WAY FORWARD COULD INCLUDE EXAMINATION OF NATIONAL STRUCTURE

FOOTHILLS OVERTURES NIXED; '2020 VISION TEAM' SOUGHT

L.A. PASTOR CALLS FOR SUPPORT OF URBAN MINISTRY AT COMPASSION, PEACE AND JUSTICE DINNER

By Bob Sloan
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – Using his not-so-welcoming arrival to Portland as a lead-in, Carlton A. Rhoden shared his story of urban revival and the need to confront injustice head-on with those in attendance at the Compassion, Peace and Justice Dinner held Tuesday night during the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Rhoden, the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church of Los Angeles, said he was told by the desk clerk at his hotel that his room was not ready and that he would have to wait. He then watched moments later as another guest, this one of European heritage, was greeted warmly and given a room.

“This is the reality of the world we live in still in 2016,” he said. “It’s the reality we face. We must confront and challenge the injustices of this world.”

Rhoden, who has served as pastor of Westminster for nearly three years, told the audience that as an urban minister, he looks at the world through a certain lens. From that vantage point, he described the area in which his church is located.

“We are confronted with drugs and violence issues on a daily basis,” he said of the church located in the poor South

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WANTED!

The Presbyterian Historical Society is seeking suggestions for candidates for our Living History interview series.

The film project features diverse experiences and stories told by American Presbyterians. Visit us at the OGA booth (423) to learn more and nominate someone today.
AWARDS GIVEN AT STATED CLERK’S ECUMENICAL DINNER

By Mike Ferguson
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – First a grateful ecumenical community showered blessings and gifts on Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), who is retiring shortly after the 222nd General Assembly ends.

Next on the agenda for Tuesday’s Stated Clerk’s Ecumenical Dinner was the PC(USA)’s recognition of two individuals and two groups who have made important contributions to the cause of Christian unity and interreligious relations.

From churches including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, the Presbyterian Church of Korea and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Parsons accepted best wishes, handshakes, hugs and gifts, including a book, cufflinks and a stole he wore for the remainder of the dinner.

“I’m just honored,” he said afterward, “to be representing Presbyterians’ long ecumenical commitment.”

Recognized for their ecumenical work were:

- Carolyn Winfrey Gillette, a popular and prolific hymn writer from New Castle Presbytery. “Hymns are prayers that we sing,” she said. One of hers, “O God, in Christ You Call Us,” concluded the dinner. Gillette said hymns help worshipers “lift up our deepest concerns for this world God loves.”
- Burns Stanfield, a pastor in South Boston recognized for his work with the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization. Working with partners of other faiths “has been a grace-filled thing for me, particularly after the Boston Marathon bombings,” he said. “I am a better Christian because of my Jewish and Muslim friends.”
- NorthPark Presbyterian Church in Dallas. Ruling Elder David Haynes said church members have been visiting Kenya for years, but as recently as last year he realized that he – like 70 percent of Americans – knew no Muslims. So the church started a regular ice-cream social where Muslims and Christians could get to know each other.
- The Presbyterian Church of Chicago’s Interfaith Solidarity Network. Accepting the award, Brian Paulson called Chicago “a rich place to do ecumenical and interfaith work. It’s a rich tapestry of people from all over the world, and they bring their faith with them.”

With the awards dispensed, Parsons teamed up with General Assembly co-moderators Denise Anderson and Jan Edmiston to circle the banquet hall several times, greeting and welcoming the dozens of ecumenical partners attending the dinner.

“May God meet you where you are,” Anderson said during the benediction, “and take you where you need to be.”

L.A. PASTOR CALLS FOR SUPPORT OF URBAN MINISTRY AT COMPASSION, PEACE AND JUSTICE DINNER
Continued from page 1

Central part of Los Angeles. “There is still much work to be done, but we are seeing improvements. I believe it is a testament to the church’s role in helping with transition of a community.”

Rhoden recounted how he passed by “one of the worst parks I had ever seen” on his first day walking to the church. He said he saw deteriorating playground equipment, unkempt landscaping, and drug deals going on just a few feet away.

“It was a very sad sight,” he said.

Shortly after his arrival, the church took it upon itself to renovate the park. He said members of the congregation engaged the community in the effort, holding public meetings. The park was dedicated last March.

“Every day, you see children and families playing in that playground,” he said. “It’s a beautiful thing to see.” He said it would not have happened if it was not for the church.

“That is our mission field,” Rhoden said. “We are the ones that make transformation happen.”

Rhoden reinforced his message on the need for the church, particularly the urban church, to get involved in the community, citing Jeremiah 29:5-7:

“Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”

Rhoden said the urban church has a “unique voice and a unique role” in providing for the welfare of the people.

“They need us desperately,” he said. “The church is the place where their voice can be heard. It is where they can find support. It is where they can come and know they are loved.”

When we help the people who need it the most, the least of these, we are in reality helping ourselves, he said.
PORTLAND – After spending most of Monday on its colossal piece of business – whether to recommend divesting from fossil-fuel companies – the Immigration and Environmental Issues Committee of the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) made short work of what remained of its agenda Tuesday.

Among the overtures the committee will send to the full plenary is one from the Presbytery of New York City directing church agencies to provide leadership “diligently advocating for and seeking to improve” refugee resettlement policies.

The committee unanimously adopted the overture after amending it slightly.

That advocacy, the overture states, should include shorter overseas processing periods, more funding for refugee services, and the admittance of refugees as lawful permanent residents in order to, among other things, help ensure their safety.

The committee also approved the Presbytery of Monmouth’s overture directing the Presbyterian Mission Agency to “advocate wherever possible” against factory farms and Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations, large cattle operations known as CAFOs.

Instead, the agency is to advocate in support of farm and processing plant workers, racial-ethnic farmers, and family farmers and ranchers, among others.

In other Tuesday business, the committee approved, by a 43-11 vote, adding “caring for God’s creation” to the Book of Order’s list of the responsibilities required of members.

Brought to the committee by the Presbytery of New Castle, the overture was endorsed by the Presbyterian Mission Agency, which noted that adding the duty to the list of those required of church members “makes explicit this aspect of Christian discipleship already recognized and practiced in a great many congregations nationwide.”
PRESBYTERIANS FOR EARTH CARE SPEAKERS SAY NOW IS THE TIME TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE

By Erin Cox-Holmes
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – Climate change is not a problem to worry about in the future, a Presbyterian environmental activist said Tuesday; it’s a challenge for today.

Speaking at a luncheon sponsored by Presbyterians for Earth Care at the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Gary Payton said: “Recently I had a life-changing experience. It made my perspectives significantly different. Until then, I had framed the issue of climate change in terms of my grandchildren.”

Last November, Payton and Rebecca Barnes, the PC(USA) associate for Environmental Ministries, attended the United Nations Conference Framework Convention on Climate Change in Paris, which changed their views on the dimensions and urgency of the problem.

In their address, titled “Paris: Rising Waters, Rising Hope,” they spoke about ways Presbyterians can join others all around the world to make a difference – now.

What matters now is climate justice, Barnes said: Who is responsible for the problem, and who is bearing the brunt of it?

The worst emitters are not the ones who are suffering the ill-effects, she said.

“This is a justice issue because those who are the most vulnerable are not those who are the worst offenders.”

The effects of climate change are all around us, she said, from Typhoon Haiyan, the strongest typhoon on record, which devastated the Philippines and other parts of Southeast Asia, to drought laying waste to nations in Africa. And the effects are dire.

“In Paris, the constant chant was ‘1.5 to survive.’ That means that we have to hold the increase in global temperatures to less than 1.5 degrees Celsius. The chanters were those whose countries will be under water,” said Barnes.

It will all come down to what projects are adopted, and how they are enforced, said Payton. “Great devastation is being wrought by the excesses of the fossil-fuel companies and our

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CELEBRATE REFORMATION’S 500TH BIRTHDAY
BY EMULATING REFORMERS, COMMITTEE SUGGESTS

By Gregg Brekke
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – The story goes that Martin Luther launched the Protestant Reformation on Oct. 31, 1517, when he nailed his famed 95 Theses on the Sale of Indulgences to the door of All Saints Church in Wittenberg.

The Reformation may really have started a few weeks later, but that has become the traditional date, so it’s on that day next year that the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation will be celebrated.

Anticipating that celebration, the Committee on Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations wrapped up its work at the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Tuesday by recommending that the assembly urge Presbyterians at all levels and in all related groups to celebrate by studying the historical significance of the Reformation and the people who made it happen.

The committee also recommended that Presbyterians:

1. Find occasions to emulate the zeal that early reformers brought to their study of scripture, their practice of personal and corporate worship, their re-invention of the structures of church governance and the expansion of the mission of the church.
2. Recognize the cases in which Reformed churches fell short in their task of reform and perpetuated or created error and abuse.

3. Invite the Presbyterian Mission Agency to suggest existing resources for study that accurately reflect both the contributions and errors of the early reformers.
4. Encourage Presbyterians to schedule events in theology, worship, spirituality, polity, and mission and to consider adding a component to their programming that reflects on the changes and insights of the Reformation.
5. Recommend that congregations try to arrange for ecumenical study and worship with other Protestant congregations, especially those in the Reformed, Lutheran, Anglican and Anabaptist traditions, and to seek ways to celebrate common heritage with Roman Catholic and Orthodox congregations.

In other business, the committee:

• Nominated nine people for election by the General Assembly as PC(USA) delegates to the General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The nominees are the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly; Robina Winbush, associate stated clerk and director of Ecumenical Relations; Christian Ho Choi; Bruce Gillette; Gun Ho Lee; Emily McGinley; Michelle Sanchez; Anne Weirich; and Whitney Wilkinson. The meeting will be held June 27-July 7, 2017, in Leipzig, Germany.
• Recommended that the General Assembly invite ecumenical advisory delegates to the 223rd General Assembly (2018). From international churches: Assembly of Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Iraq, Evangelical Church in the Republic of Niger, China Christian Council, Iglesia Reformada Presbyterianna de Guinea Ecuatorial, National Evangelical Church of Guatemala, Presbyterian Church of Colombia, Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea, Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East, United Protestant Church of France, Waldensian Evangelical Church of Rio de la Plata. From churches in the United States and Canada: Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, Church of God in Christ, Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Moravian Church in North America, United Church of Christ.
• Received an introduction to and heard results of the self-study conducted by the General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations. In addition to exploring continued partnerships, GACIER reported on its work to educate the denomination on the Interreligious Stance of the PC(USA) along with its work to maintain interreligious commitments and, in light of the global climate of religious intolerance, provide resources to help Presbyterians “respond to neighbors in multiple contexts, including interfaith marriages and families, local community concerns, and global peacemaking and justice.”
• Approved a commissioner resolution, Prayer for the Persecuted Church, asking the General Assembly encourage prayer for the persecuted church around the world.
• On Monday, the committee recommended approval of adding Confession of Belhar to the PC(USA) Book of Confessions.

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PORTLAND – Teaching elders involved in disciplinary cases who have renounced the PC(USA)’s jurisdiction and remain outside it would continue to be barred from church work under an overture approved by the Church Polity and Ordered Ministry Committee Tuesday.

The action took place during the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), meeting June 18-25 in Portland.

Donna Wells, stated clerk of the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta, which submitted the overture, told the committee that she has seen only four cases in 16 years in which elders have renounced the church’s jurisdiction.

“It’s a very serious step for someone to renounce, and it’s usually not done lightly,” she said.

That recommendation is one of more than a dozen the committee has forwarded to the full General Assembly meeting this week.

Also on Tuesday, the committee voted unanimously to turn down an overture that even its advocate couldn’t argue for. The overture, on the roles of permanent judicial commissions (PJC) and the Advisory Committee on the Constitution (ACC), would have given PJC a power they’ve never had before, said ACC member Alyson Janke – the right to overrule General Assembly decisions.

The committee approved, 43-11, with amendments, a commissioner’s resolution on disputes over church property.

David Green, of the Presbytery of New Covenant, said the church is being sued by numerous congregations seeking dismissal from the PC(USA) but wanting to keep their property. “We need your prayers,” he said, “because we are being clobbered.”

“And if you would encourage the conversation” among states whose laws conflict with church law, “we would be very grateful,” he said.

On Monday, the committee recommended disapproval of six items of business and assented to three.

Among those disapproved was an overture from the Synod of the Northeast that would have allowed for election of elders to individual commissions without requiring service on the session.

The committee unanimously declined an overture from the Presbytery of Lake Erie that would have allowed ruling elders to attend session meetings virtually – through electronic means – while, for example, they are away on business.

The panel approved, with amendments, an overture from the Presbytery of Great Rivers that would strike the phrase “commissioned lay pastor” from the Book of Order and replace it with “commissioned pastor,” also known as commissioned ruling elder.

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“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

(Galatians 3:28)
SEMINARIANS RATE ‘POLITY GYMNASICS’ IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 2.2

By Eva Stimson
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – It was a heck of a way to start the day: “Have any of you heard the term ‘quasi-committee of the whole?’”

This was one of the first questions put to a bleary-eyed group of 15 students from five seminaries gathered for a 7 a.m. class at the Oregon Convention Center on day four of the 222nd General Assembly (2016). Asking the question was Paul Hooker, associate dean of Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Hooker and Clifton Kirkpatrick, a professor at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary (LPDS) and a former Stated Clerk of the PC(USA), are teaching the class, “Presbyterianism: Principles and Practices,” for which students earn academic credit while learning firsthand about church polity and structure by observing the workings of the General Assembly. Jerry Van Marter, the stated clerk of the Presbytery of Mid-Kentucky, a former coordinator of Presbyterian News Service, is the course administrator.

Hooker explained that ‘quasi-committee of the whole,’ a favorite phrase of Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons, refers to the process by which an assembly or assembly committee suspends parliamentary rules in order to discuss an issue more informally.

Other similarly technical terms were bandied about during the hour the students devoted to describing their experiences of observing or serving as student assistants in various General Assembly committees. There was talk of substitute motions, abstentions, administrative commissions and minority reports.

“Polity gymnastics” was the term used by Susan Pierson, a student at San Francisco Theological Seminary, to describe the process she observed in the General Assembly Committee on Middle East Issues.

“It seemed like we were getting caught up avoiding the issues at hand. There were amendments to amendments and rebuttals to rebuttals.”

“I would call it ‘parliamentary olympics,’” said Colleen Earp, a student at Union Presbyterian Seminary, reporting on her time with the committee on Immigration and Environmental Issues.

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PRESBYTERIANS FOR EARTH CARE SPEAKERS SAY NOW IS THE TIME TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE

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own consumption. We have more work to do; let us be about it together.”

Awards presented during the luncheon included:

- The William Gibson Eco-Justice Award was presented to Patricia K. Tull for her eco-justice work. She is the program director for Hoosier Interfaith Power and Light and author of *Inhabiting Eden: Christians, the Bible, and the Ecological Crisis*.
- The inaugural Emerging Earth Care Leader Award was presented to Vickie Machado. Her acceptance speech, read by a colleague on her behalf, thanked the group for honoring her work as an environmental activist and community organizer.
- The Restoring Creation Award was presented to the Alliance for International Reforestation (AIR), whose mission is “to implement sustainable farming methods for poor farmers in Central America in order to protect water sources, reduce hunger and malnutrition while protecting the gift of creation.” AIR’s team has planted more than 4.2 million trees in Guatemala and Nicaragua; trained 3,000 families in sustainable farming; built more than 800 high-efficiency stoves; and started dozens of micro-businesses.

SPIRIT OF GA VIDEOS ON VIMEO

The special Spirit of GA video series being shown in plenary at the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) also is available online. The five videos, airing June 18, 19, 22, 23, and 24, can be viewed at vimeo.com/pcusaoga.

The videos take up the themes of leadership, eco-justice, discernment, social justice and identity. They are being produced by Randy Hobson and Brelin Tilford through the General Assembly Communications Center.

PORTLAND 2016

THE HOPE IN OUR CALLING

GA222 GIFT PROJECT UPDATE

Oregon Food Bank distributes emergency food to hunger-relief agencies throughout Oregon and Clark County, Wash. And that’s just the beginning.

- Metro and Statewide Services teams provide technical assistance and training to hunger-relief agencies.
- Our Network Support Fund matches local donations to help agencies build capacity to better serve people who are hungry.
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- Education programs teach low-income participants to grow food from seed and to stretch food dollars while cooking healthy meals.
- Community organizing work through FEAST (Food, Education, Agriculture Solutions Together) workshops and other partnerships help communities build stronger and more equitable local food systems.
- And our Advocacy team works to find long-term, public-policy solutions that benefit people with low incomes.

Donations from GA222 attendees total $3,200. If you haven’t been by the Gift Project Booth outside the Exhibit Hall, we encourage you to do that or donate at the following link:

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SEMINARIANS RATE ‘POLITY GYMNASTICS’ IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 2.2

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She brought five pages of notes about the committee's work, particularly on an overture urging the church to divest from fossil-fuel companies.

The overture finally passed in an after-dinner vote, following hours of parliamentary maneuvering and debate. "It was a day!" Earp said.

Another Union student, Annie Franklin, reported that the GA Committee on The Way Forward was considering creating an administrative commission to deal with a large group of overtures. "I hope the commissioners did their work last night," she said. "I'd really like to not be here at 10 o'clock tonight."

Heather McIntyre, a student at LPTS, described how things heated up unexpectedly in the committee on Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations during a debate on whether the Confessions of Belhar should be added to the PC(USA) Book of Confessions. "Everything got very confusing," she said. "There were lots of polity and procedure questions." As a student assistant, McIntyre had to scurry to find a member of the Advisory Committee on the Constitution and a second parliamentarian. Eventually the committee voted to approve Belhar, but because of the tensions in the room, committee leaders added a time of prayer and Bible study after the vote.

Piper Madison, of Austin Seminary, said leaders of the committee on Theological Issues and Institutions dealt well with contention over whether to approve a revised Directory for Worship. "God bless the leadership team," she said. "There were some obvious agendas in the room – people who wanted to leave their mark on this document."

Madison said that during the long debate she moved from the front of the committee room to the back, "where the ACC people were whispering with each other." She said, "It was definitely the most interesting place to be."

Sharron Boddy, a student at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, said she was surprised by the number of debates about what seemed like petty details in the committee on Mission Coordination. "I thought it was going to be cool, calm and collected," she said.

When all the debated items ended up being approved, she wondered, "What was all this debate about? It's so annoying."

Ed Sackett, of Austin Seminary, experienced similar frustration in the committee on General Assembly Procedures. "It was strike this and strike that," he said. Ultimately, the debate came down to one word – should vs. shall.

Another Austin student, Jim DeMent, praised the moderator of the committee on Church Polity and Ordered Ministry for being "skilled, experienced, and in control."

He said the committee stayed on track all day and only had one business item left to deal with. "The moderator keeps us on time, opens us with prayer," and enforces time limits "gently but firmly," he said.

"There are lessons in all this," Kirkpatrick told the students. It's important for church leaders to be versed in Robert's Rules of Order, parliamentary procedures, and the Book of Order. "If you want to exercise leadership in the church, you really need to learn the rules," he said.
MISSION WORK PLAN RECOMMENDED
BY COMMITTEE

By Gregg Brekke
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – A revised work plan of the Presbyterian Mission Agency of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for 2017-18 was unanimously recommended for adoption Tuesday by the 222nd General Assembly (2016), which will consider the recommendation later this week.

Noting that many structural changes are being suggested for the denomination, the PMA proposed a work plan limited to two years and structured around the Great Ends of the Church as those changes are discussed.

“We recognize these to be the goals of the church, because we have been redeemed and called into ministry by Jesus Christ, because we live in gratitude for the grace given to us by God, and because we understand ourselves to be joined and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the body of Christ,” the PMA said.

“As the Presbyterian Mission Agency in 2017-2018, we know that we are not solely responsible for the achievement of all these Great Ends. We understand that our role is to be faithful stewards of God’s blessings by focusing only on what the church needs from the national church today, using the unique resources of the Presbyterian Mission Agency.”

The Mission Coordination commission committee adopted the plan 73-0.

In other action, the committee recommended:

- Approval of minutes and reports from several task forces, works groups, committees and entities.
- That the Office of the General Assembly review its guidelines for reviewing the minutes, not updated since the 1990s, to reflect the computerized nature of the modern minutes.
- Amendments to the Organization for Mission naming Presbyterian Women as a “Corporation related to the General Assembly.”
- Updated the churchwide plan for equal employment opportunity and affirmative action.
- Received a report from the Special Offerings Review Task Force that recommended:
  - Changing annual goal to $20 million by 2025 (was $20 million by 2020.)
  - Maintain status quo distributions to ministries for the period 2018-2021.
  - Maintain funding to the remaining Historically Presbyterian Racial Ethnic Institutions (HPREIs) at current percentages of the Christmas Joy Offering (CJO).
  - Allocate funds that have become available from HPREIs that no longer qualify for funding through the CJO to support and advance the work of racial ethnic and women’s ministry in their programs of racial ethnic leadership development.
- Revise the “missional living” mandate of the PMA in two actions:
  - Acknowledge the Presbyterian Mission Agency’s efforts, among others, to rally the church around “Living Missionally.”
  - Direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA) to define “missional,” educate the church, identify strategies for deeper engagement, and develop tangible metrics to determine success and impact of living missionally within the context of the goals of the new Mission Work Plan.
- The PMA budget report from 2016, for 2017-2018 and guidance on the use of unrestricted funds.

An overture recommending "a 5:1 salary ratio between
VOICES OF SOPHIA BREAKFAST SPEAKER
SAYS GRIEF ‘CAN LEAD US TO JUSTICE’

ACTIVIST SAYS COMMUNITY, SHARED VALUES ARE KEYS TO HEALING

By Gregg Brekke
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – The program said D.J. Hudson, a self-styled “queer womanist activist and community organizer,” was going to speak at Tuesday’s Voices of Sophia breakfast on “exploring womanist ethics as a tool for resistance in the Black Lives Matter struggle.”

However, in light of the recent massacre at the Pulse night club in Orlando, she said, “I need to speak what’s on my heart.”

Her new address was titled, “Tears as a Counterbalance to Laughter: Grief and Justice.”

“In Orlando it was queer Latina/Latino. It was queer black folks. [It was] our people,” said Hudson, a non-violence and direct-action consultant with Soulforce, an organization based in Nashville that she said “works to end the political and religious oppression of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex people through relentless nonviolent resistance.”

“Womanism saved my life, and wasn’t something I could learn in a book,” she said. “It was something I’d learned my whole life, being raised by many active black women. We can learn to crystallize what we already know from our lives and experiences.”

Hudson listed Orlando, Charleston and punitive laws against transgender people among recent injustices suffered by LGBTQI Americans. “We have a lot to grieve,” she said. “Those of us committed to justice don’t often slow down enough to see how constructive grief is, how it leads us to justice.”

Speaking about the powerful grief she felt after her grandmother’s funeral, and her Missionary Baptist family’s instruction not to be saddened by her death but to celebrate her life, Hudson said she needed to mourn. “Grief is a counterbalance to joy,” she said. “It allows us to be our full selves. We can't run from grief.”

After the murders in Charleston’s Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, she said, “It was hard to see the fetishization of the forgiveness by these black people. It was hard to see them lift up forgiveness, but not enter into the grief and rage … they were feeling.”

Hudson said feeling deeply is a hallmark of empathy and grief, anger and pain, all of which are part of the natural process of [responding to] tragedy. She said she thinks the media have a hard time dealing with such feelings in minority populations.

“Our capacity to feel is not something we can fear,” she said. “I believe we have to be there, because grief allows us to grow closer to one another. If we are in a hurry to move past it, to rush on, we miss a lot of critical information.”

In the case of the Orlando massacre, she said it was necessary to draw close to community and community values: “There's no strategy for us to overcome this sort of hate for queer, bi, non-binary people. Our grief calls us to listen and inspires us to do important things. I needed to tell my own story to myself, and find the root of the healing I needed.”

Hudson said womanist theology has much to teach the church about “woundedness, wilderness and work,” referring to Jesus’ time in the desert as “rooting down into the base of his tradition; he needed to be closer to God.”

Finding the “root” of belief and purpose can help us channel feelings of grief, pain, anger and rage, she said. “Grief shows us what we long for, because it reveals the people we long for,” she said.

“Grief shows us what's important; it gives us perspective on what really matters. Grief brings us face-to-face with rage in a way we need to deal with it. In the justice arena, we fear anger because we feel it may bring us too close to the power we are opposing.”

“We have the right to feel rage for those we've lost – not only those lost last week in Orlando, but from AIDS, police violence, negligence and poverty. Rage is a means of legitimate struggle. Sometimes rage and anger keeps us honest.”

Circling back to the power of community and connection, she concluded, “I don't want to be too heavy, but we can call upon what's already in us – to call upon what we feel. The accountability we have for one another is what will keep us strong.

“The power of what we feel when we grieve is just as strong as the power we feel when we are strategizing and organizing.”

The breakfast at the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) was sponsored by Presbyterian Voices for Peace, the result of a merger of two progressive, justice-oriented Presbyterian organizations, the Voices of Sophia and the Witherspoon Society.
MIDDLE EAST COMMITTEE AFFIRMS STUDY OF BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT AND SANCTIONS

By Eva Stimson
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – The validity and use of the so-called “boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS)” tools as a way to bring peace dominated the work Tuesday of the committee on Middle East Issues of the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

In the end, the committee voted 51-25 to recommend that the full assembly reject an overture calling for a “boycott of all products manufactured and sold by HP Inc. and Hewlett Packard Enterprise until the companies cease to profit from non-peaceful pursuits and violations of human rights in Israel/Palestine.”

Then after learning that realty company RE/MAX LLC had responded favorably to concerns that it was benefiting, through its franchisees, by selling property in West Bank settlements, the committee turned around a resolution calling on the company to sever ties with those franchisees, instead urging it to “do everything within its legal and moral power to stop facilitating the sale and rental of property in Israeli settlement colonies,” and commended RE/MAX for its favorable response after discussions with PC(USA) representatives.

The committee, after a lengthy debate, recommended the adoption of a recommendation of prayerful study of “the call from Palestinian civil society for boycott, divestment and sanctions against the state of Israel.” It was adopted only after amendments were added to ensure that those who oppose the BDS movement were also involved in the study.

The amendment was in reaction to a commissioner’s resolution calling for the denomination to end outright any affiliation or support of BDS, which it called “this divisive coalition.”

“Synods cannot and must not be exempt from the realities every other structure of the church faces,” he said.

“This item is about education,” said Jon Forbes, a Young Adult Advisory Delegate from the Presbytery of Northeast Georgia. “It does not take a stance on BDS, but instead seeks to help us gain greater understanding, so that we can make smarter and more educated decisions. I’m a firm believer that there is no such thing as too much knowledge.”

COMMITTEE URGES REVERSING 2014 ACTION ON REDUCING THE NUMBER OF SYNODS

By Eva Stimson
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – A decision two years ago that would have reconfigured and reduced the number of synods in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will be rescinded if a recommendation from a committee at 222nd General Assembly (2016) is adopted later this week.

The 221st General Assembly (2014) directed synods and presbyteries to work together on a new configuration of synod boundaries that would reduce their number to between 10 and 12. The recommendation had been made by the second of two Mid Council Commissions assigned to address issues of declining resources and membership in some synods.

Joey Lee, executive of the Presbytery of San Jose, which brought the proposal to rescind, said Tuesday, “If you don’t like the way your furniture is arranged, the solution is not to come and rearrange mine.”

Rick Hayes, stated clerk of Scioto Valley Presbytery, argued against the about-face. “Synods cannot and must not be exempt from the realities every other structure of the church faces,” he said. “Let’s not have the synods be the flat tire on the Presbyterian bus.”

He and other members of the assembly Mid Councils Committee contended that the denomination’s current structure does not meet the needs of a much smaller denomination.

However, some feared that changing synod boundaries would hamper efforts to increase diversity and inclusiveness. Others said money and energy spent on restructuring synods might divert resources from the church’s mission.

“Reorganization inevitably saps the strength of any organization,” said Ken Baker, executive of the Presbytery of San Fernando.

Barbara Chaapel, immediate past moderator of the Synod of the Trinity, said synods should be part of a larger process of restructuring all national-church agencies. She suggested “watering down and nurturing things already happening at the synod level.”

“This is really about organic growth, not top-down change,” she said.

Corey Schlosser-Hall, executive of the Presbytery of the Northwest Coast, thanked the committee for approving earlier this week a merger of his presbytery with the Presbytery of Central Washington. He said the Northwest Coast presbytery was itself the product of a 2014 merger between the presbyteries of Alaska and North Puget Sound.

He noted that the mergers “all came about because of collaboration and friendships,” adding, “We chose it – it wasn’t chosen for us.”

“The same could happen with synods, he said: “It can happen from the inside out.” Rather than mandating synod mergers, he recommended that the committee members “allow the development of clear, focused ministry and partnership.”

After spending most of the day on the issue, the committee recommended approval of the San Jose proposal by a vote of 28-15.
agencies and externally as they interface with the congregations.”

The proposal, approved 51-17, comes as extensive conversations are going on all around the PC(USA) – including listening sessions hosted by immediate past moderator Heath Rada, research conducted under the auspices of the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly and future-themed conferences hosted by groups such as NEXT Church.

The proposal also responds to the reports of two assembly-authorized committees that in the last two years have reviewed the work of the Presbyterian Mission Agency and the Office of the General Assembly. The PMA review, in particular, was so harshly critical of the operations and culture of the mission agency that it has fomented calls for a merger between the agencies.

Both review committees, in fact, called for creation of a committee “to explore the possibility of a merger” between the Presbyterian Mission Agency and the Office of the General Assembly. The oversight boards of the two agencies – the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board and the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly – oppose a merger.

The Way Forward committee’s proposal states: “That [commission’s] vision shall take into account the ministries of the PMA and OGA, but shall not be bound by the current configuration of those ministries, except where mandated by the church’s Constitution.”

The PMA and OGA review committees are scheduled to be followed in the next two years by an All-Agency Review committee that will look at all six national agencies of the PC(USA) plus their interrelationships with mid-councils and congregations. The PMA Review Committee had called for the All-Agency Review to be delayed for two years while the “merger” did its work.

The Way Forward proposal calls for the All-Agency Review to proceed, with the commission directed “to integrate the recommendations of the All-Agency Review Committee as well as the PMA and OGA Review committees.”

To address its desire to take a longer-range look at the denomination’s future, The Way Forward Committee also called for creation of a 15-member 2020 Vision Team “to develop a guiding statement for the denomination and make a plan for its implementation with all deliberate speed.”

The team’s report would be the only item of business for 2018 General Assembly’s The Way Forward Committee. “This will help us name and claim our denominational identity,” said the small group of the committee that developed the proposal. “We don’t want to tinker with structure until we have done the work of visioning. We want to tap into the bottom-up energy in the church today.”

With one motion, the Way Forward Committee recommended that the assembly disapprove a package of seven overtures from Foothills Presbytery that would change the way business is brought to the General Assembly and the frequency with which the assembly deals with social-witness policy proposals. They would also have set stricter requirements for bringing business to the Assembly and for amending The Book of Order.

At the same time, the committee attached a comment to its disapproval recommendation thanking Foothills – and de Cristo and Grand Canyon presbyteries, who submitted similar overtures – “for opening the conversation” and urging the church at all levels “to continue to explore ways of better engaging the whole church in important decisions.”
HISTORICAL SOCIETY CHIEF DESCRIBES CHURCH’S SUPPORT FOR JAPANESE-AMERICAN INTERNEES

By Jerry Van Marter
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – The Presbyterian Church’s response to the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II is a little-known story, brought to vivid life Tuesday by Beth Hessel, new executive director of the Presbyterian Historical Society, during a luncheon sponsored by the society at the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Led by such Presbyterian leaders as Gordon Chapman, Presbyterians actively supported the General Assembly’s call to “Christian composure and charity” in the face of national hysteria about Japanese-Americans in the wake of the Pearl Harbor attack on Dec. 7, 1941.

Although Presbyterians opposed the forced relocation of Japanese-Americans into internment camps, “it was clear that the fight against forced deportation was a losing battle,” said Hessel, who wrote her doctoral dissertation on “Japanese Internment and PC(USA) Response.”

An ecumenical effort led by Chapman, the Protestant Commission, had four purposes:

• To assist internment-camp prisoners with their spiritual needs and provide stipends for those who provided ministry in the camps;
• To arrange for furloughed Japan missionaries to serve in the camps;
• To take part in campaigns to influence public opinion about the internment of Japanese-Americans, two-thirds of whom were U.S. citizens; and
• To serve as official mediators between the U.S. government and internees in the camps and when they were resettled after the war.

“How Presbyterians responded then is instructive today,” Hessel said, “as we face hatred and race-baiting.”

In countless practical and political ways – pen pals, Christmas gift drives, hospitality for those interred and their families, testimony at Congressional hearings – “Presbyterians went out of their way to be a witness to the injustice and inhumanity directed at Japanese Americans.”

Hessel’s talk was a primary example of the historical society’s mission, noted Louis B. Weeks, chairman of the PHS board of directors, himself a renowned Presbyterian historian. “The Presbyterian Historical Society is a ‘museum without walls,’” he said, even though PHS has a treasure trove of resources at its state-of-the-art facility in historic Philadelphia.

“We seek to be the intersection between Presbyterianism and national and world culture and history,” Weeks told a crowd of about 150 guests. “We seek to be a faithful resource for Presbyterians and the PC(USA).”

PPC, PILP PRESIDENTS GAIN APPROVAL

By Bob Sloan
General Assembly News

PORTLAND — Marc Lewis was recommended to a third term as president and publisher of Presbyterian Publishing Corp, and James G. Rissler to a first term as president of the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program Tuesday by a committee of the 222nd General Assembly (2016).

In addition to the approval of Lewis and Rissler, the Committee on the Board of Pensions, Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program, Presbyterian Publishing Corp. and the Presbyterian Foundation, also recommended for approval several board members and trustees.

During his first two terms of service, Lewis helped the organization make the transition to online bookselling. He also led the organization during the development and publication of the well-received new hymnal for the denomination, Glory to God, the first new Presbyterian hymnal since 1990.

Lewis received his undergraduate degree from the University of Tennessee and his master’s in business administration from Vanderbilt University. Prior to his role as publisher, he was general manager of PPC from 1999–2007 and, prior to that, served in a variety of management roles with Cokesbury and the United Methodist Publishing House.

Rissler was elected by the PILP Board of Directors in October of 2104 to serve a four-year term as president, effective Jan. 1,
COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS EXPRESSING “DEEP SORROWS” TO LGBTQ/Q COMMUNITY

By Erin Cox-Holmes
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – Faced with a request that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) apologize for past harms to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender queer and questioning community, a committee at the 222nd General Assembly (2016) instead is recommending adoption of a statement expressing “deep sorrow” for past actions and to “continue the journey as a denomination to become more open, understand and accepting.”

The discussion of the original overture from the Presbytery of New York City was held in a packed room at the Oregon Convention Center.

Over several hours of debate, the committee considered the original overture, an alternate resolution proposed by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, amendments to the ACSWP proposal and an alternate motion crafted by members of the committee.

The committee ultimately approved, by a 56-1 vote the motion developed by the committee which expresses regret for ways that LGBTQ/Q persons have been made to feel over the years that they “stand outside the grace of God and are unwelcome in the PC(USA).” The policy calls upon presbyteries and congregations to engage in many ways of reconciliation and ends with a prayer for all Presbyterians to work together in a spirit of renewed partnership.

David Parker, primary author of the version that will come to the assembly floor, said he was proposing it because “it is gentler. The goal is to move with the Spirit to the place where we can be reconciled.”

The committee also approved an overture from the Presbytery of the Cascades called “On Choosing to Be a Church Committed to the Gospel of Matthew 25,” which calls the church to renewed commitment with the least, the last and the lost. As part of the approval, the committee asked for a way to restore funding for Justice Unbound, a social media website that is heavily frequented by younger adults interested in connecting on social witness.

One of the co-authors, Aric Clark, who is a pastor in the Portland area, said, “I began to see something in the gospel, that stirred me to awe. And fear for myself. There are people who are hungry. There are 4000 people who are sleeping on the streets every night in Portland, and every one of those is Christ.”

In approving the Matthew 25 overture, the committee also declared that this approval answered two overtures from Foothills Presbytery that would have re-set the way that social witness policy is formulated in the PC(USA).

The advocate for the Foothills overtures, Gordon Raynal, said, “When you are in a deep hole and want to get out, the first thing you do is to stop digging. The PCUSA has been and continues to be in a deepening hole.” Citing declining statistics, he called upon the committee to consider a more localized model of engagement in social justice work.

The committee easily approved an overture to equip congregations to develop practical ways to better serve people living with HIV/AIDs. Ann Conklin, a teaching elder commissioner from Lake Michigan Presbytery summed up many comments when she said, “It’s important that we partner with other organizations and it’s important for the church to speak on this issue. I have lost three friends to AIDS.”

In other actions, the committee approved:

• A motion offering apology to Native Americans, Alaskan natives and native Hawaiians.
• Recommendations to improve cultural proficiency among the six agencies of the PC(USA).
• A response titled “Election Protection and Integrity in Campaign Finance.”
• An initiative on urban ministry called “Gospel from Detroit: Renewing the Church’s Urban Vision.”
• A statement of concern on human trafficking.
• Recommendations to address the economic crisis in Puerto Rico.
• A cluster of recommendations to address racism and ethnocentricity.
• Condemnation of therapies purported to change sexual identity.
• A policy called “Healing Before Punishment: Why Presbyterians Seek to End the War on Drugs.”
COMMITTEE APPROVES CHILD-PROTECTION POLICY

By Erin Cox-Holmes
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – Why do policies matter? The Committee on General Assembly Procedures of the 222nd General Assembly (2016) heard Tuesday exactly how devastating a lack of safeguards can be on the lives of children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Kris Schondelmeyer, a Presbyterian pastor of a congregation in Toledo, Ohio, shared his harrowing story as a survivor of sexual abuse in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Schondelmeyer recounted how he was sexually assaulted by a Presbyterian pastor who was a chaperone at a denominational youth conference.

Schondelmeyer was speaking as part of the committee’s consideration of the PC(USA)’s “Child/Youth/Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy and Its Procedures” as the assembly’s child-protection policy mandated in the Book of Order.

“Multiple leaders at the session and presbytery level knew that the pastor that abused me had previously been arrested, convicted and served prison time for federal child pornography charges in the early 90s,” Schondelmeyer told the committee. Even though people tried to convince the executive presbyter that he should bar the pastor from further contact with youths, the official concealed the pastor’s history, he said.

“He thought he was giving [the pastor] a ‘second chance,’ but I don’t get a second chance to choose whether or not to go into that dorm room, as I did that night he sexually assaulted me,” Schondelmeyer said.

He explained that his choice to come forward and speak out is not about vengeance. “It’s about doing everything we can to protect other children – your children and grandchildren, my child. The children and youth of our church deserve nothing less than our best.”

Following Schondelmeyer’s testimony, PC(USA) Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons said: “Kris’s story should never have happened. The church owes Kris an apology, and a policy that would prevent this from ever happening again.”

The committee then unanimously approved the policy.

In other actions, the committee decided to refer to Committee on the Office of the General Assembly several overtures seeking to update the categories by which people identify their ethnicity on church forms, while committing itself to implementing more diversity by the 223rd General Assembly in 2018.

The committee also referred to COGA instructions to develop a process to ensure that multiple viewpoints are shared in deliberations on overtures.

The committee also:

• Approved benchmarks in the employment of women and persons from minoritized racial groups for the Office of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency.
• Adopted a standard definition of supplier diversity.
• Disapproved an overture that would have suspended consideration of an overture with constitutional implications until the Advisory Committee on the Constitution had rendered advice.
• Approved minutes of the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Historical Society.

PPC, PILP PRESIDENTS GAIN APPROVAL

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2015. He joined PILP in 1999 as vice president of finance and administration and was elected to the position of senior vice president in 2004. Prior to joining PILP, he spent 17 years in the banking industry, most recently serving as a vice president with PNC Bank.

Among the board members and trustees approved and recommended Tuesday were:

• Sandra Copenhaver Browne and Christopher Y. Nicholas, to the New Covenant Trust Company Board of Directors.
• Steven Bass, David Ezekiel, Chad Herring, Thomas McNeill, Manley Olson, Josephene Stewart and In Yang, to the PILP Board of Directors.
• Mary C. Baskin, to the Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

In other business, the committee unanimously recommended the continuation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Foundation’s church-wide gift program.

At each General Assembly, the foundation trustees ask the assembly to endorse its work in support of mission and ministry throughout the church. A total of $118 million was made available through the foundation for mission and ministry in congregations, mid councils, national agencies, and related entities in 2014 and 2015.

New gifts and accounts amounting to more than $125 million were received over the course of the two-year period.

The committee disapproved with comment, 38-1, Commissioners Resolution calling for creation of a special committee to conduct an administrative review to assure compliance with donor and GA restrictions on the administration of the Jarvie Service. The comment states: “In the interest of Christ’s reconciliation and the hope for closure, the 222nd General Assembly (2016) would strongly recommend that both parties (commissioners and Foundation) avail themselves of the Foundation’s offer to mediate all issues in this resolution.”
the highest-paid and lowest-paid employees of the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA), beginning with new PMA positions," was passed after considerable debate.

Two supply chain and sourcing overtures were approved for consideration by the General Assembly.

• On seeking to eradicate slavery from the supply chains of vendors and other businesses that the PC(USA) and its various bodies do business, encouraging church entities to hold vendors to a high standard for employment practices.
• A resolution to ensure just compensation practices for those employed via third party contractors directing the six agencies of the General Assembly to develop standards that take into account and protect the wages and fringe benefits of outsourced employees based on Presbyterian theology and policy on work and workers.

Women's concerns received attention via two overtures approved for consideration by the general assembly.

• The “Empowered and Hopeful” reports from the women of color consultation directs the PMA to continue its support of racial and ethnic women's leadership institutes and continued support for women of color to attend training and professional development events.
• A resolution to contribute to a proactive, health-giving ministry to and relationship with our clergywomen, directs the PMA to work to develop resources that address the particular challenges ordained women face in their call and placements.

The overture “On taking specific action to address the worsening plight of the African American male” passed with six amendments, one comment and more than five hours of passionate debate. Most debated was the inclusion of female or gender neutral language and funding for the initiatives specified. The two parts of the overture passed unanimously in two votes of 73-0.

A commissioner resolution “To withdraw the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) from the Religious Coalition for Preproduction Choice (RCRC)” failed on a 58-13 disapproval vote. Primary rationale for its disapproval was what observer Peggy Howland called “misinformation” in the resolution and evidence that the PC(USA) does not financially contribute to the RCRC.

The last two pieces of business from Committee 10 heading to the General Assembly are:

• Women of Faith Awards presented by the PMA, awarded to Commissioned Ruling Elder Lucy Apatiki from Gambell, Alaska, in the Presbytery of Yukon and the Synod of Alaska-Northwest; Ruling Elder Sarah Noble-Moag from Pavillion, New York, in the Presbytery of Genesee Valley and the Synod of the North East; and Ruling Elder Clarissa Walker Whaley, Charleston, South Carolina, in the Presbytery of Charleston-Atlantic and the Synod of South Atlantic.
• Sam and Helen Walton Awards to Camino de Vida, Albuquerque, New Mexico, Synod of the Southwest, Presbytery of Santa Fe (2015, $35,000); The Fellowship Place, Charlotte, North Carolina, Synod of the Mid-Atlantic, Presbytery of Charlotte (2015, $35,000); Northland Village Church, Los Angeles, California, Synod of Southern California and Hawaii, Presbytery of San Fernando (2015, $35,000); and First Thai-Laotian Presbyterian Church, Synod of the Pacific, Presbytery of Nevada (2016, $50,000)