

ACTIONS OF THE FORTY-SEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA 2019

L. Roy Taylor, Stated Clerk

Dallas, Texas, Site of Forty-Seventh General Assembly, June 25-28, 2019

The Forty-seventh General Assembly of the PCA met in Dallas, Texas, in shortened format, convening Wednesday at 1:30 p.m. and adjourning Friday before noon. A total of 1,616 commissioners (1209 Teaching Elders and 407 Ruling Elders) registered, representing 827 churches from all 88 presbyteries. The theme of the Assembly, hosted by North Texas Presbytery, was “**Press on for God’s Glory.**” Ruling Elder Rick Owens was Host Committee Chairman.

Worship is an important aspect of the General Assembly. In the Wednesday Communion Service, retiring Moderator **Dr. Irwyn L. Ince Jr.** preached on “Grind on for Glory” from 2 Corinthians 4:3-6. Thursday **Rev. David Cassidy** preached on “A Brief History of the Future” from Psalm 145:1-3, and Friday **Rev. Ryan Anderson** preached on “Delusions, Meet Grace” from Revelation 3:14-22.

This year’s Assembly-wide seminar was on “**Civil Conversations: Speaking the Truth in Love.**” The topic was apropos because several controversial matters were docketed for discussion later in the Assembly. Panelists were **Dr. Irwyn Ince, Dr. Sean Lucas, Dr. Bryan Chapell,** and **Rev. David Richter.** **Stated Clerk Dr. Roy Taylor** moderated and **Rev. Joel St. Clair** facilitated the question and answer period.

Ruling Elder J. Howard Donahoe, Moderator

The PCA has a tradition of electing a minister or a ruling elder as Moderator in alternating years. This year RE J. Howard “Howie” Donahoe of Pacific Northwest Presbytery was elected Moderator. Mr. Donahoe has been a PCA Ruling Elder for thirty-two years. C. S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer were influences in his early Christian growth. He has been a commissioner to the General Assembly for the last twenty-six years. He has served as a Clerk of Session, Moderator, and Stated Clerk of Presbytery, a number of General Assembly committees of commissioners such as Review of Presbytery Records and Overtures Committee and has served on the Standing Judicial Commission of the General Assembly for twenty years. He is a graduate of the U.S. Airforce Academy and holds a Master’s degree from Arizona State University. He and his wife of thirty-four years, Debbie, have five adult children and a grandson, with another due soon. Donahoe, who is with American Airlines, skillfully piloted the Assembly through several stormy issues. See <https://byfaithonline.com/howie-donahoe-elected-moderator-of-47th-general-assembly/> for additional information about our Moderator.

Transitions in Assembly-level Ministries Leadership

- The Board of the PCA Foundation announced that they had elected RE Timothy W. “Tim” Townsend, to succeed RE Randel Stair, who has served twenty-one years as President of PCAF, during which time the assets of the foundation have grown from \$20 million to \$86.4 million.
- PCA Retirements & Benefits. announced the formation of a transition committee in August of 2018 to seek a successor to RE Gary Campbell who has served as President of RBI for twelve years and anticipates retirement. TE Jonathan Medlock is chairman of the transition committee <https://pcarbi.org/search/>.

- The Assembly elected RE Will Huss to become the Coordinator of Reformed University Fellowship on January 1, 2020, to succeed Dr. Rod Mays, who has served as RUF Coordinator 1999-2013 and provisional Coordinator since March of 2018. Mr. Huss is a graduate of Clemson University and a Ruling Elder at Clemson PCA in Clemson, SC. He is President of Trehel Construction Company, one of the largest construction firms in South Carolina.
- After his election to his twenty-second one-year term as Stated Clerk and Coordinator of the Administrative Committee, Dr. L. Roy Taylor, announced that he will retire at the adjournment of the Forty-eighth General Assembly in 2020. Nominations may be made at <https://www.pcaac.org/stated-clerk-search/>.

Progress Reports of the Ten Assembly-level Ministries

- **Administrative Committee/Office of the Stated Clerk** – A proposal to return to beginning the Assembly on Tuesday evening was approved. An overture to allow online remote voting for the Assembly was not approved. An overture to prefix or append to all Committee or Agency policy manuals a statement that the PCA Constitution takes precedence over all policies was answered in the affirmative as amended. This is already stated in the Corporate Bylaws of the PCA, Article VIII, Section I. Budgets of the ten Assembly ministries were approved.
- **Committee on Discipleship Ministries** – The 2018 Women’s Love Gift of \$115,000 to RBI launched a ministry to PCA pastors’ wives. CDM seeks to connect PCA people to resources through its conferences, events, blogs, social media, and its website <https://pcacdm.org/>.
- **Covenant College** – CC welcomed 296 new students from 36 states and 11 countries, appointed five new full-time faculty members, began renovations of The Kirk (a multipurpose building), and developed a seven-year strategic plan.
- **Covenant Theological Seminary** – The CTS Board and the Assembly answered in the negative an overture to disassociate CTS from General Assembly oversight. CTS has added two new hybrid (online and residential) degree programs, MABTS and an MA in Ministry.
- **Mission to North America** – MNA helps facilitate church planting, church renewal, and missional partnerships such as Engaging Disabilities, Metanoia Prison Ministries, Disaster Response, Chaplains Ministries, and the Unity Fund to fund minority theological education.
- **Mission to the World** – MTW has 630 long-term missionaries, serving in 95 countries, 2,279 short-term missionaries, and 703 national partners. Overture 41 regarding MTW’s “Statement on Valuing Women” was recommitted to MTW and the MTW CoC for next year.
- **PCA Foundation** – PCAF now has assets of \$86.4 million. Gifts in 2018 were \$11.8 million. 2018 distributions were \$14.4 million, with \$4.7 million to PCA churches, \$2.1 million to PCA Committees and Agencies, and \$7.6 million to other evangelical ministries.
- **PCA Retirement & Benefits** – RBI has 7,500 PCA minister and staff person retirement accounts with \$556,375,106 invested. The 2017–2018 Relief Offering and other donations to Ministerial Relief totaled \$775,254.
- **Reformed University Fellowship** – RUF has a fixed Reformed theology and a flexible methodology to reach students on various campuses. RUF ministers on 163 campuses in the USA and six campuses abroad. RUF-I ministers to international students on 16 campuses.
- **Ridge Haven Conference Centers** – RH has conference centers in Brevard, NC, and Cono, IA, which together hosted over 10,000 visitors in 2018. Brevard is a year-round ministry; the Cono center began with a two-week camp in 2018 and will expand to four weeks of camp in 2019.

Review of Presbytery Records

Two significant items were acted upon by the Assembly after considerable debate:

- A recommendation concerning the minutes of Mississippi Valley Presbytery, directed that the Presbytery be brought before the Standing Judicial Commission under *BCO* 40-5, to answer a "credible report" involving "an important delinquency or grossly unconstitutional [proceeding]," to "show what the lower court has done or failed to do in the case in question." The Assembly approved the recommendation of RPR.
- A recommendation concerning the minutes of Calvary Presbytery, regarding a Presbytery's right to forbid the preaching or teaching of a minister's stated difference with the Westminster Standards that the Presbytery had accepted as "not out of accord with any fundamental of our system of doctrine" (*RAO* 16-3.e.5.b). The Assembly found an exception of substance for Calvary Presbytery as it did in 2018.

Interchurch Relations

The Assembly heard from several representatives of other Reformed denominations and interdenominational organizations. Overture 23 from Central Carolina Presbytery (similar to Overture 2011-12 but with some additional arguments), for the PCA to leave the National Association of Evangelicals, was presented. MTW has been a member of NAE since 1973. The General Assembly joined the NAE in 1986. The IRC Permanent Committee recommended that the Assembly answer the overture in the negative. The Committee of Commissioners recommended that the Assembly answer the overture in the affirmative. The Assembly answered the overture in the negative once again.

Overtures

An overture is ordinarily a request of a Presbytery for the General Assembly to take an action. In 2019 forty-eight overtures were presented to the General Assembly. See <https://www.pcaac.org/general-assembly/overtures/> for a list of all overtures. The Assembly approved:

- Overture 4, to declare the Council on Biblical Manhood & Womanhood's "Nashville Statement" on biblical sexuality as a biblically faithful declaration.
- Overture 6, to amend *Rules of Assembly Operations (RAO)* 11 and 13 to disallow memorials regarding deceased officers.
- Overture 7, to form an ad interim study committee on domestic abuse and sexual assault. (Eight other overtures were answered by reference to this overture.)
- Overture 11, to commend RPCNA's "Contemporary Perspectives on Sexual Orientation: A Theological and Pastoral Analysis."
- Overture 18, to amend *RAO* 11-5 to prevent reference of overtures to multiple CoCs.
- Overture 42, to establish an ad interim study committee on the topic of human sexuality with particular attention to the issues of homosexuality, same- sex attraction, and transgenderism. (Three other overtures were answered by reference to this overture.)

Several overtures calling on the Assembly to reaffirm previous statements on abortion and homosexuality were ruled out of order because the outcome, whether positive or negative, changes nothing (*RONR* [11th ed.] p. 104, ll. 24-3), and therefore the previous statements remain in effect.

Four minority reports came out of the Overtures Committee. None were adopted.

The Assembly answered in the negative four overtures to allow non-ordained persons (either men or women) to serve as voting members of General Assembly Permanent Committees or Boards of Agencies

Assembly Videos

Video recordings of Assembly business sessions and worship services may be found at: <https://livestream.com/accounts/8521918/events/8720909>.

Actions on Book of Church Order Changes

Changing the *BCO* requires a majority vote of one General Assembly, the majority vote of two-thirds of the Presbyteries, and a final majority vote of a subsequent Assembly (*BCO* 26-2).

BCO amendments given final approval

- *BCO* 8-1; 8-3 regarding qualifications of Elders
- *BCO* 25-11 giving thirty-days' notice for congregation to leave the PCA
- *BCO* 35-11 regarding process for disqualifying judges who are witnesses
- *BCO* 9-3 adding nature of marriage to *BCO* as already is in Westminster Confession

BCO amendments not given final approval

- *BCO* 30-1, regarding definite suspension, that was self-contradictory;
- *BCO* 30-3 regarding indefinite suspension, that was shown lacking in specificity
- *BCO* 32-19 to allow counsel by any communing member in all levels of church courts.

BCO amendments sent down to Presbyteries for approval

- Overture 9, amend *BCO* 42-4; 43-2; 43-3 regarding method and deadlines for filing cases.
- Overture 17, amend *BCO* 32-8 to allow for video testimony by witnesses.

PCA by the Numbers

The Stated Clerk reported the following 2018 statistics to the General Assembly.

- The total number of churches increased by 4 to 1,572
- The number of mission churches increased by 11 to 355
- The number of ministers increased by 69 to 4,951
- Sunday School attendance increased by 679 to 94,349
- Total membership (communicant, non-communicant, ministers) increased by 10,057 to 384,793
- Total reported giving increased by \$33,574,188 to \$870,679,800.

In the light of the major decline of mainline denominations and the plateau or decline of some evangelical denominations, the present gradual growth of the PCA is noteworthy.

Suggested Prayer, Offerings, and Events

- Prayer for Covenant College as determined by local sessions during the month of October.
- November 2019, a Month of Prayer for Global Missions (MTW).
- A special offering for MTW Compassion Ministries on a date chosen by local sessions.
- November 3, 2019, a Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church Worldwide (MTW).
- Annual Relief Ministry Christmas Offering (PCA-RBI).
- *The Assembly approved the request that churches contribute to the Administrative Committee based on 0.35% of total tithes and offerings (excepting capital campaign projects).*
- **The Forty-eighth General Assembly will meet June 16-19, 2020, in Birmingham, Alabama.**