

221st General Assembly

NPC FOLLOW UP

Dr. David Renwick and Dr. Quinn Fox
(Dr John Huffman)

*Great is Thy Faithfulness, O God my Father,
there is no shadow of changing Thee
Thou changest not Thy compassions they fail not,
as Thou hast been, Thou for ever will be.*

July 13, 2014

Note: Dr. Quinn Fox was a Teaching Elder Commissioner

Please pass the Clipboard!!



221st General Assembly (“GA”) NPC FOLLOW UP

Let us Pray!!!

Setting the Scene *(See Handout)*

Some of you here . . .

- *Came to the June 15 briefing at NPC (today = some repeat)*
- *Have read newspaper reports of GA controversies*
- *Have heard little about anything from GA*

What's A General Assembly?

General Assembly of the PCUSA



Synod (Mid-Atlantic)



Presbytery (National Capital)



Session of National Presbyterian Church

General Assembly

- **Meets every two years** –

- This Year in Detroit, June 14-21, 2014.
- All Presbyteries (172) send commissioners, based on size.

By a Majority Vote

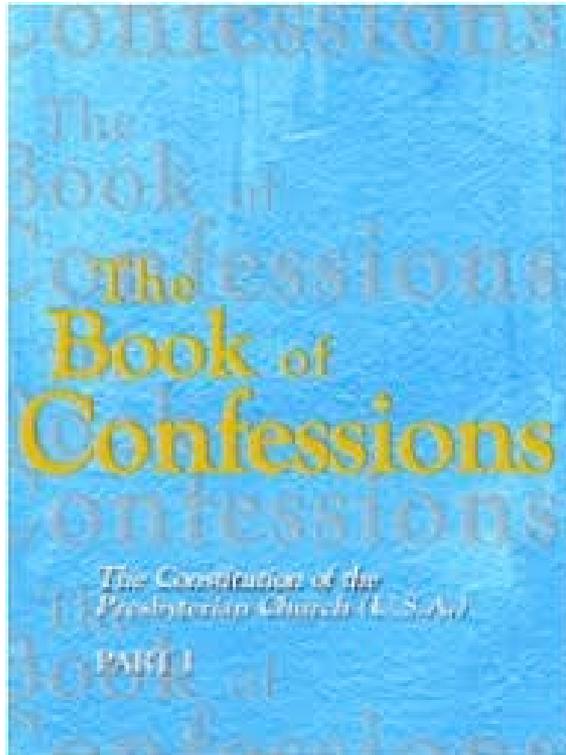
- Elects a 2-yr Moderator (Elder, Heath Rader)
- Makes Recommendations for Study by the Church
- Calls on Specific Groups or organizations to take action (*e.g., the Board of Pensions, The Presbyterian Foundation, the U.S. Government*)
- Makes authoritative constitutional interpretations
- + . . . Proposes changes to PC(USA) Constitution . . .

Also

Proposes changes in the PCUSA Constitution

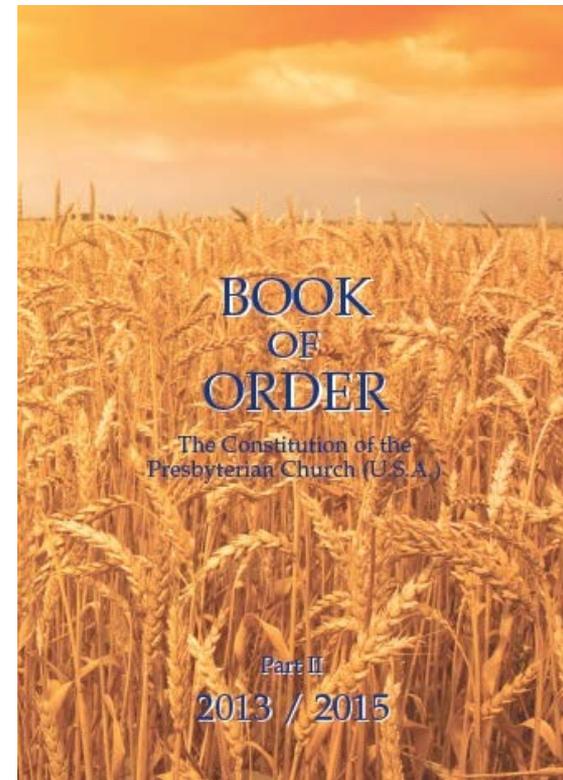
Part I: Book of Confessions

- ❖ **Faith** – 11 Confessions (theological summaries) and Creeds, from different periods of time.



Part 2: Book of Order

- ❖ **Polity**— How we do things



Changing the Constitution

- **Book of Confessions** (faith) changes must be recommended by two General Assemblies, a special committee and by 2/3 of the presbyteries.
- **Book of Order** (polity) changes proposed at GA must be ratified by a majority (>1/2) of the Presbyteries before they take effect.
- **NOTE**: An **Authoritative Interpretation** (AI) does not require ratification by the presbyteries, because it is an “interpretation” of the Book of Order.

GA Process

- One Week . . . multiple events, including
- 2 Days of Committees
 - e.g., as in US Government
 - Review all business, and determine what issues and form of issues that come to the floor
- 3+ Days of Plenary

www.pc-biz.org allows you to see all of the business before GA

Overtures (by the numbers)

- 68 overtures from presbyteries and synods qualified for consideration by the 2014 (221st) General Assembly
- + Over 130 other items of business
(including Commissioner Resolutions and “Special Committee” Reports, e.g. on an addition to the Book of Confessions: “The Belhar Confession” = Quinn’s expertise)

Items Before the GA this Summer

Recommend for Study

1. **Children – unwanted, sexually exploited**
2. Cuba/US relations
3. Drug Policies
4. End of Life
5. Financial Crisis accountability, etc.
6. Fossil Fuel exports
7. **Immigrant** Civil Right Defense Initiative
8. End Hunger (study, work, pray)
9. Survivors of Homicide
10. Sustainable Development “Precautionary Principle”
(=*if in doubt, don't*) : study and affirm

Items Before the GA this Summer

Commemorate/Pay Attention

1. John Knox 500th birthday
2. Armenian Genocide
- 3. Persecution (Egypt)**
- 4. Child Nutrition**
5. Support Congolese Hospital

Theology

1. Define/Add “Essentials” of Reformed Faith
- 2. Add Belhar Confession**

Items Before the GA this Summer

U.S./International Political Process

1. **Gun Ownership**
2. Cuba/U.S. Relations/Travel
3. **Death Penalty** Moratorium
4. **Drones**
5. **Middle East**

Items Before the GA this Summer

Internal/Organizational

1. Property gifted to congregations
2. Retired Ministers joining churches
3. Youth Leadership at GA
4. Korean Churches (assimilating, local connections)
5. Small Churches (surviving)
6. Synod Boundaries (changing)
7. Presbytery Boundaries (choosing)
8. Church Dues for General Assembly
9. Pension/medical participation and viability
- 10. Conscience *vàv* Medical Dues for Abortion**
11. Background checks (for ministers)
12. Disciplinary Processes (for ministers)
13. Acting against ministers who leave the denomination
14. Acting against ministers who do not endure disciplinary process
15. Divest **Fossil Fuels**
- 16. Marriage Definition, Permission to Conduct**

Major Items discussed and voted on at GA

- **Marriage:**
- Constitutional Statements on marriage
 - Set in Motion changes to the wording of the PCUSA constitution eliminating references to marriage as between men and women. *A majority of the 172 Presbyteries (in the next 12 months) must approve this change for it to take effect.*
- Pastors' participation in same-sex marriage ceremonies in states where such marriages are legal.
 - Issue an Authoritative Interpretation of the constitution that declares that pastors and Sessions have discretion to pursue their consciences in this matter. *This permission is effective immediately and does not require any approval from the Presbyteries.*
- **Middle-East:**
Israel-Palestinian relations generally, and particularly divestment (boycotts and sanctions) in companies that conduct specific types of business with Israel.

Marriage & Civil Unions:

Sample Original Overtures

- Ovt 011: 10-01
 - **Amend W-4.9000** Concerning the Church's Role in Legal Marriage and Services of Christian Covenant — *from Lehigh Presbytery.*
- Ovt 021: 10-02
 - **Amend W-4.9000**, Marriage — *from Cascades Presbytery.*
- Ovt 024: 10-03
 - **Issue** an Authoritative Interpretation of **W-4.9000** to Affirm Pastoral Discretion in Performing Marriage Ceremonies — *from Heartland Presbytery.*
- Ovt 047: 10-07
 - **Create a Task Force** to Identify Common Ground and Reconcilable Differences with Respect to Same Gender Marriage — *from Eastern Korean Presbytery.*

W-4.9001 Christian Marriage

Marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being of the entire human family. Marriage is a civil contract **between a woman and a man**.

For Christians marriage is a covenant through which a **man and a woman** are called to live out together before God their lives of discipleship. In a service of Christian marriage **a lifelong commitment** is made by **a woman and a man** to each other, publicly witnessed and acknowledged by the community of faith.

W-4.9002 Preparing for Marriage

a. In preparation for the marriage service, the teaching elder† shall provide for a discussion with the **man and the woman** concerning

- (1) the nature of their Christian commitment, assuring that at least one is a professing Christian,
- (2) the legal requirements of the state,
- (3) the privileges and responsibilities of Christian marriage,
- (4) the nature and form of the marriage service,
- (5) the vows and commitments they will be asked to make,
- (6) the relationship of these commitments to their lives of discipleship,
- (7) the resources of the faith and the Christian community to assist them in fulfilling their marriage commitments.

This discussion is equally important in the case of a first marriage, a marriage after the death of a spouse, and a marriage following divorce.

b. If the Marriage Is Unwise:

If the teaching elder is convinced after discussion with the couple that commitment, responsibility, maturity, or Christian understanding are so lacking that the marriage is unwise, the teaching elder shall assure the couple of the church's continuing concern for them and not conduct the ceremony. In making this decision the teaching elder may seek the counsel of the session.

W-4.9003 Time and Place of the Service

Christian marriage should be celebrated in the place where the community gathers for worship. As a service of Christian worship, the marriage service is under the direction of the teaching elder† and the supervision of the session. (W-1.4004-.4006). The marriage ordinarily takes place in a special service which focuses upon marriage as a gift of God and as an expression of the Christian life. Others may be invited to participate as leaders in the service at the discretion of the pastor. Celebration of the Lord's Supper at the marriage service requires the approval of the session, and care shall be taken that the invitation to the Table is extended to all baptized present. The marriage service may take place during the Service for the Lord's Day upon authorization by the session. It should be placed in the order as a response to the proclamation of the Word. It may then be followed by the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. (W-2.4010; W-3.3503)

W-4.9004 Form and Order of Service

The service begins with scriptural sentences and a brief statement of purpose. The man and the woman shall declare their intention to enter into Christian marriage and shall exchange vows of love and faithfulness. The service includes appropriate passages of Scripture, which may be interpreted in various forms of proclamation. Prayers shall be offered for the couple, for the communities which support them in this new dimension of discipleship, and for all who seek to live in faithfulness. In the name of the triune God the teaching elder† shall declare publicly that the woman and the man are now joined in marriage. A charge may be given. Other actions common to the community and its cultures may appropriately be observed when these actions do not diminish the Christian understanding of marriage. The service concludes with a benediction.

W-4.9005 Music and Appointments

Music suitable for the marriage service directs attention to God and expresses the faith of the church. (W-2.1004) The congregation may join in hymns and other musical forms of praise and prayer. Flowers, decorations, and other appointments should be appropriate to the place of worship, enhance the worshipers' consciousness of the reality of God, and reflect the integrity and simplicity of Christian life. (W-1.3034; W-1.4004□4005; W-5.5005)

W-4.9006 Recognizing Civil Marriage

A service of worship recognizing a civil marriage and confirming it in the community of faith may be appropriate when requested by the couple. The service will be similar to the marriage service except that the opening statement, the declaration of intention, the exchange of the vows by the husband and wife, and the public declaration by the teaching elder† reflect the fact that the woman and man are already married to one another according to the laws of the state

Middle East, Israel, Palestine 1

2 Items lost in the media blitz?

- Ovt 040: 11-02 (Peacemaking and International Issues)
 - Turn Attention to the Plight of the Church that is Suffering due to Sectarian Violence and ***Persecution in Egypt and Other Parts of the World*** — *from Pittsburgh Presbytery.*
- Ovt 051: 07-01 (Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations)
 - Distinguish between *Biblical Terms for Israel* and Those Applied to the *Modern Political State of Israel* in Christian Liturgy — *Chicago Presbytery.*

Middle East, Israel, Palestine 2

Sample Original Overtures

- Ovt 013: 04-01 (Middle East Issues)
 - Review General Assembly Policy Regarding the “Two-State Solution” in Israel Palestine — *San Francisco Presbytery.*
- Ovt 017: 04-03
 - Engage Presbyterian to Witness for Palestinian Human Rights and for Ending the Occupation of Palestine — *Grace Presbytery.*
- Ovt 022: 04-04
 - Support Middle East Peacemaking — *New Covenant Presbytery.*

Middle East, Israel, Palestine 3

BDS = *Boycott, Divest, Sanctions . . .*

- Ovt 014: 04-02
 - Divest from Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard, and Motorola – *San Francisco Presbytery.*
- Ovt 030: 04-05
 - Call for a Boycott of all Hewlett-Packard Products – *New Brunswick Presbytery.*
- Ovt 059: 04-06
 - Affirm “Occupation-Free Investment” in Palestine – *Mackinac Presbytery.*
- Ovt 061: 04-07 (All above = “Middle East Issues”)
 - Adopt the Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) Recommendation on Divestment – *Synod of the Covenant.*

What Happened at GA with Marriage?

See Handout . . . Page ____

- Constitutional Statements on marriage

Set in Motion changes to the wording of the PCUSA constitution eliminating references to marriage as between men and women. *A majority of the Presbyteries must approve this change for it to take effect.*

- Pastors' participation in same-sex marriage ceremonies in states where such marriages are legal.

Issued an Authoritative Interpretation of the constitution that declares that pastors and Sessions have discretion to pursue their consciences in this matter. *This discretion is effective immediately and does not require any approval from the Presbyteries.*

What Happened at GA with Middle East?

See Handout, Page ____

Note: Holy Land Trip Report – August 31

GA did not vote to join the “BDS” (= Boycott, Divest, Sanctions) movement.

GA did vote to make divestments in its *Presbyterian Foundation* and *Board of Pensions* portfolios from 3 corporations (Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard, Motorola Solutions) whose activities in Israel/Palestine were deemed to be unacceptable.

What Does this mean?

Remember:

No action of any General Assembly is binding on the conscience of any member of the PCUSA.

- **For PCUSA:**

- Turmoil/Loss
- Tighter/looser federation
- “Party” allegiances for pastors and/or congregations (cf. Catholic “orders”)

- **For NPC Session: ...**

What Does this mean?

For NPC Session: Prayerfully review and respond . . .

Middle East

1. Discusses each of the statements/action of the GA decision ✓
-- Affirms some; Disagrees with others?
2. Writes an independent statement?
3. Pastoral contacts with local Jewish leaders?
4. Other?

Marriage

1. Affirm or Amend the Biblical Standards for Leadership document?
2. Write an independent statement?
3. Maintain our witness a community of grace passionate about Christ's ministry in the world ✓
4. Other? . . .

What Does this mean?

- **For Congregation/Pastors:**

- Pray, Preach, Teach (*Topics?*) Pastoral Care . . .
- Continue Leading people to become faithful followers of Jesus Christ together in God's World
- Maintain our witness a community of grace passionate about Christ's ministry in the world (*see 1 Peter 3, Micah 6, Jeremiah 29 below*)
- *Today . . . Will be around after . . . + Next Sunday after worship*

1 Peter 3:8,15,16

8 Finally, all of you,
have unity of spirit, sympathy,
love for one another, a tender heart,
and a humble mind . . .

15, 16 . . . in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord.
Always be ready to make your defense
to anyone who demands from you an
accounting for the hope that is in you
. . . yet do it with gentleness and reverence.

Micah 6:8

⁸He has told you, O mortal,
what is good;
and what does the LORD
require of you . . .

*but to do justice,
and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly
with your God?*

Jeremiah 29:4-14

4Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:

5Build houses and live in them;
plant gardens and eat what they produce.

6Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease.

**7But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile,
and pray to the Lord on its behalf,
for in its welfare you will find your welfare.**

8For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel:

Do not let the prophets and the diviners who are among you
deceive you,

and do not listen to the dreams that they dream,

Jeremiah 29:4-14

9for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name;

I did not send them, says the Lord.

10For thus says the Lord:

Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.

11For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

12Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you.

13When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, 14I will let you find me, says the Lord,

and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.