



The 222nd General Assembly (2016)
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
June 18 – 25, Portland, Oregon
A Brief Summary

Election of the Co-Moderators: A change to the Standing Rules at the last General Assembly permitted candidates to stand for Moderator as either a traditional Moderator/Vice-Moderator team or as Co-Moderators. Both teams chose the Co-Moderator route this year and the Rev. Denise Anderson and the Rev. Jan Edmiston were elected with 76% of the vote. Rev. Anderson is a pastor in Temple Hills, MD, and Rev.

Edmiston is Associate Presbyterian of Chicago Presbytery. Following their election they navigated the Assembly well but admit they will need to work out the details of the position for the next 2 years.

Election of the Stated Clerk: With the term of the current stated clerk finishing and his decision not to stand for reelection, the General Assembly elected a new clerk. The search committee nominated the Rev. J. Herbert Nelson and he was challenged by the Rev. David Baker of Tampa Bay. Rev. Nelson was elected with 80% of the vote. Rev. Nelson is a third generation Presbyterian pastor and has been directing the PC(USA) Washington, D.C., office for the last six years. Before moving to Washington, Rev. Nelson was a pastor at an urban church in Memphis. He is the fourth elected Stated Clerk of the PC(USA) General Assembly and the first African American to hold the position. Throughout the assembly tributes were paid to outgoing Stated Clerk Gardye Parsons.

Belhar Confession: The Assembly overwhelmingly voted to reaffirm the adoption of the Belhar Confession after the presbyteries gave their concurrence last year. This was the final step in the process of adding it to the Book of Confessions. The completion of the process was marked by comments from several people, including Allen Boesak, who was the chair of the synod meeting in South Africa when the Belhar Confession was first adopted by them thirty years ago. Excerpts from Belhar were used during devotions and cited in speeches throughout the meeting.

The Way Forward: Over the last year one of the big questions swirling around the PC(USA) has been form and function of the church, particularly at the national level. A review committee found systemic issues in the Presbyterian Mission Agency and suggestions have been raised that it should be merged with the Office of the General Assembly. One GA committee had the exclusive charge of looking ahead for the church. They recommended that a 2020 Vision Task Force be created to study and make recommendations about the longer-term function of the PC(USA). To address immediate agency issues an administrative commission was recommended to study that situation. The Assembly agreed to both of the recommendations.

Divestment - Fossil Fuels and Israel: One of the big social justice issues each Assembly is how the church invests its money. This year the committee that manages socially responsible investing recommended that regarding fossil fuel corporations the church not divest but remain in active engagement with the companies. Overtures to the Assembly asked for immediate, full divestiture. The committee recommendation followed the request of the overtures but on the floor the full Assembly accepted the minority report that split the difference and requested selective divestment with continued engagement.

Regarding Israel there was no change in divestment policy and a request to move to company boycott was declined. The Presbyterian Foundation gave a positive report about their Positive Investment in Palestine program.

Acknowledging Harms Done: The Assembly considered an overture on “Admission of, and Apology for, Harms Done to the LGBTQ/Q Members of the PC(USA), Family and Friends.” With much discussion in both the committee and on the floor, and with the broad support of many groups - but not all - the Assembly approved a statement that says the PC(USA) “deeply regrets” actions whereby “any person might find cause to doubt being loved by God”

Other Actions: The Assembly reversed course from previous assemblies and will keep synods as they are. They adopted a report with 5 new Affirmations of Peacemaking. A New Directory for Worship was approved. Evangelism was not made part of required seminary curriculum. *Per capita* was set at \$7.50 for 2017 and \$7.73 for 2018. A budgeting change requires the mission budget to be balanced. New items from GA will not be paid for by reserves.

Brexit: While the referendum of the UK to leave the European Union was not on the GA docket, it did make a couple of appearances. The ecumenical representative from the Church of Scotland was the Rev. Derek Browning, Business Convener of their GA. The Assembly was aware of his presence and the Scottish church’s opposition to leaving the EU. As vote results came in the Assembly paused twice for prayer, the second time specifically including the Church of Scotland. Rev. Browning gave an ecumenical greeting and prayer the next morning. He began, “Good morning. I bring greetings from the Mother Church. Mother had a rough night.”

Summary prepared by Stephen Salyards (steve@gajunkie.com) Permission granted for redistribution in Presbyterian entities.