

2016 Stated Clerk Candidates' Handbook



From the Stated Clerk Nomination Committee



June 2016

To: Commissioners and Advisory Delegates to the 222nd General Assembly (2016)

From: The Stated Clerk Nomination Committee
Ruling Elder Milinda Benallie, Window Rock, Arizona
Teaching Elder Arthur Canada, Charlotte, North Carolina
Teaching Elder José Manuel Capella-Pratts, Miami, Florida
Teaching Elder Jerrod Lowry, Sandy, Utah
Teaching Elder Carol McDonald, Indianapolis, Indiana—Moderator
Teaching Elder Scott Prouty, Redwood Falls, Minnesota
Ruling Elder Virginia Rainey, State College, Pennsylvania
Ruling Elder Claire Rhodes, Hot Springs, Arkansas
Ruling Elder Linda Therien, San Diego, California
Ruling Elder Kathy Lueckert, Prairie Village, Kansas, Staff Resource

A major item of business before the 222nd General Assembly (2016) is the election of a Stated Clerk of the General Assembly. The Stated Clerk Nomination Committee, elected by the 221st General Assembly (2014), has been diligent in its work and has been careful to follow the process detailed in the Standing Rules of the General Assembly found in the *Manual of the General Assembly*. For easy reference, the relevant portion of Standing Rule H.2.b. has been included with this communication (see pages 3–4).

The committee has made available to the church a detailed report of its nomination process, which has been posted on the [Stated Clerk Nomination Committee](#) page and on the [resource page of PC-Biz](#). Highlights of that process include:

- The committee met face-to-face five times and also in five conference calls.
- A churchwide survey, translated into both Spanish and Korean, on qualities and characteristics desired in the Stated Clerk was conducted.
- Developed a job description based on survey results.
- Developed an advertisement for the position
- Developed job application requirements and an application form, translated into both Spanish and Korean. The application required both a statement of faith and a short Vimeo presentation.
- Twenty-two persons requested application packets. Thirteen persons submitted complete applications by the deadline of December 21, 2015.
- All thirteen were interviewed by telephone in late January 2016.

- Six were invited for face-to-face interviews in early March; these six underwent an Executive Assessment conducted by the North Central Ministry Development Center.
- Three were invited for a final, face-to-face interview in early April 2016.

At the conclusion of the final interviews, the committee selected the Reverend Dr. J. Herbert Nelson to recommend to the 222nd General Assembly (2016) for election as the next Stated Clerk of the General Assembly.

As provided for in the Standing Rules, one additional applicant declared to the committee on May 4, 2016, his intention to stand against the committee's nominee. He is the Reverend David M. Baker.

With this communication is a packet of information containing material for both J. Herbert Nelson and David Baker: biographical information, a personal statement, and answers to questions posed by the Stated Clerk Nomination Committee. Information for the committee's nominee is presented first.

Please note there will be an opportunity to meet both Mr. Nelson and Mr. Baker on Wednesday morning, June 22, 2016, from 10:00 a.m.–12:00 Noon in the Portland Convention Center.

The Stated Clerk Nomination Committee will report to the assembly on Sunday afternoon, June 19, 2016, and the names of both candidates will be placed in nomination at that time. The election of the Stated Clerk is the Order of the Day for Friday morning, June 24, 2016.

The committee is honored and humbled to have served the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the 222nd General Assembly (2016). To God be the glory!

Standing Rule H.2.b.(3) and (4)—Election of the Stated Clerk—Relevant Subsection

(g) The nominating committee shall announce that persons seeking the position of Stated Clerk shall file a completed application form and a resume or personal information form (PIF) with the committee 180 days before the opening of the General Assembly.

If the incumbent wants to be considered, he or she will notify the committee in writing and submit a current resume or PIF 180 days before the opening of the General Assembly. The Committee on the Office of the General Assembly shall provide a copy of the end-of term evaluation to the Stated Clerk Nominating Committee.

(h) Additional written material may be requested by the committee. No one may be nominated to serve as Stated Clerk who has not provided an application to the committee.

(i) The committee shall review and evaluate all applications to determine the constitutional eligibility of the candidates. Any candidate who is determined to not be eligible will be notified in writing within forty-five days of receipt of their resume or PIF.

(j) The committee shall interview all eligible candidates using the same methodology and select one as the committee's recommendation. All members of the committee shall ordinarily participate in the interview. The committee shall declare its nominee no later than sixty days before the opening of the General Assembly.

(k) Any of the applicants for the position of Stated Clerk, including the incumbent Stated Clerk if not the nominee of the committee, who wish to be placed in nomination against the nominee of the committee shall declare their intention to the committee to do so no later than forty-five days before the opening of the General Assembly.

(l) At the convening of the General Assembly, the Office of the General Assembly shall distribute to commissioners and advisory delegates an information packet containing the following material regarding each candidate for Stated Clerk who wishes to be included:

(i) A photograph, a biographical sketch, a personal statement by the candidate, including a statement regarding the candidate's sense of call to the ordered ministry,

(ii) The responses of the candidate to a questionnaire developed by the committee based upon issues that will be before the church as presented in business to be considered by the General Assembly.

(iii) The material submitted shall be typewritten on paper 8-1/2 x 11 inches in size. The layouts for the presentation under this standing rule (as outlined above) may be chosen by the candidates, but the copy submitted for each presentation shall be provided in one color on one side of one sheet. The material shall be submitted to the Office of the General Assembly no less than thirty days before the convening of the General Assembly for reproduction and distribution and shall be accompanied by a statement indicating the willingness of the candidate to serve as Stated Clerk, if elected.

(m) The candidates may not distribute any other materials, print or electronic, including flyers, buttons, tokens or other objects that would denote a campaign for the office of Stated Clerk.

(n) Other organizations supporting the candidacy of a particular candidate may not distribute materials electronically, through the mail, or at the General Assembly with the knowledge, support, or permission of that candidate. Should a candidate discover that an organization is advocating or campaigning for him or her, it is expected that the candidate will request that organization to cease its activities. The same expectation will be true of organizations that are critical of a particular candidate for Stated Clerk.

(o) Each candidate will be provided a place to meet and talk with commissioners and advisory delegates two days before the election. Only information provided by the Office of the General Assembly may be distributed in those rooms. Other materials, apart from that packet, are not permitted. Each candidate for Stated Clerk will be allowed to post the times when he/she will be available for conversation in that room.

(p) Any questions concerning interpretation of the election process outlined in H.2.b. shall be determined by the Stated Clerk Nomination Committee.

(4) The General Assembly, by majority vote, shall elect the Stated Clerk in the following manner:

(a) Within forty-eight hours of the convening of the assembly, the Stated Clerk Nomination Committee shall place in nomination a single nominee.

(b) The Moderator shall then invite other nominations from those who have completed the nomination process. Only one speech, made by a commissioner or a member of the Stated Clerk Nomination Committee not to exceed five minutes in length, shall be made to nominate each nominee. There shall be no speech seconding any nomination. Each person nominated from the floor shall reaffirm a willingness to serve as Stated Clerk, if elected.

Standing Rule H.2.b.(4)(d)(i)–(iii)—Other Nominations

(d) In the event there are other nominations, the election shall proceed as follows:

(i) The election of the Stated Clerk shall take place as the first order of business on the next to last day of the assembly's session.

(ii) Each nominee shall be given an opportunity to address the assembly for a time not to exceed five minutes, expressing the nominee's views regarding the functions and work of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly. The nominees shall speak in the same order as the presentation of nominating speeches.

(iii) The Moderator shall inquire of commissioners whether there are questions to be asked of the nominees for Stated Clerk. The first question shall be addressed to the nominee who was nominated first and the same question shall then be put to the other nominees in the same order in which they were nominated. The second question shall be directed to the second nominee in this order and then to each of the other nominees in sequence. Each nominee shall be afforded an opportunity to answer each question. This process shall continue for a period not to exceed the number of nominees times fifteen minutes, or for one hour, whichever is shorter, unless terminated earlier by vote of the General Assembly, after which the voting shall take place.



J. Herbert Nelson II

Biographical Sketch

Reverend Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II, serves as Director of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness (OPW) in Washington, D.C. The OPW is a prophetic office of the PC (USA) that implements the social justice policies approved by General Assembly. Nelson's role in leading the OPW includes meeting with congressional leaders and their offices; constituent education and training for Presbyterian congregations, members and governing bodies; and partnering with ecumenical, interfaith and other advocacy groups on Capitol Hill. Since coming to Washington, D.C., six years ago, his leadership has transformed the

OPW into one of the most visible offices in the denomination among all generations.

Nelson is a third generation Presbyterian Pastor, who before coming to Washington, served as Founder/Pastor of Liberation Community Presbyterian Church (LCC) in Memphis, Tennessee. The ministry chartered on April 11, 1999 with a mission to evangelize the poor to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). As an African centered ministry, LCC received the prestigious Walton Grant, which is awarded by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for outstanding work in New Church Development. The ministry was the first African American Church developed in the Presbytery of Memphis (*now Mid-South*) in forty-six years.

During his tenure in Memphis, Dr. Nelson served as Associate Director of the Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change at the University of Memphis. He also served as an education consultant, providing staff development training for Teacher Specialists, Curriculum Specialists and Principal Leaders who provide assistance for low-performing schools.

Nelson's first pastoral call after ordination in 1986 was to serve as Pastor of St. James Presbyterian Church, a redeveloping congregation located in a thriving, middle-class area in Greensboro, North Carolina. During his eleven year tenure as Pastor of St. James Presbyterian Church, Nelson became a noted community leader, preacher and advocate for justice issues both within the Church and community.

A native of Orangeburg, South Carolina, he completed Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, NC (Presbyterian University founded in 1865 – third generation graduate), with a B.A. degree in Political Science/Urban Studies in 1981. In 1985, he earned the Master of Divinity degree from Johnson C. Smith Seminary at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia. He received his Doctor of Ministry degree from Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in 2002.

J. Herbert (as he is commonly called) has served the PC(USA) at every council level. Nelson is married to Reverend Gail Porter Nelson, and they have one daughter.

Personal Statement

I give thanks and honor to Almighty God through Jesus Christ, for allowing me the opportunity by grace, to seek the Office of Stated Clerk for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). I want to thank the Stated Clerk Nominating Committee for their confidence in my abilities that led them to select me as their nominee. I am clear that their task was difficult given the many committed servants of the Kingdom of God that were interested in this position.

My experiences in the PC (U.S.A.) are linked to transformation and change within each call served as an ordained Pastor. I have served the denomination faithfully at each Council level since my ordination in 1986. My ordained ministry journey includes calls to Congregational Redevelopment; New Church Development; and leading an office in the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

The decision to seek the Office of Stated Clerk was made after much prayer, discernment and family consultation. In keeping with my life-long teachings, experiences and convictions, I believe that consultation with our Lord God and the support of family is essential in every call opportunity. I feel prepared and encouraged by God's grace to engage this significant ministry opportunity for Jesus Christ in the world.

The challenge for our denomination today is to find our way back to living and working for the Kingdom of God. Serving the Church is not enough. Our vision must point toward a higher calling that demonstrates the love and faith that Jesus taught. The reign of God over all powers and principalities is the epitome of Jesus's claim to a Godly vision for the world. The challenges to achieve this reality are great, but the God we serve is able to do all things except fail. We must trust in the Lord with all our hearts and do not rely on our own insight. (Proverbs 3:5) With God's help and the power of the Holy Spirit, I believe we can be a significant leader as a denomination in teaching, living and spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the entire world.

Responses to Questions from the Stated Clerk Nominating Committee

A survey conducted by the Stated Clerk Nominating Committee in the summer of 2015 indicated that the most desired characteristic in the next Stated Clerk is "a committed follower of Jesus Christ." Tell us about your faith journey as a follower of Jesus Christ.

By the Grace of God, I have faithfully served for thirty-one years as an ordained Teaching Elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). I grew up as a "child of the manse" in Orangeburg, South Carolina. As a third generation African American Presbyterian Pastor, my early years were filled with the racial struggles in the segregated South. My father served as a Pastor and State Conference President of the South Carolina branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) during the height of the civil rights movement. On February 8, 1968 more than twenty African American students from South Carolina State University in Orangeburg were shot in the back by State Highway patrolmen. Three individuals were killed after a peaceful demonstration intended to protest racial segregation of a bowling alley near the campus. This incident and my father's priestly and prophetic role in ministry has a significant place in my call to preach, teach and live the gospel witness of Jesus Christ. I received a call to ministry after completing college. During my seminary years, I traveled to South Africa. The opportunity to witness racial apartheid in South Africa reminded me of my growing years in South Carolina. The emergence of a biblical hermeneutic that calls the Church beyond its walls was spiritually crystalized within me. My ministry journey is reflective of leading the Church beyond its own comfort zone into the places where Jesus calls. Moreover, my theological education in a Presbyterian Seminary located in an ecumenical setting gives rise to my passion for ecumenical and interreligious ministry commitments.

I have served the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as a redevelopment and new church development pastor. Currently, I am leading a national office of our denomination. Each of these experiences provided some difficult challenges in turning the ministries around. At the same time, each ministry increased my faith as God's insurmountable grace was experienced. I believe that each of these ministry challenges prepared me to walk by faith while receiving and trusting God's divine guidance. I believe that this same divine guidance has prepared me for this moment in our denomination's life to provide leadership as the Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

As you assess the items of business coming before the 222nd General Assembly, which issues and concerns do you believe are most critical to the future of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and why?

a) The Foothills Overtures calling for changes in the constitution that would severely diminish the social witness of our denomination is a critical concern regarding our way forward. In a time when we are witnessing deep social justice commitments of young people, including the Occupy and Black Lives Matter Movements, it greatly concerns me that we would consider retreating from or delaying justice advocacy policies for three General Assemblies. The Church is always challenged to "serve the present age our calling to fulfill." Jesus spoke to and dealt with issues of injustice whenever he confronted them.

b.) I believe the adoption of the Belhar Confession is extremely significant with regards to the PCUSA confessing its own complicity to the continual struggle with racism in the United States and around the globe. Our denomination is often too cautiously non-responsive at all governing body levels regarding racial justice issues in our country. We are called in this current moment to admit our complicity with power and privilege while engaging in full repentance. Our Lord Jesus Christ reminds us that we must love the Lord with all our heart, soul and mind while loving our neighbor as ourselves. (Luke 10:27) As a

denomination, it is important that we give declaration to our participation in the sin of racism as we move toward a more diverse and racially inclusive Church. The passage of Belhar is a beginning toward repentance.

What are the opportunities and the challenges facing the PC (USA) in its ecumenical, interreligious, and interfaith work in the coming years?

I believe that the PC(USA) is challenged to enthusiastically reclaim the Judeo-Christian- Islamic Heritage as a central part of our broader dialogue and witness. Presently, I am engaged in an interreligious campaign called “Shoulder to Shoulder.” Our collective work is focused on ending violence and misunderstanding related to the Islamic community in the United States. As we are witnessing the growth of Islam in the US and across the globe, it is imperative that we broaden both our awareness and relationship for collective work and celebration.

Further, it is imperative that we forge a denominational commitment to recognize how much we have in common with other faith communities. The collective message in our Holy books embraces love. The ethic of love of Creator-Neighbor and Self is the underlying call to unity. We must utilize our significant historic commitments to mainline Protestant denominations; Historically Black Churches; Judaism; Islam; and others faith traditions to broaden both our awareness and commitments to ecumenical and interreligious engagement. Our posture in these relationships must be “Above all, clothing ourselves with love which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” (Colossians 3:12-17)

What are your hopes for your four-year term as Stated Clerk?

My hopes joyfully run rampant, but the structure of my hope includes the following:

1. Reclaiming Prayer, Biblical Literacy, Fervent Worship and Theological Discourse As Celebration
2. Making Our Theology Understandable to the Un-churched Without Dumbing Down its Content
3. Cultivating A Multi-Racial/Ethnic Denomination
4. Making our commitments as a denomination more transformative in the lives of people, especially our young adults and youth
5. Partnering with Councils and Seminaries to train leaders to impact a global society



The Reverend David Baker

Challenger to Nominee

Biographical Sketch

Stated Clerk and Director of Communications, Presbytery of Tampa Bay; c. 18,000 members; July 2015 – Present.

As Stated Clerk I am the polity expert and parliamentarian for our presbytery, and am responsible with the Coordinating Team to set the agenda for our presbytery meetings. Using training manuals, webinars, and invited guest speakers, I've trained groups on polity, the judicial process, the dismissal process, Robert's Rules and writing minutes. As Director of Communications, I've modernized our internal IT in a variety of ways, done

a lot to connect people in the presbytery through an improved website, a video email newsletter ("Better Know a Presbyter," based on Stephen Colbert's "Better Know a District") and prepared us for a transition to a completely online office.

Half Time Stated Supply, Woodlawn Presbyterian Church; St. Petersburg, FL; c. 75 members; May 2013 – July 2015.

This was a redevelopment position in a church that was facing steep decline. The church grew around 40% in attendance and membership, and 30% in giving in 2 years. Year over year Easter attendance was up 75% between the previous year and my first year, due to our outreach efforts. Since I left, they have grown an additional 15% or so in membership, adding 11 new members, and reportedly have confidence that they will continue doing well.

CEO, Internet Outreach Experts, Tampa, FL; c. 7 employees; February 2013 – Present.

Church oriented online outreach company I founded. The main reason I was working half time at Woodlawn was to focus on starting this company. Via webinars and live events, I've trained hundreds of churches and pastors in how do effective outreach online, and everyday my employees work with churches to free their staff and volunteers from graphic design, updating websites, developing materials for use in worship projections, search engine optimization and various technical tasks.

Associate Pastor, Hyde Park Presbyterian Church; Tampa, FL; c. 400 members; August 2008 – January 2013.

Hyde Park hired me to revitalize a declining contemporary worship service. Working mostly with young adults age 22 to 35, the service grew from 25 people to around 70. We planned and hosted the first Tampa Food Truck Rally, which drew around 4,000 Millennials to our grounds. The Interim Pastor at Hyde Park tells me that this group is still going strong.

CEO, Baker Sales Association, LLC, Danville, VA; c. 4 employees; August 2007 – March 2013.

A company I founded to help people with online businesses; I trained more than 100,000 people in online marketing and business principles. As part of this process, I developed significant skills in business administration, human resources, organizing systems, communication, training, video editing, marketing, search engine advertising, search engine optimization, and website design.

Organizing Pastor, Living Peace Church, PC(USA); Ladysmith, VA; October 2005 – July 2007.

New Church Development (NCD) I attempted at the same time I was leading a small church at three quarters time. The NCD had 4 total staff; a children's pastor, associate, music person and myself, while the solo church had a sextant and organist.

Statement Expressing Sense of Call and Willingness to Serve If Elected

My sense of call emerges from prayer and a feeling of guidance from God, as well as from affirmation of others. However, as I stand for Stated Clerk I do so with a deep sense of alarm regarding decline in the PC(USA). The membership losses that we've incurred are a problem that demands immediate attention. From the beginning of 1995 to the end of 2010, membership contracted 25%, but assuming 2015 losses will be similar to 2014's, we'll have lost an additional 22.5% in just the last 5 years. The next 5 look similarly bleak, with OGA budget projections assuming a 75,000 member loss in both 2017 and 2018. Yet our national agencies are cutting back on programs designed to help pastors and churches like the recently cancelled New Beginnings and Small Church Residency Programs, and not replacing them with similar initiatives. The people with the experience to help our churches are losing their jobs.

Our churches are dying and our Mid Councils are suffering as they do. Despite a popular narrative, this is not primarily due to controversies related to GA actions; for every church that has been dismissed in the last 10 years, almost 2 more have closed due to merger, lack of members, or other reasons related to decline. Nor should the fact that other mainline denominations are struggling with similar challenges mean we should accept these losses as inevitable. I believe it's not too late to rescue many of the churches that are in trouble.

We need to act boldly and proactively, doing whatever we can before deciding on a new structure, not after. I agree with GA Moderator Heath Rada, quoted in the 4/25/16 issue of the Presbyterian Outlook as saying that waiting years to figure out a new structure before acting would be like "putting a Band-Aid on a broken bone". Ideally, I believe the PC(USA) needs a vision oriented movement to help our existing churches in the same way the 2012 GA's 1001 New Worshiping Communities Overture resulted in immediate action to help establish new churches.

The role of the Stated Clerk to help set the budget and equip our Mid Councils through the OGA affords the next Clerk with considerable opportunity to address the crisis our congregations are facing. Equipping our Mid Councils' staffs is one of the more efficient ways to address the problem and help reverse membership decline. However, our Mid Councils are also in crisis, facing a dearth of churches with enough members and finances to support their work. Once staff has been drastically reduced, as in some presbyteries without an executive or even a paid Stated Clerk, it becomes even more difficult to put a structure in place to help turn things around.

I'm someone with direct, extensive experience in navigating these waters. I've helped our presbytery and my own church face transition successfully. The Presbytery of Tampa Bay has been a leader in modeling new ways to do Mid Council leadership. I wrote the proposal for the \$50,000 grant we were awarded to pursue our transformation, and have assisted with the transformation both as staff and as a member of the presbytery's Coordinating Team. As the founder of Internet Outreach Experts, I've also been proactive in helping to fill a need I felt called to address in the greater Church. I'm standing to offer an option for those who are concerned about the challenges their churches are facing.

I have every confidence that the Stated Clerk Nominating Committee's nominee is an excellent person. However, in distinction to the nominee, I stand as someone who has polity and constitutional experience (the main job of a Stated Clerk), experience as a Mid Council leader (who are directly supported by the OGA and are undergoing unprecedented crisis), strong interfaith experience, and almost a decade of executive experience as CEO of two companies. I am qualified and experienced in each of the areas required by the position of Stated Clerk, and will serve if elected.

Committee Questions

1. A survey conducted by the Stated Clerk Nominating Committee in the summer of 2015 indicated that the most desired characteristic in the next Stated Clerk is “a committed follower of Jesus Christ.” Tell us about your faith journey as a follower of Jesus Christ.

Although I grew up in the church, attended youth group, sang in the choir, and made more crafts that is right for a young man to make, I didn't have a deep faith until just before I turned 14. While I believe that God was working in my life prior to this time, bringing me to the right place and enabling faith to take hold... I did not have a deep sense of the divine until after a conversion experience when I was 13.

Just before my 14th birthday, I found myself in a situation that I thought was really important, important enough to do something I had never *really* done before: pray. All I knew about prayer was “Now I lay me down to sleep”, the Lord's Prayer, and that it had something to do with talking to Jesus, so I decided to try that. Turns out Jesus is real, and is interested in me!

Prayer was a wonder and a joy, and I committed to reading the Bible and learning more about God. As a teen, much of my spare time was spent in prayer and study. Eventually the Lord encouraged me to get involved in church again, and I began to feel a call towards missionary work, or perhaps parish work. My pastor at the time discouraged me from the missionary field and guided me towards pastoral ministry. By the time I was 15, I had decided I would be attending seminary, although I wasn't sure what I would do on the other side of it.

As I think is common for Teaching Elders, seminary was a challenging time. My prior beliefs were poked and prodded and tested in many unpleasant but necessary ways. Fortunately, my many friendships with those in the Korean community at Princeton helped keep me grounded. Those relationships, some of which continue today, deeply influenced my faith and my appreciation for other cultures.

My first few years of ministry were another test of my commitment. Separated from friends and family in a town of 1,400 people, this was a wilderness period for me, and nearly resulted in my leaving the ministry. After around 4 years of service (including fundraising for and starting a new church development), I took a year off to do something that I had wanted to do for ages – start an internet based company. I eventually discerned God leading me to return to the ministry, and received a call to help Hyde Park Presbyterian Church of Tampa, FL revitalize their contemporary worship service.

Although I had a successful business and fairly prestigious position at Hyde Park, after a few years I felt the Lord calling me in another direction. I found that I didn't have much passion for my business work, because it didn't align with my desire to help the church. While training Teaching and Ruling elders about online outreach, a new sense of call emerged. It occurred to me that no half day class could ever equip these church folks with what amounted to a professional skillset acquired over years. I resonated with the deep need and desire I saw in them to be able to effectively reach their community, and with the help of a well-timed CREDO conference as a catalyst, I closed my existing business and started a new one dedicated to helping churches with professional online outreach (websites, search engine optimization, graphic design, etc.).

Closing a business with a 23,000 member newsletter that I'd worked on for over 6 years was not an easy decision. Nor was taking a part time call in order to give myself enough time to develop the business helping churches I felt God calling me to. It wasn't an easy decision for my family, and my employees weren't thrilled, either. However, three years later, the church I was called to during that time has grown by around 50%, and the business, Internet Outreach Experts, is accomplishing its mission of getting churches online for offline growth. In that time I've trained hundreds of pastors and churches in online outreach, and the team working under me helps churches manage their internet presence every day.

Deciding to stand for Stated Clerk of the General Assembly was also not an easy decision. If successful, it will likely mean stepping away from another business that I've spent years building. Through the ups and downs that

make up any faith journey, I have remained committed to follow where I believe God is leading me, even if that's not easy. I will continue to tenaciously pursue God's purpose and call in my life, wherever that leads.

2. As you assess the items of business coming before the 222nd General Assembly, which issues and concerns do you believe are most critical to the future of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and why?

In the ocean of overtures and committee reports before the General Assembly this year, the work of "The Way Forward" committee, which handles business related to the future of the denomination, stands out as being especially relevant for the future of the PC(USA). I believe the most vital recommendations come from the reports of the review committees for the Office of The General Assembly (OGA) and the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA), with honorable mentions for the "When we Gather at the Table" report from the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly (COGA) and the overtures from the Presbytery of the Foothills. If you haven't read these documents, I recommend doing so on pc-biz.org on "The Way Forward" committee's page.

Report of the Committee to Review the Office of the General Assembly (OGA)

The OGA is the office for which the Stated Clerk is the Chief Executive Officer, consisting of 50 plus staff. This review report, while mostly positive, highlighted some serious areas of concern for the future. First, there is a severe staffing shortage, mostly due to an office wide 30% staffing cut three years ago driven by reduced resources. Second, exacerbating this problem in the office meant to support Mid Councils, the report acknowledges that the serious financial and transitional problems faced by our presbyteries have resulted in far more presbytery staff who are inexperienced or in crisis and in need of OGA assistance. These issues combined create a crisis situation where there are fewer staff and staff hours to assist leaders who are in greater need than ever.

As a Mid Council employee served by the staff of the OGA, I can personally attest to both their incredible competence and their unreasonably heavy load. I've gotten amazing support, but I've also had occasion to wait nearly a week to hear back from staff.

The role of the Mid Council, particularly the presbytery, is of critical importance if the denomination has any chance of addressing our membership predicament. Unfortunately, this is also the council of the church that has been hit hardest by the losses. Many presbyteries are in a state of confusion with transitional staff, new models, and far fewer resources. Yet the primary support for struggling churches is the presbytery; our churches, in a perfect world, should look to the presbytery for leadership and training to face their challenges successfully.

This report is exactly on target when it says that the OGA staff cannot be proactive while spending most of its time responding to crises and inexperienced presbytery staff. They can't address systemic problems if they're barely treading water. In order to proactively address the problems our presbyteries face, they'll need to embrace new ways of doing things, because in the near term resources are more likely to contract than expand. There are many gains in efficiency that I believe are possible with proper use of best practice customer service tactics companies around the world use, but that the OGA for some reason has been slow to adopt (see my response to question 4 below for more).

Report of the Committee to Review the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA)

The Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA) is the agency involved in directly equipping our churches and New Worshiping Communities through education and staff support, among many other duties. While the review report found that the PMA staff were competent and dedicated, there were also many issues holding the agency back, indicating problems with: "strategic decision-making and priority-setting; organizational culture and work environment; and collaborative efforts with other General Assembly agencies".

The most significant recommendation of this report is to study the possibility of merging the PMA with the OGA. Given the pivotal role that the PMA plays in supporting leaders and congregations, this will be a big decision that could do a lot to help or hurt the denomination as it tries to address the problem of decline.

From interviews with former staff, I believe that agencies are too isolated from one another and that there is duplication of effort as a result. Additionally, this insular nature results in a poor understanding of resources available elsewhere in the OGA/PMA. While it's possible that there would be benefit in combining certain services, I think the greater benefit of a possible merger would be from the potential for a more unified strategic vision and sense of mission.

When We Gather at the Table Report and Foothills Overtures

I believe the When We Gather at the Table report is also worthy of mention, as it reveals some deep divisions that I would like to see us try to heal. The fact that nearly 30% of respondents are unhappy is a concern, not only for those who are disappointed, but also for those who value the diversity of perspective that our denomination has provided in recent decades. One of the Foothills Overtures also cites "votes on divisive issues" as being detrimental to the peace, unity and purity of the church. What can we do to bring our denomination closer together? I believe the Church should be an example of how people relate to one another. While our country is so divided, can't the PC(USA) be an example of unity with and love for those with whom we disagree?

3. What are the opportunities and the challenges facing the PC(USA) in its ecumenical, interreligious, and interfaith work in the coming years?

Ecumenical Work

Some of the my most meaningful experiences as a Teaching Elder have been the result of successful programs from other denominations imported into the PC(USA). CREDO in particular, I can't say enough good things about. Hosted by the Board of Pensions, it helps Teaching Elders assess themselves over 8 days in many critical ways: health, vocation, and both the spiritual and financial aspects of life. This program was originally developed by the Episcopal Church, but Presbyterians have benefited from it since 2005.

So while it is a joy to get to know our brothers and sisters in Christ from other denominational viewpoints, it can also be of great benefit as we share solutions to the challenges that we face in common. There are ample opportunities to find new ideas and programs through other Christians, and I believe we need to take best practices from wherever we can find them. While maintaining who we are as Presbyterians, we should endeavor to learn from whoever is successfully addressing problems we face like reaching Millennials and "nones" (the people who respond "none" when asked what their religious affiliation is). From my own work engaging Millennials, I believe that our denomination's "Big Tent" worldview fits well with the beliefs of many young people, and so I believe there's hope that we can do more to reach them.

Similarly, our partners in other denominational offices are doing good work we could learn from. I've been particularly impressed with the way that the United Methodist Church has helped individual churches and pastors grow in their worship experiences, and I'm sure there are myriad other examples to be found.

Finally, as memberships decline across all mainline denominations, ecumenical relationships become ever more important than in the past as we stand side by side in witness to the world. Our voices together make for a stronger testimony as our overall influence in the culture wanes.

Interfaith Work

Regarding interreligious work, I see the importance of interfaith dialogue with Muslims being of increasing importance, given the friction and lack of understanding in our society surrounding Islam, and the enduring conflicts in the Middle East. I have personally experienced the value of interreligious dialogue between Christianity and Islam, in addition to other faiths.

My wife and I host international college students in the United States to learn English, so for the last 6 years or so we've been living with a near constant stream of varying faiths in our home: Buddhist, Shinto, Muslim, Santerian, Catholic and even one Methodist (from Japan of all places). These students often stay for months at a time, and become like family while they're with us. As a result of my status as a Teaching Elder, answering questions about Christianity and learning about other faiths in return has been a perennial feature of our household.

The faith I've come to know best as a result of these dialogues is Islam; at least half of our two-dozen-plus students over the years have been Muslim, and their perspectives, practices, and insights have been invaluable in helping me to form a deep understanding of the Middle East and the politics there. Most of our Muslim students have shown a great deal of interest in Christianity and have often attended church with us.

I'm also fortunate enough to have personal experience with another side of the conflict in the Middle East, as my roommate for three years in college was Jewish. This provided us with many opportunities for discussions about our faiths, and helped me better understand the Jewish perspective on Christianity and faith in general. Since I find it likely that the Middle East will continue to be an area of interest for the national church, I believe it to our advantage to have a Stated Clerk with perspective on these faiths.

4. What are your hopes for your four-year term as Stated Clerk?

My hopes for a term as Stated Clerk include modernizing the Office of the General Assembly (OGA), proactively supporting our Mid Councils and Mid Council leaders, and attempting to raise awareness about and facilitate solutions for the membership crisis.

Modernize our Support Systems

In modernizing the work of the OGA, my hope is that we would increase efficiency, lighten the load of the staff of the Office of the Mid Council and be more effective supports to our Mid Council leaders. These are for the most part things that we could be doing now to help Mid Councils and churches, saving money in the process.

Given the ever increasing load on OGA staff and likelihood of fewer resources in the future, there is a need to be more efficient. This means embracing new ways of doing things. In my business life I've found extremely effective ways of minimizing the one on one interactions that tend to be the largest draw on staff time, as have many other organizations. I'd like us to start using more resources we can get into the hands of our constituents to help themselves: training manuals, videos, and articles explaining common problems. One of the first things to do would be to put more of this information on the OGA website, in a place that it can be easily found, so that those we serve are not dependent on waiting to hear back from staff to find necessary information.

Communication is another major issue. Obviously the website could use a major overhaul; some OGA pages haven't been updated in years, and the site is infamously byzantine. However, the denomination could also be doing a better job in getting information out about available resources in other ways. For instance, the Tampa Bay area has a major problem with human trafficking that one region in our presbytery is trying to raise awareness about, but it was months before we discovered that the denomination had developed resources to do that. Why didn't I know about this as a Mid Council staff? I'd ask OGA to provide lists of OGA, PMA and other resources for supporting Teaching Elders and churches to Mid Council leaders.

Additionally, I'm mystified by the absence at OGA of perhaps the greatest modern tool for remote training of groups at once – the webinar. We can train more people, more often, and less expensively this way. There is so much great training provided by the OGA staff, it's a shame that more isn't shared with those who can't make it to conferences or who need the information immediately. Similarly, conferences could be recorded and archived online as resources that are always available for training.

The OGA should modernize not only in how we offer support, but in what types of support we offer. The world is changing and so are the needs of those the OGA serves, in addition to the types of opportunities to serve them.

Anyone who has seen more than a few Mid Council websites will realize that many Mid Council staffs are not equipped in this area, and could use support. This many not seem like a priority, but poor communication practices have an impact on Teaching and Ruling Elders. Such support is trivially inexpensive when shared at the national level. Top quality website hosting is next to free, and we could provide contracted support for little more. Creation of website and communications templates that employ best practices is also something that benefits from pooling our resources.

Another modern support that would best be created at the national level is custom software. Almost all of the administrative work that I do as a presbytery Stated Clerk, the reports, the training, maintaining the rolls, can be automated by software or delegated to others assisted by software. I've already been at work on such a database, and will be releasing it to other Stated Clerks for testing soon. If my presbytery is any indication of how other presbyteries do things, it should significantly reduce the administrative load of staff. The cost of developing such software is trivial on the national scale; a few thousand dollars.

Proactive, not Reactive, Support for Mid Councils

To proactively support our Mid Councils and leaders we need to get focused on the changes and challenges they face. To be proactive about this means not waiting for leaders to come to us with problems or concerns, not waiting passively while our churches are in trouble, but going to these leaders, listening to their concerns and asking how we can help them. What are their challenges and where could they use care?

Being proactive means approaching effective leaders and encouraging them to share their expertise regarding presbytery transformation; it means developing and disseminating effective resources that can be used by Mid Council staffs with Teaching and Ruling Elders. The OGA should pursue any resource avenue to save a Mid Council leader an hour or a day of work, preferably many of them at once, enabling them to do more to help our churches.

Raising Awareness of the Need for Action

I firmly believe that the PC(USA) is facing an urgent crisis, albeit a slow moving one. Our house is burning down, one declining congregation at a time, and we need to address this if the long term work of our Church is to continue. Part of the job of the Stated Clerk is to communicate and to lead Presbyterians, and I would try to raise awareness and challenge the denomination to take action to turn this problem around.

I hope to challenge the leaders of the denomination, our Teaching and Ruling Elders, sessions, and presbyteries, to make addressing the membership crisis in our churches the priority it ought to be. I'd encourage an overture at the next General Assembly to redirect our budgetary priorities towards something as bold and visionary as the 1001 New Worshiping Communities movement, but to help churches connect with their communities and find new life. If you're unfamiliar with 1001, it was the result of an overture to the 2012 General Assembly and I think will be one of the great success stories of the PC(USA). The initiative aims to start 1001 worshiping communities over 10 years, and has already started more than 320 such communities, often among groups not served by our existing churches. This has been vision based and action oriented, not the result of a 2 year study. We need something similar to inspire, guide and unify action in our existing churches. I know that this is possible, as I've personally lead a church that (with God's help) has reversed a steep decline. Let's act before it's too late.

There's one related area of concern I would try to raise awareness about during my time as Stated Clerk. When I look ahead for the PC(USA), what I see for Teaching Elders under 40 is grim. According to the [Board of Pensions](#), in 1995, 39% of Teaching Elders were under 45; in 2010 that figure was down to 23%. Only 5 years later, barely 12% (1,471) of pastors serving a church were 40 or under (thanks go to the OGA staff for this figure). However, we have more seminary graduates and *fewer* second career graduates than we did 20 years ago, according to the [Association of Theological Schools](#). From these statistics, it seems to me that we need to do more to nurture our next generation of leaders, or we will have trouble finding experienced leaders in the not too distant future. In the present, I think the stats also speak volumes about the relative difficulty our denomination seems to have had reaching as many Millennials as we did members of Gen X.