

**Presbyterians Pro-Life
Report of GA Actions
216th General Assembly (2004), Richmond, Virginia**

Memorandum

To: PPL Board of Directors and Friends of PPL
From: Sue Cyre and Terry Schlossberg
Re: Outcomes of the 2004 General Assembly with particular emphasis on the concerns of PPL
Date: July 16, 2004

Each year members of the Presbyterians Pro-Life General Assembly team keep a record of key actions taken by the Assembly as an aid to those who served on the team and for interested supporters. This year we were ably assisted by Sue Cyre who gave tireless attention to the plenary proceedings from Wednesday afternoon until Saturday noon.

Section I. Summary of Pertinent Actions

On Life Issues, this Assembly

- Failed by a margin of four votes to speak in defense of the lives of viable babies late in pregnancy. It left the current General Assembly statement in place that provides for so many exceptions for abortion that no late term baby has the protective voice of the church.
- Reaffirmed a previous General Assembly's approval of embryonic stem cell research
- Rejected an effort to urge the FDA to approve over-the-counter sale of the "morning after" pill.
- Rejected a population control overture along with its call to refund the UN Population Fund.

On Sexual Standards for Ordination, this Assembly

- By a four vote margin, approved a statement in response to efforts to remove authoritative interpretation and G-6.0106b. The statement says:
We, the 216th General Assembly (2004), recognizing the church's commitment to a churchwide process of discernment with the leadership of the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church, call upon the church to pray for the task force and to engage faithfully in the processes of discernment as led by the task force.

On marriage and the family, this Assembly

- Approved a vastly improved policy on the family, now titled "Transforming Families." At the same time, the Assembly failed to endorse either the ecumenical Christian Marriage Declaration or the Federal Marriage Amendment. The Assembly commented:
Nothing the 216th G.A. (2004) has said or acted upon is to be construed to state or imply a position for or against the Federal Marriage Amendment. G.A. entities shall not advocate for or against the Federal Marriage Amendment.

On other issues, this Assembly

- Disapproved another effort to return to annual assemblies
- Disapproved all overtures regarding changes in advisory delegates. There were overtures both to increase the number and to remove voting privileges.
- Made a rather weak effort to strengthen the administrative review process. The overture from Mississippi Presbytery would have created a process of accountability that would give the

General Assembly power and responsibility to assist in maintaining the integrity of our constitution by following through on specific situations of non-compliance. That overture was referred to the ACC.

- Defeated another effort to give voice and vote to Certified Christian Educators. Presbyteries have just voted down a change in the Book of Order to allow that.
- Referred a commissioner resolution requesting study of the feasibility of providing coverage for domestic partners to the BOP adding comment that it be considered “in accordance with the constitution of the PCUSA.”

Section II. Report of Some of the Actions Related to Abortion

Abortion appeared on virtually every list of the top issues at this General Assembly.

Overtures and reports on the subject went to two committees: Health Issues (#11) and International Issues (#13)

Committee #11 spent a day and a half of their two days as a committee in discussion of late term pregnancy and abortion. So many people signed up to testify on Monday morning that the committee agreed to a lottery. The leadership team for the committee drew the names. The committee later interviewed physicians and overture advocates. They heard from four physicians. One was Leroy Carhart, who appeared wearing buttons and ribbons in support of reproductive rights. Carhart referred to partial birth abortion as “partial truth abortion.” He was a principal in the challenge to the Nebraska law that went to the Supreme Court. The other three physicians were Presbyterians from the Richmond area. One of them presented a petition to the committee that had been signed by 200 Presbyterian physicians. The petition declared that there are no medical reasons for abortion late in pregnancy because a viable baby can be delivered quickly and give both mother and child the opportunity for life and good health.

Commissioner Derek Richman offered a motion in committee to respond to the overtures by substituting new wording for the existing wording in the statement originally offered by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy and the Advisory Committee on Litigation. The new wording was

We affirm the protection of viable babies in the womb. In cases where problems develop late in the pregnancy, we urge our members to support the live delivery of the baby. In the interest of protecting the life and health of both the mother and the baby, late-term abortion should be considered only if the physical life of the mother is at serious risk and no alternative means of delivering the baby alive is available. Furthermore, we urge our members to provide pastoral and tangible support to women in problem pregnancies, seeking ways that the church can intervene to mitigate the problems in a pregnancy. We affirm adoption as a provision for women who deliver children they are not able to care for and ask our members to assist in seeking loving, adoptive families.

Richman’s substitute was amended to add “or mental health” following “...if the physical life...” and to add “or late term abortion” following “mitigate the problems in a pregnancy.” The amended statement went to the floor as the majority report from the committee.

A minority report to send a pastoral letter along with four abortion-affirming booklets and the booklet containing the Statement on Post-Viability and Late-Term Abortion became the main motion by a four vote margin in plenary and was passed by the Assembly. It was the first time since reunion that a pro-life statement went to plenary as a majority vote from the committee. Commissioners who supported the committee’s recommendation felt that adding mental health was mitigated by the language that followed: “...and no alternative means of delivering the baby alive is available.”

There was a second effort at a minority report when the committee disapproved the overture to lobby the FDA to approve over-the-counter sale of the “morning after” pill.

The Stated Clerk's office contacted me before recent assemblies to advise me that minority reports must contain the exact wording of a motion made in writing in the committee in order to be accepted and go to the floor. When I learned of the intent to file the second minority report, where I knew no motion had been made to constitute a minority report, I approached the committee leadership team immediately when the committee adjourned. The moderator and the parliamentarian assured me that they would approve the minority report. I went from there to the Clerk's office and was informed by Gradye Parsons that they already had advised the commissioner that it would not be accepted. At that time, I mentioned knowing about an attempt to file a minority report on population control in Committee #13 and understood that there also was no motion on which to base a minority report in that committee. The response of the Clerk's office in that case, however, was quite different.

Population control was the subject of an overture from Lackawanna Presbytery that went to the Committee on International Issues. By a two-to-one margin the committee voted to disapprove the overture. Although there was no motion to constitute a minority report and the report appeared in plenary with no signatures, the Clerk's office allowed the minority report.

This report came to the floor on the last day of the Assembly. Prior to the report, I asked to talk with Gradye Parsons during a break because he was on the stage. The Assembly was running behind and they took no break that morning. When the matter came to the floor, the minority report failed to become the main motion and the committee's recommendation to disapprove was sustained.

An observer in the committee, a commissioner from the committee, and I went behind the stage and intercepted Gradye Parsons who was trying to respond to my message by cell phone. I explained that there was a principle involved in the acceptance of a minority report that did not meet the criteria his office had stated to me, even though the minority report had failed. His response was that he knew it did not meet the criteria but thought commissioners would raise an objection on the floor.

Readers may not be aware of the long debates in past years between those desiring to file minority reports, committee moderators, and the Office of the Stated Clerk. These very tense situations arose when committee moderators were not in sympathy with those wishing to file a minority report and they occurred primarily on issues of sexuality.

Section III. Other Problematic Situations.

There were at least two other questionable situations in the process at this General Assembly.

Authoritative Interpretation. There were majority and minority reports from Committee #5 on Church Orders and Ministry on this subject. The majority favored removal of authoritative interpretation. That report was presented by committee moderator Scott Schaeffer. During his presentation, the committee moderator quoted disparaging language regarding those in same-sex relationships. He implied that the language was from the 1978 authoritative interpretation document and characterized the document. In fact, the document does not contain the quoted language and condemns such language and attitudes. For example, it says,

The Christian community can neither condone nor participate in the widespread contempt for homosexual persons that prevails in our general culture. Indeed, beyond this, it must do everything in its power to prevent society from continuing to hate, harass, and oppress them.

It appeared to be a blatant attempt to influence commissioners who were unfamiliar with the long document. This misinformation went uncorrected by the Stated Clerk and by representatives of the Advisory Committee on the Constitution who have the privilege of the floor. The Clerk's office is responsible for knowledge of the content of the authoritative interpretation and had an obligation to correct the error.

Worse, the misleading language was repeated more than once in the floor debate in support of rejecting the authoritative interpretation. No correction was offered until commissioner Todd Billings, who had read the long document, spoke in its defense on the matter. For an excellent and complete report on this matter and information on the source of the language quoted, see the Berkley Blog for July 8, 2004 on www.pfrenewal.blogspot.com.

Clerk's Election. During the question/answer time of the election of the Stated Clerk, after three questions had been put to the candidates, candidate Russ Howard held up a single sheet of paper which he said contained the three questions that had just been put to the candidates, and in the order they appeared on the sheet of paper. He had found the paper lying around, he said, and noted that it advised commissioners to line up several deep at the microphones to prevent other questioners from having access to the mikes, and to ask the questions in the order they appeared on the paper. Pastor Howard stated his objection to such clear manipulation of the process that was intended to favor the incumbent over the other candidates.

Commissioners are to take advantage of opportunities presented by the G.A. process, and even to work together for a desired outcome. The serious problem in this case was the appearance that commissioners supporting the incumbent might have been aided by those whose role it is to ensure fairness of the process.

Readers will find other accounts of abuse of the process in the reports by committee below. Manipulations of the process, like these, are what destroy the trust between Presbyterians and their leadership. They are what lead Presbyterians to seek more and more rules to accomplish what honor does not.

Section IV. Pertinent Actions (mostly by Committee)

Elections:

Moderator election

The Moderator election is held on the first Saturday of the Assembly. This year there were three candidates: Pastor David McKechnie from Houston, Pastor K.C. Ptomey from Nashville, and Elder Rick Ufford-Chase from Tucson. Ufford-Chase, who clearly supports the ordination of Presbyterians in homosexual relationships in addition to emphasizing mission and youth with his own youthful enthusiasm, was elected on the second ballot.

GANC candidates: No floor nominations; all GANC candidates approved by consensus for 243 positions of leadership at the G.A. level of the church.

Moderator nominations for the GANC: Two floor nominations. Both failed. This was the first election of a class of the General Assembly Nominating Committee. The nominees were proposed by last year's Moderator, Susan Andrews.

Stated Clerk election.

The Standing Rules made this was an order of the day on Friday morning. There were four candidates: Incumbent Clifton Kirkpatrick, pastor Bob Davis, pastor Russ Howard, and elder Alex Metherell. The four had been nominated formally early in the Assembly. On Friday each made a statement in plenary prior to responding to questions. After three questions had been asked, Russ Howard noted that he had picked up a piece of paper with the questions and saw that the directions on the paper were to stack the mikes and ask the questions in order. Howard observed that the strategy was being executed. The paper apparently was distributed by supporters of Kirkpatrick to ensure that all the questions were those he would wish to answer. Kirkpatrick denied knowledge of the plan.

Clifton Kirkpatrick was reelected on the first ballot. The results were: Davis: 137; Howard: 25; Kirkpatrick: 349; Metherell: 19.

The Assembly approved a motion to ask COGA to investigate the integrity, openness, and fairness of our electoral process. Later in the assembly, commissioners argued on the floor for an independent evaluation process instead of asking COGA to do the evaluation. A motion to reconsider the previous action failed.

Committee 1: Business Referrals

This committee is made up of the leadership for each committee. They meet approximately 5-6 weeks prior to GA. Under a new rule, they consider the business coming to GA and assign it to a committee. In the past, that responsibility belonged to Bills and Overtures.

Committee 2: Bills and Overtures

Committee 3: G.A. Procedures

03-07: Disapproved moving the deadline for commissioner resolutions forward.

03-08: Disapproved overture (National Capital) to return to annual GAs.

03-12: Disapproved overture (Atlanta) increasing the number of Youth Advisory Delegates (failed to obtain a 2/3 majority required to change the Standing Rules).

03-13: Referred overture to increase the number of advisory delegates overall (Minnesota Valleys) to COGA.

03-14: Disapproved overtures (Peaks and Northeast Georgia) to remove advisory delegate vote in committee.

03-16: Approved keeping per capita charges uniform each year

Per capita assessments:

2005: .065

2007: .07

03-17: Disapproved allowing presbyteries not to pay per capita that is not received from sessions.

Committee 4: Church Polity

04-04: Disapproved overture to limit investigative committees to thirty days.

04-08-11: This group of initiatives dealt with issues of child abuse. The General Assembly Council proposed *Book of Order* changes as did the presbyteries of Grace, Baltimore, and Northern New York. The GAC proposals were debated and the action on those answered the overture from Grace. 04-10 was adopted with amendment and 04-11 was answered by that action.

04-17: Approved COGA recommendation to add Standing Rule B.8.c. to provide for Special Administrative Review. An amendment was added that specified the GA's authority to undertake special administrative review of synods, by overture, by request of an entity, or by a commissioner resolution. The new rule reads as follows (the amendment to be added)

“To provide for a further way to initiate special administrative review of a synod, the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly recommends that a new section, “c.” be added to Standing Rule B.8. to read as follows:

“c. *Special administrative review of an alleged synod irregularity or delinquency may occur when a written request for such review is received by the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly from another synod or a presbytery within the synod of the alleged irregularity or delinquency. If the request relates to an alleged delinquency, the request can only be filed with the Stated Clerk after the failure or refusal of the synod to cure the alleged delinquency at its next meeting, having been requested to do so in writing prior to the meeting. When the request for special administrative review is received, the Stated Clerk shall convene a meeting of the Moderator of the General Assembly, the moderator of the General Assembly Council, and the moderator of the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly. If the request is in order and all the moderators agree that for the good of the church the special administrative review needs to be undertaken before the next meeting of the General*

Assembly (when the request could be considered by the whole General Assembly), the Moderator of the General Assembly shall appoint a special committee (Standing Rule B.8.) to conduct a special administrative review in accordance with G-9.0408 •.0410 and report its findings and recommendations to the next General Assembly.”

04-18: Referred to the ACC an overture (Presbytery of Mississippi) to amend Standing Rule G.2.g. and C.7. regarding an Assembly Committee on Administrative Review. This overture was an attempt to provide more accountability and power to enforce the constitutional standards in situations of non-conformance with the *Constitution*.

Committee 5: Church Orders and Ministry

05-02: The Advisory Committee on the Constitution (ACC) was asked by a minister member of Presbytery of the Cascades for an authoritative interpretation concerning persistence in disapproved work. The ACC recommended a response which was put in the consent agenda for this committee’s report. The recommendation was removed from the consent agenda, and then adopted by consensus. This action is pertinent to current cases in the denomination. The ACC offered an amendment to its own section #2 that appeared separately in the reports.

the Advisory Committee on the Constitution recommends that the 216th General Assembly (2004) approve the following authoritative interpretation:

“1. In order to presume that an officer has renounced the jurisdiction of this church under G-6.0502, a governing body must follow the following procedure:

“a. The governing body must disapprove the work of the officer (Wilson v. Presbytery of Donegal, Remedial Case 206-8, Minutes, 1994, Part I, p. 149, 11.091).

“b. The governing body must notify the officer that it has disapproved his/her work and that he/she is prohibited from engaging in such work as an officer of the church (Stimage-Norwood v. Presbytery of Southern New England, Remedial Case 214-7, Minutes, 2002, Part I, p. 344).

“c. If the officer engages in the prohibited work after the notice of disapproval and prohibition, the governing body must consult with the officer and notify him/her of the consequences of his/her action, i.e., that his/her persisting in the work may result in a presumption of renunciation of jurisdiction.

“d. If the officer persists in the prohibited work after such consultation and notice, the governing body may presume that he/she has renounced the jurisdiction of the church. If the governing body so determines, it shall notify the officer of its decision.

“e. The officer has the right to challenge the governing body’s determination and to speak on the floor of the governing body in so doing. He/she also has the right to file a remedial case challenging the governing body’s determination of renunciation (D-6.0100).

“2. The term ‘work disapproved by the governing body’ relates to both (a) repeating or persisting in a particular offense for which one has been duly censured, and (b) the exercise of the vocation of a minister of the Word and Sacrament or the official conduct of church business for which a deacon or elder was elected. It does not relate to particular acts of ministry, or to behavior, that might be considered an offense under the Constitution (D-2.0203), other than acts or behaviors that have already provoked censure of the individual. One can be presumed to have renounced jurisdiction because of persisting in disapproved work following consultation and notice, only if the work is engaged in after the disapproval of the work and if it is persisted in following a warning of the consequences.”

(The underlined portion is the amendment suggested by the ACC.)

05-11: Disapproved overture (Western North Carolina) to grant voice and vote in presbytery meetings to Certified Christian Educators. A similar proposal had recently been rejected by the presbyteries. It was defeated again at this G.A.

05-07: The Assembly debated removal of Authoritative Interpretation on sexual standards for ordination using the overture from Western Reserve. The majority report proposed a new authoritative interpretation of the constitution. Commissioner Kyle Otterbein moved the minority report. As the Assembly worked to perfect the majority and minority reports, commissioner Matt Johnson asked for clarification on what section of the *Book of Order* the newly proposed

authoritative interpretation would be interpreting. The wording of the proposed authoritative interpretation was

In carrying out their responsibilities under the Constitution to determine fitness for office, sessions and presbyteries are not bound by statements of the General Assembly and its commissioners, regarding ordained service by homosexual persons, that predate the adoption of G-6.0106b.

Johnson's question was not answered either by the Stated Clerk or by the ACC resource person though Johnson and other commissioners persisted in seeking an answer.

In the perfection of the minority report, commissioner James Kim moved to refer all the overtures to the Task Force on Peace, Unity and Purity. The motion was defeated handily.

In the debate over whether the minority report should become the main motion, Commissioner Todd Billings from Boston Presbytery charged that removal of the AI would be extremely disruptive to the Church. It would be interpreted, he said, as allowing the ordination of homosexuals. He noted that the quotations, repeated during the debate, were out of context and the language that was used to give a picture that the church disparages those in homosexual practice was actually condemned by the existing AI.

At the end of this long debate, the vote was 259/255/2 that the minority report become the main motion. The final action to adopt the new main motion was 297/218.

All items related to sexual ordination standards were answered by this action.

Committee 6: Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

06-02: Disapproved overture (Eastern Oklahoma) request to "develop policy consistent with religious pluralism."

06-09: Approved overture (Hudson River) to re-examine relationship between Christians and Jews as amended to say "to reexamine and strengthen relationship between Christians and Jews." The overture's recommendation to suspend funding was defeated.

06-03: Approved ecumenical delegates for 2006: Korean Christian Federation (North Korea), Presbyterian Church of Korea (South Korea), Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (South Korea), The Presbyterian Church of Cameroon, Cumberland Presbyterian Church of Liberia, Christian Evangelical Church of Minahasa (GIMM), Tomohon (Indonesia), United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Island, The Lesotho Evangelical Church, The Apostolic Orthodox Church of Albania, The Synod of the Nile of the Evangelical Church of Egypt; U.S. and Canadian Churches: African Methodist Episcopal Church, Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, Orthodox Church in America, United Church of Canada, United Church of Christ.

06-07: Approved the NCC was review. An attempt to evaluate continued level of funding failed.

Committee 7: Mission Coordination and Budgets

07-06: Disapproved adding a fifth Special Offering

Approved 2005 and 2006 budgets

2005: \$114,891,603

2006: \$115,048,841

Committee 8: Theological Issues

Approved Iain Torrance as new President of Princeton Seminary, and Dean K. Thompson as President of Louisville Seminary.

08-05: Responded to an overture (John Calvin) calling for a reorganization of Chapter 2 of the Form of Government with a long statement regarding adherence to essential tenets (attached).

08-06: Referred overture (Central Washington) changing wording of Lord's Supper invitation from "baptized" to "acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior" to GAC and Office of Theology and Worship.

08-09: Approved the study paper on the Trinity for distribution for response and comment. Final report in 2006.

08-10: Approved preliminary report from the Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity ("encourage gatherings of Presbyterians of varied views to covenant together to discuss the affirmations in the report").

08-12: Answered this overture (Hudson River) with its action on 08-05 (examination of candidates on basis of conscience).

Committee 9: Evangelism and Higher Education

09-01: Approved amended overtures on granting voice and vote to immigrant fellowships (Des Moines) by granting presbyteries the right to recognize designated leaders with voice and vote if they choose. Presbyteries that do so must operate according to written criteria. A motion to reconsider was defeated.

09-08: Approved the development of a youth magazine.

Committee 10: National Issues

10-06: Approved Transforming Families policy. This policy paper, presented by ACSWP last year, sparked widespread objection across the denomination and at General Assembly to its content. A motion by commissioners in committee last year won the approval of the committee as a substitute for the ACSWP paper. When the two statements reached plenary, the commissioners asked that both be referred back to ACSWP with direction for revision and presentation at this GA. Most of the significant revisions were written and defended by Alan Wisdom, executive director of Presbyterian Action for Faith and Freedom. His work was so faithful to Scripture and our confessions that the revised policy met with little opposition this year and was nearly unanimously approved by the Assembly with one minor amendment substituting the word "natural" for "biological." The final vote was 482/23/4.

10-11: A Christian Declaration of Marriage was answered by a recommendation to pray for strengthened marriages.

10-17: Approved recognition of civil rights for same-gender couples including civil unions after amendment to add reference to the Book of Order's affirmation of the historic definition of marriage between a man and a woman, quoted from the 1996 action on this subject.

10-16: Answered a commissioner resolution's request to support the Federal Marriage Amendment with the following statement:

Nothing the 216th General Assembly (2004) has said or acted upon is to be construed to state or imply a position for or against the Federal Marriage Amendment. General Assembly entities shall not advocate for or against the Federal Marriage Amendment.

An effort to amend by removing the last sentence failed. Nevertheless, the Washington Office continued after this Assembly to lobby publicly for the defeat of the Amendment.

10-08: Disapproved overture (Northern New York) to repeal the Patriot Act.

Committee 11: Health Issues

11-02: Rejected overture from Charlotte Presbytery on protecting viable babies in the womb by adopting a minority report substituted for the majority report by a margin of four votes. New main motion then adopted by vote of 298/219/2. Other overtures and concurrences answered with this action.

11-06: Approved Commissioner Resolution on reaffirming the 2001 GA statement on embryo stem cell research.

11-07: Accepted final response to referral of 2002 overture (Donegal) on developing pastoral resources for women and men who have experienced negative effects of abortion, spiritually, physically, and emotionally. If an eight day meeting can contain a saga, this was it!

We in PPL followed the action of 2002 in contacts with Louisville offices that dealt with the referral: The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP), The Advocacy Committee on Women's Concerns (ACWC) and the Office of Theology and Worship.

We were invited to and attended an afternoon meeting in Louisville where we presented PPL's resources on the subject. Both before and after that meeting we continued to provide the committees with our own developing resources on the subject. The committees sought no consultation from us and made no use of our materials.

As the 2004 GA approached, we were informed that the newly written booklet would be coming as business. It appeared in the consent agenda at the opening of the Assembly. A commissioner asked to have it removed, and it was then sent to the Health Issues Committee.

The Standing Rules provide that when referred business returns to the G.A. for approval, the originating presbytery made send an overture advocate to speak to the response. Donegal Presbytery approved an overture advocate to speak to the original intent of the 2002 overture (the original intent was preserved in the wording adopted by the 2002 GA). The advocate was the pastor of the church that had originally sponsored the overture. Committee leadership had scheduled a hearing on the matter and had approved opportunity for the advocate to speak.

However, when the business came before the committee, the leadership had changed its mind. The hearing was canceled and the committee moderator announced that the advocate would not be allowed to speak. The committee was told that they could not evaluate the content of the pamphlet; that they could only vote to receive or not receive the report.

So, there were at least two points of interference with proper process and expression of concerns regarding the booklet were denied. Commissioners were hamstrung and unclear about their rights.

I went to the G.A. office of the Stated Clerk and spoke with Gradye Parsons, associate Clerk, about the violation of the rules in not allowing the advocate to speak. Parsons verified the right of the advocate. I asked him to come personally and inform the committee, which he did. The committee had already acted to receive the report, however, and refused to reconsider its action.

When the matter came to the floor of plenary, the commissioners had so little information on the matter that they had little choice but to approve the committee's recommendation.

11-01: Disapproved an overture (Upper Ohio Valley) to amend the *Book of Order* by including a condemnation of abortion.

11-04: Disapproved overture urging the FDA to approve the "morning after" pill for sale over-the-counter (Baltimore). In committee and on the floor, commissioners had misgivings about approving the sale of drugs to youth without prescription and without parental knowledge.

Committee 12: Peacemaking

12-01: Approved support for the Geneva Accord.

12-02: Approved overture (Chicago) calling for an end to the construction of a wall by the State of Israel.

Committee 13: International Issues

13-07: Approved overture (Pacific) expressing solidarity with the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan and with the Taiwanese people.

13-03: Approved including funding to combat HIV/AIDS and diseases of poverty in Africa in the One Great Hour of Sharing.

13-04: Disapproved an overture (Lackawanna) on Global Population Stabilization and Reduction. By a two-to-one vote, the committee recommended disapproval. The action had so little debate in committee that there was no motion to justify a minority report. Nevertheless, a minority report was accepted by the Office of the Stated Clerk. The minority report was rejected on the floor by a 174/260 margin and the motion to disapprove adopted by a 312/122 vote. This Assembly was clear about its opposition to population control. Nevertheless, The Washington Office continued to lobby for restoration of funding for the UN Population Fund after the General Assembly.

Committee 14: Pensions, Foundation, and PILP

Confirmed Robert Leach for four year term as President of the BOP

Confirmed Jay Hudson as President and COO of PILP

14-08: Disapproved overture (Abingdon) on creation of a task force to review the medical plan. Added comment that concerns be referred to GA Committee on Review for BOP.

14-09: Approved overture (Southeastern Illinois) to recalculate salary for married clergy couples installed in one position.

14-15: Referred a commissioner resolution on coverage for domestic partners to the BOP with comment: “in accordance with the constitution of the PCUSA.” The wording was amended to remove reference to implementing church policy and replace it with “explore the feasibility of providing....”

Attachment to report on Item 08-05 (See Committee 8) regarding request to reorganize sections of Chapter Two of the form of Government. The General Assembly's response was the following statement:

The 216th General Assembly (2004) affirms the right and responsibility of presbyteries to determine whether candidates and ministers "sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church," together with all other matters expressed in ordination and installation vows.

Ordination vows and essential tenets have a long and complex history in the Presbyterian church. The church has worked through the issue of "essential tenets" many times before, so attention to that history is essential.

From the beginning, the church has lived in the space between two tendencies. One stressed the more "objective" aspects of Christian faith such as theological precision, the distinct character of the ministry, and ordered church government. The other placed more emphasis on spontaneity, vital experience, and adaptability. In 1729, division was averted by recognizing the concerns of both groups in the "Adopting Act." The Adopting Act required:

1. That all ministers and candidates accept the Westminster Confession, together with the Larger and Shorter catechisms . . .

2. . . . but not categorically.

3. That all ministers and candidates must declare "agreement in and approbation of" the confessional standards "as being in all the essential and necessary articles, good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine."

4. That any minister who did not accept any particular part of the Confession or catechisms should state his scruple concerning that part, and the presbytery should then decide whether or not the scruple involved "essential and necessary articles of faith."

The Adopting Act regularized confessional standards, but it did not require adherence to every confessional articulation. "Essential and necessary articles" were not identified. The Adopting Act was refined in 1758 at the repair of the Old Side/New Side schism:

1. With respect to any action deemed essential and necessary by the church, "every member shall actively concur . . . or passively submit . . . or peaceably withdraw."

2. It became a censurable offense irresponsibly to accuse other ministers.

3. Presbyteries were to examine candidates on "religious experience" as well as doctrine.

4. Five questions were to be asked at ordinations and installations, including, "Do you sincerely receive and adopt the confession of faith of this church as contained in the system of doctrine taught in the holy Scriptures?" The "system of doctrine" was interpreted in the spirit of "essential and necessary."

The 1910 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America declared that the Adopting Act of 1729 called upon judicatories to determine which articles of faith are "essential and necessary." The assembly then identified five doctrines as "essential" (although the assembly added, "others are equally so.") (1) inerrancy of Scripture, (2) virgin birth, (3) sacrificial atonement, (4) bodily resurrection, (5) Christ's miracles.

Although the 1910 deliverance was challenged repeatedly, it was not repealed. Following the 1923 General Assembly, and in reaction against the 1910/1916/1923 doctrinal deliverance, more than 1,200 ministers signed the "Auburn Affirmation" declaring that the five-point deliverance

attempts to commit our church to certain theories concerning the Inspiration of the Bible, and the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection, and the Continuing Life and Supernatural Power of our Lord Jesus Christ. We all hold most earnestly to these great facts and doctrines... .

Some of us regard the particular themes contained in the deliverance of the General Assembly of 1923 as satisfactory explanations of these facts and doctrines. But we are united in believing that these are not the only themes allowed by the Scriptures and our standards as explanations of these facts and doctrines of our religion, and that all who hold to these facts and doctrines, whatever theories they may employ to explain them, are worthy of our confidence and fellowship.

The issue was set: narrowly defined confessional subscription or broadly defined confessional subscription. The question was not whether confessional subscription was required, but the specific nature of that confessional subscription.

The matter was referred to a special commission that reported in 1926 and 1927. The upshot of the special commission's report, adopted by the 1927 General Assembly, was that:

1. The General Assembly does not have the constitutional power to give binding definition to the church's essential faith. By denying that the assembly has the right to define authoritatively the "essentials" of the church's faith, the commission eliminated the five points as a source of controversy.

2. While a measure of tolerance was embedded in the church, it was made clear that the church, and not the individual, must decide the limits of tolerated diversity, "either generally, by amendment to the constitution, or particularly, by Presbyterial authority."

The church has decided limits generally, by amending the constitution to create The Book of Confessions, and particularly, by the continuing examination for ordination of candidates and for reception into membership of ministers. To this end, it must be acknowledged that in ordination the presbytery has historically demonstrated its power and responsibility in determining confirmation with the church's theology.