



The 221st General Assembly (2014)
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
June 14 – 21, Detroit, Michigan
A Brief Summary

Election of the Moderator: Ruling Elder Heath Rada from North Carolina was elected the Moderator of the General Assembly on the first ballot with 52% of the votes from a field of three candidates. He has served as President of the Presbyterian School of Christian Education in Richmond and the CEO of the Greater Richmond chapter of the American Red Cross. As his Vice-Moderator he selected the Rev. Larissa Kwong Abazia, pastor of Church of Forest Hills, a multicultural, multiethnic congregation in Queens, New York. Historically, election of a Moderator on the first ballot is not common; the last Moderator elected on the first ballot was the Rev. Jack Rogers who served as the Moderator of the 213th General Assembly (2001).

Mid Councils Commission 2 – Synod and Presbytery action: The 219th General Assembly established a Special Commission to study the structure of the denomination and make recommendations. The Commission's report to the last Assembly was sent back for further work by a somewhat restructured Commission. This year the Commission brought a recommendation to reorganize the current 16 synods into eight in a collaborative process based on “an emerging sense of purpose, partnership, context, and call.” The Assembly increased the number to 10-12 new synods and the Sinodo Presbiteriano Boriquen en Puerto Rico (Synod of Puerto Rico) successfully overtured to remain as is based on its cultural and geographic setting. In related business the Assembly granted the request of the Synod of Southern California and Hawai'i that Hanmi Presbytery be dissolved and the churches transferred to the corresponding geographic presbyteries. Hanmi did present an overture asking for a delay in the dissolution.

Divestment: Middle East and Fossil Fuels: Once again, the Mission Responsibility Through Investment Committee (MRTI) brought a recommendation to divest from three companies whose business dealings with Israel help support the Palestinian occupation: Motorola Solutions, Caterpillar and Hewlett-Packard. After intense advocacy by outside groups before and during the Assembly, and impassioned testimony and debate in committee and on the floor the Assembly voted 310 to 303 to support divestment. There were also numerous statements of support for both Israel and Palestine and a reaffirmation of the commitment to a two-state solution. In partial response to a controversial study guide issued by a PC(USA)-affiliated advocacy group earlier this year the Assembly added a first point to the resolution that reaffirmed Israel's right to exist.

The other matter was an overture to divest from companies that appear on the Carbon Tracker fossil fuel company list. The Assembly chose instead to refer the matter to MRTI for their study and recommendation.

It is worth noting that one of the financial officers of the Board of Pensions explained to the Assembly that most of their assets are placed with private investment advisers and when they receive the divestment instructions they do not have to divest but can keep any current holdings but will not acquire any more listed stocks.

Marriage: The Assembly took three actions related to Marriage regarding the PC(USA) Book of Order. They approved an Authoritative Interpretation permitting pastors to conduct marriage services, and the session may approve the use of facilities for such services, for any marriage in jurisdictions where they are permitted and in accordance with the conscience of the pastor and session. They approved a rewrite of W-4.9000, the section on marriage that, among other things now says marriage is between “two persons, traditionally a man and a woman.” Finally, they directed that a consultation process with presbyteries and churches be developed to promote reconciliation associated with these changes as the vote on the Book of Order amendment goes forward.

Other actions: The new translation of the Heidelberg Catechism was affirmed and the Belhar Confession will again be sent to the presbyteries for a 2/3 approval to be added to the Book of Confessions. Modifications were made to the Peacemaking Offering and it will be renamed the Peace and Global Witness Offering. A statement was issued about the need for due process regarding weaponized drones. The 248 New Worshiping Communities were celebrated. Mandatory background checks are urged when hiring pastors but it was decided not to add it as a requirement of the call process in the Book of Order. *Per capita* rate was set at \$7.07 for 2015 and \$7.12 for 2016.