

222nd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA)

The Presbytery of Coastal Carolina sent nine commissioners to the 222nd General Assembly of the PC(USA) in Portland, Oregon from June 18th through June 25th. This assembly proved to be very uplifting as we experienced a renewed Hope in our Calling. This assembly celebrated our diversity as we discerned our way forward as a denomination.

Saturday, June 18, 2016

- On the 60th anniversary of making women eligible to be pastors, and the 85th anniversary of ordaining its first woman elder, the PC(USA) made history again, electing two women as co-moderators for the first time. Denise Anderson, a pastor from National Capital Presbytery, and Jan Edmiston, a presbytery executive from Chicago, were overwhelmingly elected Co-Moderators of the 222nd General Assembly.

Sunday, June 19, 2016

- Nearly 2,500 participants in the GA spread out on Sunday to worship in about 30 congregations stretching from Vancouver, Washington, to Salem, Oregon.

Monday – Tuesday, June 20 & 21, 2016

- The commissioners were busy in their various committees debating and voting on issues to bring before the assembly for approval.

Wednesday, June 22, 2016

- Fifty years after it was birthed in South Africa by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church during its battle against apartheid, the Confession of Belhar is now included in the Book of Confessions of the PC(USA). After a four-year-long process of study and periodic votes, this assembly voted overwhelmingly Wednesday to make Belhar our denomination's 12th recognized confession, the first originating in the global south. The historic moment was greeted with tears of joy by many in the Oregon Convention Center, including Allan Boesak, a co-author of Belhar who was moderator of the DRMC when it was adopted.
- A slimmer, less restrictive Directory for Worship for the PC(USA) was overwhelmingly approved Wednesday by GA222. The directory, which is part of the *Book of Order*, now goes to the denomination's 171 presbyteries, a majority of which must ratify it to be adopted.
- Also on Wednesday, with tears and prayer – and a remarkable apology from Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons – GA222 unanimously passed a comprehensive policy to protect children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Thursday, June 23, 2016

- Several recommendations that would have drastically changed the structure and operation of the PC(USA) were rejected Thursday by GA222. Commissioners instead adopted a compromise plan that would create a vision team and a separate administrative commission to address those matters. By a vote of 480-86, commissioners authorized the creation of a 12-member Way Forward Commission, which would have sweeping powers “to study and identify a vision for the structure and function of the General Assembly agencies.”

- Declining a proposal to admit to and apologize for harming the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning community, commissioners to GA222 instead opted to express *deep regret* for ways that those minorities of “God’s beloved children” have been led to feel that they stand outside the grace of God and are unwelcome in the denomination. At the same time, the resolution expresses the deep sorrow of all in the PC(USA) who have left the fellowship of the church, and expresses appreciation to those who have maintained relationships despite profound disagreement. Calling for deeper conversations about theological differences, the resolution adopted by a 463-51 vote calls upon Presbyterians to seek reconciliation and to reach out to those who have been marginalized across the spectrum of theological understanding.
- A decision two years ago that would have reconfigured and reduced the number of synods in the PC(USA) was rescinded by a 421-158 vote.

Friday, June 24, 2016

- J. Herbert Nelson was overwhelmingly elected Stated Clerk of the PC(USA) in an historic vote, becoming the first African-American elected as the top ecclesial officer of the nation’s largest Reformed body.
- The PC(USA) will continue its investment in fossil-fuel companies after overwhelmingly turning back an overture to begin divestment immediately. Instead, it will continue the process of selective, phased, divestment that begins with full corporate engagement.
- After several hours of debate, commissioners voted to send to presbyteries a proposed amendment to the *Book of Order* that would restore the previous nomenclature for ordered ministry. If approved by a majority of the denomination’s 171 presbyteries, those now called teaching elders would become ministers of Word and Sacrament; ruling elders would be elders; and commissioned ruling elders would be commissioned lay pastors. The vote was 320- 218 to return to language in use prior to 2012, when the new form of government was adopted.
- After a debate that stretched over the dinner hour, GA222 approved a lengthy report containing a re-evaluation of the PC(USA)’s historic support of a two-state solution in Israel/Palestine. The document, “Israel-Palestine: For Human Values in the Absence of a Just Peace,” says the PC(USA) “should advance those efforts that best accord with its values . . . including, but not limited to, that of two sovereign states—Israel and Palestine.”
- After a six-year discernment process throughout the denomination, GA222 approved a lengthy report underscoring the centrality of peacemaking to Christian faith and promising to “practice boldly the things that make for peace.”

Summary Notes

- During the assembly there was intentional Bible study, prayer, and worship that commissioners found life giving. There are numerous items not mentioned in this summary. The work of the assembly is exhausting but our commissioners are available to speak in your congregation about their experiences in Portland.

For more information, please see www.PC-Biz.org