

04-01 Committee to Review Biennial Assemblies Report to the 220th General Assembly (2012).

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Committee: [04-01] Review of Biennial Assemblies Type: General Assembly Full Consideration

Topic: Unassigned

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RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation 1

The Committee to Review Biennial Assemblies recommends that the 220th General Assembly (2012) do the following:

1. *Regarding the Plenary Sessions of the General Assembly*

Direct the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly to structure the docket of each biennial meeting of the General Assembly to contain plenary sessions focused on prayer, Bible study, and community building.

Recommendation 2

2. *Regarding the Framework for Plenary Sessions of the Next Three General Assemblies*

Direct the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly to construct the dockets for the next three successive General Assemblies (2014, 2016, 2018) around the Great Ends of the Church, the Marks of the Church, and the Notes of the Church. (cf. G 3.0501: "...As it leads and guides the witness of the whole church, [the General Assembly] shall keep before it the marks of the Church (F-1.0302), the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed communities have identified themselves through history (F-1.0303) and the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304).")

Recommendation 3

3. *Regarding Concurrences for Overtures and Commissioners' Resolutions*

That in order to improve collaboration among presbyteries, assure that the business before it is both of common concern to the mission of the church (G-3.0302(d)) and about key issues facing the church and society, and to encourage well-considered, significant overtures and resolutions of church-wide significance:

a. Direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative vote:

Shall G-3.0502 be amended by adding a new section "f." to read as follows:

"f. present to meetings of the General Assembly such overtures from presbyteries and synods that have received concurrences from at least 10 percent of the presbyteries or, in the case of overtures from a synod, concurrence by 10 percent of the synods."

b. Amend Standing Rule A.3.(c)6 so that it reads as follows: [Text to be added is shown as italic.]

"(6) In the event that the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly receives an overture similar to one already proposed (excluding the rationale), she or he shall inquire of the presbytery or synod in question whether it would be willing to concur with that existing overture or desires to withdraw the overture. A presbytery or synod concurring with an overture may submit additional rationale for its action, provided that it does not duplicate the rationale provided by the

overturing body. The concurrence and any additional rationale will be printed with the original overture in the Reports to the General Assembly. Concurrences to any overture shall be received up to 45 days prior to the convening of the next session of the General Assembly. Concurrences to any overture with constitutional implications shall be received up to 120 days prior to the convening of the next session of the General Assembly."

c. Amend Standing Rule A.8.a as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown as italic.]

~~"a. Any two commissioners may propose an item of new business, known as a commissioners' resolution, for assembly consideration by delivering it in writing to the Stated Clerk or the Stated Clerk's designee. No commissioner may sign more than two resolutions. An item of new business, in the form of a commissioners' resolution, must be signed by commissioners representing 10 percent of the presbyteries. Such resolutions must be delivered in writing to the Stated Clerk or the Stated Clerk's designee. No commissioner may sign more than two such resolutions."~~

Recommendation 4

4. *Regarding the Assembly's Plenary Consent Agenda*

Amend Standing Rule F.5 (b) as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown as italic.]

~~"b.(1) The General Assembly shall ordinarily decide questions by electronic voting. The Moderator may also call for unanimous consent by voice vote or show of hands. Assembly committees may recommend the use of a consent agenda for portions of their reports. In all cases, the right of any commissioner to call for one of the other forms of voting or to remove any item from the consent agenda shall be preserved. All decisions made by assembly standing committees by a three-quarters (supermajority) vote shall be placed on the assembly plenary consent agenda to be considered as the first order of plenary business following committee meetings. Any actions requesting constitutional change must be considered in plenary.~~

"(2) *In addition to all consent items from assembly committees, the following items shall be placed on the assembly plenary consent agenda:*

"(a) All unchallenged nominations from the General Assembly Nominating Committee.

"(b) Unanimous recommendations from assembly agencies and entities for confirmations of those offices that, according to the Manual of the General Assembly, require General Assembly confirmation.

"(3) *In all cases, the right of any commissioner to remove any item from the plenary consent agenda or to call for one of the other forms of voting shall be preserved."*

Recommendation 5

5. *Regarding Young Adult Commissioners*

Direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative vote:

Shall G-3.0501 be amended by adding a new paragraph after the formula for the number of commissioners to read as follows:

"...48,001 or more: 7 ruling elders and 7 teaching elders

"The presbyteries within the geographical boundaries of each synod shall elect, according to a rotation system agreed upon by the presbyteries, one young adult teaching elder commissioner and one young adult ruling elder commissioner, age 36 or younger at the time of the convening of the General Assembly to which they are commissioned."

Recommendation 6

6. Regarding Moderatorial Pre-election Activities

a. Amend Standing Rule H.1.b.3(c) follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown as italic.]

~~“(c) Distribution of written campaign materials at General Assembly outside of the candidate’s room shall be limited to printed materials placed in mailboxes the public distribution area.”~~

b. Amend Standing Rule H.1.b.3(d) as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown as italic.]

~~“(d) On the day of the convening of the General Assembly, the Stated Clerk shall provide a room for each candidate where commissioners and advisory delegates may meet and talk with the candidate. Candidates are encouraged to meet and make themselves available for conversation with commissioners and advisory delegates within the scope of these campaign procedures.”~~

Recommendation 7

7. Regarding Removal of Nominating Speeches for the Office of Moderator

a. Amend Standing Rule H.1.b.4(a) as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown as italic.]

~~“(a) When the General Assembly is ready to elect its Moderator, only one speech shall be made placing in nomination the name of each nominee. The speech shall be made by a commissioner to the General Assembly. Such speech shall not exceed five minutes in length. There shall be no speeches seconding the nomination of any nominee. The order of speaking shall be determined by lot, the drawing conducted by the most recent Moderator attending the General Assembly. Each candidate shall be nominated by a commissioner to the assembly in the following manner: the commissioners making nominations shall be recognized at microphones on the assembly floor. Upon recognition by the assembly Moderator, the nominator shall say, “Moderator, I place in nomination for the office of Moderator of the ___ General Assembly Ruling/Teaching Elder _____ from the Presbytery of _____.” The nominator shall then return to his/her seat on the plenary floor. No seconds to nominations are required.”~~

b. Amend Standing Rule H.1.b.4(b) as follows:

~~“(b) After nominations are closed, each nominee shall be afforded an opportunity to address the General Assembly for a time not to exceed five minutes, expressing the concerns that nominee feels to be the most important for the church. The nominees shall speak in the same order as the presentation of nominating speeches. The order of speaking shall be determined by lot, the drawing conducted by the most recent Moderator attending the General Assembly.”~~

Recommendation 8

8. Regarding Extending the Timeframe for the Work of the Biennial Review Committee

The 220th General Assembly (2012) instructs the Committee to Review Biennial General Assemblies to continue its work to the 221st General Assembly (2014) in order that all matters related to the form and function of the meeting of the General Assembly may be explored, developed, and discerned, and additional recommendations brought to the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly for the 221st General Assembly (2014).

RATIONALE

Rationale for Rec. 1

Since the General Assembly convenes to lead the whole church in becoming “a community of

faith, hope, love, and witness" (*Book of Order*, G- 3.0501), we recommend the assembly spend significant time during its plenary sessions in prayer, Bible study, and community building. As we gather as God's people, we do so as those forgiven, redeemed, and called to discover and embrace God's will for us. Therefore, we will intentionally construct our time together around practices unique to the church such as prayer, singing, and Scripture reading. As we draw closer to God through these practices of faith, we seek greater spiritual wisdom to discern God's will and the courage to act on the call of Christ.

Rationale for Rec. 2

In light of G 3.0501, we believe such a framework for the assembly will provide a form for the week and a context for its work while encouraging the assembly to center its work in worship, study, witness, and decision making.

Rationale for Rec. 3

A consistent theme of the reflection and feedback we received is the need to focus the business considered by an assembly. Overtures from presbyteries represent a significant source of assembly business. At the 219th General Assembly (2010) 124 overtures were received from presbyteries; only 25 percent of these overtures had concurrences from other presbyteries.

The intent of this recommendation is not to control the business of the General Assembly; it is to help focus the business coming to any meeting of the General Assembly. Requiring the concurrence of at least 10 percent of presbyteries with any overture—and that commissioners' resolutions require signatures from at least 10 percent of the presbyteries—will indicate that the significance of and interest in a particular issue have been tested across the church. Such concurrences will encourage and increase collaboration, education, and conversation within and among presbyteries about key issues.

Rationale for Rec. 4

Much of the reflection and responses we received involved the overwhelming amount of business considered in plenary sessions of the assembly. We believe General Assembly committees should be empowered to place on the Plenary consent agenda all recommendations, except constitutional changes, made by supermajority (three-quarters) vote of the committee.

Rationale for Rec. 5

Feedback provided us indicates both strong encouragement for and a desire for younger commissioners to be involved in the proceedings of the General Assembly. In consultation across the PC(USA), we received strong affirmation about this recommendation.

Recognizing that a body maintains the right to determine its own election procedure, it is not our desire to impose strictures on presbyteries regarding the individuals they choose to elect as commissioners. We recommend the creation of young adult commissioners (YACs) in order to facilitate the participation of gifted, younger adults throughout the church. These commissioners will be elected by the presbyteries within a synod's geographical bounds using processes and criteria determined by those presbyteries.

At the assembly meeting, YACs will not be differentiated from "regular" commissioners in any way (i.e., they will be seated as commissioners in the same manner as others, will have full rights and privileges, etc.) and will be identified as ruling elder commissioners or teaching elder commissioners as appropriate.

Under current mid-council structure, this recommendation would result in thirty-two additional commissioners to the General Assembly, as there are sixteen synods. In the event of synod realignment or restructuring, it is recommended that the current geographical boundaries be used for this purpose until specifically addressed in the Standing Rules of the General Assembly and the *Book of Order*.

Rationale for Rec. 6

Commissioners and advisory delegates are frequently unable to visit the booths/rooms because of other pre-assembly activities. We believe that providing booths for moderatorial candidates is not the best use of resources. We request the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly, within the scope of the outlined campaign procedures, to facilitate opportunities for conversation between moderatorial candidates and commissioners and advisory delegates.

Rationale for Rec. 7

This practice offers to the General Assembly the powerful symbol that all candidates for Moderator come from within the body of the assembly. It will also streamline the current election procedure by eliminating nominating speeches.

Rationale for Rec. 8

We have only been able to respond in part to our mandate “to include all matters related to the form and function of the meeting of the General Assembly.” We believe it is vital at this time in the life of the church for us to explore the possibilities of different ways of presenting issues, seeking God’s discernment, and making decisions. Our own work as a committee has convicted us of the importance of caring community, genuine collaboration, and generous conversation.

We believe the church is weary of a win/lose method of dealing with difficult and controversial issues and that the church in our 21st century context yearns for a way for those who make decisions on behalf of the church to do so in an environment that enables a greater awareness of the guidance of the Holy Spirit.¹ As the council of the whole church, “*The General Assembly constitutes the bond of union, community, and mission among all its congregations and councils, to the end that the whole church becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness.*” (G-3.0501). For a community of faith, hope, love, and witness, the means by which the church searches for a common mind will be as important as the decisions that are reached.²

We seek to study other resources in greater depth including materials from the Uniting Church in Australia, and the significant contributions of the Task Force on the Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church. We believe both, as well as other resources, should be explored in greater depth.

Our goal in continuing our work would be to explore alternate processes for presentation and discussion of issues, to invite several mid-councils to work with us to assess the effectiveness of these processes, and to propose to the 221st General Assembly (2014) alternative ways of doing the work of the assembly.

Endnotes for Rationale for Recommendation 8.

1. *Coming to Consensus: A Case Study for the Churches*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 2003.
2. *Ibid.*

Rationale Overall

INTRODUCTION

These recommendations are in response to the following referrals:

2002 Referral: Item 02-01. Recommendation 6. COGA Prepare Full Evaluation of Biennial Assemblies After the 219th General Assembly (2010) and Bring a Report to the 220th General Assembly (2012) (Minutes, 2002, Part I, p. 159).

2010 Referral: Item 03-18. On Expanding the Scope of the Review of Biennial Assemblies—From the Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy (Minutes, 2010, Part I, p. 215–16).

The Committee to Review Biennial Assemblies was established by action of two previous assemblies. The 214th General Assembly (2002), in recommending biennial General Assemblies to

the PC(USA), requested a review of the biennial concept following the 219th General Assembly (2010). A committee was to be appointed by the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly and the Executive Director of the General Assembly Mission Council. *Overture 049* (Item 03-18) to the 219th General Assembly (2010) from the Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy requested an expansion of the scope of the review committee to include all matters related to the form and function of the meeting of the General Assembly.

The following persons were named to the committee: Glen Bell, Indianapolis, Ind.; Theresa Cho, San Francisco, Calif.; Thomas Evans, Atlanta, Ga.; Glen Alberto Guenther, Denver, Colo.; Marcus Lambricht, Princeton, N.J.; Kathy Lueckert, Seattle, Wash.; Carol McDonald, Indianapolis, Ind.; Matthew Schramm, Bay City, Mich.; David Van Dyke, St. Paul, Minn.. Carol McDonald serves as Moderator. The committee is staffed by Thomas Hay from the Office of the General Assembly.

The committee began its work in January 2011. From the beginning, the committee has kept before it these words: "The General Assembly constitutes the bond of union, community, and mission among all its congregations and councils, to the end that the whole church becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness" (*Book of Order*, G-3.0501).

Our research and evaluation involved two surveys—one of open-ended and one of specifically focused questions. Approximately 125 persons responded to the open-ended questions and almost 900 persons responded to the specific-question survey. In addition, we interviewed the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, the Executive Director of the General Assembly Mission Council, and members of the GAMC executive staff. We requested and received input from each of the other four entities of the General Assembly: Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Foundation, Board of Pensions, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Investment and Loan Program, Inc., and Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. We staffed a table at the Big Tent and engaged in conversation with many event attendees. The committee has held three face-to-face gatherings and has met multiple times by conference call.

The way we have worked together reflects our hope for future meetings of the General Assembly. We built community and have engaged in worshipful collaboration. Spirited and faithful conversation led, again and again, to decisions made by strong consensus. We offer this report with grateful hearts—thankful for one another and thankful for the One who called us together to do this work.

CONTEXT

We are a church with a newly adopted Form of Government (FOG)—one being explored and embraced by councils at all levels. The new FOG. invites us to move from governance as we have always known it into new and flexible ways of being church. We are a church living in and through a time of dramatic change; transition is the norm. We are a church yearning for new and different ways of discussing and discerning God's call around difficult and controversial issues. We seek to be faithful to the One who has called us into being and who is calling us to be the church in a new way.

VALUES

—That the common life of the whole church, as reflected in the meetings of the General Assembly, will reflect the mind of Christ as described by the Apostle Paul in Philippians 2.

—That our mode of engaging one another in the work of the whole church will reflect the image of the body of Christ described by the Apostle Paul in Romans 12 and in 1 Corinthians 12.

—That everything we say and do, as the council of the whole church, will allow us to engage with one another in love, humility, grace, and servanthood.

—That the council of the whole church will be an integrated community of worship, study, witness, discernment, and decision-making.

—That collaboration will be increased among all the councils of the church.

—That processes for discussion and deliberation will be fair and open and honest.

—That the work and business of each meeting of the General Assembly will be focused so as to encourage full and prayerful participation of those seeking the mind of Christ for the whole church.

AFFIRMATION

We affirm the pattern of biennial General Assembly meetings. Our research, conversations, and discernment indicate this pattern is helpful to the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) We heard no strong support either to return to annual assemblies or to lengthen time between assemblies. Biennial assemblies are wise stewardship of both human and financial resources. They permit the church to deliberate and discuss important issues facing church and society, and offer councils necessary time to consider and live into suggested actions. Biennial assemblies provide for the whole church opportunities for worship, Bible study, fellowship, collaboration, and spiritual reflection.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

Item 04-01, Recommendation 08- 2013: \$21,200; 2014: \$8,990 (per capita - OGA)

COMMENT

ADVICE FROM THE ACC

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advises the 220th General Assembly (2012) to disapprove Recommendation 3.a. from the Committee to Review Biennial Assemblies.

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advises the 220th General Assembly (2012) that Recommendation 5 from the Committee to Review Biennial Assemblies raises constitutional issues that the assembly should consider.

Rationale

Two recommendations from the Committee to Review Biennial Assemblies propose amendments to the Form of Government, and require the advice of the Advisory Committee on the Constitution (ACC). The ACC responds to each recommendation under separate headings.

1. *Recommendation 3.a.*

Recommendation 3.a. proposes that a new section "f" be added to G-3.0502, reading as follows:

"f. present to meetings of the General Assembly such overtures from presbyteries and synods that have received concurrences from at least 10 percent of the presbyteries or, in the case of overtures from a synod, concurrence by 10 percent of the synods."

Recommendation 3.a. proposes that a new section "f." be added to G-3.0502. Section G-3.0502 currently consists of a series of lettered sentence fragments, each completing a sentence that begins, "The General Assembly has responsibility to maintain relationships with presbyteries and synods by..."

The meaning of existing sections a. through e. is clear in the context of the entire paragraph. The proposed addition of section f. would have a different structure and would read as follows:

"The General Assembly has responsibility to maintain relationships with presbyteries and synods by present [sic] to meetings of the General Assembly such overtures from presbyteries and synods that have received concurrences from at least 10 percent of the presbyteries or, in the case of overtures from a synod, concurrence by 10 percent of the synods."

The meaning of this sentence is not obvious, and a reasonable reader might ask whether the new section f. was intended to complete a different sentence, perhaps in a different constitutional provision, or even in the Standing Rules. Even if the grammar is corrected, the sentence would still present the reader with a provision in which the subject ("The General Assembly") is also the indirect object of "present" or "presenting."

Lacking clarity as to the precise text and intention of the proposed constitutional amendment, the ACC advises the assembly that the rationale for the proposed amendment raises constitutional issues.

a. *Right of Appeal*

It appears that the amendment is aimed at limiting the business before the assembly. This could be seen as limiting the historic right of appeal, which is restated in F-3.02 (see footnote 6), and specifically implied in F-3.0206.

Other constitutional provisions address this issue. Each of the councils of the church has a responsibility to maintain relation with the other councils. "It is of particular importance that sessions ... propose to the presbytery, or through it to the synod and General Assembly, such measures as may be of common concern to the mission of the church" (*Book of Order*, G-3.0202e). "The presbytery has a responsibility to maintain regular and continuing relationship to synod and General Assembly by ... proposing to synod or General Assembly such measures as may be of common concern to the mission of the church" (*Book of Order*, G-3.0302d). "The synod has responsibility to maintain regular and continuing relationship with the General Assembly ... by proposing to the General Assembly such measures as may be of common concern to the mission of the whole church" (*Book of Order*, G-3.0402). These responsibilities in the session, presbytery, and synod presume a corresponding responsibility of the General Assembly to receive and consider the communications from them.

b. *Business That Possibly Should Not Require Many Concurrences*

There are many types of business that may not require substantial debate, but that are important to a small number of presbyteries. One example would be transferring a congregation from one presbytery to another. This is a matter typically brought to the assembly by overture from one presbytery with a concurrence from the other presbytery. For reasons we state in other advice before this assembly, the whole church does have a stake in such business, but it is difficult to explain why the two presbyteries at the heart of the matter would need to lobby sixteen other presbyteries for concurrence.

c. *Shifting of Power*

A restriction on the handling of overtures from presbyteries and synods would work against the ability of those councils to place business before the assembly, while leaving untouched the ability of entities of the General Assembly to present business. This shift could disturb the relationships expressed in G-3.0101:

... All councils of the church are united by the nature of the church and share with one another responsibilities, rights, and powers as provided in this Constitution. The councils are distinct, but have such mutual relations that the act of one of them is the act of the whole church. The jurisdiction of each council is limited by the express provisions of the Constitution, with the acts of each subject to review by the next higher council.

d. *Creation of Parties*

The emphasis on synods and presbyteries collaborating on overtures could have the effect of fragmenting the church by privileging conversations between the like-minded over the broad discernment and conversations that are intended to take place in the council of the whole church—the General Assembly.

The General Assembly constitutes the bond of union, community, and mission among all its congregations and councils, to the end that the whole church becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness. As it leads and guides the witness of the whole church, it shall keep before it the Marks of the Church (F-1.0302), the Notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed communities have identified themselves through history (F-1.0303), and the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304).

e. *The Protection of Minority Voices*

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) protects the voice of the one from being silenced by the many. Our church protects the rights of dissent and protest for those who disagree with decisions made in councils (*Book of Order*, G-3.0105).

Even as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) affirms the principle that a majority shall govern (F-3.0205), it also “seeks a new openness to the sovereign activity of God, ... in its own membership, ... to see both the possibilities and perils of its institutional forms, ... to God’s continuing reformation of the Church ecumenical” (*Book of Order*, F-1.0404). Frequently, the possibility of this new openness is carried by the same prophetic voices who are repeatedly outvoted in meetings of our councils.

f. *Other Options*

The assembly has a number of other options available to focus its discernment on which matters are important enough to warrant sustained consideration.

A restriction such as proposed in Recommendation 3 might more appropriately be stated within the *Manual of the General Assembly* than in a constitutional amendment, so long as the assembly approves its policy consistent with its constitutional role and obligations, described above.

The assembly, being required to operate in accord with *Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised* (see G-3.0105), can control the best use of its time by its response to motions to approve the docket, by motions to limit debate, by motions to refer worthy but ill-prepared ideas for further study, or to disapprove business that does not convince the assembly of its merits. In addition, our parliamentary standard approves of the use of various additional tools of discernment and ways of crystallizing opinion.

The ACC advises the assembly that the above tools may be more helpful than merely counting concurrences, to the commissioners’ efforts to seek to find and represent the will of Christ (*Book of Order*, F-3.0204).

2. *Recommendation 5.*

Recommendation 5. proposes that G-3.0501 be amended by adding a new paragraph after the formula for the number of commissioners to read as follows:

“The presbyteries within the geographical boundaries of each synod shall elect, according to a rotation system agreed upon by the presbyteries, one young adult teaching elder commissioner and one young adult ruling elder commissioner, age 36 or younger at the time of the convening of the General Assembly to which they are commissioned.”

Rationale

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) considers young adults as an important constituency of the church. The church has provided an opportunity for the voice and influence of youth and young adults to be expressed at General Assemblies dating back to 1970. One mechanism that has been used over the last several assemblies is representation of youth as youth advisory delegates (YADs) which have had a voice but no vote on the floor of the assembly (see 1970 G-13.0100(1), UPC, 1969, 771, 65, Ref. 18; cf. PCUS, 1979, 123, 178; 1970, 94, 102; UPC, 1973, 466, 64; 1970, 100, 1005; 1969, 771, 65). The participation of advisory delegates (including youth advisory delegates—now “young adult advisory delegates”) is provided for in the Standing Rules of the assembly.

Several issues are raised by the proposed recommendation that would amend G-3.0501 to allow one young adult teaching elder commissioner and one young adult ruling elder commissioner, from each synod through the presbyteries of that synod. The proposed amendment would significantly alter the process by which commissioners are allocated and selected, and the process by which underrepresented voices are included at the assembly.

Section G-3.0501 of the Form of Government provides in part:

The General Assembly is the council of the whole church and it is representative of the unity of the synods, presbyteries, sessions, and congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). *It shall consist of equal numbers of ruling elders and teaching elders elected by the presbyteries and reflective of the diversity within their bounds* (F-1.0403 and G-3.0103)... [emphasis added].

It is important to note that this section of the Form of Government was changed to include the requirement that the delegates elected to General Assembly from the presbyteries be “reflective of the diversity within their bounds.” This new requirement would not only affect the young adult commissioners (YACs) but also other diverse constituencies within the bounds of the presbyteries.

The election of commissioners by presbyteries has been a right afforded to the presbyteries under the Constitution, with the manner of election left to the discretion of the presbyteries (former G-13.0102b). Historically there has not been a constraint regarding whom the presbyteries could elect other than the requirement that the delegation consist of equal numbers of ruling elders and teaching elders. Under the current Form of Government there is an explicit requirement that the delegation “[reflect] ... the diversity [of the] bounds” (G-3.0501). This introduces the potential for a number of competing interests that must be taken into consideration with regard to diversity, of which age—in this case, youth—may be one. Other areas of diversity may include race, ethnicity, disability, and gender. To require the election of two youth representatives from each of the synods would elevate the importance of youth over other underrepresented groups such as racial minorities and women. The ability to elect young adults from presbyteries now exists and well may be required under the revised G-3.0501. The implementation and enforcement of Section G-3.0501 are issues that transcend the issue of young adult commissioners. Is the assembly now required to evaluate each delegation with respect to its compliance with this provision? Do underrepresented groups have the right to raise challenges to delegations that fail to comply with this section? It is noteworthy that no form of enhanced representation or quota has ever been accorded to other underrepresented constituencies of the church, despite the church’s historic and deeply held commitment to diversity and representation.. The right to determine the persons and qualifications to serve as a commissioner has always been the prerogative of the electing presbyteries.

Another issue regarding the amendment of G-3.0501 is the possible involvement of synods in the election by presbyteries of young adult commissioners to the General Assembly, a right afforded exclusively to presbyteries. By providing for the election of commissioners by allocation to synods, and according to a method developed by synods, the presbytery-elected young adult commissioners may arguably be more accurately characterized as synod commissioners than presbytery commissioners.

Finally, the proposed amendment states that the mechanism by which such a process of rotation would be implemented is to be “agreed upon by the presbyteries.” The meaning of this is unclear, and presumably would need to be articulated by the synod and incorporated as a change to its standing rules.

COMMENT

ACSWP ADVICE AND COUNSEL

Item 04-01, Committee to Review Biennial Assemblies report, proposes eight recommendations to change the structure of the General Assembly so that more time will be devoted to prayer, Bible study, and community building; that time will be spent in those activities unique to the church: prayer, singing and Scripture reading; and that the business of the assembly be more focused through greater collaboration among presbyteries and synods.

The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy advises that Item 04-01 be approved with the following amendments. [Text to be deleted is shown with brackets and with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown with brackets and with an underline.]

1. Amend Recommendation #1 as follows:

"1. *Regarding the Plenary Sessions of the General Assembly*

"Direct the Committee on the Office of General Assembly to structure the docket of each biennial meeting of the General Assembly to contain plenary sessions focused on prayer, Bible study, and community building[, not to exceed 10 percent of total plenary time in addition to daily worship services]."

2. Amend Recommendation 3.a. as follows:

"a. Direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative vote:

"Shall G-3.0502 be amended by adding a new section "f." to read as follows:

"f. present to meetings of the General Assembly such overtures from presbyteries ~~and synods~~ that have received concurrences from at least ~~[10-percent]~~ [two] of the presbyteries ~~or, in the case of overtures from a synod, concurrence by 10 percent of the synods.~~"

3. Amend Recommendation 3.c. as follows:

"c. Amend Standing Rule A.8.a as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown as italic.]

"a. Any two commissioners may propose an item of new business, known as a commissioners' resolution, for assembly consideration by delivering it in writing to the Stated Clerk or the Stated Clerk's designee. No commissioner may sign more than two resolutions. An item of new business, in the form of a commissioners' resolution, must be signed by commissioners representing ~~[10-percent]~~ [three] ~~[of the]~~ presbyteries. Such resolutions must be delivered in writing to the Stated Clerk or the Stated Clerk's designee. No commissioner may sign more than two such resolutions."

4. Add a new Recommendation 9. to read as follows:

"[9. Direct the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) to prepare a concise statement for the General Assembly Mission Council (or Presbyterian Mission Agency) for the year between assemblies, to be presented at "Big Tent" or other similar events, addressing timely matters of social witness based on existing policy, on the model of the Church of Scotland's annual "Address to the Nation.]"

Rationale

The ACSWP appreciates the work of the Committee to Review Biennial Assemblies and the careful analysis it presents. The following considerations we raise arise out of the great value we place on the General Assembly. The assembly is a faith-strengthening experience as emphasized in this item. However, it is also a decision-making body whose deliberative process addresses internal church policy and structures as well as the church's relationships to local and global society. Through its deliberative process, the assembly carries out the prophetic responsibility of the church to challenge the world with values arising from its biblical faith. With that goal in mind, we present the following considerations.

1. We are concerned that adding more worship and study experiences may constrict the time necessary for good participatory decision-making that can inspire, challenge, and educate both the church and world. This time often includes careful presentations, reflection on submitted documents, and in-depth debate. We absolutely affirm the daily worship of the assembly, which often addresses topics of the day. Thus, we suggest that Recommendation 1 be amended with a way to protect the time needed to communally process significant and complex issues and to reach decisions that enable the church to carry out its historic role of speaking God's truth to the world as well as to the church. We are also not clear who has the responsibility to provide the additional conference programming sought.

2. We believe that imposing a 10 percent concurrence rule for overtures would have a seriously negative impact. The quality of overtures simply does not correspond to the number of concurrences. Concern for the prophetic imagination makes the ability of a single presbytery to overture the whole assembly seem an important virtue of our democratic system. Requiring one or two concurrences would seem sufficient to ensure broader importance while encouraging the church's creativity. The process of seeking concurrences through collaboration, however, requires mechanisms and resources for consultation among presbyteries that they may not have and do not have equally. This could result in more "politicking" and "lobbying" by special-interest groups. Such processes are not necessarily bad, provided self-reporting General Assembly rules still apply to the special-interest "affinity" groups often involved. A further concern is diversity; seeking concurrence has the danger of "diluting" distinctive concerns of presbyteries facing particular issues. Due to the likely reduced number or eliminated role of synods, we do not see a necessary need for concurrence for any synod overtures.

3. We are more inclined to accept a bit more restriction on commissioners' resolutions. However, while the proposed rule would require more consultation among commissioners, the process of submitting commissioners' resolutions, the requirement that signers represent 10 percent of presbyteries has some of the dangers described above. As proposed, this requirement would reduce not only the capacity of individual commissioners but restrict the assembly's ability to receive new business addressing new developments in church and society.

4. From the standpoint of the public witness of the General Assembly, biennial assemblies affect the timeliness of the church's voice on critical social issues. One strategy to overcome the problems of timelines would be to enhance the connection and visibility of the General Assembly Mission Council (GAMC) or the Presbyterian Mission Agency to the church between assemblies. The proposal here would be received or approved by the GAMC/PMA in an appropriate manner and reported to the following year's General Assembly and would be a condensed social witness statement to the church, on the lines of the Scottish General Assembly's annual "Address to the Nation," which seeks an evangelical concern for the welfare of the whole nation.

GACOR COMMENT

1. *Comment on Item 04-01, Recommendation 1*

The General Assembly Committee on Representation (GACOR) respectfully advises that the 220th General Assembly (2012) approve Item 04-01, Recommendation 1, and offers the following comment:

Regarding the *Plenary Sessions of the General Assembly*, recommendation affects the inclusion of prayer, Bible study, and community building within sessions of the plenary. It is important to GACOR that the assembly and COGA remain alert and take into consideration that worship and community building needs to be inclusive and accessible, and that these sessions will be designed to take representation issues into concern. For example, recent assemblies have chosen means of communicating worship materials that are not accessible to all. Using projected screens alone for liturgy or music when persons are standing, moving, or sitting in rows that are not ranked to allow for height differences, or have other challenges to see the screens means fewer are participating in worship. The GACOR encourages planners to include participation and access issues into the process with the committee on local arrangements, facilities, and partners.

2. *Comment on Item 04-01, Recommendation 3*

The General Assembly Committee on Representation (GACOR) respectfully advises that the 220th General Assembly (2012) disapprove Item 04-01, Recommendation 3, and offers the following comment:

Regarding *Concurrences for Overtures and Commissioners' Resolutions*, Recommendation 3 would dramatically increase the barriers to submitting items of business (overtures and commissioners resolutions) to an assembly. Commissioners have rarely had difficulty in discerning

what are the weighty matters before them and what items require less of their time. The proposed changes would prevent all items of business from being heard at the 220th General Assembly (2012) as no overture has reached the level of having 10 percent of presbyteries (or synods) concurring—for presbyteries it would require 18. The most concurrences received, as of May 15, according to PC-biz.org, was four presbyteries on a single overture (while related families of overtures do garner a few more, none receive 18 with agreement on an issue). The GACOR views this recommendation as absolutely contrary to the principles of representation and participation in the PC(USA). A great strength of Presbyterian polity is allowing space for the Holy Spirit to move within a congregation who may take it to larger councils for further discernment. It provides for voices of dissent to be heard and access for commissioners in the minority on issues of concern to raise questions for the consideration of the wider church. Requiring this level of concurrences goes against the experience of inclusiveness and representation and promotes greater politicization of the assembly meeting, encouraging the stronger lobbying activities of affinity and advocacy groups within our communion in order to get concerns raised for consideration. No longer would the single congregation be able to suggest an issue of discussion, having been heard and approved by its presbytery. This recommendation would significantly alter access and provide a significant barrier to congregations wishing to bring concerns before the body for discussion and discernment of the will of God for the Church. Participation would be diminished in drastic ways.

3. *Comment on Item 04-01, Recommendation 4*

The General Assembly Committee on Representation (GACOR) respectfully offers the following comment on Item 04-01, Recommendation 4:

Regarding the *Assembly's Plenary Consent Agenda*, Recommendation 4 will mandate the use of consent agendas in the business meeting of the assembly. Constituencies that GACOR advocate for are wary of "omnibus motions" and consent agendas as experience has demonstrated that these means are ways the majorities may violate the rights of marginalized groups. If the assembly goes forward with this recommendation, GACOR would caution that every effort be made to give notice and allow access for commissioners who wish to pull items from the consent agenda for discussion. The ability for all commissioners and advisory delegates to participate in decision-making and in the discernment of the Spirit's will for the church may be adversely affected by these time-saving changes. Protecting the rights and privileges of commissioners and advisory delegates who find themselves in the minority is an essential identifying aspect of what it means to be Presbyterian.

4. *Comment on Item 04-01, Recommendation 5*

The General Assembly Committee on Representation (GACOR) respectfully offers the following comment on Item 04-01, Recommendation 5:

Regarding *Young Adult Commissioners*, Recommendation 5 suggests the creation of thirty-two young adult commissioners (who would be persons under the age of 36 at the time of the assembly). The GACOR commends the committee for considering options for including more young people in the decision-making process of General Assembly with voice and vote. Having evaluated the pools of persons selected by their presbyteries to serve as commissioners, the GACOR recognizes how very many ways commissioners are selected and lifts up for your consideration the reality that it is very rare (sometimes one per assembly out of nearly 700) for commissioners to be elected who are under the age of 25 and not too much more frequent when commissioners are selected who are under the age of 35. This reality may be a negative consequence of the young adult advisory delegate positions each presbytery has (aged 17–24, many are ordained ruling elders and some have been teaching elders). While we appreciate the creative thinking the special committee did to encourage greater participation of young adults as commissioners, the proposed recommendation leaves much to be desired.

The GACOR met with the special committee and challenged them to be bold. After ten years of analyzing commissioner selection trends in presbyteries, GACOR encouraged the special committee to consider eliminating the young adult advisory delegate designation and replace that position with

young adult commissioners (with voice and vote), one per presbytery (just as YAADs are distributed now). With slight adjustments of the age categories (we proposed 18–30 years of age), this would have a profound influence on the age distribution of commissioners, give greater responsibility and access to young adults, while not increasing the cost of the assembly and increasing the minimum number of commissioners per presbytery from two to three. If it be the will of commissioners to approve 04-01, Recommendation 5, there will be increased costs added to each General Assembly, while it does not significantly increase the number of persons under the age of 35 serving as commissioners and complicates the selection process of these commissioners by giving to presbyteries within geographic bounds of synods, (which may or may not be councils after the action of this assembly and the majority vote of presbyteries), the burden of working out how they will distribute the opportunity for these two additional commissioners each assembly. The reality is that most synods (exceptions are Puerto Rico and Southwest) have more than ten presbyteries within their bounds. That means if this opportunity rotates to each presbytery, that council does not get to select the additional two young adult commissioners again for a minimum of twenty years.

5. *Comment on Item 04-01, Recommendations 6 and 7*

The General Assembly Committee on Representation (GACOR) respectfully advises that the 220th General Assembly (2012) approve Item 04-01, Recommendations 6 and 7, and offers the following comment:

The GACOR concurs that Recommendation 6 does not hinder the election process, nor is it expected to affect representation, participation, or inclusiveness. Regarding the removal of nominating speeches for the Office of Moderator (Recommendation 7), we concur with the recommendation and rationale and see no affect on representation and participation.

6. *Comment on Item 04-01, Recommendation 8*

The General Assembly Committee on Representation (GACOR) respectfully offers the 220th General Assembly the following comment on Item 04-01, Recommendation 8:

Recent assembly action opened up the possibility of using means of discernment other than *Robert's Rules of Order* for decision-making and deliberation in assembly committees. In the wake of that change, the GACOR has been curious about what impact new processes may have on participation. In 2010, GACOR began an experiment using a new tool to discover if there is a relationship between the process used and any resulting patterns of participation. For the second time, GACOR is gathering data through "process observation" of what happens and who participates in the decision-making processes within committees during the 220th General Assembly (2012). We will provide a report to the Stated Clerk about any patterns that may emerge and the impact different means of deliberation had on participation. The GACOR will be able to expand this work to include evaluating and recommending alternate processes to the assembly with encouragement and support. Assisting in investigating new means for decision-making processes and making recommendation to the Stated Clerk and assemblies is a continuation of their advising role.

If it be the will of commissioners and the assembly to approve Recommendation 8, GACOR respectfully requests that the Biennial Review Group be directed to work with GACOR in this task. As GACOR refines ways to measure the impact choices among decision-making processes has, they can be a helpful partner in the work. For now we are recruiting multiple observers widely from diverse communities within the PC(USA), for each assembly, and working on improving the data collected and its quality. We are excited to be doing a second round of this work at the 220th General Assembly (2012) and are eager to learn more about the ways in which "how we decide" impacts "who decides."

The General Assembly Committee on Representation is made up of sixteen persons, elected by the General Assembly, who are drawn from ruling and teaching elders from across the church. Its mandate and functions are described in G-3.0103 of the Book of Order (Form of Government).