THIRD-GENERATION PRESBYTERIAN PASTOR ELECTED STATED CLERK
NELSON IS FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN TO LEAD NATION’S LARGEST REFORMED BODY

By Mike Ferguson
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – J. Herbert Nelson was overwhelmingly elected Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in an historic vote Friday, becoming the first African-American elected as the top ecclesial officer of the nation’s largest Reformed body, a largely white denomination.

Commissioners to the 222nd General Assembly (2016) selected Nelson over Dave Baker, stated clerk and communications director of the Presbytery of Tampa Bay, by a 447-112 margin.

Nelson, director of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness, succeeds Gradye Parsons, who is retiring after eight years as stated clerk.

WORLD CHURCH LEADERS HAIL J. HERBERT NELSON’S ELECTION AS STATED CLERK OF THE PC(USA)

By Jerry Van Marter
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – It didn’t take long for the kudos to start pouring in Friday after the 222nd General Assembly (2016) elected J. Herbert Nelson as the PC(USA)’s new Stated Clerk, the highest ecclesial office in the 1.5-million-member denomination.

Nelson, 57, is the first African-American elected to the post.

“On behalf of the World Council of Churches, I wish a warm welcome to J. Herbert Nelson as he takes up the responsibilities of his new position,” said General Secretary Olav Fykse Tveit. “I am eager to meet personally with him, to share our views and discuss how best we can work together in the quest for Church unity and the unity of humanity.

“The new stated clerk and co-moderators of the General Assembly bring remarkable gifts and skill in addressing the things that make for peace, justice and unity,” Tveit said. “We have with retiring Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons, a member of the Central Committee who throughout his tenure has lent great strength and wisdom to the work of the World Council. May God’s blessing continue to be felt in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)!”

Derek Browning, ecumenical officer of the Church of Scotland, said, “We congratulate your new Stated Clerk and celebrate his election. What a bold and historic step for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)!”

From the Presbyterian Church in Canada, Principal Clerk Steven Kendall, said, “We have had great relations with Cliff (Kirkpatrick) and Gradye (Parsons), and I have had a chance to talk with J. Herbert Nelson this week. I look forward to his fresh perspective and his carrying on the strong ecumenical commitments of the PC(USA).”

“I am thrilled by the election of J. Herbert Nelson, said Tony de la Rosa, interim executive director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency. “All of the Presbyterian Mission Agency is looking

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CALIFORNIA PASTOR INSTRUCTS WORSHIPERS: “BE RECONCILED TO GOD. NOW.”

By Eva Stimson
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – Reconciliation has vertical and horizontal dimensions—and “the vertical orients the horizontal,” Jerry Andrews, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in San Diego, told Presbyterians gathered for worship on Friday, the final full day of the 222nd General Assembly (2016).

Preaching on 2 Corinthians 5:16–6:2, Andrews said the Apostle Paul calls us to “be reconciled to God.”

“The command is not to get along with each other – though that’s really good advice,” he said. “The command is to be made right with God.”

Layering his sermon with insights from John Calvin and St. Augustine as well as the Apostle Paul, Andrews systematically unpacked the text he called “the theological core” of 2 Corinthians. He noted that Calvin considered that text’s teaching about reconciliation “the most profound in all of Paul.”

The text also talks about “a new creation of all things” by God through Christ, Andrews said. The old way of thinking, he said, would have stressed the divisions between Paul, the “old Jew,” and the new converts in Corinth, “a bunch of barely baptized barbarians.” The new message, he said, is that such divisions in the church and the world can only be healed by God. “God reconciles, not the church. Not ever,” he said. “We have been entrusted with the message of reconciliation.”

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GA TURNS BACK MOVE TO DIVEST FROM FOSSIL-FUEL FIRMS
OPPONENTS SAY MAINTAINING INVESTMENTS GIVES PC(USA) MORE CLOUT

By Mike Ferguson
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will continue its investment in fossil-fuel companies after overwhelmingly turning back an overture Friday to begin divestment immediately. Instead, it will continue the process of selective, phased, divestment that begins with full corporate engagement.

Bill Somplatsky-Jarman, the denomination’s associate for Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI), told commissioners that divestment could well reduce Presbyterians’ ability to persuade energy companies to act in environmentally responsible ways – one of the purposes of MRTI.

“In the real world of corporate engagement, the more stock you own the more power you have,” Somplatsky-Jarman said. “You are treated much more seriously by companies that are skeptical of what you are asking for.”

By a 31-25 vote, the assembly’s Immigration and Environmental Issues Committee had recommended divestment. Commissioners wound up voting for a substitute, 460-91.

MRTI Chair Elizabeth (Terry) Dunning told commissioners that the committee’s corporate-engagement approach has been effective.

In recent years, ConocoPhillips has reduced its carbon dioxide emissions by 6.8 million tons, she said, adding: “But for our engagement, that may well not have happened.”

MRTI member Joseph Kinard said corporate engagement has helped the PC(USA) establish partnerships with a broad range of institutions, including environmental and human-rights groups and other churches. “We get access to senior leaders and decision makers,” he said. “We believe categorical divestment will take away our leverage.”

Divesting, said David Green of Presbytery of New
Continued on page 12
WHERE HAVE ALL THE CR’S GONE?
GA222 COMMISSIONERS SUBMIT FEWER ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

By Jerry Van Marter
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – One barometer of the pressure points within the Presbyterian family in past years has been “commissioners’ resolutions,” which enable delegates to General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to submit items of business on the spot. Historically, resolutions have addressed recent developments in the life of the church or the world that have arisen after the deadlines for submission of traditional items of business such as overtures from presbyteries and synods. Resolutions are, in effect, the “rapid-response” vehicles for the assemblies.

However, the 222nd General Assembly (2016) was presented with just 12 such resolutions, 10 of which were accepted – by far the fewest the assembly’s Tracking Office can remember. “We’ve never had so few CRs,” said Jim Collie, who has been a “tracker” since the 201st General Assembly (1989) in Philadelphia.

Even after the recent massacre in Orlando, Collie said: “We didn’t see CRs on gun control or assault weapons. We didn’t see anything on hate speech, on health care, on access to water [or water-quality issues in] Flint (Michigan). Ordinarily, we’d kind of expect CRs on all of those.”

Why so few CRs this time?
Tracker Kathy Lueckert of Prairie Village (Kansas) Presbyterian Church believes the move to biennial Assemblies in 2004 is a contributing factor, noting that the number of CRs has been slowly declining since then. “I think when we went to biennial General Assemblies, it gave presbyteries more time to develop overtures and move them forward,” she said. “That makes some CRs unnecessary.”

Tracker Kerry Clements of Louisville said that, with denominational battles over gay ordination and gay marriage essentially settled, “a general cooling of tensions” has taken place in the PC(USA).

“There are fewer organized advocacy groups at this Assembly,” he says. With a couple of exceptions – the Middle East, fossil fuel divestment – “the heat and fervor is down,” Clements says.

“There is a very different atmosphere at this assembly,” said longtime assembly-goer Vernon Broyles, who advises the Stated Clerk on social-witness statements.

Broyles, who attended his first assembly (of the pre-unification Presbyterian Church in the United States) in 1965, attributes the change in part to the rapid responses of retiring Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons to current events, which have diminished the perceived need for CRs.

“The clerk has done a good job of speaking in a timely way to public issues and crises,” Broyles said, “so maybe more folk don’t feel the need to submit CRs – they feel our response mechanisms are adequate.”

But the trackers aren’t quite sure. “Have we come to a place where people feel they can’t or don’t feel the need to impact the system?” Collie asked. “I don’t know.”

“We’ll see when GA223 comes around,” Lueckert said.
PROPOSED AMENDMENT WOULD RESTORE PRE-2012 MINISTRY TITLES

MEASURE WOULD REQUIRE APPROVAL BY MAJORITY OF PRESBYTERIES

By Mike Ferguson
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – After several hours of debate, commissioners to the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) voted to send to presbyteries a proposed amendment to the Book of Order that would restore the previous nomenclature for ordered ministry.

If approved by a majority of the denomination’s 171 presbyteries, those now called teaching elders would become ministers of Word and Sacrament; ruling elders would be elders; and commissioned ruling elders would be commissioned lay pastors. The vote was 320-218 to return to language in use prior to 2012, when the new form of government was adopted.

The assembly also approved, by a 6-1 margin, an overture from the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area forbidding teaching elders who have renounced the church’s jurisdiction in the midst of a disciplinary proceeding from working in any church on any basis – paid or voluntary – until the person has rejoined the church, come forward and resubmitted to the disciplinary process.

One overture that had been disapproved by the Committee on Church Polity and Ordered Ministry was eventually referred to the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly. It would have allowed individually commissioned elders to serve without having first served on the session. That would have allowed elders to serve in churches without sessions – for example, in some new worshipping communities.

Most commissioners who offered comments supported the overture, which came from the Synod of the Northeast.

“Once an elder, always an elder,” said Kimmy Stokesbary of the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta. “For me, a compelling reason is for full vote and voice for young, emerging leaders as well as immigrants.”

More about the votes of the General Assembly with respect to church polity and ordered ministry can be found at www.pc-biz.org/#/committee/563/business.

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PASTOR, FORMER SEMINARY CHIEF HAS PROUD MEMORIES OF ‘SUMMER OF LOVE’ GA IN PORTLAND

Office of the General Assembly

It was 1967, often referred to as the “Summer of Love.” Scores of young people were involved in religious and meditative movements. They were suspicious of the government and generally opposed to the Vietnam War. Grown-ups viewed young people as being too radical or acting too militant.

In Portland, Oregon, all this was being experienced while the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. was gathering, and among the items on its agenda was the Confession of 1967 (C67).

“I was just finishing up my freshman year in college at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon,” said the Rev. Dr. Cynthia Campbell, pastor at Highland Presbyterian Church in Louisville, Kentucky, and a former president of McCormick Theological Seminary. “That made attending the assembly easy … since it was right downtown.”

Campbell recalled the excitement and controversy surrounding the confession, which focuses on themes of race and reconciliation.

“At that time, during that period of adopting C67, it was a big deal, and really groundbreaking,” said Campbell, who was born and raised in Pasadena, California. “There was huge opposition, and a number of congregations actually left the denomination.

“People thought the language of C67 was crazy. There was a statement on race and racism. It contained a very strong statement on war and nuclear weapons. Also there was a statement that suggested that the nation should be about peacemaking, and the role of the church somehow being involved with a phrase saying, ‘even at the risk of national security.’”

Campbell said one of her most interesting memories of the assembly was a group of protesters opposed to the ratification of C67 that staged a mock funeral during the debate: “The discussions were held in a basketball arena. It had an upper level and a lower level. At first they protested outside and then it moved inside. They had a cheap black casket that they paraded around the arena… it was very dramatic.”

Campbell served on a committee that dealt with issues concerning the Vietnam War.

“I remember during the early part of the assembly, most of my time was spent camped out on the floor, because there were so many people in attendance that were involved in the debate in taking a stand against the war,” she said.

The mood was pretty divided, and some felt that the church had no business dealing with such issues, Campbell recalled. “Others weren’t so much angry as they were perplexed. … And then there were those of us, like myself, who were quite proud that I belonged to an institution that was actually dealing with relevant subjects that were so controversial. Those issues being race and racism, war and peace, poverty and sexuality.”

In spite of the sometimes spirited debate, Campbell remembers feeling a great sense of accomplishment when the assembly passed C67.

“We still have a lot of work to do,” she said, “but in a very powerful way, coming back to Portland, and how far we’ve come since C67 brings back memories of all those that were so courageous and who spoke out regarding the issues.”

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CROCHET ARTIST STOLE AWAY, CREATED A SPECIAL VESTMENT FOR A SPECIAL PRESBYTERIAN

By Erin Cox-Holmes
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – Mary Gene Boteler, in Ohio, had an idea. Mary Stout, in Nebraska, took it another step.

The result was a special stole presented Friday to the brand-new Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

It started when Mary Gene Boteler of Cincinnati Presbytery learned that she would be assisting the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee of the 222nd General Assembly (2016).

Why not enlist the members of the committee – who hadn't yet met each other – to knit or crochet “pocket” prayer shawls to be presented to the ecumenical guests and leaders of the assembly?

Boteler set up a Facebook page for the committee, and shared her idea. And the committee delivered beyond all imagining.

Committee members, recruited church groups, random knitters – produced a pile of prayer shawls. Enough for all ecumenical guests of the assembly, with plenty left over.

Enough for the newly installed Co-Moderators of the Assembly.

Enough for retiring Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons.

But when the pocket prayer shawls were heaped in a pile, one was not like the others.

Mary Stout of Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church of Lincoln, Nebraska, who has taught her foster grandchildren and many of the young people in her church to crochet, had started crocheting and been unable to stop. She crocheted.

And crocheted.

And crocheted.

And after two weeks she had a sparkling white prayer shawl that wasn't pocket-size at all.

It was as big as a cloud. Just the right size for one special presentation.

"Mary has a big heart," said her pastor, Jeff Warwick, a teaching elder commissioner from Homestead Presbytery. "It will be a big joy for her when she learns that it was her stole that went to J. Herbert Nelson, the new Stated Clerk."

Lisa Eye of Transylvania Presbytery, the vice moderator of the assembly committee, explained what happened.

"When we looked at all the pocket shawls, there was this one. It looked like a stole." They knew it was the one that supposed to mantle the new Stated Clerk upon his installation.

Eye also explained more about the pocket prayer shawls. “Because we have so many ecumenical and interfaith delegates among us, we wanted to show them that we are connected to them and praying for them.”

A legacy of this assembly is that traveling all over the world will be pocket prayer shawls with this attached: “This pocket prayer shawl was handmade by artisans across our denomination and other faith communities, and was prayed over by members of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee of the 222nd General Assembly. May it be a reminder that you are covered by God’s grace as we journey together.”

And travelling with a new Stated Clerk with be the blessing of the pocket prayer shawl that grew into a stole.

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Nelson was installed immediately after his election. He will begin his duties on Aug. 1.

“This is a powerful day, a powerful day in my life, and for many people of color who did not envision the possibility of this ever happening,” Nelson told the assembly.

He said he asked only one thing of commissioners: “Pray for me and work with me – and not on me – and we’ll get some things done in the name of the Lord.”

After the vote, Nelson stood arm-in-arm and hand-in-hand with his wife, the Rev. Gail Porter Nelson, during his installation.

Parsons reminded his successor that 1.5 million people will be praying for him, and that “this is as much Gail’s ministry as it is yours.”

Some nights, Parsons said, Nelson will go to bed knowing he’s accomplished a lot. On other nights, he said, “Know that you will have the next morning to do it again.”

Nelson, the unanimous choice of the nomination committee elected by the 221st General Assembly (2014), and Baker, his only challenger, addressed the assembly for five minutes each before taking questions for more than 30 minutes.

Nelson, 57, said he believes the denomination “is not dying, but I believe we are reforming. Only through the eyes of faith can we see beyond death.”

To think only of the survival of the church “means our aim is too low,” he said.

When he was deciding whether to seek the job, he said, he spoke with his daughter, Alycia, who advised him to put his name forward, “because you are a fixer.”

Those fixes, he said, weren’t “done simply by me, but by a God who held my hand at every turn, a God who promises even now to take all that has been done, put a comma there, and then shift gears to build a powerful future for the PC(USA). Thanks be to God.”

During the question-and-answer session after the candidates’ speeches, Nelson said the denomination can “no longer be 93 percent white and expect to grow.” He said each Presbyterian can “take all that has been done, put a comma there, and then take a vacation, “because we both need quite a lot of rest and we need to reflect on what has happened.”

Those conversations, he said with a smile, are more effective on the beach than at home.

He said he’s enjoyed seeing Young Adult Advisory Delegates set the tone for the rest of the church, including dining together with no separate seats based on race or sexual orientation.

“Nobody’s focused on particularities,” he said. “They are modeling right now the role we have to create for each other in order to be viable going into the rest of the 21st century.”

Nelson said a heavy travel schedule during his six years as director of the Office of Public Witness has taught him the value of “a ministry of presence, of being in the place where the conversations are being held.”

Just as important is meeting face-to-face with people dealing with problems, he said.

“I am a pastor at heart, although I’m framed as ‘that justice person in D.C.,” Nelson said. “I learned a long time ago that people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care. Engaging people where they are will be an important role.”

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.
World church leaders hail J. Herbert Nelson’s election as stated clerk

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forward to continuing our strong working relationship. As a person of color, I am personally looking forward to working with J. Herbert as we continue to live into the promise of the Confession of Belhar.”

One of Nelson’s predecessors as Stated Clerk, Clifton Kirkpatrick, said. “J. Herbert’s election is a dream come true, not just because he is so competent, but because he’s a symbol of our commitment to diversity, and his commitment to the work and witness of the church in the world.”

Joseph Geevarghese, director of Good Jobs Nation, a workers’ rights organization, said, “Like Martin Luther King Jr., the Rev. Dr. Nelson understands that the faith community and the labor movement share a common mission to achieve racial and economic equality in America. By standing in solidarity with striking U.S. contract workers who are fighting for $15 per hour and a union, Dr. Nelson follows in footsteps of MLK who died supporting striking sanitation workers in Memphis.”

Raafat Zaki, chair of the PC(USA) Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns, called Nelson an “excellent selection” celebrated for “his distinguished gifts and faithfulness in serving church and society. We congratulate the PC(USA), the 222nd General Assembly and ecumenical and interfaith partners for this historic nomination and election that underscores how God continues to bless and lead the church.”

California pastor instructs worshipers: “Be reconciled to God. Now.”

Continued from page 2

And Jesus is the mediator of our reconciliation, he continued. Unlike a moderator, an impartial person who brings together two parties in a dispute but is not connected to either party, a mediator is “one who is in his person both parties.”

The new creation is not primarily about individual salvation, he said: “Salvation is very personal, but never private. The gospel is profoundly intimate but also public.”

Paul says that now is the “acceptable time” for reconciliation with God, Andrews pointed out. He quoted the Nike slogan: “Just do it!” And Shakespeare: “There is a tide in the affairs of men.” And Elvis: “It’s now or never.”

Andrews, who calls himself an evangelical, said some evangelicals stress the urgency of salvation by warning, “Jesus may come back before lunch.” But the ultimate message, he said, is this: “Be reconciled to God. Now.”

Reinforcing that message, worshipers sang the gospel favorite “Just As I Am” as a call to confession, pausing after each stanza for silent reflection.

Then Andrews and Jenny Warner, associate pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Bend, Oregon, called worshipers to the communion table with these words: “You need not be wise, you need not be perfect, you need not be decent or orderly, to join the feast.”
GA APPROVES REPORT RE-EVALUATING TWO-STATE SOLUTION IN ISRAEL/PALESTINE

By Eva Stimson
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – After a debate that stretched over the dinner hour, the 222nd General Assembly (2016) approved a lengthy report containing a re-evaluation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s historic support of a two-state solution in Israel/Palestine.

The document, “Israel-Palestine: For Human Values in the Absence of a Just Peace,” says the PC(USA) “should advance those efforts that best accord with its values . . . including, but not limited to, that of two sovereign states—Israel and Palestine.”

Doug Tilton, who was part of the team that produced the report, described it as “deeply rooted in Reformed theology.” He said it builds on positions held by the PC(USA) since 1949, and “does not abandon support for a two-state solution, but seeks to move us in fresh directions.”

Approval of the report from the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy came with a comment added by the GA Committee on Middle East Issues, affirming a preference for a two-state solution and a desire to stay in conversation with partners in Israel who are working for peace.

In the plenary debate, commissioners approved two amendments to the document that further emphasized the church’s preference for a two-state solution and the desire to stay in conversation with partners in the region.

Commissioners voted down a minority report that would have referred the paper to the Presbyterian Mission Agency for further study and editing, then re-submission to the 223rd General Assembly (2018). They also rejected two attempts to refer the paper to an administrative commission.

Supporters of referral said the tone and rhetoric of the ACSWP paper did not promote reconciliation, and urged more balance in speaking about violence and injustices committed by both parties.

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GA APPROVES REPORT RE-EVALUATING TWO-STATE SOLUTION IN ISRAEL/PALESTINE

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Palestinians and Israelis.

Sam Jones, a member of the writing team for ACSWP, agreed that balance is critical. “However, the balance of suffering of Palestinians and Israelis simply does not exist,” he said, noting that Israel is an occupying power with much greater military might than the Palestinians have.

The final document passed by a vote of 429-129.

Also approved by a wide margin after extended debate was an overture urging advocacy for the safety and well-being of the children of Palestine and Israel. The measure asserts that children “suffer widespread and systematic patterns of ill treatment and torture within the Israeli military detention system,” affirms the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and directs the Presbyterian Mission Agency, through its Office of Public Witness, to advocate and witness for the human rights of the children of Palestine and Israel.”

An amendment added in committee calls on “the Palestinian Authority, Hamas, and Israel to denounce and cease incitement of violence against children or at the hands of children.”

Several commissioners, both in the committee and on the plenary floor, criticized the overture for citing data from a 2013 United Nations report about Israel’s unjust detention of children while ignoring a 2014 UN document that affirms that Israel has made progress in correcting abuses. However, commissioners rejected attempts to amend the item to commend Israel’s progress and to soften descriptions of Israeli violence against Palestinian children.

In emotional testimony, Sandy Hanna, a commissioner from Missouri River Valley Presbytery, said: “I’ve been to Palestine. I heard soldiers who told us what they did, how they took children from their homes. Our mission partners have also witnessed some of this.”

Several overtures sparked debate about the validity and usefulness of the so-called “boycott, divestment and sanctions” (BDS) tools as a way to bring peace. In the end, the assembly voted to 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.”

The assembly also voted to recommend prayerful study of “the call from Palestinian civil society for boycott, divestment and sanctions against the state of Israel.” The action included an amendment added by the GA Committee on Middle East Issues to ensure that those who oppose the BDS movement be represented in the study.

Commissioners also voted to make the study their response to a commissioner’s resolution calling for the denomination to end outright any affiliation or support of BDS.

Two items from the Committee on Middle East Issues were on the consent agenda approved earlier in the week. One called on the realty company RE/MAX LLC to “do everything within its legal and moral power to stop facilitating the sale and rental of property in Israeli settlement colonies.” The other urged continuing support for the people of the Middle East by encouraging Christian presence, countering religious radicalism, promoting economic development, and promoting long-term stability in the region.
ASSEMBLY AFFIRMS CENTRALITY OF PEACEMAKING IN CHRISTIAN FAITH

By Bob Sloan
General Assembly News

PORTLAND _ After a six-year discernment process throughout the denomination, the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approved on Friday a lengthy report underscoring the centrality of peacemaking to Christian faith and promising to “practice boldly the things that make for peace.”

“Risking Peace in a Violent World: Affirmations for Presbytery Consideration” was ordered by the 219th General Assembly (2010) to “seek clarity as to God’s call to the church to embrace nonviolence as its fundamental response to the challenges of violence, terror, and war.”

The report calls for Presbyterians at all levels of the church to employ its insights to respond to and prevent violence on the local, national and international levels through prayer, direct action and advocacy.

The study was approved by the 220th General Assembly (2012), then approved for study. The 221st assembly (2014) sent it to the presbyteries for advisory votes. Of the approximately 40 presbyteries who responded, more than 30 approved the report’s five “affirmations,” although with differing levels of support.

“I have great appreciation for all those who had a part in bringing this report to the floor of the General Assembly,” said Rick Ufford-Chase, moderator of the 219th General Assembly, who played an integral role in formulating the call for the study.

“This has been done the right way, have been discerned and voted upon at the last three General Assemblies,” Ufford-Chase said. “What we are doing by approving this report and its affirmations is lifting up our denomination’s position on peacemaking during a most difficult time in our history.”

Following the 332-169 vote, commissioners stood and recited the five affirmations of the report’s conclusions:

- We affirm that peacemaking is essential to our faith in God’s reconciling work in Jesus Christ, whose love and justice challenge evil and hatred, and whose call gives our church a mission to present alternatives to violence.
- We confess that we have sinned in participating in acts of violence, both structural and physical, or by our failure to respond to the acts and threats of violence with ministries of justice, healing and reconciliation.
- We follow Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace and Reconciler, and reclaim the power of non-violent love evident in his life and teaching, his healings and reversals of evil, his cross and resurrection.
- Learning from non-violent struggles and counting the costs of war, we draw upon the traditions of Just War, Christian pacifism, and Just Peacemaking to cultivate moral imagination and discern God’s redemptive work in history. We commit ourselves to studying and practicing non-violent means of conflict resolution, non-violent methods for social change and non-violent opposition to war. … We commit ourselves to continuing the long tradition of support by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for our sisters and brothers who serve in the United States military, veterans, and their families. We promise to support materially and socially veterans of war who suffer injury in body, mind, or spirit, even as we work toward the day when they will need to fight no more.
- We place our faith, hope and trust in God alone. We renounce violence as a means to further selfish national interests, to procure wealth, or to dominate others. We will practice boldly the things that make for peace and look for the day when “they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

It was noted that the financial cost of having the report produced and distributed is estimated at $165,850 over the next two years. The cost of the project will be taken from the Presbyterian Mission Agency budget.

Commissioners also approved by voice vote an overture from the Presbytery of Cayuga-Syracuse calling for the denomination to urge the United States to acknowledge its role in the killing of nearly 300 Korean civilians near the village of No Gun Ri in July 1950. The overture asks the Stated Clerk of PC(U.S.A.) to communicate to the president and members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives the denomination’s desire for the nation to provide appropriate compensation to the surviving victims and to the families of those killed or wounded in the incident. In addition it calls for a meeting between surviving U.S. troops involved in the incident and surviving Koreans or relatives of the deceased, and the creation of a memorial.

Other assembly actions on the recommendations from the Committee on Peacemaking and International Issues are available on PC-Biz at https://www.pc-biz.org/#/committee/575/business.

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GA TURNS BACK MOVE TO DIVEST FROM FOSSIL-FUEL FIRMS

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Covenant, who helped bring forward the minority report for selective divestment (the one the assembly endorsed), said divestment would be “perceived as vilifying people who have worked hard in the energy sector,” including roughnecks, pipefitters, electricians, truck drivers and mechanics. “We have a pastoral responsibility to care for and love all God’s children,” he said.

His partner in bringing forward the minority report, Max Reddick of the Presbyterian of East Tennessee, said its supporters were asking the assembly “to speak with a voice both prophetic and pastoral, one that speaks with accountability and welcome.”

Supporters of divestment argued that more immediate action was required.

“Why do so many of our habits perpetrate our addiction to fossil fuels?” asked Sarah Cleeland of the Presbyterian of Giddings-Lovejoy.

Under an amendment approved by Susan Sytsma Bratt of Grace Presbytery, MRTI must report back to the 223rd General Assembly in 2018 with recommendations, possibly including divestment if significant changes in corporate practices are not being implemented.

For more on assembly actions on the overtures presented by the Immigration and Environmental Issues Committee, visit www.pc-biz.org/#/committee/569/business.