

ACTIONS OF THE 40TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PCA

L. Roy Taylor, Stated Clerk

The Fortieth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America met in the Kentucky International Convention Center in downtown Louisville, Kentucky, June 19-21, hosted by Ohio Valley Presbytery. A final total of 1,120 commissioners attended (832 Teaching Elders and 288 Ruling Elders).

Michael F. Ross Elected Moderator

Dr. Michael F. Ross, Pastor of Christ Covenant PCA, Matthews, NC, was elected moderator, after being nominated by Dr. Ligon Duncan, Pastor of First Presbyterian, Jackson, MS. Dr. Ross is a graduate of Ohio State University, Miami University of Ohio (MBA), Columbia Biblical Seminary (M.Div.), and Reformed Theological Seminary (D.Min.). He served as founding pastor of Surfside PCA, Myrtle Beach, SC, and Senior Pastor of Trinity PCA, Jackson, MS, before becoming Senior Pastor of Christ Covenant PCA in 2006. He does adjunct teaching in Pastoral Theology at RTS-Charlotte, NC. Dr. Ross's interests in church planting and church revitalization have been evident throughout his ministry. He and his wife, Jane, have four children. Dr. Ross's fairness and graciousness were evident in his moderating of the Assembly, guiding it through a full docket that included debates on several controversial issues.

BCO Changes

- The Assembly **gave final approval** to amend 19-11 to give Presbyteries discretion in repeating any portion of a transferring intern's licensure examination
- The Assembly **declined to give final approval** to a proposed amendment to 12-4
- The Assembly **gave initial approval** to proposed amendments to BCO and sent them to Presbyteries for a vote. Two thirds of the Presbyteries must approve the proposals before the next Assembly decides the matters (BCO 26-2):
 - 19-2, to require applicants for licensure to state differences with the *Westminster Standards*.
 - 58-5 to prohibit the practice of intinction in communion.
 - 20-3; 24-2; 25-4 to allow a Ruling Elder to moderate a congregational meeting of a congregation of which he is not a member.
 - 43-2 to extend the deadline for filing a complaint with the court of original jurisdiction from thirty to sixty days.
 - 43-3 to change the beginning of the time frame for filing a complaint to the next higher court.
 - 42-4 3 to change the beginning of the time frame for filing an appeal.

Overtures

Overtures are requests for action by the General Assembly that have been approved or at least considered by Presbyteries. Forty-four overtures were submitted to this Assembly including actions on:

- **Intinction** (a communicant's dipping bread into a common cup, instead of receiving the bread and cup separately) – the Assembly by a 14-vote margin approved a Minority Report from the Overtures Committee (OC) that the Assembly give initial approval to amend BCO 58-5 to prohibit intinction (Overture 30 from Savannah River Presbytery as revised).
- **The Historicity of Adam and Eve** – the Assembly approved Overture 26 from Potomac Presbytery that *the Westminster Standards* are sufficiently clear on the divine creation of Adam and Eve as historical persons and that an additional declaration by the Assembly is not required.
- **Dissolution of Louisiana Presbytery** – the Assembly approved the request of Louisiana Presbytery that it be dissolved and its seven churches be transferred to contiguous Presbyteries with new boundaries.

Interchurch Relations

Thirtieth Anniversary of Joining and Receiving of the RPCES and PCA

The year 2012 marked the **Thirtieth Anniversary of the Joining and Receiving** (J&R) of the Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (RPCES), and the PCA. In that process of church union the 160th General Synod of the RPCES adopted the PCA Constitution (*Westminster Standards and Book of Church Order*) and joined the PCA. The PCA gained congregations throughout the USA and some in Canada, Covenant College and Covenant Theological Seminary became PCA educational institutions, and the RPCES synodical committees and agencies were merged with their PCA Assembly counterparts. Moreover, the history and historical documents of the RPCES were incorporated into the PCA. The IRC chairman asked all who had been in the former RPCES, along with those who had graduated from Covenant College and Covenant Theological Seminary, to stand and be recognized.

National Association of Evangelicals

The 1st General Assembly (1973) approved the affiliation of the Committee on Mission to the World with the NAE in order to benefit from the services and expertise of the Chaplains Commission, the World Relief Commission, and the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association. In 1986, the 14th General Assembly approved the PCA's entering into full membership of the NAE. Through the NAE the PCA is also related to the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA). Under the WEA the PCA participated in the formation of the World Fellowship of Reformed Churches in 1994, which later became the World Reformed Fellowship. In 2011, Central Carolina Presbytery sent Overture 2011-12 to the 39th General Assembly asking that the PCA withdraw from the NAE at the soonest possible date. The 2011 General Assembly **approved** the recommendation of Interchurch Relations Committee (IRC) and the Committee of Commissioners on Interchurch Relations **that the IRC study the issue after receiving written comments by February 1, 2012**, from Sessions and Presbyteries and report to the 40th General Assembly. The Stated Clerk notified all Presbyteries of that action through his report on the "Actions of the Thirty-ninth General Assembly." No Session or Presbytery submitted any concerns to the IRC. The IRC Permanent Committee recommended that the overture simply be answered in the negative (i.e. that the PCA remain in the NAE). The IRC Committee of Commissioners recommended to the Assembly that the overture be answered in the negative and added a provision that the IRC report significant actions of the NAE to the Assembly. The latter recommendation was adopted. **The PCA remains in the NAE.**

Ad Interim Committee on Insider Movements and Bible Translations

Last year the Assembly approved the formation of a committee to study the issue of the so-called Insider Movements in Islam and Bible translation. Some missiologists have suggested that people who become believers in the Lord Jesus Christ – and who are in circumstances where public baptism and joining a Christian church may subject a convert to death, persecution, or being ostracized from families and communities – that such persons remain in their non-Christian religious communities (hence the term "Insider Movements"). Moreover, some linguists and missiologists suggest that translations of the Bible that confuse non-Christians (for example, the suggestion that references to God as Father and to Christ's being the Son of God communicate to some people that Christ was conceived by the sexual union of God the Father and Mary) could be expressed in translation to dispel any connotations of sexual generation.

The PCA's Mission to the World (MTW) has taken the position that people who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ should not continue to practice non-Christian religions but should become part of the Church, and that Bible translations that remove from the text references to God as "Father" (*pater*) or Jesus as "Son" (*huios*), so as to alter the doctrines of the Trinity, the doctrines of the person and work of Christ, or the doctrine of Scripture, are unfaithful to God's revealed Word.

The Ad Interim Committee presented a partial report. The Assembly approved the initial recommendations of the committee, namely:

1. That “Part One – Like Father, Like Son: Divine Familial Language in the Bible Translation” serve as a *Partial Report* (Part One of Two Parts).
2. That the 40th General Assembly *declare** that , since social familial terms fail to capture the biblical meaning of “Son” (*huios*) and “Son of God” (*huios tou theou*) applied to Jesus and “Father” (*pater*) applied to God, Bibles should always translate divine familial names using common biological terms.
3. That the 40th General Assembly *make available and recommend for study* “Part One – Like Father, Like Son” to its presbyteries and sessions.
4. Pursuant to the *Rules of Assembly Operations* 9-2, that the 40th General Assembly *grant an extension* to the Ad Interim Committee on Insider Movements for one year to allow for completion of its mandate and to provide Part Two of its report on Insider Movements.
5. That the 40th General Assembly *set the budget* for the study committee at \$15,000 for its second year, and that the funds be derived from gifts to the AC designated for that purpose.

The **report is available** at <http://www.pcaac.org/Ad%20Interim%20on%20Insider%20Movements%20Report%205-17-12.pdf>

Designated gifts for the committee should be sent to the PCA Administrative Committee, 1700 N. Brown Road, Suite 105, Lawrenceville, GA 30043-8143, and clearly indicated as gifts for the Ad Interim Committee.

*The **status of declarations** (“deliverances, resolutions, [and] overtures”) of the General Assembly is specified in *Book of Church Order* 14-7. Such declarations do not amend the Constitution but are to be given due and serious consideration by the Church and her lower courts.

The **PCA is not alone in studying this issue**. For example, the World Evangelical Alliance has a task force on the matter <http://worldea.org/news/3978/WEA-Announces-Dr-Robert-E-Cooley-as-Chairman-of-Wycliffe-and-SIL-Review-Panel> .

Review of Presbytery Actions

The Review of Presbytery Records Committee (RPR) reviews the actions of the PCA’s 81 Presbyteries (regional judicatories of local churches). Committee recommendations and minority reports emanated from the committee regarding **Paedo-communion**, whether or at what age baptized young children may receive communion (*Westminster Larger Catechism* Q. 177 and *Book of Church Order* 58-4, *et al.*) The **PCA Constitution requires** that one must be a communicant member in good standing of an evangelical church **or permits** that one may be allowed by a local church session (elders) to receive communion after being interviewed by the session. Heretofore, PCA ordained officers (Teaching Elders, Ruling Elders, and Deacons) have been allowed to hold to the concept of paedo-communion, but not constitutionally allowed to practice it. Since the Assembly did not adopt either the committee reports or the minority reports on the issue, **the matter was referred back to the RPR Committee** with the hope that a consistent report could be reported to the next Assembly.

Administrative Committee Funding Plan

The Assembly adopted an AC funding plan without objection. It requires no amendment to the *BCO* and includes such features as 1) **contribution requests to churches based on a percentage** of the church’s operating budget rather than a per member request; 2) a request (not a requirement) that **all PCA ministers contribute at least \$100/yr. to the AC** 3) a **General Assembly Registration Fee** that covers the costs of the Assembly and the AC’s Unfunded Mandates; 4) **contributions from other Committees and Agencies** which the AC serves; 5) **fees for services** as appropriate; and 6) **increased communication** from the AC with churches.

Most denominations and para-church organizations fund support services by a fee that is included in contributions. The PCA is distinct in that we make contributions to the Administrative Committee of the General Assembly (AC) a separate funding request. The 2011 funding proposal to underwrite the AC was not accepted when enabling *BCO* amendments were not approved by the required majority of Presbyteries. Several overtures and communications were submitted by Presbyteries

to the 39th Assembly on the issue. The Cooperative Ministries Committee (CMC) appointed a sub-committee to come up with a new proposal. The CMC at its January 2012 meeting approved a plan to give to the AC, which the AC in turn recommended to the 40th Assembly (with only one revision, to maintain a reduced Assembly registration fee for churches who report an annual income of \$100,000 or less).

byFaith Magazine and byfaithonline.com

Part of the CMC's study on AC Funding involved the role of *byFaith*. The CMC concluded that *byFaith* has an important role to fill in PCA life. The CMC encouraged *byFaith* to continue to be diligent and responsive to the PCA constituency to provide useful, timely, and relevant content and information, and to utilize new media and technology to foster communication across the PCA. Richard Doster, byFaith editor, reported to the Assembly that the **byfaithonline.com web site has recently been upgraded <http://byfaithonline.com/>** and that ***byFaith Magazine will now be sent without a subscription fee*** to all individuals and PCA churches who so request.

Other Issues and Reports

- Covenant College reported that the President Dr. Niel Nielson had resigned to promote opportunities for Christian education throughout the world via a Christian foundation. The Board elected Dr. Eric Halvorson as President.
- Covenant Theological Seminary reported that Dr. Bryan Chapell is making a transition from President to Chancellor. The Board named Vice-president Dr. Mark Dalbey as Interim President.
- Christian Education and Publications reported that Dr. Charles Dunahoo, who has served as Coordinator since 1977 has declined to stand for re-election. He will serve in an interim capacity until December 31, 2012. A search committee is active.
- Reformed University Ministries has ministries on 140 campuses in 37 states and 58 Presbyteries, as well as in Mexico and Greece. RUM is still ministering on the campus of Vanderbilt University because the local campus ministry is led by a PCA minister, not by students as some other ministries are. The university had changed its policy to require that elected student leaders be taken from "all comers." The Assembly thanked the RUM Staff and Committee for their wisdom in that situation.

PCA Statistical Changes Reported as of December 31, 2011

- Churches and Missions – 1,771, an increase of 14.
- Total membership – 351,406, an increase of 4,176 (1.32%)
- Total Professions of Faith – 10,067, 63 fewer than last year.
- Total Family Units – 137,508, an increase of 245
- Sunday School Attendance – 102,626, a decrease of 1,285

Suggested Prayer, Offerings, and Events

- October 14, 2012, prayer for Covenant College.
- November 2012, a Month of Prayer for Global Missions (MTW).
- November 11, 2012, a Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church Worldwide (MTW).
- Annual Thanksgiving Offering for MNA Mercy Ministries and Ethnic Training.
- December 2012, Offering for Ministerial Relief (PCA-RBI).
- The 2012 Love Gift of the PCA Women in the Church is for MTW's Gonaives, Haiti Children's Home project
- A special offering for MTW Compassion Ministry to be taken in 2012, date set by Sessions.
- May 6-June 18, 50 Days of Prayer for the General Assembly, coordinated by MNA & CEP.
- **The 41st General Assembly will convene June 18, 2013 in Greenville, SC.**