

Same-sex marriages are now permitted by pastors in PCUSA

By Paula R. Kincaid
The Layman

DETROIT, Mich. – The 221st General Assembly passed two measures on June 19th, to allow same-sex marriages in the Presbyterian Church (USA).

The General Assembly voted first to approve an Authoritative Interpretation (AI) of the constitution that would give Presbyterian pastors discretion to conduct same-sex ceremonies in states where the practice is legal. The vote on business item 10-03 was 61 percent (371) in favor and 39 percent (238) against. It is now the rule of law in the PCUSA and will not be affected even if the amendment fails in a majority of presbyteries.

The assembly also voted to approve an amendment to the *Book of Order* that would change the definition of marriage from “a woman and a man” to “two people.” The vote was 429 (71 percent) to 175 (29 percent).

It will now be sent to the denomination’s 171 presbyteries for ratification, and if approved by 86 of the presbyteries, it would be part of the PCUSA constitution by this time next year (2015).

The assembly did approve an amendment to the first paragraph of the proposed change to the definition of marriage so that what will be sent to the presbyteries for approval reads – “Marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being of the entire human family. Marriage involves a unique commitment between two people (traditionally between a man and a woman) to love and support each other for the rest of their lives. The sacrificial love that unites the couple sustains them as faithful and responsible members of the church and the wider community.”

Tension between the AI and constitution

During the assembly debate on the AI, concerns were raised about having an Authoritative Interpretation of the denomination’s consti-

Read the PLC statement repudiating GA action on marriage, page 4

Find sample protest letters for members and sessions, page 14

In this issue ...

Membership in PCUSA declines 10% in 2 years	2
PCUSA’s social witness policy advocates for higher taxes.....	3
Congressman expresses disappointment in PCUSA.....	4
Did Joseph wear a ‘princess dress?’	6
Stay(ing) put in Los Ranchos Presbytery for now.....	7
College prof demits PCUSA ordination.....	8
PCUSA official calls ECO ‘ethically questionable’	10

General Assembly orders divestment

By Alan F. H. Wisdom
The Layman

DETROIT, Mich. – The Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assembly has decided to divest the denomination’s holdings in three corporations that do business with the Israeli military. The June 20 vote to divest from Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard, and Motorola Solutions was a narrow 310-303. The three companies were targeted because their products, construction equipment, biometric scanners, and cell phones, respectively – are used by Israel in maintaining its military presence on the West Bank.

Within minutes of the assembly vote, reactions came from major Jewish organizations. “The PCUSA leadership is facilitating the delegitimization of Israel in the guise of helping Palestinians,” charged Rabbi Noam Marans of the American

“Let’s arrange a bus tour for [Presbyterians] in the region. Let them go to maybe Syria, Lebanon, Iraq. I would give two pieces of advice, though: one, make sure the bus is an armored bus, and two, don’t say you are Christian.”

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in response to the GA’s action on divestment

(Read more comments on page 15)

Membership in PCUSA declines 10% in 2 years

By Paula R. Kincaid
The Layman

While the decline wasn't as big as 2012, the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s reported membership loss in 2013 is the second largest membership loss the denomination has experienced since 1974.

According to the 2013 statistics for the PCUSA, the denomination lost 89,296 members in 2013 bringing the total membership to 1,760,200. That's down 4.83 percent from 2012's total membership of 1,849,496.

The 2012 decline was the largest since 1973 when the PCUSA lost 139,882 members. The 2013 decline, though less than 2012, is still the second largest decline since 1974. The denomination lost 100,762 members that year. (For PCUSA membership and losses during 1960-2013, visit <http://tinyurl.com/ppabzxp>)

In a news release from the Office of the General Assembly, PCUSA Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons said, "Yes, the numbers reflect a decrease in active members in the denomination, but the numbers also illustrate fewer losses than the previous year. The membership declined by 89,296 in 2013, compared to 102,791 in 2012.

"We are meeting the challenges we have had and it's showing," he said. "And, our decline in total congregations is holding fairly steady."

Many of the members who have left did so when their congregation was dismissed from the denomination. The PCUSA acknowledges a total of 148 churches and 165 ministers were dismissed in 2013.

That's 38 more churches and 39 more ministers dismissed in 2013 than in 2012.

Carmen Fowler LaBerge, president of the Presbyterian Lay Committee, points out that "those numbers do not account for churches that disaffiliated nor those situations where the presbytery sided with a minority of the membership and declared it the true church. There are several more congregations that left the PCUSA in 2013 that are not accounted for in these statistics. But the PCUSA does not acknowledge that those churches are gone."

The official statistics released by the Office of the General Assembly show 10,038 PCUSA churches in 2013, down from 10,262 in 2012.

LaBerge says, "It is important to remember

YEAR	TOTALS	CHANGE	pct change
2006	2,267,118	-46,544	-2.05%
2007	2,209,546	-57,572	-2.61%
2008	2,140,165	-69,381	-3.24%
2009	2,077,138	-63,027	-3.03%
2010	2,016,091	-61,047	-3.03%
2011	1,952,287	-63,804	-3.29%
2012	1,849,496	-102,791	-5.26%
2013	1,760,200	-89,296	-4.83%

that more than half of those 10,262 churches have fewer than 89 members and no installed pastor. We won't know the full story until the PCUSA Research Services finishes crunching the numbers. But we can confirm that the trend continues in a long-term negative direction. Revival is needed."

Parsons did note that the number of churches does not reflect any new church developments, new immigrant fellowships or other worshipping communities.

Fewer professions of faith, baptisms

The statistics also show there were fewer gains by professions of faith and baptisms in 2013 than in 2012.

In the 17 and under category, 14,905 joined the church through profession of faith, reaffirmation and restoration, while in the 18 and over category, the number was 27,601. That's down 1,488 and 3,844 respectively.

Children's baptisms were down 1,933 to total 17,929 in 2013, while adult baptisms totaled 4,583, down 1,546 from 2012.

LaBerge finds those numbers "troubling." She said, "28,734 PCUSA Presbyterians died in 2013. But PCUSA churches only baptized 17,929 children and 4,583 adults. That alone is a net loss of 6,222 members. That is simply not sustainable. The PCUSA cannot rely on so-called natural evangelism to refill its pews. She must re-engage the first Great End of the Church which is the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind."

It's not just the pews that are lighter, it's also the offering plates.

Both contributions and expenses showed a decline from 2012 figures. Contributions decreased by \$61,988,095 in 2013. Total contributions in 2013 were \$1,848,807,540 and in 2012, \$1,910,795,635.

Expenditures also showed declines – except in three areas: Local mission saw an increase of \$1,855,462; other mission an increase of \$5,642,335, and investment expenditures, \$391,772.

GA wants everyone safe by disarming private citizens

By Carmen Fowler LaBerge
The Layman

DETROIT, Mich. – The female ruling elder who presented the commissioner's resolution that became a part of the General Assembly action on gun control advocacy said that she lives in "the safest place in America." Her desire is for everyone to feel as safe where they live as she feels in her home. The problem then is not guns or the ammunition for those guns. The problem is that most people don't live on highly affluent islands that keep them secure from interaction with the American populace.

In her speech advocating that the PCUSA put the full force of its advocacy behind efforts to curb gun violence by eliminating private gun ownership she admitted, "We may not be able to get the guns back from the millions of Americans who own them, but we can keep them from getting ammunition."

Her idea was presented as a commissioner's resolution, and was ultimately incorporated into the language adopted by the assembly in its action on item 09-07.

Although it was argued that "this is in no way intended to infringe on the rights of law-abiding gun owners but to reduce gun violence," the PCUSA's newly enhanced policy is going to feel like infringement on all responsible gun owners.

Advocacy for legislative change at local, state and national levels now includes:

- opposition to "legislation that exempts gun manufacturers and marketers from legal liability and/or financial accountability for the medical and security costs of predictable gun misuse ...;"
- opposition to "stand your ground and other legislation that may entitle gun owners to shoot before taking alternative measures ... in perceived defense of persons or property;"
- opposition to "legislation designed to permit and encourage the carrying of weapons in all areas of life, including houses of worship..."
- "advocate that federal and state governments enact legislation to regulate ammunition."

The 10,000-plus churches in the PCUSA are being "strongly encouraged" by their General Assembly to prominently display signs that prohibit carrying guns onto their property.

Little attention was paid to commissioners who raised concerns about the impact the "comprehensive approach" would have on ranchers and hunters or how advertising that Presbyterian churches are "gun free zones" might make them "soft targets."

PCUSA's social witness policy advocates for higher taxes

By Carmen Fowler LaBerge
The Layman

DETROIT, Mich. – In its approval of “Tax Justice: A Christian Response to a New Gilded Age,” the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) seeks a re-write of the U.S. tax code to make it expressly “progressive, transparent, sustainable and adequate.”

Chris Iosso, Presbyterian Mission Agency staffer and an ordained PCUSA minister who continues to accept his own annual tax-free ministerial housing allowance as evidenced by his 2014 terms of call approved May 20 on the consent agenda of Hudson River Presbytery, is the chief architect of the plan. Notably, this particular tax avoidance measure that benefits all active and retired clergy is not recommended for reform.

The reforms instead seek to target individual tax deductions with the goal of “capping benefits less needed by high-income individuals and families.” According to the PCUSA, those include:

- mortgage interest deductions
- 501(c)3 charitable contributions deductions
- 501(c)4 charitable contributions deductions
- exclusion of capital gains on home sales
- property tax cap for senior citizens
- deductions for state taxes and municipal bond interest, for “high net worth households.”

The mortgage interest deduction is targeted because it “privileges those who borrow the most” and “should be capped at a level that has a meaningful relationship to average home costs,” which the PCUSA now defines as reflecting



“reasonable housing needs rather than luxury market subsidies.”

Charitable contributions are targeted because they are “only deductible by the approximately 25 percent of taxpayers who itemize deductions.” But the report never quantifies the percentage of the PCUSA’s 1.8 million members in

that 25 percent of Americans. Nor does the report examine the potential negative impact such a revision of the tax code would have on the support of individuals for churches who depend on charitable contributions for their mission.

The PCUSA now advocates for the elimination or raising of so-called “capping” of property taxes for senior citizens because, it says, that “privileges many elders while burdening younger citizens of similar income.”

But the report fails to consider the fact that the vast majority of PCUSA members would be personally and adversely affected by raising taxes on senior citizens who own homes.

Moderating voices were drowned out by those who want to see a redistribution of wealth in this country, and the General Assembly overwhelmingly approved the measure 425-170.

The progressive “Tax Justice” report and all of its recommendations was adopted as the new social witness standard of the PCUSA by the assembly.

“Tax Justice” grows out of an Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) report approved by the 2012 General Assembly called “World of Hurt.” That document laid what Iosso calls “the theological commitments” that now find expression in the recommendations of the “Tax Justice” document. He said this now gives the PCUSA an opportunity to be “a prophetic witness” in Washington for “economic justice in our country.”

Now that the General Assembly has adopted the report, every advocacy arm of the PCUSA can be fully extended to advocate for the comprehensive public policy measures therein.

The PCUSA now seeks to “make the U.S. tax system fairer, calling it to be:”

- “more progressive, taxing those with greater wealth at higher proportions of their income, wealth, and inheritance;
- “more transparent, which includes both simplicity and accountability for all tax preferences and tax expenditures;
- “more solidarity-focused, which means reducing the use of tax expenditures, shelters and havens, and supporting more adequate international standards to reduce tax competition within and among nations;
- “more sustainable for current and future generations, which means avoiding unproductive financial and ecological indebtedness; and
- “more adequate, effectively addressing broader objectives of economic and social health than efficiency alone, such as meaningful employment, improved family life, and restored public trust. The tax system must be characterized by both efficiency in tax collection and revenue sufficient for the common good.”

FPC-Houston files lawsuit seeking clear title to property

By Paula R. Kincaid
The Layman

Just months after a congregational vote to leave the Presbyterian Church (USA) failed, the session of First Presbyterian Church (FPC) in Houston, Texas, has filed a civil lawsuit seeking clear title of its property.

The session initiated a court action on May 29, seeking to clear the title of the church property from claims by the denomination that it holds a trust interest in FPC’s property.

During the time that FPC-Houston worked with New Covenant Presbytery and its “Reconciliation and Dismissal Procedure” to leave the PCUSA, the presbytery “made it clear that it

believes that FPC owns its property for the benefit of the PCUSA. The FPC session believes it is necessary to resolve this issue once and for all – does PCUSA have any interest in FPC’s property?” According to a May 29 letter from the session to the congregation, “Clearing up property rights will honor the legacy of our past and provide stability for our future.”

The clerks of session – Jane Costello, Lesley Lilly and David McCarty – wrote that, “It’s important to stress what this lawsuit is not. FPC is not seeking to leave the PCUSA through the filing of this legal action. ... All this action seeks is a determination from the court of whether FPC completely controls the use of its property.”

The letter cites a recent Texas Supreme Court ruling which “is very favorable to local churches such as FPC and presents an historic opportunity to end a long-standing disagreement over the right of FPC to control its property.”

The court ruled that “no trust existed merely on the basis of a trust clause in the denomination’s constitution and, if any trust were found to exist, it would have to be as a result of compliance with Texas trust, property, and corporation law.

“Because FPC never agreed to place all of its property in trust for the denomination, we believe that we should be successful in this action,” the letter continued.

Presbyterian Lay Committee

Chairman/CEO

Forrest A. Norman III*

Vice chairman

Lloyd J. Lunceford*

Secretary

Joshua A. Dobi*

Treasurer

Lee H. Gery*

Board of Directors

Stephen G. Brown

Constance K. Elliott*

Robert B. Fish*

Matthew A. Johnson*

Raymond A.M. Jones

Edward A. Kappus*

Susan Mattingly

Douglas W. Meiser

Pamela Metherell

Cindy M. Pirtle

Leslee E. Washer

*Members of the executive committee

PLC staff

Carmen Fowler LaBerge

President and Executive Editor

Parker T. Williamson

Editor Emeritus

Paula R. Kincaid

Editor

Nathan D. Key

Assistant Editor

Debra S. Corley

Executive Assistant

Neena C. Tysinger

Financial Administrator

Barbara L. Redman

Operations Assistant

Subscriptions: For a free subscription to *The Layman*, call 1-800-368-0110.

E-mail Alerts: Sign up for free e-mail news alerts at www.layman.org.

PLC Board of Directors repudiates action of PCUSA General Assembly

A statement of protest by the Presbyterian Lay Committee repudiating the action of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA to redefine marriage.

The 221st General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) has approved both an Authoritative Interpretation of the Constitution and an amendment to redefine marriage. In the name of 1.8 million Presbyterians nationwide, the General Assembly has committed an express repudiation of the Bible, the mutually agreed upon Confessions of the PCUSA, thousands of years of faithfulness to God's clear commands and the denominational ordination vows of each concurring commissioner. This is an abomination.

The Presbyterian Lay Committee mourns these

actions and calls on all Presbyterians to resist and protest them. You should tell your pastor and the members of your session that you disapprove of these actions. You should refuse to fund the General Assembly, your synod, your presbytery and even your local church if those bodies have not explicitly and publicly repudiated these unbiblical actions.

God will not be mocked and those who substitute their own felt desires for God's unchangeable Truth will not be found guiltless before a holy God. The Presbyterian Lay Committee will continue to call for repentance and reform: repentance of those who have clearly erred at this General Assembly and reform of the PCUSA according to the Word of God.

Presbyterian Lay Committee
Board of Directors, June 19, 2014

Congressman expresses disappointment in PCUSA

The Layman

WASHINGTON, D.C. — On June 24, Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA) spoke on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives about recent actions taken by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA). His speech was shown on C-Span.

As part of his protest, he submitted into the Congressional record the Presbyterian Lay Committee Board of Directors' statement of repudiation for the assembly's actions on marriage. A portion of his remarks are below. The entire speech can be seen at <http://tinyurl.com/kq5swx3>.

"I rise today as a follower of Jesus and lifelong member of the Presbyterian Church USA who was deeply grieved by what transpired at last week's gathering of the PCUSA's General Assembly. I feel increasingly alienated from this rich faith tradition, ... and submit for the record a statement of protest by the Presbyterian Lay Committee Board of Directors which expresses a similar sentiment.

"... After several years of internal discussion and debate the assembly voted overwhelmingly to take a position which runs counter to the counsel of Scripture, which defines marriage as a divinely inspired joining of one man and one woman.

"It has long been clear that our culture is in the throes of a seismic shift on this issue. ...

"But perhaps most troubling is that increasingly this is happening within the church itself, which has historically served as a bulwark against the cultural



whims of the day.

"In addition to marriage, I was also troubled by the PCUSA's action on Israel. I submit for the Record a *Wall Street Journal* piece which ran yesterday regarding the PCUSA's vote to divest the denomination's stock from three American companies that do business with Israel in the West Bank citing their 'involvement in the occupation and the violation of

human rights in the region. ..."

"The denomination's action on Israel stands in stark contrast to its inaction on the persecuted church in the region. The PCUSA expressly declined to sign a recently issued 'Pledge of Solidarity and Call to Action' which more than 200 religious leaders from across the country signed onto.

"These representatives of the American church came together across ecumenical lines to pledge to do more to help beleaguered minority faith communities, foremost among them the ancient Christian communities in Egypt, Iraq and Syria. The PCUSA privately expressed concerns that this action would be perceived as an 'anti-Muslim' statement.

"The Pledge itself was carefully crafted with input from faith leaders here in the United States and throughout the region and conveyed that the time had come for the church in the West to 'pray and speak with greater urgency about this human rights crisis.' With the PCUSA's decision not to associate itself with this urgent call to action, I find myself once again out of step with my denomination in profound ways. ..."

Leaving? No. Protesting? Yes.

For the record, we (the Presbyterian Lay Committee) are not going anywhere. We are, in fact, going everywhere. More on that later. Here I will offer comment, comfort and some castigation over the actions of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

By now you know that the General Assembly did the mental and intellectual gymnastics necessary to issue an Authoritative Interpretation (AI) of the constitution that ignores the plain meaning of “one man and one woman” and now allows nearly half the ordained clergy in the PCUSA to perform same-sex marriages. Every state that allows gay marriage to be performed, PCUSA ministers may now do so and Presbyterian church property can be used for the same. The GA went on to send an amendment to the presbyteries for ratification to formally redefine marriage as between “two people,” but the horse will be fully out of the barn by the time a majority of presbyteries vote. We will certainly fight to resist passage of the amendment, but the vote will not affect the AI as it is based on the current language anyway. So, the PCUSA has a new theological and institutional position: same-sex marriage.

The GA also took action to divest its corporate holdings of three American companies whose products Israel uses in what the PCUSA deems “non-peaceful pursuits.” The backlash from the Jewish community and Israel itself has been vociferous. Our interfaith relationships have been heavily damaged. These are theologically, politically and relationally troubled waters that the PCUSA has stirred up when the hope was peacemaking.

The Social Witness policy decisions of the GA are a veritable minefield: new advocacy for progressive reforms of the U.S. tax code, the U.S. financial and political systems, U.S. drone policy, gun control including regulation of all ammunition, a controversial U.N. program on food sovereignty ... the list goes on and on. Certainly the GA did some good things, but there is no denying that these are strange days in the life of the church and growing ever more so.

The damage done by this assembly to our global relationships is yet to be seen, as are the responses of regular members hitting the door. An exodus is expected, and the GA voted to increase per capita



Commentary
by Carmen
Fowler LaBerge

by 5 cents in 2015 and again in 2016 to spread the costs over a smaller number of members. How many will leave is not known. The actions of this assembly will almost assuredly exacerbate the exodus of congregations, but the GA did nothing to smooth that path.

On page 4, you will find a statement of response by the Board of Directors of the Presbyterian Lay Committee to the actions of the PCUSA and the PLC’s recommendation of how you might respond. The proposal to stop funding a corporation that has been unresponsive to efforts by its stakeholders is to give the PCUSA a taste of its own divestment medicine. The redirecting or positive investment of your dollars to minis-

tries and missions that are aligned with classical definitions of Reformed faith are heartily encouraged. Divesting financially from corporations who purport to be an expression of the Church but do not conform to the Scriptures at the most basic of levels is a legitimate protest of that corporation’s actions. To fully divest would be to leave and some will be called to do just that. Please know this, we will seek to inform and equip you wherever you land. So, see, we’re not going anywhere, we’re going everywhere.



As you can see, *The Layman* was highly visible in the General Assembly’s exhibit hall, and its staff was busy elsewhere covering the news of the assembly for you.

Visit www.layman.org
for all the news from the
221st General Assembly, including
video reports from Carmen, news articles,
analysis and photographs.

Presbyterian Lay Committee

Raising The Standard Since 1965

Presbyterian Lay Committee
Reformation Press®
PLC Publications®
136 Tremont Park Dr., P.O. Box 2210
Lenoir, NC 28645
(828) 758-8716 • (800) 368-0110
Fax: (828) 758-0920
E-mail: laymanletters@layman.org

Mission Statement

The mission of the Presbyterian Lay Committee is to inform and equip Christians to share the Biblical faith by proclaiming Jesus Christ alone as:

- The Way of salvation.
- The Truth of God’s Word.
- The Life of discipleship.

Objectives

1. To provide reliable information and resources concerning significant issues confronting Presbyterians and the Church Universal, thereby equipping and empowering faithful congregations and leaders to fulfill the Great Commission in the 21st century.

2. To inform and equip Presbyterian congregations and leaders concerning the urgency for greater emphasis on the teaching of the Bible as the authoritative Word of God and regular Bible study and prayer.

3. To inform and equip Presbyterian congregations and leaders concerning the urgency of presenting Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior through preaching, teaching and witnessing, with evangelical zeal, as the primary mission of the Church.

4. To inform and equip individual Christians in Presbyterian denominations to engage the ethical and moral issues in cultural, economic and political affairs as Christ’s active disciples.

The PLC is a member – and affirms the respective statements on mission, ethics and accountability – of the Evangelical Council on Financial Accountability and the Evangelical Press Association. It also is a member of the Presbyterian Renewal Network and the Common Ground Christian Network.

Did Joseph wear a ‘princess dress?’

By Paula R. Kincaid
The Layman

DETROIT, Mich. – How many Bible readers knew that Jacob gave Joseph a princess dress, not a coat of many colors? At least that was the interpretation that Annanda Barclay gave in her sermon to those gathered at the More Light Presbyterian’s National Celebration Worship Service.

The service was held June 15 at Fort Street Presbyterian Church in Detroit, as part of the activities of the Presbyterian Church (USA)’s 221st General Assembly.

Speaking of the Genesis story, Barclay referred to “our beloved Joseph, who seemed to embody the very essence of compassion ... Throughout the Biblical narrative, compassion seems to be inextricably tied to ‘the other.’”



Rainbow scarf

Joseph’s father “loved him so much that he made him a gown, which when we read 2 Samuel we learn that the gown is also a princess dress,” she said. “The same garment,” she emphasized as she waved her multicolored, knitted scarf.

The knitted scarves are given by the MLP to General Assembly commissioners and observers to be worn as a sign of their support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer issues.

When reading the text, Barclay said a question kept “popping up” in her mind: “How many times?” Her litany of questions included:

- “How many times must we as individual Christians and as members of an institutional body commit acts that deny the humanity of the other, before we become aware of our sin?”
- “How many Josephs, how much of creation, has to be placed in a dark, hollow pit, cut off from life-giving compassion and love until we get it?”
- “How many times do we act like



Barclay speaks of Joseph’s ‘princess dress.’

Joseph’s brother Reuben and disagree to the harm being done to others, but are too scared to speak up and act to stop the oppression and the suffering?”

- “How many Josephs have watched us wash our hands like Pontius Pilate so we can sell them off like Joseph’s band of brothers so we don’t have to confront their reality of oppression and marginalization?”

“When we lack compassion for ‘the other,’ we divorce them from the life-giving love and affirmation of the church and a church family, and we do this for an impressively cheap, easy and hollow gospel that is clothed in the short-lived profit of self-satisfaction,” she said.

Compassion, Barclay said, is not a single issue. “We must remember and hold on to that truth, especially this week at General Assembly because the ‘other’ bears the face of God. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people are not a single issue.”

Agreeing that marriage was important, she also spoke of other LGBTQ issues that need to be addressed:

- “Yes, marriage is important, but also is the horrible rate of queer poverty.”
- “Yes, marriage is important, but so is healthcare, which especially impacts those who identify as trans- and gender-queer.”
- “Yes, marriage is important, but so is racism, which is still ingrained in the LGBTQ movement and the church. Look around you all. Look around,” she said to the mostly white crowd.
- “Yes, marriage is important, but queer youth and adult suicides have not decreased.”

GA approves synod reduction

By Nathan Key
The Layman

DETROIT, Mich. – Commissioners for the 221st General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) gave their approval to the report of the Mid-Council Commission 2 (MCC-2) calling for the reduction of synods after voting down three substitute motions.

The assembly voted 449-128 to accept the report, which was amended by the Mid-Councils Issues Committee to call for a reduction to no more than 10-12 synods instead of eight, as proposed originally.

The Mid-Councils Issues Committee went through seven different motions to amend the opening recommendation for Business Item 05-04 during a lengthy meeting June 17, finally voting 65-1 to make the recommendation for GA approval during the June 20 plenary session at the Cobo Center.

“Each of us recognized that maybe it would be easier to do nothing, but our current synod structure is not serving our congregations,” said Courtenay Wilcox, moderator of the Mid-Councils Issues Committee. “We see hope for the future of the church in this report.”

Wilcox added a reading from Jeremiah 29:11 in reference to such hope.

Jim Wilson, a member of MCC-2, noted that both commissions (MCC-1 created in 2010 and MCC-2 created in 2012) studied the matter with great care, and both determined a need to consolidate the current mid-council structure, with both groups voting unanimously that the status quo is not working.

In approving Item 05-04, the Mid-Councils Issues Committee rejected an overture from Homestead Presbytery asking that there be consultation before possible reorganization of synod or presbytery boundaries.

The motion was defeated 38-14 in committee, based primarily on the approval of 05-04. Thus, Wilcox asked the full assembly to disapprove the item.

“We found the overture to be redundant, and we answered that overture with our response to 05-04,” she said.

The assembly agreed, voting with red flags raised in support of the motion to disapprove.



The Mid-Councils Issues Committee discusses the business before it.

Stay(ing) put in Los Ranchos Presbytery for now

Nathan Key
The Layman

Five of 10 churches seeking departure from Los Ranchos Presbytery and the Presbyterian Church (USA) to ECO: A Covenant Order

of Evangelical Presbyterians are under a stay of enforcement despite meeting the requirements of the presbytery's joint solution process following remedial complaints filed by members of the presbytery.

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church (Newport Beach), Trinity United Presbyterian Church (Santa Ana), Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church (Los Alamitos), First Presbyterian Church of Westminster and Christ Presbyterian Church (Huntington Beach) all are under a stay of enforcement and will remain part of Los Ranchos Presbytery even though at least four of the congregations already have voted to accept terms of the joint solution agreements approved by the presbytery in late May and early June.

The complaints, which have been combined into one case by the Permanent Judicial Commission (PJC) from the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii, allege that the presbytery, although it followed its own "Property Policy and Procedures" when determining the joint solutions for dismissal, nonetheless failed "to protect the interests of the presbytery."

Leadership of Los Ranchos Presbytery released the following statement in regard to the complaints: "While we support the right of our brothers and sisters in Christ to file a judicial complaint we earnestly hope and trust that that matter can be quickly resolved for the greater



interest of the church."

One presbyter said, "We tried to discuss mediation, but it is clear that the complainants do not want that. They want their day in PJC."

The complaints were brought by a group known as the Kindred Spirits. While making up a small percentage of the presbytery, the group is being vocal about its opposition to the joint solutions that have been approved to grant dismissal to the churches.

"We all felt we were following the guidelines set up by the presbytery," a presbyter said. "We don't think this group is representative of everyone in our presbytery or the churches. We have no idea if there will be remedial cases brought against other churches (seeking dismissal)."

During a June 28 presbytery meeting, three more joint solution agreements were approved by the presbytery for Christ Presbyterian Church (Lakewood), Community Presbyterian Church (Long Beach) and Wintersburg Presbyterian Church (Santa Ana).

That means eight churches have had joint solutions approved by the presbytery in a month's time. At the time of *The Layman's* publication additional charges had not been filed against the presbytery for the latest dismissals.

Journey Evangelical Church in Westminster and St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Anaheim also are engaged in the joint solution agreement process. Readings for their dismissals are sched-

uled later this month.

The churches and their joint solutions include:

- Christ (Lakewood)'s 136 members, \$101,070, taking into consideration property value (\$77,000), continued tiered mission giving over two and a half years (\$13,500) and continued tiered per-capita giving (\$10,570).
- Community, 84 members, a lump sum payment of approximately \$1,113,000 upon close of sale of that property.
- Wintersburg, a Japanese-American congregation of approximately 500 members, was asked to make a lump sum payment of \$100,000. However, the presbytery waived that amount based on the Presbyterian Church's silence during World War II when 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry were imprisoned. The PCUSA adopted a resolution in 1981 saying that it should have done more to help and drafted a letter of apology.
- St. Andrew's, 926 members, \$1.7 million plus interest over a maximum of nine years.
- First Presbyterian Church of Westminster, 235 members, \$98,786 in a lump sum within 90 days of acceptance of the terms of dismissal.
- Trinity United Presbyterian Church, 1,458 members, \$982,250 over five years with an interest rate of 5 percent annually on the unpaid balance.
- The Good Shepherd, 607 members, \$240,000.
- Christ-Huntington Beach, 462 members, was scheduled to vote on the joint solution on June 29. Terms were not available at the time of *The Layman's* publication date.

221st GA approves the Confession of Belhar

By Elizabeth Broschart
The Layman

DETROIT, Mich. – Commissioners to the 221st General Assembly voted to send the Confession of Belhar for presbytery approval, with 86 percent of the commissioners voting in favor. If approved by a 2/3 majority of the presbyteries, Belhar will be added to the *Book of Confessions* at the 222nd General Assembly in 2016.

Quinn Fox, moderator of the Theological Issues and Institutions and CE, introduced the overture to the General Assembly commissioners. "The Belhar Confession comes to us at a time when the church is facing a critical time in our history. We are rent apart from division and schism, and we have not confessed the racism

that is part of our own history. This confession is a profound statement on unity, reconciliation and justice. The committee believes that it comes as a word of God for this particular time and place in the PCUSA."

Commissioners' questions focused on the committee recommendation not to include the accompanying letter written by the special committee.

Fox answered by saying, "We spent a good part of Tuesday [June 17] afternoon talking about various aspects. The summary statement is that the committee felt for various reasons that the letter might get in the way and provide reasons to not be for it (The Belhar Confession)."

When asked if the letter would ever be seen

again, the moderator said, "It appears in the online study materials and will continue to be available. However, the accompanying letter will not be sent with the amendment materials prepared for presbyteries, and it will not be included in the *Book of Confessions* if approved at the presbytery level."

The Belhar Confession was first adopted by the mixed-race body of the Dutch Reformed Mission in South Africa in 1986. It has been adopted as a confession also by the Reformed Church in America.

The PCUSA attempted to admit it to the *Book of Confessions* following the 2010 General Assembly, but it fell short of the 2/3 majority for ratification in the presbyteries.

Heath Rada elected 221st GA moderator

By Nathan Key
The Layman

DETROIT, Mich. – Heath Rada was chosen and installed as moderator for the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s 221st General Assembly, but not without a taxing selection process brought on by a lack of Internet use and the need to vote by paper ballot.

Rada, a member of the General Assembly's Presbyterian Mission Agency Board (PMAB), was endorsed by the Presbytery of Western North Carolina. He was selected by commissioners to serve as moderator for the remainder of the GA and the next two years.

"I cannot thank you enough for the faith you have placed in me tonight," Rada said. "I will do my best. We will give you everything we have to show the love we have for the PCUSA and Christendom around the world."

Larissa Kwong Abazia was tabbed as vice moderator during the June 14th plenary session at the Cobo Center. She currently serves as pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Forest Hills in Queens, N.Y., part of Presbytery of New York City.

The tandem succeeds Neal Presa and Tom Trinidad as the public faces of the PCUSA.

Rada, a ruling elder from Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church in Asheville, N.C., garnered 52.4 percent of the vote, capturing 331 of the 631 votes cast.

Rada's choice as moderator came from a field that also included John Wilkinson, pastor of Third Presbyterian Church in Rochester, N.Y. (endorsed by Presbytery of Genesee Valley), and Kelly Allen, pastor of University Presbyterian Church in San Antonio, Texas (endorsed by Mission Presbytery).

Wilkinson earned 24.9 percent of the ballot (157 votes), and Allen had 22.7 percent (143).

Rada, who marched with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and dined with Desmond Tutu, spoke of being truthful and respectful within the church, overlooking political differences and a need to create ego challenges through seeking credit.

"In too many instances we feel entitled and forget about the truth," he said, making a reference to a T-shirt he saw that had the slogan "Jesus loves you, but I'm His favorite," on it. "We need to get rid of that message. We need to embrace taking off that T-shirt. If we do, I see important and exciting opportunities for

our church."

Speaking on the matter of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) persons in the church, Rada said, "We need to get beyond the fact that we need to label people. We need to focus

on the needs of people. We have a glorious opportunity to move beyond being identified with anything that sets us apart instead of bringing us together."

In regard to congregations leaving the PCUSA, Rada noted a need to seek common ground in a gracious manner even when looking at things differently.

"I believe in family. We need to find ways to disagree but still live together as a family," he said. "If it gets to the point we cannot, we need to be gracious and loving, and celebrate our brothers and sisters."

Internet issues at the Cobo Center forced General Assembly officials to resort to the use of hand-held clickers by advisory delegates and commissioners to cast votes, thus slowing the process. Numerous test trials were conducted to determine if the system was working properly, all in an attempt to forgo the use of paper ballots.

Following comments from each of the candidates and a 45-minute question-and-answer period, one final test of the clickers was conducted to determine if they were revealing a true reflection of the full body of commissioners.

When the test did not reveal such a number, Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons recommended that advisory delegates vote by clicker with paper ballots used by commissioners. But even that did not work. Results from the delegate vote popped up on the large video screens that showed totals from the 2012 moderator election.

So, to address that hiccup, delegates raised their red cards to advise commissioners, leading to the vote that Rada won on the first ballot.



Rada

College prof demits PCUSA ordination

The Layman

Rev. Dr. James R. Edwards, a professor at Whitworth University in Washington, has sent a letter to his presbytery stating that because he "must obey God rather than man," he must demit his ordination as a teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church (USA).

His reasoning: "The action of the 2014 General Assembly to permit same-sex marriages by ministers of the PCUSA and to redefine marriage as a covenantal relationship between 'two people' rather than between a man and a woman places the PCUSA in irreconcilable conflict with both Scripture and its confessional tradition. As a consequence of this action, I can no longer endorse or be governed by the polity of the PCUSA."

Edwards sent his letter to the Presbytery of the Inland Northwest less than two weeks after the PCUSA's 221st General Assembly approved both an Authoritative Interpretation of the constitution and an amendment of it which resulted in allowing PCUSA pastors to perform same-sex marriages in states where it is legal.

The General Assembly decision to allow pastors discretion to perform "any such marriage they believe the Holy Spirit calls them to perform" separates the Holy Spirit from the Word, to which the Spirit bears witness, and from the life of the believing community, through which the Spirit bears witness. ... In condoning same-sex marriage and redefining marriage the General Assembly of the PCUSA has heard another voice regarding gender and marriage than the univocal voice of Scripture and tradition, and in its decision to embrace that voice it has chosen to follow another lord than the one and only Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ. An ecclesial body that turns from its orthodox heritage and teaches its members to do the same can no longer command, nor does it deserve, allegiance from the faithful. What the Apostle Peter said to the Sanhedrin I must say to a denomination that has substituted an alien anthropology for a Biblical and Christian anthropology: 'I must obey God rather than man' (Acts 5:29)."

He concluded by saying that his letter was not "a renunciation of the presbytery or its members, whom I honor as faithful servants of Christ. Nor do I intend this letter to be a renunciation of my original ordination vows, which I have endeavored to uphold since my ordination on October 2, 1971. This letter is, rather, a renunciation of the decision of the 2014 General Assembly, and the status to which it would oblige me, which would necessarily require me to disavow the integrity of my original ordination vows. I therefore, regretfully, demit my ordination as a teaching elder in the PCUSA."

Transform world, educate a child

By Nathan Key
The Layman

DETROIT, Mich. – The late Nelson Mandela once said, “Education in the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.” The Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA) is relying on the truth of that statement in its attempt to evoke change on a global scale.

Taking note that education is the gateway out of poverty and the transformation of lives, PMA and the Office of Compassion Peace and Justice have partnered on a joint venture called “Educate a Child, Transform the World.” The initiative is a coordinated effort to improve the quality of education for one million children in the United States and around the world by 2020.

The General Assembly gave the initiative its approval.

Frank Dimmock, Poverty Alleviation Catalyst for PMA, noted that three areas of focus for the church are: eliminating poverty, especially for women and children, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ and reducing cultures of violence. Education is the pathway to accomplishing all three.

“This is a joint effort, nationally and internationally, to reach out,” Dimmock said during a luncheon for the Educate a Child, Transform the World initiative. “The challenges are plenty, and we must work together to make a collaborative impact on education.”

Those attending the luncheon heard presentations from Timothy Nyasulu and Jan Sullivan about efforts already under work in African nations to address educational concerns.

Nyasulu, moderator of the Church of Central Africa Presbytery and Synod of Livingstonia, explained the challenges faced in the countries of Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe as he explained the need for a program such as Educate a Child, Transform the World.

He spoke of an insufficient number of teachers in too few and insufficient schools located in areas with water and sewer issues. He also mentioned a lack of housing for teachers and limited resources for special needs students.

But plans are in the works to address those needs. Already, work is being done to achieve more community involvement, promote the education of girls, provide teacher training,



establish resource centers and libraries, and plan building renovation programs for schools and teacher housing.

Sullivan shared similar scenarios in Congo, noting that partnerships are being developed to help provide the education needed for a transformative effect. Part of that is advocacy for school funding from large agencies here and abroad.

“Together we can provide Christ-centered education for all students,” she said. “We have to stress the importance of teaching our children so they will continue to carry His love and message to the world.”

The Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, director of the Presbyterian Office of Public Witness, noted that the education challenges facing the United States are real. “It is sad that in this country we have to face that reality,” he said. “But one person can make a difference. What we have to learn in our churches is that we can come together but first we have to bring our own willingness.”

He went on to say that the church needs to be standing alongside educators, letting children know they believe in them, that they are worth something and can be transformers of the world.

“We need to remind our children that we have a Lord and Savior that has carried us and will carry them,” he declared. “Our children should be able to learn because the church of Jesus Christ and the PCUSA have made a way. God has provided the resources.”

Living Missionally Initiative approved

By Elizabeth Broschart
The Layman

DETROIT, Mich. – The “Living Missionally” recommendation from the Committee on Congregational Vitality was presented on the floor of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) following its approval on the consent agenda.

The assembly was reminded that “for nearly 200 years, the Presbyterian church has served as one of the greatest forces for mission in the world. The church is called to minister to the immediate needs and hurts of people.” The *Book of Order* states: “In the life of the congregation, individual believers are equipped for the ministry of witness to the love and grace of God in and for the world. The congregation reaches out to people, communities, and the world to share the good news of Jesus Christ, to gather for worship to offer care and nurture to God’s children, to speak for social justice and righteousness, and to bear witness to the truth and to the reign of God that is coming into the world” (G-1.0101).

The assembly approved the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board’s four recommendations to facilitate mission involvement and to ensure that tangible metrics are in place to measure the success of the church’s efforts as they seek to live missionally:

1. Acknowledge the Presbyterian Church (USA)’s historic commitment to joining Christ’s mission in local and global communities.

2. Encourage congregations, mid-councils, and the Presbyterian Mission Agency to join intentionally in God’s mission to transform our world and address root causes of societal injustices by following Christ’s example of service through faith, hope, love and witness.

3. Launch a churchwide initiative that will inspire, equip and connect Presbyterians to continue to go beyond the walls of their congregations and increase their engagement in service to their communities and the world.

4. Direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency to develop tangible metrics to determine success and impact and report back to the 222nd General Assembly (2016), sharing progress made and identifying strategies for deeper engagement in 2016–18.

Commissioner Gary Catterson of John Knox Presbytery commented, “This is who we are and what we are called to do.” Phil Hamilton of Greater Atlanta Presbytery said, “This will do more for the vitality of the church than anything else we could do. But, it’s important to remember that we are doing this for Christ and not for the church. This needs to be made known. Saying we do this in the name of our Lord and Savior is so important.”

PCUSA official calls ECO ‘ethically questionable’

Commentary By Carmen Fowler LaBerge
The Layman

The question of the graciousness of so-called “gracious dismissal policies” is now being tested nationwide.

In Los Ranchos Presbytery five churches were dismissed in May after satisfying every requirement of the presbytery’s process. Remedial charges were then filed with the synod in all five cases alleging that the presbytery did not sufficiently defend the interests of the denomination. (See article, page 7.)

The Los Ranchos policy was developed after the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission’s decision in *Wilbur Tom, David Hawbecker and Thomas Conrad, vs., Presbytery of San Francisco* requiring presbyteries to consider property values when dismissing a congregation.

Another three churches were dismissed June 28 and expect remedial complaints to be filed and a stay to be issued by the synod. During the debate about dismissing the churches to ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, the truth was unmasked. A presbyter alleged that the whole thing was a “hostile takeover by ECO of millions of dollars of church property.”

So much for ECO’s hopes of an amicable departure of congregations from the PCUSA. There has been an observable change in the approach that presbyteries are taking to churches seeking dismissal. And I see the dismissal door closing, and closing hard.

The clearest evidence is in Tropical Florida, which dismissed several churches very graciously and then had a dramatic change of heart.

This new hard line approach is laid out in a letter addressed to all PCUSA presbyteries from Tropical Florida Presbytery transitional presbyter, Amalie Ash. In it she admits that the approach she is advocating is both “hard” and “ungracious.” But she proceeds to lash out against ECO and calls presbyteries to resist dismissing congregations.

The letter without edit can be read at <http://tinyurl.com/nag3r5u>. Following are excerpts (also without edit) from the June 12 letter, addressed to mid-council leaders and stated clerks:

“This letter is to encourage you and your presbytery to reconsider church dismissals. The Presbytery of Tropical Florida is encouraging you to consider the long range implications of this current trend; the impact on the dismissed congregations, the challenge to replace worshiping centers ...

The ECO leadership hails from Tropical Florida. We have observed their strategy being implemented in your presbyteries. Our denomination

is being dissected by their successful well-orchestrated strategy that aids a church pastor(s) and a few key elders to project an inaccurate picture of the PCUSA and its spiritual beliefs. Pastors encourage elders to take the lead. Elders are carefully schooled to focus on inaccuracies such as the PCUSA no longer believes Jesus Christ is the head of the church. They are cautious to avoid any reference to the changes in ordination, lest they offend their progressive members. To the person in the pew, these claims are highly charged; they trust their leaders and pastors are telling the truth. Thus the trusting congregation is easily swayed.

Tropical Florida was gracious. We believed that our congregations had discerned their beliefs and that we needed to provide a gracious exit for them. It was after, that we realized the pastors were in collusion, that churches were using the same “play book”, using the same sound bites, and had a strategy to leave in mass with a voting bloc. ...

Again, please know, there are tactics and strategy to recruit our biggest and wealthiest congregations and to build their numbers from our smaller churches; and their strategy is ethically questionable. ECO is being built off the work and contributions of Presbyterians who envisioned a PCUSA presence in their communities. ECO is turning congregations from the PCUSA with false statements and convincing them that they are a better way, a more holy way ...

Leaders in the Presbytery of Tropical Florida believe that this train can be slowed down. We have learned that we do not have to let a church go, yes, the congregation can go, but they do not “deserve” their property. We now believe that the property is for the mission of this Presbytery and the PCUSA.....not for ECO...

This may sound hard, ungracious, and lacking compassion I believe we need to take a stand. A unified stand to save our denomination, a denomination that does make a difference ...

The Presbytery of Tropical Florida’s leadership is available to support any presbytery seeking support or encouragement, please feel free to contact us ...

In closing, we have the tools (Administrative Commissions, Book of Order, Trust Clause, the mission of the Presbytery, ...) to justify our reasons for the heritage of the PCUSA to remain as previous members, elders, and pastors had envisioned. It is worth the fight ... Stay Connected!

Rev. Amalie A. Ash, Transitional Presbyter
Presbytery of Tropical Florida, 954-785-2220x1
The allegations in this letter by a member of one part of the Body of Christ against another

part are significant. One wonders what impact such allegations will have on the relationships of PCUSA and ECO congregations who are currently working together in various ministries.

Dana Allin, stated clerk of ECO, responded, “As a brother in Christ I am deeply disappointed by the tone and false information that is exhibited in this letter. I am further saddened that this would come from my former executive presbyter whom I and others labored with faithfully in Tropical Florida Presbytery. I will respond further to the misrepresentations of this letter in the next few days. My prayer now is for Rev. Ash and the obvious pain she is feeling. I pray we can find reconciliation even in the midst of different denominations, I know many of my colleagues have also tried to be amicable. Further I pray that the attitude expressed by Rev. Ash does not become indicative in the PCUSA. I have worked hard to keep dismissals gracious and out of court. I have been in consistent communication with Gradye Parsons to do so. However if the attitudes expressed in this letter become pervasive we will unfortunately see more instances of civil court which is not good for any of us and our Christian witness.”

ECO’s presbytery of Florida also responded: “Without foundation or factual evidence, the email attacks the legitimacy of ECO, assails the character of its leadership, and questions the ethical conduct of pastors formerly of Tropical Florida Presbytery. The email also implies that TFP may challenge the legitimacy of two current ECO pastoral relationships in the Presbytery of Florida, relationships that are viewed by TFP as violations of the ‘reversionary clause’ of the churches’ terms of dismissal from PCUSA to ECO. We reject the history of events and the characterization of ECO leaders and members ... We believe these matters must be addressed as violations of both denominational and interdenominational relations.”

Ash replied to my request for comment with disappointment that “colleagues on the middle governing bodies site felt it was necessary to share my letter ...” She clarified that “The site is for those who are members of the Association of Executive Presbyters (AEPS), PCUSA. It is a place where we can share personal concerns and experiences relating to our positions.”

She discouraged the letter’s publication in *The Layman* saying that, “Publishing a letter from a closed web site is a violation of privacy and I do not give *The Layman* permission to publish it.” Ash does not understand the nature of material posted on the worldwide web and regrettably finds herself caught in it.

Same-sex marriages by pastors in PCUSA now permitted

continued from page 1

tution that was in direct conflict with the constitution itself, especially if the amendment to change the definition of marriage is not ratified by the presbyteries.

Commissioners were advised by the denomination's Advisory Committee on the Constitution (ACC) to "disapprove" the Authoritative Interpretation.

The ACC wrote, in part, "This overture proposes an authoritative interpretation which would allow the exercise of pastoral discretion and freedom of conscience in conducting a marriage service for any couple as permitted by the 'laws of the place where the couple seeks to be married.' It suggests an interpretation contrary to the clear statement of W-4.9000. Section W-4.9001 and related citations ... limit marriage to couples who are 'a woman and a man.' Because these statements are clear and unambiguous, they can not be interpreted in a manner that is inconsistent with their plain and ordinary meaning."

In approving the AI despite the advice of the ACC, Carmen Fowler LaBerge, president of the Presbyterian Lay Committee said that "The AI issued by the General Assembly is now the rule of law in the PCUSA. It authorizes a teaching elder to take part in any such marriage that is legal in the state where they serve. Not only can a pastor marry a same-sex couple, the AI authorizes PCUSA clergy to participate in any such marriage that the state legalizes."

She continued that "The assembly was committed to a course of action that was aligned with the express desires of certain individuals without concern that they were on the wrong side of a Holy God. ... the legitimate purpose of an AI is to clarify *ambiguous* language in the constitution. Clearly the AI issued by the 221st GA

Recommend the 221st General Assembly (2014) direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board and the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly to establish a way to bring reconciliation to the church that would involve visiting each presbytery and serving as a resource for each presbytery's discussion of these actions in congregations and the presbytery at-large and present voices of reconciliation for the unity of the church.

The language of reconciliation.



Committee 10 on Civil Unions and Marriage Issues votes not to read Scripture before debating and voting on overtures dealing with same-sex marriages.

exceeds this legitimate purpose."

During a press conference held following the assembly's vote, Fowler LaBerge asked PCUSA leadership what happened if the presbyteries did not vote in favor of the change? "What happens to the AI and with the new tensions that would be created?"

"The tension that was created in the assembly will be there until the tension is resolved," said Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons.

Reconciliation

The final piece of business from the Civil Unions and Marriage Issues committee was a request for some kind of reconciliation process.

The motion, which was approved (521-31) by the General Assembly, read:

"Direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board and the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly to establish a way to bring reconciliation to the church that would involve visiting each presbytery and serving as a resource for each presbytery's discussion of these actions in congregations and the presbytery at-large and present voices of reconciliation

Amend to insert the words "traditionally a man and a woman" after the words "two people"

"Marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being of the entire human family. Marriage involves a unique commitment between two people, [traditionally between a man and a woman,] to love and support each other for the rest of their lives. The sacrificial love that unites the couple sustains them as faithful and responsible members of the church and the wider community.

After voting to approve the Authoritative Interpretation to allow pastors in the PCUSA to perform same-sex marriages in states where it is legal, commissioners voted to insert the words "[traditionally between a man and woman]" into the new definition of marriage that will be sent out to presbyteries for ratification.

for the unity of the church."

In introducing the item, Committee Chairman Jeffrey Bridgeman from the Presbytery of Santa Barbara passionately spoke about the need for reconciliation.

"These issues have caused deep fissures and the exodus of churches and individuals," he said, "Both the church I grew up in and the community of faith of my first call have graciously left our community in the last six months. ... Far too many friends and family have broken fellowship to continue their ministries in other places ... My heart is broken."

"Our committee knew that something other than polity action needed to happen, that is why this new piece of business is before you," he said. "As a denomination we cannot continue to take steps to be more inclusive and ignore the exclusion of others. ... There must be a deliberate and concerted effort to find ways to heal this increasingly broken and fragile relationship. We need reconciliation."

GA refuses season of prayer for unwanted children

By Marie Bowen*
Presbyterians Pro Life

DETROIT, Mich. – Commissioners to the 221st General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) rejected an opportunity to spend two years reflecting on “the plight of unwanted children, born and unborn,” by a vote of 465 to 133.

The original overture from South Alabama Presbytery with a concurrence from Pittsburgh Presbytery never made it to the plenary floor.

David Mauldin, GA commissioner and overture advocate introduced the overture as a three-part plan “to move our denomination from an uncomfortable silence on abortion to compassionate, grace-filled ministry to women and children.”

Part one is a two-year reflection on the plight of children, born and unborn. “Silence stifles ministry,” Mauldin said. “Abortion is controversial. We are afraid to discuss it, and because of that, we miss ministry opportunities.”

The second part, Mauldin explained, is “to denounce the most egregious abuses by abortion providers.” The overture mentioned Kermit Gosnell by name, but there are other examples of abortion providers engaged in illegal and unsafe abortion practices and infanticide. “The church is not of one mind on abortion, but surely we can agree that it is wrong to kill a newborn with scissors, or to leave one in a metal tray to die, or to leave a woman bleeding. The church speaks out against all manner of evil. We should speak against this,” Mauldin stated.

Mauldin gave several reasons his presbytery adopted the third part of the overture asking for a special committee on abortion review. “Why do we need that?” Mauldin noted that “22 years is a long time ago, ... young people today are increasingly pro-life ... and Pro-life Presbyterians feel disenfranchised.”

Most commissioners never had an opportunity to vote on the three-part plan that flowed out of a James 1:27 call to the “pure gospel.”

The assembly also approved a moratorium on the death penalty. While every human life is valuable to God it is disturbing that the assembly spoke to protect the lives of those convicted of the most serious crimes against humanity while the innocent lives of unborn children and children unwanted by society were so devalued that even babies born alive in a botched abortion remain unprotected by the church.

Commissioners approved the production of a pastoral and educational booklet giving guidance on end-of-life issues. The booklet is to be tested with experienced pastors and chaplains, hospital and hospice physicians and nurses with a report back to the 222nd General Assembly (2016).

A Commissioners Resolution was approved directing the Office of the General Assembly to provide childcare at Portland (222nd GA in 2016) and all GAs thereafter. Another Commissioners Resolution adopted encourages presbyteries and denomination agencies to provide maternity and parental leave of at least six weeks with full pay for parents of newborns.

In a schizophrenic move the same assembly that refused to pray and reflect on children born and unborn affirmed the importance of maternal and child nutrition over the first 1,000 days of life (yes, including before birth until 2 years of age). The measure calls on Presbyterians to pray for and minister to women and children in the United States and around the world who are in the 1,000-day window.

**Marie Bowen is the executive director of Presbyterians Pro-Life (www.ppl.org). The Rev. David Mauldin, and Patricia Lee June, M.D., contributed to this report.*



YAADs line up to speak on the fossil fuel issue

GA refers motion to divest from fossil fuels

By Elizabeth Broschart
The Layman

DETROIT, Mich. – In spite of vehement opposition, the 221st Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) voted to refer the issue of divesting from fossil fuels to the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) for action and discernment in compliance with its long-standing policies by a margin of 469 to 119.

The importance of sustainable resources sparked passion in many commissioners, but particularly in the minds of the Young Adult Advisory Delegates and Theological Student Advisory Delegates, who were standing at least four deep at each of the four microphones when the question was called.

Jody Harrington, a commissioner from “deep in the heart of Texas,” expressed her frustration with the discussion by reminding the group that these fossil fuels are “the power that lights the hall where we are seated, enabled travel to Detroit, and are companies leading the way in research and seeking alternative forms using their own money. These are the companies you are calling morally repugnant. Is the church ready to characterize this entire industry on which our country runs as repugnant?”

Elizabeth Terry Dunning, chairperson of MRTI, assured the assembly that the 40-year-old committee is dedicated to social justice as an integral part of the way the church thinks about its investments, its witness, and its stewardship.

A Board of Pensions representative reminded the assembly that divesting means the denomination loses any opportunity for meaningful dialogue that will move these companies toward reconciliation of the concerns.

She also noted that the balance of the BOP portfolio is \$8.5 million. Of these funds, the BOP owns stock in 43 companies listed at carbon-tracker.org and comprises 2.15 percent of the entire portfolio.

After the vote on the overture, Commissioner Walter Jancura attempted to introduce a new motion that would include the recommendation that the General Assembly reduce their own energy consumption and encouraged the commissioners to reduce their own carbon footprint by at least 10 percent.

Moderator Heath Rada, with input from Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons, ruled that the motion was out of order but assured Jancura that the General Assembly is already committed to energy efficiency.

General Assembly orders divestment

continued from page 1

Jewish Committee. “It is a very sad day for Presbyterian-Jewish relations when church leaders from across the U.S. align with the international Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. This is an affront to all who are committed to a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

During the discussions, the motion authorizing divestment was amended to soften the anticipated blow. One amendment insisted, “This action on divestment is not to be construed or represented by any organization of the PCUSA as divestment from the State of Israel, or an alignment with or endorsement of the global Boycott, Divest and Sanctions movement.”

Another amendment reaffirmed “Israel’s right to exist as a sovereign nation within secure and internationally recognized borders.” A third amendment reiterated “PCUSA’s commitment to interfaith dialogue and partnerships with the American Jewish, Muslim friends and Palestinian Christians.”

Aiming to be ‘good stewards’

Stephen Choi from Newton Presbytery, moderator of the Middle East Issues Committee, introduced the divestment motion. Choi said it “is very holistic in its scope and nature, and divestment is only one of nine total recommendations.”

“The committee did not want the Presbyterian Church (USA) to be responsible for contributing to the devastating treatment of our [Palestinian] sisters and brothers,” according to Choi. “This is a matter of being good stewards of the gifts and money that God has entrusted to our care.” He emphasized that “a recommendation for divestment is always the last resort following years of attempting to engage with these companies.”

Also addressing the assembly before it decided the matter was Ecumenical Advisory Delegate Rifat Kassis from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land. Kassis appealed to the assembly commissioners: “Palestinians and Israelis who love peace with justice struggle to maintain hope while the wall [Israeli separation barrier] snakes through the Palestinian homeland, destroying our hope for freedom and the possibility of the two-state solution.”

“Palestinian Christians have urged everyone interested in seeking peace with justice in Israel and Palestine to divest from the occupation,”

Kassis said. “We need you to help us to keep hope alive.”

Also invited to address the assembly was Rabbi Rick Jacobs, president of the Union for Reform Judaism. Jacobs offered a choice: “You can choose partnership and engagement” with the Jewish community, “or you can choose separation and divestment.”

He said, “We oppose divestment and BDS because it undermines the two-state solution we so desperately need.”

By way of partnership, Jacobs invited PCUSA moderator Heath Rada and Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons “to join me for a meeting I will arrange next week in Jerusalem with [Israeli] Prime Minister Netanyahu to express our deeply shared concerns. “We are against settlements,” the rabbi stated. “We are for a two-state solution. But we can’t fight alone. We need each other, and if you choose partnership over divestment and BDS, together we can change the world.”

Frank Allen from Central Florida Presbytery presented a minority report that would have eschewed divestment in favor of “dialogue and relationship-building” with both Jews and Palestinians. “God’s blood children are on all sides of this conflict,” Allen said, “and the world needs a reconciled and reconciling Presbyterian Church to face the challenges of our time.”

“Divestment pressures Israel to take action without expecting a Palestinian commitment to peace,” Allen argued. “It also disregards Israel’s legitimate security concerns.” He warned that “divestment will link us to a global divestment group that does not share the aims and goals of the Presbyterian Church.”

Allen’s minority report was turned down on a 316-269 vote; however, the debate continued from the afternoon into the evening. Paul Talario of Palisades Presbytery in New Jersey remembered talking with a Palestinian shop-



A protest was held outside the Cobo convention center while the GA committees met inside.

keeper in Bethlehem who lamented, “You don’t know how it feels to be a prisoner in your own country.”

Young Adult Advisory Delegate (YAAD) Emma Warman from Baltimore Presbytery shared her conviction that, “our investment in these companies is inconsistent with our very Presbyterian values.” She added, “It hurts me to know that we invest in the tearing apart of Palestinian lives.”

“We cannot pray for peace and invest in violence,” said Elizabeth Mitchell of St. Augustine Presbytery. “We must make a prophetic statement that the PCUSA will not profit from violence against the Palestinian people.”

Jeff Bridgeman of Santa Barbara Presbytery disagreed. Divestment “is not a means of Biblical reconciliation,”

Bridgeman contended. “Divestment from Israel will become a slap in their face.” He pleaded with fellow commissioners: “Please, don’t divest. Invest. Invest in the way of Jesus. Invest in the way of reconciliation. That’s who we are.”

Monroe Swearingen of Trinity Presbytery considered divestment to be “a slap in the face to every employee” of Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard, and Motorola Solutions. Mike Fritz of Great Rivers Presbytery in Illinois, where Caterpillar has its headquarters, chimed in. He told of congregations in the presbytery that drew much of their leadership and financial support from Caterpillar workers. “Divestment has many churches thinking they would be more welcome in another denomination,” according to Fritz. Great Rivers had already lost one large congregation.

A difficult decision

Other assembly actions related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict included:

- approving a new study to reconsider PCUSA support for a “two-state solution;”
- turning down an overture to classify Israeli practices as “apartheid;”
- rejecting a call to boycott all Hewlett-Packard products;
- adopting a resolution clarifying that the controversial “Zionism Unsettled” study “does not represent the views of the Presbyterian Church (USA).” Less than a week after the assembly ended, it was announced that the study would no longer be sold on the PCUSA web site.
- refusing to endorse a discussion paper on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict produced by Chicago Presbytery.



Rifat Kassis

GA actions on same-sex marriage

Sample protest letters for PCUSA members, sessions

Letter from church member to session or pastor

Members of the session,

As a member in good standing of this congregation, I write to you with grief and anger at the recent action of our General Assembly to approve of same-sex marriage.

This action is contrary to the plain meaning of the Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testaments. It is contrary to the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the Confessions of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and it sets our denomination at odds with the overwhelming majority of Christians in the world today.

I view this action of the assembly as an accommodation to a cultural trend that is contrary to God's revealed will. I recognize that my stance is politically incorrect and puts me on the "wrong side of history," but here I stand and I can do no other.

This letter serves as notice that I will be making no further contributions until such a time as our session repudiates the actions of the General Assembly, notifies the presbytery of the stance of our church on these matters and commits to take actions that protect the conscience of members like me.

I ask the session to approve a resolution that clearly articulates:

- This church's commitment to the Bible as the authoritative, revealed, unchanging Word of God and marriage as an exclusive, monogamous covenant between one man and one woman;

- That this church will not permit its facilities be used for same-sex weddings nor will it approve of its pastors performing weddings of same-gender people;
- That the session is here forth redirecting all financial support (per capita and mission) to ministries that align with our convictions until such a time that the General Assembly repents of its action and returns to God's natural design for human sexuality as revealed at Creation, affirmed by Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

I request that the session resolution be sent to every member of the church and every church in the presbytery as well as to the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly. If the session requires additional information about the actions of the General Assembly or volunteer assistance or financial support in executing this request, I am committed to assisting you in those ways.

I am praying with you and for you as together we seek to honor Christ in these days.

Respectfully,

Signature

Name (print)

Date

Letter from church session to presbytery

The session of _____ Presbyterian Church protests the actions the 221st General Assembly in its approval of same-sex marriage.

Whereas this action is contrary to the plain meaning of the Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testaments,

Whereas this action is contrary to the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the Confessions of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and therefore contrary to our mutually agreed upon ordination standards,

Whereas this action sets our denomination at odds with the overwhelming majority of Christians in the world today,

Whereas this action is an accommodation to a cultural trend that is contrary to God's revealed will, and

Whereas we will each stand one day before the holy God and be held to account for our submitted obedience to God's Word, God's Son and God's will,

We hereby repudiate the actions of the 221st General Assembly in approving of same-sex marriage.

This resolution shall serve as notice that the duly elected and installed leadership of _____, as stewards of the financial resources of this church, will be making no further contributions to the presbytery, synod or the General Assembly of the PCUSA until such a time as the General Assembly reverses course on this matter. We are here forth redirecting all financial support (per capita and mission) to ministries that align with our convictions until such a time that the General Assembly repents of its action and returns to God's natural

design for human sexuality as revealed at Creation, affirmed by Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, we resolve that the facilities of this church shall not be used for same-sex weddings nor shall pastors associated with our church be authorized by this session to perform weddings of same-gender people.

We request that our resolution be included in the formal record of correspondence at the next meeting of the presbytery and that it be communicated by the presbytery to the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly. If the presbytery requires additional information about the actions of the General Assembly we look forward to the opportunity to address the presbytery at its next meeting about this matter.

Respectfully submitted by the members of the session of

_____ Presbyterian Church

Clerk: _____ Date: _____

Signature page for session members:

Name: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____ Date: _____

Reactions to General Assembly decisions

More reactions can be found at www.layman.org

The actions of the 221st General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) – especially on allowing same-sex marriage and divesting from three U.S. companies that do business with Israel – have caused a firestorm of comments and protests, both within the denomination and without.

Comments from various organizations and news articles include:

“Today the Presbyterian Church (USA) took two illegitimate actions that may prove in future years to be the death knell to the church as we have known it. ... As a result of these actions, the Presbyterian Church now abandons its Reformed heritage as to its organization, its belief, and its unity. To conservatives like us, the PCUSA is no longer the denomination in which we took our ordination vows or were baptized. ... We call upon the orthodox/evangelical wing of the church to have courage to protest this action by living freely and radically within the Biblical framework for marriage and sexuality, by refusing to conduct same-sex marriages, by remaining faithful teachers of the Word of God, and by defeating the constitutional amendment in your presbytery.”

The Presbyterian Coalition

“It is astonishing that proponents of redefining marriage hardly bothered to justify their innovation from the Scriptures or the confessions. How far we have come from a denomination that affirmed that ‘all [its] decisions should be founded upon the revealed will of God’ in Scripture! That affirmation still appears in the PCUSA *Book of Order*, but it seems widely to be forgotten. Amidst the sexual confusion and brokenness of our society, we Presbyterians desperately need to recover the Biblical vision of marriage. Even more, we need to recover the deep-seated Reformed conviction that it is to the Scriptures we must go to discover that vision – and all else that is necessary for Christian faith and practice. Otherwise, we are lost at sea.”

Alan Wisdom, Fellow for Marriage Issues, Theology Matters

“By overturning natural marriage the PCUSA is only accelerating its already fast-paced demise. It will become even smaller, whiter and older. Only declining denominations reject historic Christian standards and in nearly every case that rejection reinforces the decline. Who respects a church that only echoes the secular world?”

**Institute on Religion and Democracy
President Mark Tooley**

“Our elders remain steadfast in declaring, ‘As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.’ While our denomination increasingly drifts from Jesus by the book, we will, depending upon God’s grace, order our life and ministry with prayer, proclamation, and passion for Jesus – by the book. While confessing our sins against our Lord and each other, we will not affirm, condone, or cooperate with any actions of our denomination that insult God’s holiness as personified in Jesus and prescribed in Holy Scripture. When we are wrong about Jesus – by the book, we will confess and repent. When we are right about Jesus – by the book, we will remain steadfast. Please join us in praying for the knowledge, wisdom, strength, and courage to look up, stand up, speak up and act up for Jesus alone as above all others.”

A pastor of a PCUSA congregation

“Over the past ten years, PCUSA leaders have fomented an atmosphere of open hostility to Israel within the church, promoted a one-sided presentation of the complex realities of the Middle East, and permitted the presentation of a grossly distorted image of the views of the Jewish community ... (the resolution) threatens the long-standing relationship between the Jewish community and the national Presbyterian Church”

**Abraham H. Foxman
Anti-Defamation League national director**

“For the Presbyterian church to engage in something like this [divestment from companies doing business with Israel] is indefensible and abominable. And it’s based on lies, misunderstanding, or maybe as one person said, ‘disunderstanding’, because it’s misinformation that is intentional.”

Former Arkansas Governor Huckabee

“When the Middle East is fragmented in this horrible war, this savage, savage war between militant Shiites and militant Sunnis ... the only place where you have freedom, tolerance, protection of minorities, protection of gays, protection of Christians and all other faiths, is Israel.”

Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli prime minister



The 221st General Assembly’s new moderator, Heath Rada appeared on CNN to answer questions about the denomination’s decision to sell \$21 million worth of stock in companies whose products are used by the Israeli government (See story, page 1). The video of the interview can be seen at <http://tinyurl.com/msykoa9>

“A vote for divestment will cause a painful rift with the great majority of the Jewish community. If we are truly partners and you disapprove this divestment overture, I look forward to sitting with your leadership in the prime minister’s office in Jerusalem. You can choose partnership and engagement or you can choose separation and divestment.”

**Rabbi Rick Jacobs,
President of the Union for Reform Judaism**

“The PCUSA leadership is facilitating the delegitimization of Israel in the guise of helping Palestinians. It is a very sad day for Presbyterian-Jewish relations when church leaders from across the U.S. align with the international Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. This is an affront to all who are committed to a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

**Rabbi Noam Marans, American Jewish
Committee director of Interreligious
and Intergroup Relations**

“We are greatly disappointed by the vote in favor of divesting from companies doing business with Israel, a move that is out of step with the views of the majority of Presbyterians in the pews at the community level. The claim by the PCUSA that it does not support the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement is simply not reflected in this resolution and the overall tone of the discussions.”

**Rabbi David Sandmel, Anti-Defamation
League Director of Interfaith Affairs**

Farrell: Changing marriage definition predicted to negatively impact PCUSA's global mission partnerships

By Paula R. Kincaid
The Layman

DETROIT, Mich. – Speaking to the 221st General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) before it voted to allow same-sex marriages in the PCUSA, the director of Presbyterian World Mission (PWM) warned commissioners about the vote's repercussions world-wide.

The commissioners did not heed the warning.

Hunter Farrell told General Assembly commissioners that if the PCUSA's definition of marriage was changed, he believed at least 17 of the denomination's 54 global mission partners will break relations with the PCUSA.



Hunter Farrell

Another 25 global partners have told World Missions personnel that the change would cause damage to their relationship with the PCUSA, but the partner would not completely break ties with the denomination.

Farrell told both the committee that discussed marriage issues and the General Assembly, that beginning in March, PWM "began talking discretely [with mission partners] about how the change would affect our relationships," because they thought that "the assembly might ask us to comment on this issue."

Farrell said that the PCUSA's global partners have differing "understandings of homosexuality and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in the midst by local cultural traditions and their own traditions of faith."

There is a "cultural distance that separates us from our global partners," he said. "Homosexual practice is understood very differently. ... It is a criminal offense in some countries. When we speak with global partners about homosexuality we have to make sure they understand the meaning of the words we use."

Another caution for the commission-

ers was the changing landscape, he said.

Two countries – Argentina and Uruguay – have legalized same-sex marriage and two churches in

Argentina and one in Uruguay have affirmed the practice, but, he said, "There's an opposite reaction in Africa and the Middle East."

10% DISCOUNT
Presbyterian Layman
Use coupon code: LAYMAN14

The Gospel, Homosexuality, and the Future of Marriage

A Conference on Ministry in a Post-Marriage Culture

JOIN US AT THE ERLC NATIONAL CONFERENCE as we explore what the gospel means for the future of marriage and sexual identity. We'll equip you to defend marriage in the culture and strengthen marriage in the church with convictional kindness. Discover how your church can be a beacon of hope, clarity, and redemption.

OPRYLAND HOTEL, NASHVILLE • OCTOBER 27-29, 2014 • ERLC.COM/CONFERENCE

RUSSELL MOORE	ROSARIA BUTTERFIELD	DAVID PLATT	CHRISTOPHER YUAN	R. ALBERT MOHLER JR.	JIM DALY	SAM ALLBERRY