

Presbytery of Boston
E-Connection
July 22, 2010

Follow-up to General Assembly: Part Two

Partners in ministry,

Reports from our GA Commissioners are posted in the July 26 Presbytery Meeting Packet on our PoB website (www.presbyteryofboston.org).

In the last E-Connection, we provided an overview and specific questions and answers on the Middle East Report and Civil Unions and Marriage. GA Assembly actions which will require Presbytery endorsement include replacing our current Book of Order with the New Form of Government and the Ordination Standards. A special commission has been empowered to work with presbyteries and synods who request their assistance in examining and moving forward on ways to make our middle governing bodies more missional and in sync with strengthening and equipping local congregations. Some helpful questions and answers are listed below for your information.

Please check out the newly updated PCUSA website for further details (www.pcusa.org). Let us know how we can help you and your congregation as together we seek to be refreshed by the streams of living water that flow from Christ, and out of the hearts of believers, that the world might be renewed and blessed with God's love.

Shalom,

Wayne

A Letter from General Assembly

To Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregations:

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38) ...

Just one week ago, the 219th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) convened with Scripture and music and prayer. Commissioners and advisory delegates from every presbytery across the church gathered around the baptismal font with hopeful expectation of what God’s Spirit would do in and through them as they sought to discern together the mind of Christ for the PC(USA). As the week progressed, prayer was a foundational part of each day’s deliberations and decisions, and the presence of the Spirit was palpable!

“Out of the believer’s heart...”

While all assemblies are significant, this one holds particular significance in the life of the PC(USA). Among the assembly’s decisions – to be ratified by presbyteries – are the addition of the Belhar Confession to *The Book of Confessions* and a revised Form of Government. Both of these items give a clear signal that we are a church that is not afraid to change – an important perspective to have in these days of great change in the church and the world.

The assembly celebrated and was greatly encouraged by the commissioning of 122 young adult volunteers and 17 new mission workers for service around the globe. Commissioners voted unanimously to renew the call to “Grow Christ’s Church Deep and Wide” and were inspired by the stories (<http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/evangelism>) of congregations that are growing in evangelism, discipleship, diversity, and servanthood. They celebrated the generosity of Presbyterians who have contributed more than \$10.5 million to relief and redevelopment work in Haiti in the wake of January’s devastating earthquake.

The assembly also engaged in discussion about significant matters of faith and life – ordination standards, justice and peace in the Middle East, and civil union and marriage, to name just a few. Information on the more than 300 assembly actions is available at <http://pc-biz.org>. Answers to frequently asked questions about the items that have already garnered media attention are...available online (www.pcusa.org/ga219). We commend these resources to you for their accurate and straightforward information.

While the content of the assembly’s decisions is important, what may be of equal or greater importance is the *manner* in which commissioners and advisory delegates did their work. They debated, but did not fight. They tackled tough issues while refraining from tackling each other. They placed great value on finding common ground as they displayed gracious, mutual forbearance toward one another. They sought the will of God

within their actions, rather than regarding their decisions as the will of God. One commissioner called the experience of seeking – and finding – common ground truly “miraculous.”

In short, this assembly exhibited to the whole church and, indeed, to our society and the world a way to engage in difficult issues while maintaining respect for one another. To put it another way, they exhibited well what it means for the church to “a provisional demonstration of what God intends for the world” (Book of Order, G-3.0200).

...shall flow rivers of living water.”

Just a few short hours ago, the 219th General Assembly ended in the same worshipful manner with which it began, as well as with a similar same sense of hopeful expectation that the hard work done in Minneapolis will continue forward across the church. Michael East and Caroline Sherard, elected by their peers as co-moderators of the young adult advisory delegates to this assembly, shared their thoughts in a blog entry (www.pcusa.org/ga219):

If all our commissioners and advisory delegates returned to their places of community and encouraged others to continue similar stories, what great things could be next for the PC(USA)? These narratives have the ability to inspire discussions on new, creative, and innovative ways of being the Church. At the heart of being Presbyterian is the principle belief that our discernment is best done when we gather together. Being able to gather in one place, as one people, for the one Church is a powerful and transformative experience—one which dramatically shapes future generations.

The assembly has commended to the church a number of items for further study, out of which is hoped will come, as Michael and Caroline write, “new, creative, and innovative ways of being the Church.” May the good and faithful work begun in Minneapolis truly be just the beginning of a season of respectful, earnest, and gracious engagement – both in our words and in our deeds – all for the sake of the gospel.

In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord,

Elder Cynthia Bolbach, Moderator, 219th General Assembly

The Rev. Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly

The Rev. Landon Whitsitt Elder, Vice Moderator, 219th General

Linda Bryant Valentine, Executive Director, General Assembly Mission Council

New Form of Government questions and answers

by General Assembly Communications Center
Office of the General Assembly

MINNEAPOLIS — A summary of the 219th General Assembly's action to approve the new Form of Government:

What happened? What changed?

The General Assembly voted to recommend a revised Form of Government to the presbyteries by a vote of 468 in favor, 204 against, and 6 abstentions — a 70%-30% margin. The new Form of Government includes:

- Foundations of Presbyterian Polity — the principles that are foundational to government, worship, and discipline for the PC(USA) — preserves the vast majority of the material in the first four chapters of the current Form of Government.
- Form of Government — in six chapters, which spells out the constitutional framework for government of the PC(USA) as it seeks to respond to God's call to life in mission.
- Advisory Handbook for Councils for the Development of Policies and Procedures — required by the Form of Government as an aid to councils (governing bodies) of the church for developing the policies and procedures to carry out their mission.

Nothing has changed until a majority of presbyteries vote to approve this new Form of Government. Voting must be completed by July 10, 2011, and if affirmative, the new Book of Order would take effect the next day.

What does it mean?

The current Form of Government has served the church ably over the past quarter century. The bedrock historic principles of Presbyterian governance will continue to order our lives together today and into the future, just as they have guided those who witnessed before us. At the same time, the world in which we as 21st-century Presbyterians proclaim the gospel is not the world of the 1950s, or even the 1980s. The proposed Foundations of Presbyterian Polity and Form of Government are intended to help the church better meet the needs of mission in the 21st century. The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity gathers together in three succinct chapters the historical and theological provisions that have defined, and continue to define, our church life together. Placing this bedrock material into a separate section of the *Book of Order* provides an excellent teaching tool to explain who and what we are. The current Form of Government has evolved over the years from a Constitution into a regulatory manual that attempts to provide a "one size fits all" answer to every situation faced by congregations and presbyteries. The problem with this regulatory approach is that the diverse, multicultural

environment in which we do mission no longer permits a "one size fits all" approach if we are to do mission effectively. The proposed new Form of Government lifts up the constitutional standards that are essential to our life together, while at the same time empowering councils (governing bodies) at all levels to respond more effectively to the ministry and mission needs that each faces.

What's next?

The revised Form of Government must now be considered, and approved by a majority of presbyteries, before July 10, 2011, in order to replace the existing Form of Government.

Where can I learn more?

The document, as amended by the Assembly, is available now at the [PC-Biz website](#). A formatted version will be developed and made available online and in hard copy.

Ordination standards questions and answers

Office of the General Assembly by General Assembly Communications Center

A summary of the 219th General Assembly's action on ordination standards:

What did the Assembly do? What has changed?

The 219th General Assembly (2010) proposed a change to the PC(USA) Constitution regarding ordination standards by a vote of 373-323-4. This action does not change the Constitution. It is a first step in the process. A majority of the 173 presbyteries would have to vote in the affirmative to approve the replacement by July 2011.

What does it mean?

G-6.0106b is a provision in the PC(USA) Book of Order (Constitution) that provides the following standards for persons ordained as church leaders (deacon, elder or minister). The current version reads: "Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament."

The 219th General Assembly (2010) recommends deleting the above provision and replacing it with the following language: "Standards for ordained service reflect the church's desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (G-

1.0000). The governing body responsible for ordination and/or installation (G.14.0240; G14.0450) shall examine each candidate's calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of office. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate's ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003). Governing bodies shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates."

This proposed change would focus ordination examinations on the individual calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability of candidates for the responsibilities of the office, in joyful submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life.

What's next?

Presbyteries will study this recommendation and vote over the course of the next year. If a majority of the 173 presbyteries approve the change, it will replace the previous provision in the *Book of Order*. The deadline for presbyteries to vote is July 10, 2011.

The Middle Governing Body Commission: questions and answers

by [Jerry L. Van Marter](#)

General Assembly Communications Center

MINNEAPOLIS — A summary of the 219th General Assembly's action to create a middle governing body commission:

What did the Assembly do? What has changed?

The 219th General Assembly (2010) has created a Middle Governing Body Commission with the power to act as the General Assembly, upon request of presbyteries and synods. The commission has the power "to organize new synods and to divide, unite, or otherwise combine synods or portions of synods previously existing" (G-13.0103m) and "to approve the organization, division, uniting or combining of presbyteries or portions of presbyteries by synods" (G-13.0103n) upon the request, by a majority vote, of the affected presbyteries and/or synod.

What does it mean?

Presbyteries and synods wishing to realign their structures or boundaries may request such actions from the commission and make those changes without having to wait until the 220th General Assembly (2012) for approval. The commission will also supervise the work of the Special Committee on Administrative Review of the Synod of Boriquen in

Puerto Rico and its constituent presbyteries. That special committee has been seeking reconciliation among the governing bodies in Puerto Rico, which have experienced struggles that threaten the effectiveness of the PC(USA)'s mission and ministry in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. The 219th General Assembly voted to continue the special committee for two more years.

What's next?

The moderators of the 218th General Assembly (the Rev. Bruce Reyes-Chow) and the 219th General Assembly (Elder Cynthia Bolbach) will appoint the 21-member commission. The commission will serve until at least the 220th General Assembly (2012). It must include at least one representative from each of the 16 synods.

Where can I learn more?

The Office of the General Assembly will provide information about the membership, meetings and activities of the commission through their website <http://oga.pcusa.org/>

“Assembly in Brief”

Assembly in Brief, a 16-page bulletin-insert size news-and-photos summary of the 219th General Assembly, can be accessed through the Presbytery of Boston website.

From our home page, select the “About Us” title at the top. A drop-down menu will appear; choose “Links.” Scroll down to “219th General Assembly,” and click. The *Assembly in Brief* is the leading story on the website: www.pcusa.org/ga219, from which you may download and print the summary.