization for Mission*, and the Standing Rules of the meetings of the General Assembly. The work of the Stated Clerk must be undertaken as a conscious act of discipleship to Jesus Christ. It always bears elements of a pastoral style, both with individuals to whom the clerk relates, and as a spiritual leader for the whole church.

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Beginning of Stated Clerk job description, 2016

Any future clerk needs to be prepared for the possibility of structural change. Several overtures before the 2016 General Assembly suggest placing the General Assembly mission and program under the office of the Stated Clerk. There are budgetary and interagency rationales behind this suggestion, and the church has long had a tradition of trying to solve theological and practical challenges with structural and organizational solutions. And yet, historically, the clerk is the public persona of the denomination, with functions that remain distinct from those of the Executive Director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency; a merger of the Presbyterian Mission Agency and the Office of the General Assembly would require a significant change in polity. Whatever the future church structure will be, the new clerk, in the opinion of the Stated Clerk Nomination Committee, has to be prepared to participate in that conversation. Committee Moderator McDonald suggests that this clerk will serve in a time of transition, and undoubtedly help to reshape the denomination.

Though the most recent job description for the Stated Clerk remains largely the same as earlier versions, one conspicuous addition gives the office holder the task of being “cheerleader for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)”—not in the sense of presenting a rosy view of all things, but by being a positive public presence for the entire denomination.

Hopefully, the 2016 General Assembly in Portland will confirm that we have a sound, fair, and clear process in place for the election of this important officer, and that all things will be done “[decently and in order](#).” However the assembly plays out, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will soon have a new Stated Clerk, who will take office on August 1 and who will need and covet our encouragement and prayers. The new U.S. President will no doubt warrant the same, but that’s a matter for another time.

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[1]Rich Reifsnnyder recently retired after 44 years in pastoral ministry in the PC(USA), including 21 years as pastor of the [First Presbyterian Church of Winchester, Virginia](#). He is a graduate of Duke University, Yale Divinity School, and Princeton Theological Seminary, where he received a Ph.D. in



Church History. Among his publications are articles on the history of church organization and leadership in [The Presbyterian Presence series](#). Rich lives in Salisbury, CT.

[2] [A note on sources](#): Primary sources consulted during the research for this post at the Presbyterian Historical Society are the *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1983-2012); the Joint Committee on Presbyterian Union Records, the Records of the Advisory Committee on the Development of the GA Manual and a position description for Stated Clerk (1983-84); and the Reports and Records of the Stated Clerk Nominating Committees (with varying names, 1984-2014). Because many of these unprocessed records are restricted, I have been cautious in citing specific identifications.

I also interviewed Stated Clerks Clifton Kirkpatrick and Gradye Parsons, as well as current Stated Clerk Nomination Committee Moderator Carol McDonald.

[3] Thompson had General Assembly action as justification for such amicus briefs, though he was challenged by some within the denomination who thought he overstepped his authority.

[4] [A note on name and structure changes to the nominating committees](#): The committee charged with the task of overseeing the nominating process of the stated clerk was initially called the Search Commission and later the Stated Clerk Review/Nomination Committee (SCRNC). It is elected by the assembly a year before a Stated Clerk's term ends.

Although the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly did its own end-of-term review of the clerk on a regular basis, this special committee was also given that task, and took its job quite seriously. Input was solicited from among the clerk's colleagues at the General Assembly, the Stated Clerks of the Presbyteries, other church and ecumenical leaders, and the church as a whole. If the current clerk chose not to be nominated for another term, the committee was charged with the task of conducting a search, including "recruiting, screening, interviewing and selecting a candidate" to nominate. The Committee on the Office of the General Assembly was to provide an updated job description. While initially the Search Commission/Stated Clerk Review/Nomination Committee passed its recommendation of a specific candidate on to an Assembly Committee on the Nomination of the Stated Clerk, in subsequent elections it became unclear if that was the intention or if its mandate was only to collect and screen applications to pass on to the Assembly Committee.

Indeed, exactly how the SCRNC work was to relate to the Assembly Committee was unclear. If the SCRNC did propose a specific candidate after months of work, it was unsettling that the Assembly Committee, meeting only for a few days, might reject that nominee, as happened in 1984. By 1996, the step of having a separate assembly committee was eliminated, and the SCRNC began reporting directed to the assembly.

[5] The Committee on the Office of the General Assembly affirmed that the clerk's actions were in compliance with the standing rules and were part of his responsibility as clerk.

*This article has been republished in its entirety from the [Presbyterian Historical Society website](#).*

## Appendices

### Appendix A. Email Exchange on the Foothills Presbytery Overtures Controversy.

December 29, 2015

To: Presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) -- distributed by email --  
From: National Black Presbyterian Caucus

Subject: Important Issues for our Denomination

This correspondence from the National Black Presbyterian Caucus (NBPC) is being sent to bring to your attention two issues that will come before the General Assembly of our denomination in June 2016.

The first issue concerns the fact that the members of the Special Offerings Task Force have received a referral from the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board recommending that the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly (2016) approve that funds from **the Christmas Joy Offering** continue to be distributed to eligible Historically Presbyterian Racial Ethnic Institutions through 2024, after which time, funds will be allocated for racial ethnic leadership development programs in the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

NBPC encourages the Church to oppose this recommendation and advocate that the Christmas Joy Offering funds be continued without interruption to our racial ethnic institutions well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century to assure their financial viability. Presbyterian Racial Ethnic Institutions, while they have made some progress, will still need support from the Church well beyond 2024. This is true because Black wealth is still very limited in the U.S. According to the Institute for Policy Studies, Blacks comprise 13 percent of the U.S. population but have only 2.7 percent of total wealth. The wealth of the Forbes 400 billionaires is equal to the wealth of the entire African American population (Institute for Policy Studies, "Billionaire Bonanza Report: The Forbes 400 and the Rest of Us," December 2015, Collins and Hoxie).

Martin Luther King, Jr. observed in his **I Have a Dream Speech** that the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. Even so, Black institutions are trying to cultivate alumni support and support from other sources, but raising funds is still challenging.

In an article written this fall in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* about Black institutions, it was noted that these institutions have played a significant role in the lives of African Americans. The supportive atmosphere at these institutions has allowed Black students to excel within the classroom without the racial pressures that can be found in society. They have allowed many to enroll as diamonds in the rough that are nurtured and polished to become, after graduation, significant contributors to church and society. Many of these schools take chances on students that other schools will not enroll. Many students come from low-income families, from less than well know high schools, and will be the first to attend college in their families. These institutions

have produced some significant leaders for the Church and society. We are a much stronger Presbyterian Church today due to the leadership of African Americans like Drs. Thelma Davidson Adair, Katie Geneva Cannon, James Thomas, Edward Newberry, Arthur Canada, Darius and Vera Swann, Lonnie J. Oliver, Byron Wade, Larry Hill, and the late James H. Costen, all of whom are products of racial ethnic institutions.

These institutions have been a major factor in educating African American leaders for the Church. If we want to ensure the development of African American Presbyterian leaders for the Church and society, we need to continue to provide financial support to our Historically Presbyterian Racial Ethnic Institutions through the Christmas Joy Offering for a very long time.

The second issue that NBPC wants to bring to your attention concerns the fact that Foothills Presbytery will send to the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly nine overtures for consideration that will have an impact on how the Church will deal with social justice matters. Find below a very brief description of the overtures. NBPC opposes all nine of the overtures.

Overture # 1 overtures the General Assembly to amend paragraph G.0503 of the Book of Order adding language that requires the Biennial meetings of GA to discuss and more faithfully fulfill the Great Ends of the Church. Every third General Assembly shall depart from the rotation of the Six Great Ends and instead be called together to consider all amendments to the Constitution that have been properly submitted. All overtures to amend the Constitution, in order to be considered by the GA for Constitutional change, must have the endorsement of no fewer than 15% of the Presbyteries. Overtures that receive 2/3rds endorsement of the presbyteries may be considered at any GA following the achievement of the 2/3rds endorsement.

Overture # 2 overtures the GA to amend the Standing Rules of the GA regarding plenary meetings requiring that any social witness policy statement of resolution to be proposed at the GA shall first have the concurrence of 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the presbyteries. As an alternative to yes/no votes the Assembly shall seriously consider calling the denomination's attention to the issue to explore its dimensions, and imploring its members to learn and pray about the issue, and become more engaged at the local church and presbytery level. In developing dockets of plenary and committee meetings, social witness policy should relate only to the Six Great Ends of the church.

Overture # 3 overtures the GA that for the next three General Assemblies, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy shall focus its attention on generating discussion in the presbyteries about social witness policy concerns. The aim of these discussions will be to work toward forming consensus in the broader church regarding social witness policy. This will temporarily set aside the GA's guidelines for forming social witness policy.

Overture # 4 overtures the GA to Amend the Standing Rules of the GA to strike certain words (under section B and Subsection 2) and adding others to read that 20% of the presbyteries may elect an Executive Presbyter Advisory Delegate, who shall ordinarily be the presbytery executive, to be an advisory delegate to the GA. The Committee on the Office of the GA shall design a rotation system among the Presbyteries to accomplish this goal.

Overture # 5 overtures the GA to change the language to amend G-6.04 by striking language to allow for a 2/3rds vote from the present majority vote of approval from the presbyteries to change the Book of Order. The approved amendment would become effective not one year following the adjournment of the assembly transmitting the proposed amendment, but it would become effective, if approved and enacted by the next General Assembly, which now meets every two years.

Overture # 6 overtures the 222<sup>nd</sup> GA to amend the Book of Order, Chapter 3, “Councils of the Church,” to allow presbyteries to register an abstaining vote when voting on GA proposals recommending constitutional changes. Consequently, a presbytery’s decision to abstain will not be recorded as a no vote. The authors of the overture think this will help presbyteries that are undecided about an issue to vote their conviction that to change the constitution at that time is inadvisable, divisive, and that further prayer, discussion and discernment will benefit the Church. They reason it will also help the perceived pressure on the part of some who feel that GA is pressing for votes on divisive issues which have disrupted the peace, unity and purity of the Church, resulting in diminished membership and mission momentum.

Overture # 7 overtures the 222<sup>nd</sup> GA to amend Section L of the Standing Rules of the GA as found in the Manual of the GA. Presently, these rules allow for the Stated Clerk to recommend changes to the GA for changes in the Standing Rules in consultation with the Committee on the Office of the GA before proposing to the GA any amendment. The change would allow for Presbyteries and Synods to submit overtures to amend the Standing Rules. The Committee on the Office of the GA, in consultation with the stated Clerk, may offer their advice on the overtures. These rules may be amended by a majority vote of the commissioners. A motion to suspend the standing rules is not debatable and shall require a 2/3rds vote of the total enrollment of the commissioners.

Overture # 8 overtures the 222<sup>nd</sup> GA to amend G-3-05 by inserting a new section, G-3.0502 (Organizational Review). The new section shall read that the GA has the responsibility to regularly review the Manual of the GA. Presbyteries and Synods may submit overtures to amend, delete or suspend sections of the Manual of the GA. The concern is that this will prevent the GA from becoming entrenched and isolated and self-perpetuating.

Overture # 9 overtures the 222<sup>nd</sup> GA to create a General Assembly Reform Coordinating Committee with the aim to reform, renew and refresh the practice of our Reform polity for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This committee will coordinate with Synods and Presbytery Stated Clerks and Executives to organize regional gatherings of the commissioners to the 222<sup>nd</sup> and subsequent GA’s, plus Ruling Elders, Teaching Elders, and other leaders. The thinking in implementing this change is that the issues facing the Church and society are complex and multifaceted and are often made simplistic by simple “yes” or “no” choices, the aim is to create a third category of voting that allows for the message, “**no, not now.**” Some feel that this will make the Church more stable and bring change through building consensus and developing mutual interdependence.

**Rational for opposing all 9 Overtures:** NBPC encourages the Church to oppose these overtures because they are intended to slow down the process of dealing with social justice, economic and

political issues that bring about change to improve the human condition. There are some who feel that changes are being made in the Church and society which stand in stark contrast to their faith and belief. Consequently, they want to change the process for considering social justice issues. In a sense, creating islands of stability amid the prophetic cries for “Let justice roll down like the waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.”

For example, consider the fact that health care should be a guaranteed right of every individual. The Affordable Care Act passed by Congress helps to make this more of a reality. However, if some had their way, the Church would delay supporting this right and perhaps would still be trying to build a consensus around this issue. In 2014, the White House reported that more than 14 million people had obtained health care under the Affordable Care Act, 8 million had selected insurance plans through exchanges established by the health-care law and 5 million more people had gained coverage through the Medicaid expansion provision of the law.

It is quite apparent, that if the Foothills Presbytery overtures are passed, they will slow down the process and make the Church a Neanderthal in dealing with social justice issues. Change is not easy. However, as Presbyterians we are aided in our reformed process by our commitment to education. This helps us to grow and become more knowledgeable about the things of God. Through our study of scripture and theology, we learn about why we must change to live in keeping with God’s purpose. Also, Reformed theology encourages us to embrace the motto **Ecclesia Reformata Semper Reformanda**, which means the church reformed and always reforming, according to the Word of God and the call of the Holy Spirit. In other words, as followers of Jesus Christ, we must be aware of our human fallibility and sinfulness. And so, we must confess our separation from God and submit all aspects of our lives to constantly being reformed and transformed according to the Word and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Martin Luther King addressed the importance of the urgency of social justice change by suggesting in one of his books that society can’t wait because when we see the vast majority of African Americans smothering in airtight cages of poverty, one can’t wait. When one sees parents stammering to explain to their children why they can’t have the same privileges and opportunities as white children, one can understand why society can’t wait. And when one is forever fighting a degenerating sense of “nobodiness,” then we understand why it’s difficult to wait.

Powerful reasons exist why we cannot wait to address issues that we must change to make the Church and society a better place. As followers of Jesus Christ, we must work to guarantee the God given rights of every human being. Too many are still standing and languishing on the margins of life suffering from injustices. We need to bring about change now and not wait until sometime off into the distant future when folk can feel more comfortable about change and reform. We must oppose all nine of the overtures being proposed by Foothills Presbytery.

The Reverend David L. Wallace, Sr., D.Min.  
President  
National Black Presbyterian Caucus

**Response:**

Dr. Wallace and Colleagues,

I want to thank you and the National Black Presbyterian Caucus for seriously considering the overture work of Foothills Presbytery towards the Reform, Renewal, Refreshment and Modernization of our beloved PCUSA. While we disagree with your conclusions about our overture efforts, what we dearly hope for is a serious, deep and sustained engagement about real Reformation. On issues of social justice, we agree with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., that matters of justice cannot wait. However, we do not believe that the current structures and practices of the PCUSA actually work to facilitate broad and in-depth engagement. We believe that indeed we can make meaningful changes to our structures and practices that will enhance our engagement. The Foothills GA Reform Group sees our offerings as significant first steps to move towards that sustained engagement.

I want to direct everyone's attention to "The Presbyterian Outlook." We are grateful to Editor Jill Duffield for opening the pages and the website to discuss issues of meaningful Reformation. In the print edition about Reformation the Outlook has published my article on "Reclaiming Our Constitution." In the online edition, Paul Hooker and Ray Roberts have written critiques of our work. Dr. Merwyn Johnson and Dr. Mike Hoyt have written responses to those critiques. In the coming months the Outlook will be a great resource for all commissioners to keep up with the conversations and debates.

I also want to direct everyone's attention to Facebook. As an experiment we have created a Closed Group: PC(USA) GA Overture Reform and we are hoping this might be yet another portal to engage in serious conversations. We hope that many people will join the group and engage the discussions.

A Blessed New Year Celebration to all!

peace,

Gordon

Rev. Gordon W. G. Raynal  
Interim Presbytery Pastor and Stated Clerk  
Foothills Presbytery



## **Appendix B. Presbyterian Outlook Articles on the Foothills Presbytery Overtures Controversy.**

Please go to the sites to read these articles and capture the comments they may have elicited to date:

From: <http://pres-outlook.org/2015/11/reclaiming-our-constitution-moving-to-a-two-thirds-vote-to-approve-change/>

### **Reclaiming our constitution: Moving to a two-thirds vote to approve change**

November 23, 2015 by [The Presbyterian Outlook](#)

#### **Troubling scenario**

Imagine this situation. The United States government implements a plan to functionally erase state governments. At the same time, Congress allows for changes to the Constitution to be made by voting needing only concurrence of a simple majority of the counties and parishes. What do you suppose the effects on the country would be within a very few years? Does the word “chaos” come to mind? ...

From: <http://pres-outlook.org/2015/12/in-search-of-real-reform-expounding-on-the-foothills-overtures/>

### **In search of real reform: Expounding on the Foothills overtures**

December 23, 2015 by [The Presbyterian Outlook](#) [1 Comment](#)

*Guest commentary by Merwyn S. Johnson*

The die is cast. The nine Foothills Overtures are now officially before the next General Assembly for action, duly passed by the presbytery, docketed by the Office of the General Assembly and accompanied by the requisite concurrences. With public interactions to them emerging, now is the time to speak for them. ...

From: <http://pres-outlook.org/2015/11/editors-note-on-outlook-coverage-of-overtures-from-foothills-presbytery/>

## Editor's note on Outlook coverage of overtures from Foothills Presbytery

November 23, 2015 by [Jill Duffield](#) [Leave a Comment](#)

Formed following the 221<sup>st</sup> General Assembly, The Foothills Presbytery General Assembly Reform Group has taken on the task of seeking large-scale reform of how the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) changes its constitution. To do this, the group has been in communication with the executives and stated clerks of all 171 presbyteries, 16 synods, General Assembly moderator Heath Rada and key leaders in the Office of the General Assembly. The group has drafted nine overtures that address three areas of Presbyterian polity: the purpose of GA and the proposed cycle for GA meetings; the process by which the PC(USA) discerns its social witness and bears this witness to the world; and the scope and function of the constitution of the PC(USA). These overtures can be found on the Foothills Presbytery website. ...

From: <http://pres-outlook.org/2015/12/seeking-reform-reflections-overtures-from-foothills-presbytery/>

## Seeking reform: Reflections overtures from Foothills Presbytery

December 1, 2015 by [Chris Currie](#) [1 Comment](#)

I have been encouraged by moderator Heath Rada's "[Call to the Church](#)" to re-think our Presbyterian identity, to re-think how we do business as a church, to re-envision who we are – not just in terms of size and scope, but in terms of who we are and what we are about in our mission as a church in the world, reformed and always reforming, according to the Word of God. ...

From: <http://pres-outlook.org/2015/11/a-response-to-the-foothills-presbytery-from-the-advisory-committee-on-social-witness-policy-acswp/>

## **A response to the Foothills Presbytery from the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP)**

November 23, 2015 by [News from other sources](#) [Leave a Comment](#)

### **Introduction:**

The Presbytery of Foothills sent copies of several of its overtures to the Advisory Committee in June, after developing and circulating these proposals for some time. Our members have debated about responding, as our response may inevitably seem self-justifying. Yet the Presbytery has asked our view (as GA rules require) and we believe that other presbyteries considering concurrence deserve an analysis of how the significant but selective changes proposed would severely limit the work of the General Assembly, focus the church inward in cumbersome processes, and virtually freeze in place current social witness (and constitutional) positions. ...

From: <http://pres-outlook.org/2015/11/social-witness-of-the-church-commentary-on-foothills-overture-1/>

## **Social witness of the church: Commentary on Foothills Overture #1**

November 23, 2015 by [The Presbyterian Outlook](#) [2 Comments](#)

*Guest commentary by Ray Roberts*

We live in times of tremendous cultural change. We also live in times of high anxiety as a church, having lost so many congregations over the past two years. During these times, we are going to be tempted by solutions that may lead us astray. Overture #1 suggested by Foothills Presbytery is alluring because it promises to reunite the church around its core mission. Yet it reflects numerous misunderstandings. It is supported by a factually challenged view of the way the church is making its social witness and by a romantic memory of a more united church of the 1960s. ...

From: <http://pres-outlook.org/2015/11/commentary-on-overtures-submitted-by-foothills-presbytery/>

## **Commentary on overtures submitted by Foothills Presbytery**

November 23, 2015 by [The Presbyterian Outlook](#) [4 Comments](#)

[Foothills Presbytery](#) in South Carolina has submitted a series of overtures that would redefine the work of the General Assembly. Their aim seems to be to reduce the amount of controversial positions and amendments sent into the life of the church, many of which Foothills Presbytery regards as divisive and conducive to discord. ...

From: <http://pres-outlook.org/2015/02/broader-conversation-ahead-tom-hay-foothills-overture-working-group/>

## **A broader conversation ahead: Tom Hay on the Foothills Overture Working Group**

February 12, 2015 by [Tom Hay](#) [1 Comment](#)

The news from [Foothills Presbytery](#) is that they convened a vibrant and energetic group of teaching and ruling elders to [consider potential reforms](#) in the operations of the General Assembly. From where I sit this is welcome news, though maybe not for exactly the reasons they might expect. The Foothills study documents and eight proposed overtures have been sent out across the church to every presbytery inviting conversations for reform. Much of what is suggested has been a part of the public discourse around the assembly for many years but their work gives focus to the conversations. ...

From: <http://pres-outlook.org/2015/12/the-work-of-foothills-presbytery-toward-social-witness-reform-a-response/>

# The work of Foothills Presbytery toward social witness reform: A response

December 22, 2015 by [The Presbyterian Outlook](#) [1 Comment](#)

*Guest commentary by Mike Hoyt*

The members of Foothills Presbytery who are working toward reform of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s approach to social witness are genuinely grateful for the responses offered by the [Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy](#) (ACSWP) and from [Ray Roberts](#). As teaching and ruling elders who are committed to the social witness of the PC(USA) we find Roberts' articulation of Jesus' preaching of the kingdom especially compelling. In fact, we heartily agree with his fine statement of the church's call to social witness, and we appreciate his taking the time to draft it. ...