**GENERAL ASSEMBLY NEWS GOES ELECTRONIC**

**General Assembly News**

All the news fit to print on the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will be available electronically as a newspaper this year for the very first time. **General Assembly News**, the official assembly newspaper, will be online, making news accessible to readers both on site at the biennial meeting taking place in Portland, Oregon, and across the country and world.

Go to [www.pcusa.org/ganews](http://www.pcusa.org/ganews) at 6 a.m. Pacific Daylight Time/9 a.m. Eastern Daylight Time to view the paper from Saturday, June 18, through Sunday, June 25. The editions also will be downloadable and archived.

The paper, which has been a go-to news source for assembly attendees for years, features everything from committee actions and plenary votes to worship services and special events. It is produced by the Office of the General Assembly (OGA), with the help of a cadre of staff and volunteers.

“It was past time for us to share the vital information reported in General Assembly News with the rest of the Presbyterian world, and with readers in general,” said Toya Richards, director of communications for OGA and an Assistant Stated Clerk. “The goal is to help people feel more connected to the business and events of the assembly.”

People also can stay abreast of General Assembly actions via live stream. All plenary sessions and worship services can be viewed at [www.pcusa.org/ga222](http://www.pcusa.org/ga222) beginning at 11 a.m. Pacific Daylight Time on June 18. The business before the assembly is available at [www.pc-biz.org](http://www.pc-biz.org).

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**GENERAL ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE 4 PREVIEW**

**The Way Forward Committee to Consider OGA-PMA Merger, GA Changes**

By Jerry Van Marter

*General Assembly News*

After a two-year period of denominational soul-searching, the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is poised this June to consider dramatic changes to the ways the 1.66 million-member church conducts its ecclesial and mission work.

The aspiringly-named Assembly Committee on The Way Forward (Committee 4) will:

- Distill feedback from conversations initiated over the last two years by GA Moderator Heath Rada and from affinity groups such as NEXT Church, the Covenant Network of Presbyterians and The Fellowship.
- Examine GA-mandated evaluative reviews of the Office of the General Assembly (OGA) and the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA) and recommendations coming out of those reviews.
- Study research contained in a “PC(USA) Snapshot” compiled by the denomination’s Research Services office and the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly from nearly 3,500 Presbyterian respondents.
- Consider 10 prescriptive overtures submitted by presbyteries.

Out of all that material, the Way Forward committee and the Assembly itself will attempt to fashion solutions to counter the denomination’s decline, which includes:

- A 40 percent loss of members since Presbyterian reunion in 1983.
- Reduction of the General Assembly mission budget by half in the last 20 years.

*Continued on page 2*
GENERAL ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE 4 PREVIEW

Continued from page 1

- Reduction of national staff by two-thirds since 1994.
- Reduction of mid-council (presbyteries and synods) staffs.
- A 79 percent reduction in unrestricted mission support contributions (as opposed to investment income) over the last 18 years—$24 million in 1999 compared to $5 million in the proposed 2017 mission budget.

Perhaps the most dramatic change the Way Forward committee will consider is a proposal to merge the Office of the General Assembly—the ecclesial agency of the denomination—and the Presbyterian Mission Agency—the mission arm. Proposals to that effect are coming from several places.

In its report (item 04-11), the Committee to Review the Presbyterian Mission Agency seeks the creation of a 15-member committee “to explore the possibility of a merger” between OGA and PMA. In the meantime, the report calls for an eight-member committee to provide a plan to restructure the PMA to provide corrective oversight to mitigate recent administrative issues including creation of an unauthorized corporation in which to channel “1001 New Worshiping Communities” funds, the cancelation of One Great Hour of Sharing promotional materials deemed racially insensitive and their subsequent redesign, and a sizable cost overrun for the 2013 Presbyterian Youth Triennium.

The Committee to Review the Office of the General Assembly report (item 04-12), while taking no position on the merger, “commends to the church the merits of deliberate and thoughtful conversation on the subject.”

An overture from Santa Fe Presbytery (item 04-07) is more matter-of-fact. It calls for merger of OGA and PMA, effective at the end of the 2018 General Assembly. The Presbyterian Mission Agency Board and the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly would be dissolved and succeeded by a Council of the General Assembly with the GA moderator as chair, the GA vice-moderator as vice-chair and the GA stated clerk as head-of-staff, with the title Stated Clerk/Director of Presbytery Mission Support.

An overture from St. Andrew Presbytery (item 04-08) calls for the GA “to hire a top-tier national consultant … to assess and make recommendations on the nature, function and relationship of the OGA and the PMA to each other and to the presbyteries and congregations … including the need for their continued existence as two distinct entities.”

Foothills Presbytery has submitted a package of eight overtures with the aim, it says, “of engaging our denomination in the sustained work of reform, renewal and modernization.” Seven of the eight overtures have been referred to the Way Forward committee:

- Item 04-01 calls for each GA to be organized around one of the Six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304), with the main business of each Assembly “to discuss and to explore ways to enable PC(USA) congregations to fulfill more faithfully and effectively the Great End which is the theme for that Assembly.” Constitutional amendments would only be entertained every third Assembly (every six years) and would have to have the endorsement of 15 percent of the 172 presbyteries to be considered.
- Item 04-02 would add a fifth category of advisory delegates to the GA – Presbytery Advisory Delegates – to the current ones: young adult, theological student, missionary and ecumenical advisory delegates. For each General Assembly, 20 percent of the presbyteries could designate their chief executive to be an advisory delegate.
- Item 04-03 would require the affirmative votes of a two-thirds majority of the presbyteries and approval by two consecutive General Assemblies to amend the Book of Order. Currently, amending the Book of Order requires a majority vote of one General Assembly and then ratification by a majority of the presbyteries. An overture from the Presbytery de Cristo (04-10) proposes much the same rubric.
- Item 04-04 would grant presbyteries the right to “abstain” when voting on proposed amendments to the Constitution.
- Item 04-05 would grant presbyteries and synods the ability to submit overtures to amend or suspend the General Assembly Standing Rules. Currently, the Assembly itself adopts its standing rules and amends them as it so chooses.
- Item 04-06 would grant presbyteries and synods the ability to submit overtures to amend, delete or suspend sections of the Manual of the General Assembly. Currently, the General Assembly has sole responsibility for its manual (of operations).
- Item 04-09 calls for the creation of a “General Assembly Reform Coordinating Committee” charged to “reform, renew and refresh the practice of our Reformed polity for the 21st century.” The centerpiece of the committee's work would be a series of regional gatherings “to study the core principles of our historic polity, to reflect upon the sweeping changes” affecting church and society and to advise the reform committee on “the content and organization of the Constitution and the creation of a 10-year strategic mission plan for the PC(USA)” and to devise “the most effective structures to faithfully and boldly uphold our Reformed polity and practice.”

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE 9 PREVIEW
IMMIGRATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES COMMITTEE WILL MULL FOSSIL FUEL DIVESTMENT

By Mike Ferguson
General Assembly News

Competing overtures—one seeking Presbyterian divestment from fossil fuel companies, the other placing that action on hold—will headline the work of the Immigration and Environmental Issues Committee during the 222nd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

The General Assembly runs June 18-25 in Portland, Oregon.

In item 09-01, the Presbytery of San Francisco overtures the General Assembly to call upon the Board of Pensions and the Presbyterian Foundation to stop any new direct investment in fossil fuel companies and to work over the next three years not to own such assets. Instead, those entities are charged with “actively seeking out and investing in renewable and energy efficiency related securities.”

Item 09-02, brought by the Presbytery of the New Covenant, seeks to postpone complete divestment “because it does not meet the denomination's long-standing process for consideration of divestment.” Instead, according to the recommendation, the General Assembly should request that the two affected agencies and the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program “study ways that investments can best be leveraged to help care for God's creation and mitigate the negative effects of climate change.”

Divestment will, according to the pro-divestment overture, place the PC(USA) alongside ecumenical partners, including Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists and the United Church of Christ, which have all committed to divest. It also protects the denomination's financial interests, because, it is argued, “in the carbon-constrained world we are entering, the value of fossil fuel companies will decline.”

The divestment alternative argues that it’s possible for Presbyterians to address the issue of climate change by continuing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and approving lower-carbon and zero-carbon technologies and lifestyles. “Divestment has no direct effect on climate and makes no difference in individual behaviors,” as argued in the rationale. “In addition, divestment renders a moral judgment on thousands of good, moral Presbyterians who are employed within the fossil fuel sector.”

The Presbytery of New Covenant has two additional overtures on climate change – item 09-03, which is about faithfully engaging climate change, and 09-04, which is labeled “On Faithful Response to Climate Change.”

The first includes 15 recommendations for faithful engagement. Those include repenting “from our inadequate stewardship of God’s creation” and recognizing “the Gospel's call and the moral mandate for humanity to shift to a long-term sustainable energy

Continued on page 4
regime in ways that are both just and compassionate.” It calls on Presbyterians to work to establish a “consistent, rational and equitable global pricing mechanism for greenhouse gasses” while protecting the poor from “the regressive nature of the pricing mechanism” around emissions pricing. It also asks the foundation, Board of Pensions and PILP to allocate funds that target climate change solutions, such as PILP’s Restoring Creation Loan program.

Item 09-04 contains a seven-part response to climate change. Those include commending Mission Responsibility through Investment (MRTI) “for its long history of engagement with companies on issues related to climate change” and urging MRTI to continue that engagement, “applying the long-standing PC(USA) principles related to consideration of divestment.” It also asks Presbyterians to recognize “that divestment does not excuse us from the requirement for faithful responses that do alter behaviors.”

Item 09-07, an overture from the Presbytery of Boston, asks the General Assembly to approve an “Affirmation of Creation.” After tracing nearly 14 billion years of creation, the affirmation notes that God “has connected all life on Earth in a network of kinship by virtue of descent with modification from common ancestors.” By virtue of “the powers of intellect and creativity called forth in us by God, we bear exceptional responsibility for the future of the Earth and all its constitutive creatures,” the recommendation states.

In item 09-08, the Presbytery of Seattle asks the General Assembly to empower the Office of Public Witness in Washington, D.C., and the Presbyterian Ministry to the United Nations in New York “to witness against environmental degradation and to affirm public policy that supports good stewardship of natural resources.” With “firm biblical foundation and the policies of twenty General Assemblies to build upon,” those agencies can give voice to concerns like water quality; threats from hydraulic fracturing, crude oil transport and storage; and threats from methane that results from industrial processes.

The Presbytery of Santa Fe’s item 09-05 seeks General Assembly approval for encouraging throughout the PC(USA) the study of Pope Francis’ encyclical, “Laudato Si.” It’s available at https://laudatosi.com/watch.

Only one overture, 09-06, is on immigration. The Presbytery of New York City seeks to respond to people who are refugees or are internally displaced. It would direct appropriate agencies, office and staff to advocate for and seek to improve “matters related to United States government refugee resettlement policies and related issues.”

Those would include advocating for a shortened overseas processing period for refugees approved for admission to the U.S., increasing federal funding to expand the number of refugees and admitting refugees as lawful permanent residents to increase their personal security.

The overture also urges presbyteries, sessions and pastors to encourage congregations to host, co-sponsor and/or support refugee families. That can include basic support such as clothing, housing, furniture and food as well as “a social connection for refugees to assist their acclimation to the community—including a welcoming voice for Muslims.”

Continued on page 5
GENERAL ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE 9 PREVIEW
Continued from page 4

Item 09-09, is the Mission Responsibility through Investment report on divestment from fossil fuel companies.

MRTI’s report calls for the church to commend companies – especially those in the oil, gas and coal sectors – that have addressed climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The report calls on corporations to increase efforts to address climate change through their corporate governance, strategies, implementation, transparency and disclosure, and public policies.

It also commends the PC(USA)’s Foundation for providing, through its New Covenant Trust Company subsidiary, the option of fossil-free managed portfolios to congregations, as well as the efforts of the Board of Pensions and the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program for other fossil-free options and programs.

Rather than divest from fossil fuel holdings, MRTI asks the General Assembly for permission “to pursue its focused engagement process on climate change issues,” especially with companies in the oil, gas and coal sectors. MRTI would then report back to the 223rd General Assembly in 2018 with recommendations – possibly including divestment, “if significant changes in governance, strategy, implementation, transparency and disclosure, and public policy are not instituted,” the report states.

Item 09-10 is called “A Collaborative Agenda for Environmental Stewardship.” It comes from a variety of agencies, including the Board of Pensions, Office of the General Assembly, PC(USA) Foundation, Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program, Presbyterian Mission Agency and the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation.

The strategy lays out the history of how each agency has helped Presbyterians toward eco-friendly options and indicates the work ahead.

Finally the Presbytery of New Castle, in item 09-11, wants to add a 12th duty—caring for God’s creation—to the ministry of members found in G-1.0304 in the Book of Order. In a concurrence, Lake Michigan and Heartland presbyteries note that human “dominion” as intended in Genesis “is best practiced in care for creation, in stewardship, which according to Genesis Noah fulfills best by implementing God’s first endangered species act.”

Caring for God’s creation “is a critical act of faith in today’s world” and should be included in the Book of Order, the overture states.

But the Advisory Committee on the Constitution notes that the Book of Order is “a constitutional document, not a manual of operations. Although there is no impediment to approving this overture, there is no compelling reason to add this to the Book of Order.”

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- Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI)

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DAY-LONG ORIENTATION BUILDS COMMUNITY, TRAINS YAADS FOR WORK AHEAD

By Gregg Brekke
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – The 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) may not get started until today, but more than 140 Young Adult Advisory Delegates met Friday for a day of worship, reflection, inspiration, training and community building.

Coming from every presbytery in the PC(USA), YAADs prepared for their work in Portland over the next week, during which they have full voice and vote during committee deliberations, and voice during plenary sessions.

YAADs, who must be between 17 and 23 when the assembly convenes, “bring a unique perspective to the process and realize they have a lot of listening to do,” advisor Rebecca Chancellor said. “They want to learn and, in those moments when it feels right, to share their perspective and voice. They also realize they have a stake in the future in a way that a lot of the current commissioners don’t.”

YAADs began the day with worship, followed by a presentation by current Moderator Heath Rada and Vice-Moderator Larissa Kwong Abazia. Emphasizing the importance of YAADs’ presence at the General Assembly, Rada said, “You are the present and the future of the church.”

Divided into four “Home Groups” of approximately 40 delegates sorted by committee assignments, YAADs will meet regularly during the assembly to reflect on their experience. Guided by a group covenant as a way to “agree, disagree, respect, engage in open dialog and set the stage,” elected co-moderators of each Home Group will lead debriefing discussions at these scheduled meetings.

“Nearly every night the Home Groups will gather for open and honest dialog, to share frustrations, ask questions, and debrief the day,” Chancellor said. “They’ll have an opportunity to say where they saw God and where they didn’t see God was revealed in the General Assembly.”

Madeleine Olson, 18, from Presbytery of Southern New England, was recommended as a YAAD by her pastor. She’s been involved in youth group and served on her church’s pastoral nominating committee, and will serve on The Way Forward Committee. Olson said she looks forward to learning more about how the assembly works as a whole along with learning from the insights of other delegates.

“I value peoples’ opinions that are different from mine,” she said. “Learning to agree to disagree is part of this process. “I hope people aren’t too narrow-minded to listen and learn,” she said. “Hopefully they will follow what the Spirit is doing and not follow just what their presbytery wants them to do. That’s part of the experience of being the Body of Christ.”

Alyssa White, 19, of Pittsburgh Presbytery, also serves on The Way Forward Committee. “We’re not here for ourselves or for our own churches individually, but for the whole church,” she said. “We’re one church when we come here so coming together to working things out is what needs to be done.”

“You are very important,” said YAAD advisor Keisla Lanzot in her “What is a YAAD” presentation. “The Moderator and commissioners expect you to represent the youth perspective with full voice and vote in committees. Be prepared to listen and learn, but also to respectfully express your opinion – not that of your presbytery, synod or church, but your opinion. You are part of a bigger community.”

Known as Youth Advisory Delegates prior to 2010, YAADs are joined by other advisory delegates: TSADs – theological student advisory delegates, EADs – ecumenical advisory delegates and MADs – missionary advisory delegates.
Thorny issues involved in the pursuit of peace in the Middle East will be among the topics under consideration when the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) meets June 18–25 in Portland, Oregon.

The General Assembly Committee on Middle East Issues will review progress on the denomination's divestment from three companies engaged in "non-peaceful pursuits" in Israel/Palestine. Prompted by several presbytery overtures and a recommendation from the PC(USA)'s Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI), the 221st General Assembly (2014) voted to divest from Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard and Motorola Solutions after a decade of unsuccessful attempts at corporate engagement with the companies.

An overture (08-05) from the Presbytery of Flint River urges this year's Assembly to "remove the divestment mandate" and allow PC(USA) investment in the three companies. The rationale for the overture states "these three companies cannot be responsible for how purchasers use their products."

Overture 08-01 from the Synod of the Covenant calls 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 rationale for the overture notes that Hewlett Packard is the sole provider of computer hardware for the Israeli military. It says the company "is directly involved in widespread human rights abuses and military violence in the Gaza Strip" and also "contributes to and profits from the Israeli military's occupation of the Palestinian West Bank."

A similar overture was voted down by the 2014 Assembly. The PC(USA)'s Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) is sending to this year's Assembly a 56-page report re-evaluating the denomination's long-time support for a two-state solution in Israel/Palestine. The document, "Israel-Palestine: For Human Values in the Absence of a Just Peace," was prepared by the Study Team on Prospects for a Just Peace in Israel and Palestine, as directed by the 2014 Assembly.

The report (08-06) notes that over the years, the Presbyterian Church "has supported the international consensus favoring a two-state solution with a shared Jerusalem. Yet as situations change, the church must evaluate its positions accordingly. And in the view of many analysts, the door to a viable Palestinian state is closing rapidly, if it is still open at all."

The report describes in detail how "Israel's policy trajectory of continued settlements and brutal occupation" makes it "difficult, if not impossible" to achieve a two-state solution. Acknowledging this reality, the report 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."

The report recommends a list of actions the church should take in order to uphold its values—values such as dignity of all persons, self-determination of peoples through democratic means, solidarity with those who suffer, and others.

An overture (08-02) from the Synod of the Covenant, with concurrences from the Presbyteries of Southeastern Illinois and Cimarron, urges advocacy for the safety and well being of the children of Palestine and Israel, a concern also included in the report from ACSWP. The overture asserts that children "suffer widespread and systematic patterns of ill treatment and torture within the Israeli military detention system."

An overture (08-03) from the Presbytery of New York City, with concurrences from four presbyteries, urges continuing support for the people of the Middle East. The overture calls for a variety of actions to encourage Christian presence, counter religious radicalism, promote economic development and promote long-term stability in the region.

An overture (08-04) from the Presbytery of the Redwoods, with concurrence from the Presbytery of Santa Fe, calls for the RE/MAX corporation to cease selling property in West Bank settlements.
GENERAL ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE 7 PREVIEW

ECUMENICAL AND INTERFAITH RELATIONS COMMITTEE TO PROPOSE CONFESSION OF BELHAR ADOPTION

By Gregg Brekke
General Assembly News

Among the business being considered by the Committee on Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations at the 222nd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) meeting June 18–25, 2016 in Portland, Oregon, is the final adoption of the Confession of Belhar.

Proposed by National Capital Presbytery to the 220th General Assembly (2012), an overture for Belhar’s inclusion in The Book of Confessions was affirmed by the required two-thirds, or 116, of presbyteries following the 221st General Assembly (2014)—144 affirmative, 25 negative and 2 no action. The committee is expected to recommend the General Assembly “approve[s] and enact[s] the Confession of Belhar, to be included in The Book of Confessions, starting with the 2016 printing.”

A previous attempt at adopting the Confession of Belhar was defeated following the 219th General Assembly (2010) when presbytery yes votes were 108 and no votes 63.

In other business, the committee will consider the election of nine allotted PC(USA) delegates to the General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) meeting June 27–July 7, 2017, in Leipzig, Germany. The slate includes the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, 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 committee will also propose to the Assembly the following list of ecumenical advisory delegates to invite to the 223rd General Assembly (2018):

International invitees – Assembly of Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Iraq, Evangelical Church in the Republic of Niger, China Christian Council, Iglesia Reformada Presbyteriana de Guinea Ecuatorial, National Evangelical Church of Guatemala (IENPG), Presbyterian Church of Colombia (IPC), Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK), Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East, United Protestant Church of France, Waldensian Evangelical Church of Rio de la Plata (IEVRP).

United States and/or Canada invitees – Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, Church of God in Christ, Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Moravian Church in North America,

Continued on page 9
GENERAL ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE 7 PREVIEW
Continued from page 8

United Church of Christ.

Information items for the committee include a summary of the work and working principles of the General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations (GACEIR), links to essential resources for GACEIR committee members and results of a 2016 self-study by GACEIR.

Primary findings of the self-study, as reported by GACEIR, include:

- An overwhelming majority of Presbyterian respondents stated that they are aware of the central mandate of the denomination to be in ecumenical relations with other Christians and concur with the statement that “the church should have an ecumenical policy that helps guide it when working and ministering with other denominations.”
- According to Research Services’ Executive Summary, most Presbyterian respondents are aware of both the Ecumenical Stance and the Interreligious Stance, and yet less than a third are even moderately familiar with GACEIR.
- Among ecumenical and interfaith partner respondents, most are familiar with both the Ecumenical and Interreligious Stances. Approximately half of the respondents believe that the PC(USA) carries out the values lifted up in the stances moderately well.

SFTS welcomes GA students!

There is a lot to absorb in the coming days. Learn from world-class faculty who also happen to be our co-sponsors: Rev. Dr. Clifton Kirkpatrick, professor of World Christianity and Ecumenical Studies at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary; Rev. Dr. Paul K. Hooker, associate dean for Ministerial Formation and Advanced Studies at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary; and Rev. Jerry Van Marter, former director of the Presbyterian News Service, alumni relations advisor for San Francisco Theological Seminary, and stated clerk of the Presbytery of Mid-Kentucky.

Have a great week!

“Nearly everyone who attends a General Assembly describes it as a life-changing experience. I wish this class had been available when I first attended General Assembly.”

—Jerry Van Marter
Confirming the election and reelection of the presidents of the denomination’s loan program and publishing company are among the numerous items to be decided by Assembly Committee 13 during the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) 222nd General Assembly, June 18-25 in Portland, Oregon.

The standing administrative committee for The Board of Pensions (BOP), Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program (PILP), Presbyterian Publishing Corporation (PPC) and the Presbyterian Foundation, will be called upon to confirm the election of James G. Rissler as president of the PILP to a four-year term. It will also be asked to confirm the reelection of Marc Lewis to a third, four-year term as president and publisher of PPC.

Rissler was elected by the PILP Board of Directors in October of 2014 to serve a four-year term as president, effective January 1, 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, N.A.

Holding a Bachelor of Science degree in Economics and Business Administration from Vanderbilt University, Rissler served as chair of the Board of the Presbyterian Homes & Services of Kentucky, Inc. and on the Board of the Presbyterian Homes & Services Foundation, Inc. He currently serves as a trustee on the Board of Spalding University.

During his 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.

In other business, Assembly Committee 13 will consider:

- A recommendation from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Foundation to confirm the election of two directors of its subsidiary, New Covenant Trust Company, N.A.
- A recommendation from the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board to confirm the election of seven individuals to the PILP Board of Directors.
- A recommendation from the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board to confirm the election of Mary C. Baskin to the Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Class of 2020.

Assembly Committee 13 will also hear reports from each of the six agencies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
GENERAL ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE 14 PREVIEW
THEOLOGICAL ISSUES AND INSTITUTIONS COMMITTEE TO GRAPPLE WITH NEW DIRECTORY FOR WORSHIP

By Jerry Van Marter
General Assembly News

Twelve years in the making, the 222nd General Assembly (2016) is poised this June to adopt a new Directory for Worship for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

First, the document (item 14-04) will be thoroughly reviewed by the Assembly Committee on Theological Issues and Institutions before it goes to the full Assembly for adoption and then on to the church's 172 presbyteries for ratification in the coming year.

The Directory—part of the denomination's Constitution—gives standards and norms for the ordering of worship in PC(USA) congregations and councils. It also lays out the theology that underlies Presbyterian worship, “outlines appropriate forms for worship and highlights connections between worship and Christian life, witness and service.”

The long-awaited revision of the Directory for Worship—which was first adopted in 1983 at Presbyterian reunion—was launched by the 2004 General Assembly with the goal of “evaluating [the Directory’s] influence and effectiveness in guiding sessions, pastors and higher governing bodies (now called "councils") in planning and conducting worship that is authentically Reformed and culturally appropriate.”

After conducting research, a staff team from the Office of the General Assembly and the Office of Theology and Worship reported to the 2006 Assembly that a revised Directory for Worship would be "more accessible and helpful" if it were shorter and better organized. That Assembly agreed but delayed work on the new Directory due to ongoing consideration of a new Form of Government (nFOG).

After the nFOG was approved in 2010 and ratified by the presbyteries the following year, work on the new Directory for Worship heated up. A broad consultation was held in 2013 to look at the initial draft of the document. A revised draft was presented to the 2014 Assembly, which commended it to the church for study and comment, with comments due on July 1, 2015.

A further consultation was held in October 2015 and further suggestions were incorporated into the final proposal, which is now before the Assembly. In the spirit of the nFOG, “the revised Directory for Worship seeks to foster freedom and flexibility, with openness to a broader range of worship styles and cultural expressions.”

Assembly Committee 14 will also consider:

- An overture from Kiskiminetas Presbytery (item 14-01) that seeks to restore the definition of marriage in the Directory for Worship (W-4.9000) from “between two people” to “between a man and a woman.”
- A request from the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly (item 14-12) to create a Special Committee to Study the Reformed Perspective of Christian Education in the 21st Century. The committee would be charged to examine the historic and current roles of Christian educators in the PC(USA) and ecumenically, to study current employment trends for Christian educators and how they can be a more effective resource to the whole church, and to consider how to diversify the corps of PC(USA) Christian educators for the benefit of smaller membership and racial ethnic and immigrant congregations.
- An overture from Southeastern Illinois Presbytery (item 14-03) that would remove baptism as a prerequisite for receiving the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, arguing that children whose parents choose not to have them baptized as infants and people new to the faith who have not yet been baptized, among others, are currently excluded from the sacrament.
- The Committee on Theological Education’s selection of the Rev. Craig Dykstra and the Rev. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld as recipients of the PC(USA)’s Award of Excellence in Theological Education (item 14-11), which was established in 1996 to “honor a person who has made an outstanding lifetime contribution to theological education in and for the PC(USA).”
- Confirmation of new members of the Boards of Trustees of the 10 PC(USA) seminaries (item 14-06) and two new seminary presidents (item 14-07): the Rev. Leanne Van Dyk at Columbia Theological Seminary, succeeding the late Steve Hayner; and the Rev. David Esterline at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, succeeding the retired William J. Carl III.
- An overture from Cascades Presbytery (item 14-02) calling for the PC(USA) to endorse the Clergy Letter

Continued on page 12

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Project, a statement by upwards of 14,000 religious leaders, including 13,000 Christian clergy, that affirms the teaching of evolution, insisting that “religious truth is of a different order from scientific truth” and that “as a scientific theory [evolution] does not contradict the existence of God, but can be seen as a natural, creative process in God’s creation.”

GENERAL ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE 14 PREVIEW

Continued from page 11

GENERAL ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE 11 PREVIEW

SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE TO CONFRONT WIDE RANGE OF RECOMMENDATIONS, INCLUDING CHANGES TO THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL WITNESS POLICY PROPOSALS

By Erin S. Cox-Holmes
General Assembly News Team

The charge to the Social Justice Issues Committee is clear. It is to consider matters related to the concerns of the church in national affairs, national military matters and matters relating to righteousness and justice of persons/organizations.

How to accomplish this tall order is far more murky. When Committee 11 begins their work at the 222nd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) meeting June 18-25, 2016 in Portland, Oregon, they will be facing a marathon agenda of 26 overtures on social justice matters, plus summaries and self-study reports from GA committees and agencies.

For starters, the Presbytery of the Foothills believes it is time to change altogether how the PC(USA) forms social policy witness. Overture 11-01 supports the engagement of Presbyterians in issues of social justice, economics, and politics. But it calls for an end to “divisive, up-or-down, yes-or-no positions on partisan issues.” Instead, the overture calls upon the denomination to learn and pray about issues and to become engaged locally. If the overture is adopted, any proposed social witness policy would require a concurrence of one-third of presbyteries before coming to the General Assembly for consideration.

Overture 11-02, also from Foothills, urges that for the next three General Assemblies, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) "shall focus its attention on generating discussion in the presbyteries about any social witness policy concerns that arise.” If adopted, the ACSWP would not generate social witness policy, but instead would facilitate any social witness policy proposals to arise from the presbyteries. Proponents believe that generating conversations could move towards more consensus reflecting the wisdom of the whole church. Both of the Foothill overtures are recommended for disapproval by ACSWP and other advisory groups.

On the other side of the spectrum, a number of overtures call upon the PC(USA) to take stands on a plethora of social witness policy issues. Some involve broad calls to new engagement in the social causes of our times. The Presbytery of Carlisle calls upon the PC(USA) to be a “church committed to the Gospel of Matthew 25,” focusing upon the poor locally and globally.

The Presbytery of John Knox argues for resources to combat white privilege, while the Presbytery of Baltimore advocates for a six-year plan to dismantle racism. In a similar theme, the Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy is advocating for a new civil rights movement.

Apology for harm done is the focus of several overtures. The Presbytery of New York City calls for admission of harm and apology to LGBTQ/Q Members of the PC(USA), and their family and friends. The Presbytery of Baltimore seeks an apology to Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians.

In addition, suggested policies and recommendations from agencies and committees of the General Assembly will come to the committee on a range of topics, including human trafficking, facing racism, opposing therapies purported to change sexual or gender identity, and ending the war on drugs.

Other overtures from presbyteries are focused on:

- Commitment to play an Active Part in the Global Response to the HIV/AIDS Epidemic
- Advocacy against factory farming
- Election protection and integrity in campaign finance
- Better serving for those living with HIV/AIDS
- Addressing the economic crisis in Puerto Rico

Summaries of the work of the Advocacy Committee on Racial Ethnic Concerns, Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, the and Advocacy Committee on Women’s Concerns are also on the agenda.
REV. SUN BAI KIM HONORED FOR LONG MINISTRY NURTURING KOREAN PRESBYTERIAN CONGREGATIONS

By Eva Stimson
General Assembly News

A Korean Presbyterian leader whose ministry spans nearly half a century was honored at a retirement party Friday evening by Presbyterians gathering in Portland for the 222nd General Assembly (2016).

Rev. Sun Bai Kim, associate for Korean ministries in the Presbyterian Mission Agency, is retiring after nearly 40 years of service—first as a pastor and then as a national staff member—with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). During his tenure on the national staff, the number of Korean Presbyterian congregations in the denomination doubled, from about 200 to more than 400. Kim also served as executive director and moderator of the National Council of Korean Presbyterian Churches.

"Sun Bai once said that a leader is one who does not wait for things to happen but helps make things happen," says Rhashell Hunter, director of the PC(USA)’s Racial Ethnic and Women’s Ministries, which hosted Kim’s retirement celebration. "Sun Bai Kim is definitely a leader who makes things happen."

Born in Korea, Kim was ordained in 1969 by the Presbytery of Seoul. A third-generation Presbyterian, he proudly tells the story of how his grandfather was baptized by a Presbyterian missionary at the age of 13. The boy and his mother became the first Presbyterian Christians in Jeonjoo, a city in southwestern Korea, in 1897.

Kim says his long career has been motivated by gratefulness for the U.S. Presbyterians who laid the foundation for a vibrant church in Korea. "The reason I’ve served the PC(USA) and worked so hard for 40 years is that I strongly felt that I need to pay back what I owe to this great church," he says.

"Sun Bai was a tireless and faithful leader for our Korean constituencies," says the Rev. Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly. "He was always reminding the church of the historic and important partnership of the PC(USA) and the Presbyterian churches in Korea.”

After coming to the United States for advanced study, Kim began his ministry as a new church development pastor of the Korean Presbyterian Community Church in Columbia, South Carolina, in 1977. Four years later, he became pastor of the Korean Community Presbyterian Church of Atlanta. The congregation grew in worship attendance from about 60 to 350 under Kim’s leadership and now draws some 3,000 people to its worship services.

Kim’s work in racial ethnic ministries for the PC(USA) included staffing a church growth task force and contributing to development of a racial ethnic and immigrant church growth strategy in the mid 1990s. One of his continuing hopes for the denomination, he says, is that Presbyterians would "fully embrace all racial ethnic congregations."

"Sun Bai is a deeply committed individual," Hunter says. "Among his best qualities are his faithfulness and spirituality. He is respected throughout the denomination and beyond."

Kim’s wife, Grace Choon Kim, associate for Korean curriculum development for Congregational Ministries Publishing, is also retiring after some 40 years of service to the PC(USA). The two plan to remain in Louisville and spend more time with their grandchildren.
The future of the 16 synods in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will once again be on the docket when the 222nd General Assembly (2016) meets June 18–25 in Portland, Oregon.

The 221st General Assembly (2014) directed synods and presbyteries to collaborate on establishing a new configuration of synod boundaries that would reduce the number of synods from 16 to between 10 and 12. This year’s Assembly Committee on Mid Councils will consider responses from synods and presbyteries to the 2014 action.

A report from the 16 synods (05-13) calls for rescinding the 2014 Assembly action on synod boundaries and urges synods to continue exploring mission partnerships and shared functions. The report is based on feedback from synod representatives who met in various configurations over the past two years to discuss the Assembly’s action.

An overture (05-01) from the Presbytery of Santa Fe also calls for rescinding the 2014 Assembly action, contending that reducing the number of synods is not likely to enhance mission endeavors or to save money.

Requiring fewer synods, the rationale says, imposes “an onerous burden upon the synods in the western half of the United States because of our vast geographic reality.” Concurrences with overture 05-01 have been filed by 14 presbyteries, all in the western half of the country.

In contrast, two more presbyteries note the lack of progress since 2014 in the reconfiguration of synod boundaries and call for appointment of an administrative commission to move the process forward.

Overture 05-03 from the Presbytery of Scioto Valley asserts, “Further delay in addressing the boundaries of the synods will not serve the church’s needs in the 21st century.” Overture 05-04 from the Presbytery of Maumee Valley recommends creating seven synods corresponding with the seven regions of the Association of Stated Clerks: Northwest, Southwest, North Central, South Central, Northeast, East Central and Southeast.

PC(USA) mid councils (currently 172 presbyteries and 16 synods) have been under scrutiny since the first of two Mid Councils Commissions began its work in 2010. The 220th General Assembly (2012) rejected a commission proposal that synods be eliminated.

Responding to recommendations from the second Mid Council Commission, the 2014 Assembly affirmed “synods continue to have a vital role within our life as a denomination,” but called for a reduction in the number of synods.

Family leave, child and youth protection, dependent care

The committee will also consider issues related to women, children and families. The Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns (ACWC) has submitted two resolutions. One of them (05-10) urges congregations, presbyteries and the six General Assembly agencies to create family leave policies for employees to care for a newborn or adopted child or “other family members, such as seniors or those requiring health assistance.”

The other ACWC resolution (05-09) calls for amending the fourth paragraph of G-3.0106 in the Book of Order to clarify an action taken by the 2014 General Assembly. The amended paragraph would require councils to adopt and implement both a child and youth protection policy and a sexual misconduct policy. The resolution stresses that these “shall be different policies with differentiated intents.”

An overture (05-06) from the Presbytery of Susquehanna Valley urges development of a national child protection policy manual and training resources for presbyteries and congregations. The presbytery states that though the 2014 Assembly called for all church councils to adopt a child protection policy, many congregations do not have the expertise or resources to develop such a policy on their own.

An overture (05-05) from the Presbytery of Great Rivers proposes an amendment to G-3.0106 of the Book of Order requiring all councils of the church to adopt and implement a dependent care policy. Churchwide policies supporting caregivers of children, the elderly and people with disabilities are necessary, the presbytery says, “to create settings of full inclusion that honor the humanity and dignity of all God’s children.”

Other issues

The Assembly Committee on Mid Councils will also consider the following:

• A report from the Task Force for Korean-Speaking Congregations, created by the 2014 Assembly, offers recommendations for strengthening ministry with Korean Americans.
• Eastern Korean Presbytery has submitted two overtures (05-07 and 05-08) calling for revisions to the guidelines for nongeographic presbyteries that would allow a racial ethnic or immigrant congregation—no matter where it is located—to request transfer to a non-geographic presbytery.
• An overture (05-02) from the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii calls for restoration of the boundaries of the Presbytery of the Pacific, which were changed in 2012 to allow two churches to become members of neighboring presbyteries. Both congregations have since left the denomination.

Below: GA attendees during the ARCEC commissioners’ briefing and ice cream social. Photo: Danny Bolin
More than a dozen items will be debated by the Mission Committee for referral to the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) meeting June 18-25, 2016 in Portland, Oregon.

The committee receives overtures and reports on matters related to mission programs authorized by the General Assembly, PC(USA) vision and mission goals, Organization for Mission and Presbyterian Mission Agency Manual of Operations, mission budget, audits, churchwide compensation, initiatives on church growth and the 1001 Worshiping Communities program.

Overture 10-01, “On Seeking to Eradicate Slavery from the Supply Chains of Vendors and Other Businesses That the PC(USA) and Its Various Bodies Do Business,” encourages Presbyterian entities to inquire about supply chain practices for vendors and companies in which the church invests or does business with to ensure these companies do not engage in unfair labor practices, including slavery.

Overture 10-03, proposed by the Presbytery of Pittsburgh, with concurrences by the presbyteries of Charleston-Atlantic, Lake Erie, New York City, Upper Ohio Valley and Western Reserve, seeks to, “Take specific action, not just in word, but also in deed, to address and improve the worsening plight of the African American male in five specified cities as a pilot initiative pointing toward future and further nationwide intervention.” Pilot cities include Baltimore, Maryland; Charlotte, North Carolina; Cleveland, Ohio; New York, New York; and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Item 10-05 asks the General Assembly to rescind the 1990 “General Assembly Mission Program Budget Policy and Procedures,” which includes specific ratios regulating the Presbyterian Mission Program Fund, and replace it with a “Presbyterian Mission Agency Reserve Policy.” Two major changes include the provision that the “restricted reserve fund will not be used to manage projected operating budget shortfalls” and granting the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board the approval power over the use, minimum levels and allocations to the restricted reserve fund.

Item 10-07 asks the Assembly to approve the revised Churchwide Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action Plan, now titled “Toward Inclusiveness in Employment: The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Churchwide Policy for Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action for General Assembly Agencies.” The renamed and revised document offers a broader set of protections and prohibits discrimination based on “race/ethnicity, color, national origin, gender, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, creed, protected disability status, citizenship status, genetic information, uniformed service or veteran status or religious, or any other characteristic protected by law; and to correct any existent patterns of discrimination.”

In consultation with the Advocacy Committee on Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC), where the phrase “equal employment opportunity” was found in the document, the phrase has been revised to read “equal employment opportunity and affirmative action.”

Item 10-08 is the “Report of the Special Offerings Review Task Force.” The report asks the General Assembly to “revise the $20 million by 2020 [annual] goal for Special Offerings receipts to $20 million by 2025 as the aspiration of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)” The report also asks the Assembly to affirm the current distribution allocations for each of the offerings, to maintain funding to the remaining historically Presbyterian racial ethnic institutions (HPREIs) at current percentages, and to distribute “funds that have become available from HPREIs that no longer qualify for funding through the [Christmas Joy Offering] to support and advance the work of racial ethnic and women’s ministry in their programs of racial ethnic leadership development.”

Item 10-09, “Empowered & Hopeful”—Women of Color Consultation Report, asks the Presbyterian Mission Agency, through the work of Racial Ethnic & Women’s Ministries to “continue to sponsor racial ethnic and women’s leadership institutes to develop women of color leaders in the church, so that they will have opportunities to serve fully in ministry and leadership; and to continue to provide and support opportunities for women of color to attend trainings and professional development events.”

Item 10-10 asks the General Assembly to acknowledge the work of the Presbyterian Mission Agency’s in rallying the church around the theme of “Living Missionally” while releasing it from the directives “to develop tangible metrics to determine success and impact,” and “identify strategies for deeper engagement.” Instead, the Mission Agency asks the Assembly to affirm Item 10-14, the 2017-2018 Presbyterian Mission Agency Work Plan.

Item 10-11, “A Resolution to Contribute to a Proactive, Health-Giving Ministry to and Relationship with Our Clergywomen,” sponsored by the Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns, seeks to direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency to sponsor events and provide support for clergywomen. The recommendations include annual gatherings, listening groups, virtual work groups, mentoring, coaching, and provide theological resources to support the ministries of women. It also asks “the six denominational agencies to collaboratively create and share the expense of new leadership development opportunities for all clergywomen.”

Item 10-12, “A Resolution to Ensure Just Compensation Practices for Those Employed via Third Party Contractors,” also sponsored by the Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns, asks 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.”

Overture 10-13, “On Achieving a 5:1 Ratio Between the Highest-Paid and Lowest-Paid Employees of PMA,” is sponsored by the Newton Presbytery. It asks the General Assembly to “establish the goal of achieving, in a reasonable period of time, a 5:1 ratio between the highest-paid and lowest-paid employees of the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA), beginning with new PMA positions, understanding this to be a partial return to earlier policy and a practical embodiment of missional solidarity.”

Continued on page 16
GENERAL ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE 10 PREVIEW
Continued from page 15

A comment from the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board to this goal says, in part, “[the PMA] compensation range has nonetheless narrowed from 7.5:1 (in 2010) to 6:1 (in 2015)—a level that is very comparable to, or less than, the actual ratios between the lowest paid and highest paid employee for each of the other General Assembly agencies, even though some of the lowest paid positions in the General Assembly offices are within the Presbyterian Mission Agency.”

Item 10-14, the “2017-2018 Presbyterian Mission Agency Work Plan,” establishes a two-year guideline for the work of the Mission Agency based on the mission: “Inspire, equip, and connect the PC(USA) in its many expressions to serve Christ in the world through new and existing communities of faith, hope, love, and witness.”

Key to the PMA Work Plan are the directional goals that are to guide managers, employees and the PMA Board in its work:

- Evangelism & Discipleship, Servant Leader Formation and Justice & Reconciliation, based on the core values of “Faith, Compassion, Accountability, Teamwork, Dedication, Service, [and] Justice.”

Item 10-04 is a minor revision to the Presbyterian Mission Agency Manual of Operations. Item 10-06 amends the Organization for Mission to include a distinction between “Other General Assembly Corporations,” including agencies of the denomination, and “Corporations Related to the General Assembly,” such as Presbyterian Women. Item 10-A recognizes Commissioned Ruling Elder Lucy Apatiki, Ruling Elder Sarah Noble-Moag, and Ruling Elder Clarissa Walker Whaley as the Women of Faith award recipients at the 222nd General Assembly.

Other committee items include minutes from the PC(USA), A Corp. meeting; the final audit report; a Report of Changes to the Appendices of the Presbyterian Mission Agency Manual of Operations; a Report of the Presbyterian Mission Agency on Current Task Forces, Work Groups, and Ad Hoc Committees; and the Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity Report of Progress.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE 3 PREVIEW

GA PROCEDURES COMMITTEE TO CONSIDER CHANGES IN THE ELECTION OF THE MODERATOR

By Erin S. Cox-Holmes
General Assembly News

Whether the time has come to change the timing of the election the Moderator of the General Assembly will be on the agenda of the Committee on General Assembly Procedures at the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) meeting June 18-25, 2016 in Portland, Oregon.

The Presbytery of St. Andrews is proposing moving the election of the General Assembly Moderator and Vice-Moderator (or Co-Moderators) to the end of the meeting, rather than the beginning. Their rationale is that this would permit the Assembly to elect those who have demonstrated leadership throughout the week, rather than electing on the basis of campaign speeches and a brief question and answer period as the Assembly kicks off. The General Assembly would then send the newly elected Moderators to “serve as its ambassadors for the next two years, working to build the next assembly’s agenda and business, over which they would then preside.”

The overture additionally asks that a system be established for General Assembly committees to convene at least six months prior to the assembly, using electronic meeting technologies. Proponents believe this would improve upon “the current process of coming together for a total of one week with the expectation that commissioners will reach good and well-reasoned decisions on a myriad of matters enumerated in thousands of pages of overtures, responses, reports, and recommendations.” If the overture passes, the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly (COGA) would be directed to bring proposals for the constitutional changes and implementation recommendations to the 223rd General Assembly.

Several overtures seek to help the General Assembly better address racial, ethnic and cultural diversity in the PC(USA). The Presbytery of Greater Atlanta proposes adding the category “multiracial” to the annual statistical report submitted by sessions. The Presbytery of Elizabeth proposes a task group to revise the entire classification system to avoid confusion and misrepresentation. The Presbytery of Arkansas asks that a new category called “Partners in Ministry” be added for those who are not members, but are full participants in the ministry of a congregation.

Other business before the committee includes:

• A proposal to introduce more breadth of perspectives in resource materials and oral presentations provided to General Assembly committees.
• Acceptance of the invitation of the Presbytery of Scioto Valley to hold the 225th General Assembly (2022) in Columbus, Ohio, June 25–July 2, 2022.
• The recommendation that the General Assembly per capita rate be 7.33 per active member for 2017, and a rate of $7.55 to be effective for 2018. This is an increase from the previous rate of $7.02, which had remained the same for several years.
• Benchmarks for the representation of women and people from minoritized racial groups in the employment of personnel by the Office of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency.
• Approval of a standard definition of “Supplier Diversity” for use by all six agencies of the PC(USA).
• A recommendation that when the General Assembly is in plenary session, that action upon any items with constitutional implications shall be suspended until the Advisory Committee on the Constitution renders an opinion to the Moderator.
The denomination's role in helping build a bridge of reconciliation between the United States and South Korea regarding the Korean War tragedy in the village of No Gun Ri is the subject of one of seven overtures to be discussed by the Peacemaking and International Issues Committee during the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) 222nd General Assembly, which takes place June 18-25 in Portland, Oregon.

The Peacemaking and International Issues Committee will also hear an overture regarding the strengthening of Cuban-American relations, particularly in the faith community.

Overture 12-01, submitted by the Presbytery of Cayuga-Syracuse, calls for acknowledging the U.S. military's role in the killing of nearly 300 Korean civilians near the village of No Gun Ri in July 1950. The overture requests the stated clerk of PC(USA) communicate to the president of the United States and to members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives the denomination's desire for the nation to acknowledge its responsibility in the deaths of those Korean civilians, to provide appropriate compensation to the surviving victims and to the families of those killed or wounded in the incident.

The overture asks the Presbyterian Mission Agency to arrange a meeting between U.S. soldiers who were present at No Gun Ri and Korean survivors of the incident there for the purpose of resolving resentments and feelings of guilt, and to move toward forgiveness and reconciliation. It also calls for the Presbyterian Mission Agency to consult with the denomination's mission partners in South Korea in regards to jointly commissioning and funding the construction of a memorial church on the grounds or near the No Gun Ri Peace Park in South Korea.

Item 12-07, submitted by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, calls for the 222nd General Assembly to affirm and receive a report entitled “New Hopes and Realities in Cuban-American Relations: A ‘Nuevo Momento.’”

The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy was assigned the task of creating the report during the 221st General Assembly.

The report calls for “a better and fairer relationship than our nations have had both before and after Cuba’s 1959 revolution. The PC(USA) continues to support the self-determination and initiative of the Cuban people, a cause for which they have struggled for more than two centuries.”

More specifically, the report urges the denomination to celebrate and strengthen the ecclesial relationship of PC(USA) and the Iglesia Presbiteriana-Reformada en Cuba (IPRC) as sister churches and to update the partnership agreement between the two. It commends the U.S. government and the Cuban government for reinstating their embassies in the two countries and initiating other diplomatic engagements and calls for the ending of policies of isolation and the threat of regime change and to normalize immigration policies. It also urges the return of the island of Guantanamo to the Cuban nation.

In other business, Assembly Committee 12 will consider:

• Overture 12-02, submitted by the Presbytery of Mission, on the completion of the six-year discernment process initiated by the 219th General Assembly 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.” It calls for Presbyterians at all levels of the church to employ the understandings and insights to respond to and prevent violence on the local level, the national level, and the international level through prayer, direct action, and advocacy.

• Overture 12-04, submitted by the Presbytery of Chicago, pertaining to a call for the United States government and other international bodies to join together to promote credible, fair and transparent elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to offer encouragement and financial and technical support to the Congolese government to provide quality education for its children and youth, including civic education in order to enable them to become informed, active, and responsible citizens.

• Item12-06, from the Advisory Committee on Social Witness, which calls for the approval of five affirmations as guidance for new directions in the PC (U.S.A.‘s) peacemaking witness in congregations, presbyteries, synods, and the Peacemaking Program of the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

• Overture 12-08, submitted by the Presbytery of the Nation’s Capital, which urges all members of the PC (U.S.A.) to promote nonviolent resolution of disagreements, be they of a personal or a national level, to undertake actions consistent with breaking down the barriers between ourselves and persons who might be wrongly considered “the other.”

• Overture 12-05, from the Presbytery of Muskingum Valley, which calls for the affirming of non-violent means of resistance against human oppression in American society and throughout the world.
Overtures on requiring evangelism training for teaching elders, inserting caring for God’s creation as part of each congregation’s ministry—and a dozen other proposals—await the Committee on Church Polity and Ordered Ministry during the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

The Assembly will be held June 18-25, 2016 in Portland, Oregon.

In business item 06-02, the Presbytery of Tampa Bay asserts that “practical training in evangelism (agile speaking and teaching concise truths about Jesus Christ as confessed in the Nicene Creed)” should be required of teaching elders seeking ordination. The 1001 New Worshipping Communities initiative, proponents argue, “can become reality if we are intentional about evangelism throughout all denominational organizations.”

The Presbytery of New Castle, in item 06-03, wants to add a 12th duty—caring for God’s creation—to the ministry of members found in G-1.0304 in the Book of Order. In a concurrence, Lake Michigan and Heartland presbyteries note that human “dominion” as intended in Genesis “is best practiced in care for creation, in stewardship, which according to Genesis Noah fulfills best by implementing God’s first endangered species act.”

Three overtures—06-01, 06-07 and 06-10—deal with people who have renounced the jurisdiction of the church.

The first overture, by the Presbytery of the New Covenant, would delete language added by the 221st Assembly prohibiting teaching elders who have renounced jurisdiction from working or volunteering for a congregation or other PC(USA) entity.

The Presbytery of Greater Atlanta’s overture, 06-07, adds “and as long as the former teaching elder remains outside the membership and jurisdiction of the PC (USA)” to the language found in G-2.0509, the jurisdiction of the church in the midst of a disciplinary proceeding.

The final overture on the handling of renunciation of jurisdiction, overture 06-10, allows teaching elders who have renounced to become re-employed after they’ve taken certain steps, including coming forward in self-accusation, pleading guilty to all charges, being censured and completing appropriate rehabilitation. The Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area brought this overture.

**Virtual attendance, title changes and more**

The remaining nine overtures are scattered over broad areas of ministry.

Item 06-04, brought by the Presbytery of Lake Erie, asks that ruling elders be allowed to virtually attend session meetings when appropriate technology is available. “Virtual session accommodations provide the homebound, those traveling for work, pleasure or family responsibilities, and those with family situations requiring their presence at home” a way to participate, according to the overture’s rationale.

In item 06-06, the Presbytery of Central Nebraska asks that a new section be added to G-2.11, Certified Church Service, to include skills and training certification by the Administrative Personnel Association. Certified administrative personnel assistants who have skills and training in such disciplines as church polity, reformed theology and spiritual growth and discipline would be identified and their credentials publicized.

An overture from the Presbytery of Great Rivers, 06-08, changes titles in ordered ministry. The new Form of Government changed “elder” to “ruling elder,” “commissioned lay pastor” to “commissioned ruling elder” and “minister of Word and Sacrament” to “teaching elder.” This overture would repeal those changes to reduce confusion, especially with other denominations, and more closely match what’s going on in churches: “The local church and many churches and pastors have simply ignored the change to the nomenclature,” as the rationale states.

Overture 06-09, from the Presbytery of Monmouth, would allow the election of ruling elders who wouldn’t immediately begin serving on the session. Those ruling elders could assist in serving the Lord’s Supper, exercise spiritual leadership and help balance diversity representation requirements of presbyteries and synods.

The Presbytery of St. Andrew, in item 06-05, seeks to strike language in G-3.0109 requiring committees of councils higher than the session to contain equal numbers of ruling elders and teaching elders. While parity “is essential in decision making,” requiring it of all committees—especially study committees and those formed only to make recommendations—is “an unnecessary restriction placed on councils,” as argued in the rationale.

The Presbytery de Cristo, which brought item 06-13, wants the General Assembly to clarify presbyteries’ use of commissioned ruling elders. The change will allow presbyteries to use commissioned ruling elders to administer the Sacraments or moderate meetings at a list of named congregations.

Item 06-11 would add language to G-3.0104. The overture, brought by the Presbytery of Detroit, defines the stated clerk as “the council’s chief ecclesiastical administrator and relates to other governing bodies and Christian communions, interprets council actions, represents the council, staffs the council’s permanent judicial commission, and is the council’s executive secretary and parliamentarian.” The proposed description of the role of stated clerks “more clearly marks the historic tradition and function of a stated clerk within the Presbyterian tradition, and brings the Form of Government in line with the practice and guidance already given by the Office of the General Assembly.”

One overture, 06-14, brought by the Presbytery of Chicago, would create a Rules of Discipline Task Force to revise the rules to make them what proponents say are more accessible to the church and, among other improvements, provide flexibility in crafting censures and remedies. The only alternative to public shaming under the current Rules of Discipline “is sweeping the problem under the rug. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) can do better than this,” the rationale states.

The final overture, 06-12, from the Presbytery of Grand Canyon, would amend the Book of Order and General Assembly Standing Rules on the roles of the Advisory Committee on the Constitution and the Permanent Judicial Commission when constitutional questions are considered by the General Assembly.
MEET THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY REPORTING STAFF

A talented group of volunteers and staff are in place to report on the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the General Assembly. Their work will be featured online in General Assembly News, and on Facebook (spiritofga) and Twitter (presbyga). Here they are, listed alphabetically.

Danny Bolin and his wife April are full-time photographers who operate a studio in Tell City, Indiana. He has a strong photojournalism background and he works all over the country for various events. Bolin has been covering General Assembly meetings since the early 1990s.

John A. Bolt is a life-long Presbyterian who enjoys words and the Word. Called by God to communicate in secular and spiritual worlds, Bolt has served at all levels of the denomination. He said he is a firm believer in the power and necessity of education to make the world better. He is the director of University Relations/News at West Virginia University.

Gregg Brekke is current editor of Presbyterian News Service and the former news director at the United Church of Christ. Ordained in the United Church of Christ, he has written on ecumenical, interfaith, and international aid/development topics for more than a decade and is an award-winning photojournalist and video documentarian.

Beau Brown is the pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Olney, Illinois (home of the white squirrels). He and his wife Amber recently adopted twins Asher and Avery. Two of his favorite things are good theology and great hip-hop.

Aric Clark is a writer, a speaker, and Presbyterian minister. He is the co-author of Never Pray Again: Lift Your Head, Unfold Your Hands, and Get To Work, a book which challenges readers to embrace a concrete other-centered spirituality. He is also the creator of LectionARIC, a YouTube channel for hermeneutical vlogs.

Mike Ferguson is a ruling elder at St. Andrew Presbyterian Church in Billings, Montana. This is his sixth General Assembly volunteering in the communication center. His day job is as a reporter for the Billings Gazette, where his beat is city government. He’s married to the Rev. Susan Barnes, pastor at St. Andrew.

John Filiatreau worked for The Courier-Journal in Louisville, Kentucky for 20 years as reporter, investigative reporter, editor, and columnist and was editor-in-chief of Louisville Magazine for three years. From 2000 to 2008 he was a writer and editor for the Presbyterian News Service.

Erin Cox-Holmes is executive presbyter for the Presbytery of Donegal and a regular contributor to the Presbyterian News Service. She has worked in the General Assembly Communications Center as a reporter for numerous years.

Jerry Van Marter retired in December 2014 after 26-plus years with Presbyterian News Service. He is currently stated clerk for the Presbytery of Mid-Kentucky. This is his 40th General Assembly.

Rachel Van Marter has been to sixteen General Assemblies with her parents, Eva Stimson and Jerry Van Marter. This year (her seventeenth General Assembly) she’ll be working on social media team. Van Marter lives and works in as an actor in Chicago.

Bob Sloan is a commissioned ruling elder for the Presbytery of New Harmony Presbytery. He serves as pastor of Society Hill Presbyterian Church and Patrick Presbyterian Church in South Carolina. Sloan has worked in the field of newspaper journalism for more than 25 years. He has also served as a correspondent for the Presbyterian News Service and Presbyterians Today.

Eva Stimson, a Presbyterian preacher’s kid, grew up in the Southeast and now works as a freelance editor, writer, and artist in Louisville, Kentucky, where she is a ruling elder and member of Crescent Hill Presbyterian Church. She served on the staff of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for more than 30 years, including 15 years as editor of Presbyterians Today.

Michael Whitman lives in Louisville, Kentucky and, besides being a photographer, works in congregational transformation and resourcing at a firm in Indianapolis, Indiana. He is an avid cyclist, hiker, homebrewer, and Atlanta Braves fan. He enjoys sports and outdoor adventure photography, as well as covering topics of religion and spirituality.