



The 220th General Assembly (2012) Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) June 30 – July 7, Pittsburgh, PA A Brief Summary

Election of the Moderator: The Rev. Neal Presa was elected the Moderator of the General Assembly on the fourth ballot with 52% of the votes from a field of four candidates. A pastor from Middlesex, NJ, he most recently served as chair of the Special Committee on the Heidelberg Catechism that reported to this Assembly. He has also served as the Vice-Moderator of the General Assembly Mission Council and the Moderator of Elizabeth Presbytery.

As his Vice-Moderator he selected the Rev. Tara Spuhler McCabe, a pastor from Washington, D.C. Shortly before the Assembly it was learned that Rev. McCabe had signed a marriage license for a same-gender couple in D.C. where it is legal. The current PC(USA) position prohibiting pastors from performing same-gender marriages made this a controversial issue in the election and Rev. McCabe received only 60% affirmative votes in her confirmation. The questions continued in the very public venue of social media and on Wednesday afternoon Ms McCabe stepped down as Vice-Moderator to stop the “pervasive poisonous activity” and avoid being a distraction from the business of the Assembly. The Rev. Tom Trinidad, a pastor from Colorado Springs, was nominated and confirmed to replace her. But this incident raised many questions about the line between asking significant questions regarding a candidate and officer and doing so in a way that is not helpful but rather questions their integrity or qualifies as bullying.

Mid Councils Commission: The last General Assembly established a Special Commission to study the structure of the denomination and make recommendations. The Commission wrote a report and made the recommendation to restructure and repurpose synods, to authorize provisional experimental non-geographic presbyteries structured around missional objectives, to create a task force to review the General Assembly Mission Council and Office of the General Assembly and another task force to study Racial Ethnic Ministry. The assembly agreed to study the synod repurposing further, did not agree to the concept of provisional presbyteries and authorized the two task forces although the GAMC review was combined with the group studying synod repurposing.

Middle East Peacemaking Issues: The Mission Responsibility Through Investment committee of of the PC(USA) brought to the Assembly a report stating that engagement with three companies profiting from the Israeli/Palestinian conflict - Caterpillar, Hewlett Packard and Motorola Solutions - had not been successful and they recommended divestment from these companies. This was a high-profile issue with commissioners heavily lobbied on both sides of this issue. The Assembly chose, by a vote of 333 to 331, to adopt a substitute motion that calls for the church to find ways to “positively invest” in Palestinian business. In a related item the Assembly did call on the church to boycott products produced by Israeli companies in the Occupied Territories.

Marriage and Civil Union: The Assembly debated and disapproved, on a 308 to 338 vote, a proposed amendment to the Book of Order that would have changed the definition of marriage to being between “two people.” The Assembly did approve a two-year “season of serious study and discernment concerning its meaning of Christian marriage.” A requested Authoritative Interpretation that would have permitted ministers to perform marriages in jurisdictions where it is permitted was answered by this without debating that action.

In general – this Assembly demonstrated a certain resistance to change and a strong sense of fiscal responsibility

Other actions: The Assembly chose to make no substantial changes to the four current special offerings; it approved items related to Review of Biennial Assemblies and the Church in the 21st Century; an initiative to create 1001 New Worshiping Communities was approved; Gradye Parsons was elected to a second term as Stated Clerk without opposition; none of the proposed changes to ordination standards was approved; presbyteries will be asked to approve a new translation of the Heidelberg Catechism and the process has been started again to add the Belhar Confession to the *Book of Confessions*; GAMC will be renamed the Presbyterian Mission Agency; *per capita* rate was set at \$6.87 for 2013 and \$7.02 for 2014.