

SIGNIFICANT ACTIONS OF THE 29TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Moderator, RE Steve Fox

The Twenty-ninth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America met in Dallas, Texas June 18-22, 2001. Ruling Elders Steve Fox and Howard Q. Davis were nominated for moderator. RE Fox was elected by a vote of 492-401. Mr. Fox is a Ruling Elder at Trinity Presbyterian Church of Montgomery, Alabama. Mr. Fox is an executive with the Walker Printing Company.

BCO Amendments

The Assembly had sent down three amendments to Presbyteries for ratification before the final vote. Forty of the sixty Presbyteries must vote in the affirmative (*BCO 26-2*).

- Proposed amendment to *BCO 15-5, d. failed* by a vote of 31 Presbyteries for and 23 against. It concerned women expounding and preaching in worship.
- Proposed amendment to 32-19, concerning the use of professional counsel in church courts was *deferred* for one year (see *BCO 26-6*) since a number of Presbyteries did not vote on the matter.
- Proposed amendment to *BCO 14-1, 12 passed* the Presbyteries and was adopted by the Assembly, making Reformed University Ministries a General Assembly Permanent Committee.
- Seven other proposed amendments were given first approval (*BCO 26-2*) and will be sent down to Presbyteries for their vote and reported back to the next Assembly.

General Assembly Ministries (Committees and Agencies) Highlights

- *Covenant Seminary (CTS)*- CTS enjoyed its twelfth consecutive increase in enrollment to 935 students from forty-seven states and sixteen nations. Over 1,172 students throughout the year were registered in Covenant classes. A fully accredited M.A. degree is now offered through a combination of audio and visual resources, phone support, three one-week residencies – all enhanced by Internet resources and support. The Assembly, in response to the President's report, approved the following motion by a vote of approximately 1,000 to 10:

In light of an unfortunate and unfair article in the *Presbyterian and Reformed News* accusing CTS of an apparent cover-up, this 29th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America reaffirms its support of and confidence in the Board of Directors, the administration, the staff, and the faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary.
- *Covenant College (CC)* - President Frank Brock has announced his retirement effective at the end of the 2002 General Assembly. RUM is beginning, at CC, a campus ministry led by the Rev. Jed Johnston. Total enrollment increased by thirty-four to 1,158; 58% are members of the PCA. CC was again listed in *U.S. News Best Colleges* for its academic excellence.
- *Administrative Committee (AC)* – The new PCA Office Complex is under construction in Atlanta. The first day of business in the new site is slated for August 27. Of the \$6,800,000 needed for the project, only \$365,000 remains to be raised in order to move in without a long-term mortgage.
- *Christian Education & Publications (CE&P)* – In addition to the ongoing ministry of discipleship, providing resources, and training, CE&P held a well-attended conference on Mercy Ministries in partnership with MNA.
- *Mission to North America (MNA)* – A significant increase of ethnic and multicultural Church Planting projects has been seen. Of the twenty-four churches received into the PCA over the last year, twenty-two have been newly organized church plants. The Assembly dissolved one Presbytery, redrew the boundaries of two Presbyteries, and erected four new Presbyteries.

- *Mission to the World* (MTW) – The PCA has the largest missionary force in Presbyterian Church history with over 800 missionaries (519 career, and 337 two-year term or interns) serving in forty-seven countries. In 2000, 5,835 summer missionaries were sent out under MTW-Impact. Field Operations have been reorganized to include five international directors instead of the previous two to coordinate the complex of ministries more effectively. A capital campaign for ministry to street children in the Philippines is planned, modeled after such MTW ministries in Peru, Kenya, and Romania.
- *Reformed University Ministries* (RUM)- RUM has ministries on fifty-six campuses and expects to have ministries on sixty-two campuses by the beginning of the 2001-2002 academic year. The Presbyteries and the General Assembly made RUM a full General Assembly Permanent Committee.
- *Ridge Haven Conference Center* (RH)- The Rev. Mack Griffith has joined the staff as Ministry Director. A project to upgrade the water system is under way. Over 8,500 guests attended conferences at RH over the last year.
- *Insurance Annuities and Relief* (IAR) - The PCA retirement plan increased in number of participants. Assets grew from \$172.1 million to \$176.7 (+2.7%) in a difficult year for the stock market. The health insurance plans basically held their own during the past year.
- *PCA Foundation* (PCAF) - The Assembly approved the PCAF's directors all being elected at-large. Previously CC, CTS, MTW, and MNA appointed members. Total gifts to the foundation topped \$9.1 million, a new milestone. Distributions from the foundations totaled over \$6.1 million.

Westminster Presbytery Action

A few churches in Westminster Presbytery have indicated a desire to leave the PCA and continue as "Westminster Presbytery." In order to accommodate that desire, Westminster Presbytery overtured the General Assembly to allow the entire Presbytery to withdraw, give the name and records of Westminster Presbytery to the departing minority, and then reconstitute the PCA churches into a Presbytery with a new name. The Assembly declined to do so but rather asked Westminster Presbytery "*again, for the sake of Christ's glory and the good of His Church, [to] reconsider your action to withdraw and reverse your judgment.*"

Women in Military

The *ad interim* Committee on Women in the Military had been established in 1998. The consensus of the committee was that women should not be drafted nor ordered into combat roles. The committee was divided as to whether that proposition is based on a clear biblical duty of men to protect women or whether it is wise biblical counsel. *Ad interim* committees are funded by designated gifts through the Administrative Committee/Office of the Stated Clerk. The committee is in need of additional funds. The committee was continued for another year to report to the 30th General Assembly.

Standing Judicial Commission

The SJC reported that twenty-six cases have been submitted to the commission since the last Assembly. Two cases were withdrawn and one abandoned. Case 99-1, regarding John Wood, generated the most concern; the SJC investigated the case but decided that there were not sufficient grounds for prosecution. A request to expunge from the minutes a Concurring Opinion was ruled out of order (see BCO 15-5 a. and *Robert's Rules of Order*, 10th Ed., § 39, p. 332, lines 15-19). A writer of the concurring opinion in question offered an apology. A letter from the Board of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary concerning the John Wood Matter was inserted into the minutes following the SJC Report. The SJC was directed to formulate standards and procedures for evaluating what may be regarded as intemperate language. The assembly answered in the negative an overture to condemn the

actions of the SJC on the Wood case. The Assembly also answered in the negative an overture to bar General-Assembly-Ministries personnel from service on the SJC.

Debate on Doctrinal Subscription

As a special pre-assembly event June 18, a debate on the meaning of doctrinal subscription (ordination vows) was held. Dr. Will Barker moderated the event. Copies of the addresses may be downloaded from <http://www.PCANews.com>, an expanded version of Dr. Chapell's remarks at <http://www.covenantseminary.edu/resources/ga2001>, and audio tapes at <http://www.Briarwood.org>.

- Dr. Tim Keller presented the System-Subscription View.
- Dr. Bryan Chapell presented the Good-Faith (a.k.a. "Vital-to-the System") Subscription View.
- TE David Coffin presented the Articles-of-Unity (a.k.a. "Logically Consistent") Subscription View.
- Dr. Joseph Pipa presented the Full Subscription (a.k.a. "Strict Subscription") View.

Creation Issue

The Assembly answered in the negative overtures 1) to require ordained men to declare exceptions to the *Westminster Confession*, if they held to other-than-24-hour Creation Days, 2) to allow church courts to permit exceptions on other-than-24-hour Creation Days, and 3) to allow diversity of views on the length of Creations Days. The Assembly stated, "It is the responsibility of the lower courts to determine if a man's views are in accord with the constitution, not the man himself, not the General Assembly, except in cases of judicial process."

Interchurch Relations

The Interchurch Relations Committee (IRC) reported several significant items.

- Discussions are now going on within the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), of which the PCA is a member, regarding the similarities and differences among the member denominations with a view toward the possibilities of eventual Church union. NAPARC is composed of several conservative Presbyterian and Reformed denominations in North America. Similar discussion led to the "Joining and Receiving" of the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod into the PCA in 1982.
- The United Reformed Churches denomination is seeking a closer ecclesiastical relationship with the PCA. The URC is a denomination of conservative Reformed churches emanating out of the Dutch Reformed Tradition. Most were formerly part of the Christian Reformed Church.
- Last year the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), of which the PCA is a member, revised their membership rules to allow denominations that are members of the National Council of Churches of Christ (NCCC) to become members of the NAE and the NCCC simultaneously. At this year's NAE Convention the PCA delegation moved that the membership rule be changed back to its previous standard that a denomination could not simultaneously be a member of the NAE and NCCC. The PCA proposal was well received and will be acted upon at the next NAE convention, March 2002.
- The PCA had been instrumental in 1992 in the formation of the World Fellowship of Reformed Churches, which was composed primarily of conservative Presbyterian denominations in the Americas. In October of 2000, representatives of the World Fellowship of Reformed Churches (WFRC) met with representatives of the International Reformed Fellowship (IRF) that had been formed in 1994 by conservative Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in the Pacific Rim. The IRF was received *en masse* into the WFRC. The name of the fellowship was changed to the World Reformed Fellowship (WRF) and the membership basis was expanded to make it possible for denominations, local churches, institutions, mission agencies, and individuals from all branches of

Reformed Fellowship (WRF) and the membership basis was expanded to make it possible for denominations, local churches, institutions, mission agencies, and individuals from all branches of the Reformed Community to become part of the fellowship. The PCA General Assembly reaffirmed our membership in the newly expanded World Reformed Fellowship.

Prayer for Religious Liberty

The Assembly took note of the 300th anniversary of Religious Liberty of Americans, and requested that all the churches and agencies of the PCA have a special season of prayer, worship, and thanksgiving either around July 4th, October 28th, or early November to thank God for our religious liberty and to pray for the persecuted Church worldwide. The Assembly acted to inform the National Association of Evangelicals and the North American Presbyterian Reformed Council and to ask their constituencies to have similar seasons of worship, prayer and thanksgiving.

Special Days, Offerings, and Events Recommended by the Assembly to PCA Churches

- July 4, October 28th and/or November 18, 2001 – Season of prayer of thanksgiving for religious liberty in the USA and prayer for the persecuted Church worldwide.
- October 2001 – A Month of Prayer for the “10/40 Window” and World Evangelization (MTW). (The “10/40 Window” is the area of the globe between 10° north latitude and 40° north latitude, which contains people groups that have historically been the most resistant to the Gospel).
- Sometime in 2001 – A Special Offering for relief and mercy, Compassion Ministry of MTW.
- Sunday, November 18, 2001 – Day of Prayer and Fasting for the Persecuted Church Worldwide (MTW).
- November 2001 - Thanksgiving Offering for MNA Urban and Mercy Ministries.
- December, 2001 – Christmas Offering for Ministerial Relief (IAR)
- February 3, 2002 – Day of Prayer and Promotion for Ridge Haven ministries.
- The 2002 Women in the Church Offering will be for Christian Education and Publications.