

The Presbytery of Utah will provide leadership and resources resulting in healthy and growing congregations.



PRESBYTERY OF UTAH

SYNOD OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

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July 15, 2010

Dear friends,

Executive Presbyter
Rev. Laura Stellmon
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We wanted to share with you just briefly some significant highlights from the recent 219th General Assembly of the PC(USA).

Stated Clerk/Treasurer
Rev. Alan Hammond
arhammond@utahweb.com

First, please know that the commissioners and young adult advisory delegate who travelled from Utah to Minneapolis served Christ with grace, humility and prayerful diligence. Dave Patten (elder, St. George), Dave Stellmon (minister, Trinity, Ogden), and Shelby Cate (YAAD, Wasatch) served faithfully on their assigned committees, and listened for the voice of God's Spirit as they participated in the discussion and voting process. It was an exhausting week, and they faithfully endured!

Administrative Assistant
Bonnie Chipman
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Moderator
Rev. Paul Heins
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This year, for the first time ever, the sacrament of Baptism was celebrated during the (two and a half hour long!) opening worship service. What a joy! The assembly commissioned 17 new mission workers who will be serving worldwide, and 122 young adult volunteers for service in the U.S. and abroad. Some of the highlights include: A new Middle Governing Body Commission will be established so that synods and presbyteries will have the opportunity to enter into new relationships with each other so that they can divide or unite in new configurations as they deem appropriate for shared mission. Also, a comprehensive report on the Middle East was approved. The Final Report and the Minority Report from the Special Committee to Study Issues of Civil Union and Christian Marriage will be sent out for study by the wider church, and the definition of marriage as between "a man and a woman" is maintained. During conversations surrounding such difficult issues as peace in the Middle East, ordination standards and declining membership and mission funding, commissioners and advisory delegates prayed and sang together, witnessing to their unity in Christ.

Vice-Moderator
Rev. Rod Castro
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The General Assembly has voted to send a number of amendments to the constitution to the presbyteries for their "yes" or "no" vote. Please remember that when the GA forwards these proposed amendments to the presbyteries, a majority of the presbyteries must vote "yes" in order for the proposed change to become a part of our Book of Order. We are sure that there will be some proposed amendments over which you will rejoice, and some which may raise questions or concerns for you. The General Assembly will forward to the presbyteries a number of proposed amendments, but among them, we think the following two amendments might particularly catch your attention. The first recommends adoption of a revised Form of Government which would provide

for less structured, more flexible rules to replace portions of the “G” section of our current Book of Order. The current conversation about ordination standards continues, and the General Assembly will also forward to the presbyteries a proposed amendment which would change the wording in G-6.0106b, focusing ordination examinations on the individual calling, gifts, preparation and suitability of a candidate for the responsibilities of the particular office. It calls for joyful submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life. The General Assembly has voted to send to the Presbyteries the Belhar Confession, for inclusion in the Book of Confessions. This will require a two-thirds vote for approval.

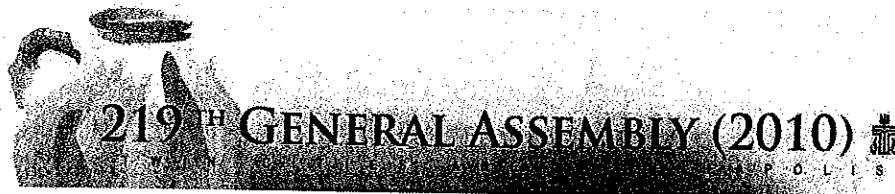
Please find attached several FAQ sheets from the Office of the General Assembly which address some of the issues dealt with at the 219th General Assembly, and provide links for finding more information for study and reflection. You can find a downloadable version of the Assembly in Brief at www.pcusa.org/ga219, which you may want to use in whole or in part as a bulletin insert or in your church newsletter.

The 219th General Assembly is forwarding much for our consideration this year. We are planning to begin facilitating discussions about the possible amendments to our constitution in the fall, and anticipate that the voting on these amendments may very well be spread out over more than one presbytery meeting. It is our prayer that as the Presbytery of Utah considers the issues critical to our denomination, that we will do so with grace, wisdom, humility and appreciation for our brothers and sisters in Christ and their diverse viewpoints.

Yours in Christ,

Reverend Laura Stellmon,
Executive Presbyter

Reverend Al Hammond,
Stated Clerk



Civil Union and Marriage Issues Questions and Answers

What did the General Assembly do? What has changed?

The General Assembly approved both the Final Report and the Minority Report of the Special Committee to Study Issues of Civil Union and Christian Marriage and ordered they be sent out for study by the wider church. The vote was 439 in favor, 208 against, with 6 abstentions.

By this action (sending both reports for study) the Assembly maintained the definition of marriage as "a man and a woman." With the action to send the reports for study, no change has occurred, or is pending.

What does it mean?

The Special Committee Report provides descriptive material on the historical and theological aspects of marriage, as well as a look at current laws on same-gender partnerships and their children, and the place of same-gender covenanted relationships in the Christian community. They commend to the church their covenant, "Those Whom God Has Joined, Let No One Separate" as a guide for Presbyterians to come together to discuss difficult issues when there is disagreement. The Minority Report, also approved for study by the Assembly, concludes that Scripture is clear that marriage is between a man and a woman only and does not support any kind of sexual behavior outside marriage. The minority report also contains a covenant for the wider church to use.

What next?

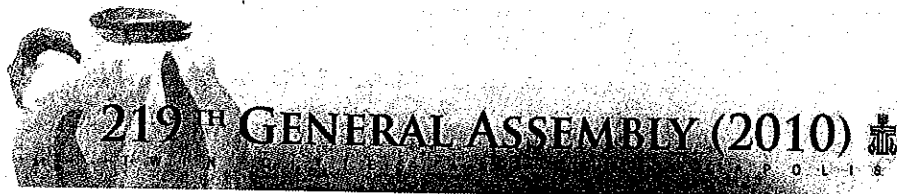
The Special Committee Report and the Minority Report will be prepared for distribution as one document to the wider church.

By sending both reports to the wider church, it is the hope of the Assembly that Presbyterians will find helpful background information on civil unions and marriage, as well as material to help individuals and groups remain together as they work through these difficult issues.

Where can you learn more?

Majority report: <http://www.pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=3333&promoID=168>

Minority report: <http://www.pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=3335&promoID=169>



New Form of Government Questions and Answers

What happened? What changed?

The General Assembly voted to recommend a revised Form of Government to the presbyteries with 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 -- 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.

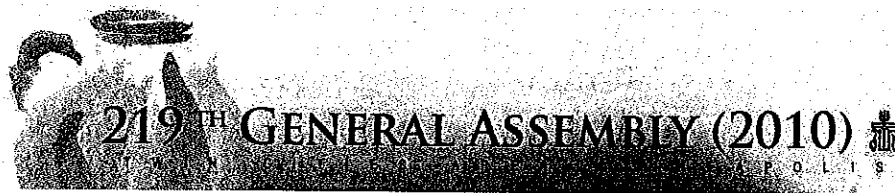
What's next?

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 <http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=2263&promoID=99>.

A formatted version will be developed and made available online and in hard copy.



The Middle Governing Body Commission Questions and Answers

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?

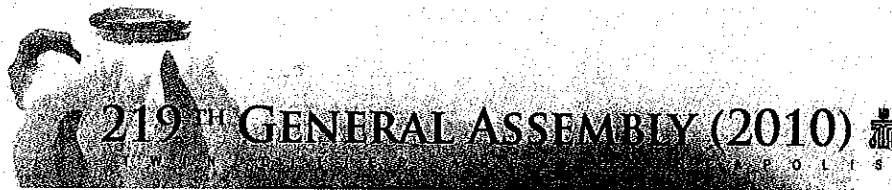
Presbyteries and synods wishing to realign their structures or boundaries may request such actions from the commission and make those changes without having to wait until the 220th General Assembly (2012) for approval. The commission will also supervise the work of the Special Committee on Administrative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



Actions regarding the Middle East Questions and Answers

What did the Assembly do?

The General Assembly approved a comprehensive report on the Middle East – its first since 1997. The paper calls for:

- An immediate cessation of all violence, whether perpetrated by Israelis or Palestinians;
- The reaffirmation of Israel's right to exist as a sovereign nation within secure and internationally recognized borders;
- The end of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories;
- An immediate freeze on the establishment and expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, and on the Israeli acquisition of Palestinian land and buildings in East Jerusalem;
- And many other steps toward peace in the region.

The General Assembly also approved the report of the Mission Responsibility through Investment (MRTI) committee, which:

- Provides an update on all corporations that MRTI has engaged as a result of the 2004, 2006 and 2008 General Assemblies;
- Acknowledges that "Caterpillar has in many ways provided positive leadership to its community, its state, and the nation. It has donated considerable resources and equipment in support of local development and disaster relief at home and overseas. It has significantly improved workplace safety, acted aggressively to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and pursued environmental conservation within its production processes. In recognition of these accomplishments, Caterpillar has been listed for seven consecutive years in the Dow Jones Sustainability World Index";
- Strongly denounces Caterpillar's continued profit-making from non-peaceful uses of a number of its products on the basis of Christian principles and as a matter of social witness;
- Calls upon Caterpillar to carefully review its involvement in obstacles to a just and lasting peace in Israel-Palestine, and to take affirmative steps to end its complicity in the violation of human rights.

What does this mean?

Coming into the 219th General Assembly (2010), few thought that agreement on issues relating to the Middle East would be possible. Diverse perspectives divided Presbyterians from each other, and from the Jewish community. However, during the committee deliberations and again in the plenary session, through God's grace, a place of broad consensus was found -- common ground for continued peacemaking work in Israel/Palestine.

The General Assembly rejected immediate divestment from Caterpillar in favor of continued corporate engagement with Caterpillar and other companies profiting from the sale and use of their products for non-peaceful purposes and/or the violation of human rights.

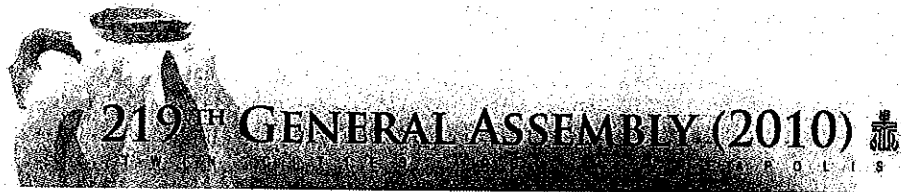
What's next?

A Monitoring Group for the Middle East will be formed to assist the appropriate General Assembly Mission Council offices and the Middle East staff team in monitoring progress and guiding actions to ensure adequate implementation of policy directions approved by this General Assembly. MRTI will continue to engage Caterpillar, and other companies, in relation to particular actions whereby the company profits from "non-peaceful action" of their products.

Where can I find out more?

<http://www.pcusa.org/middleeastpeace>

<http://www.pcusa.org/mrti>



Ordination Standards Questions and Answers

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 2010.

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; G-14.0450) 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.

Where can I get more information?

<http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=2309>