

# Presbyterian & Reformed News

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## Charlotte to Serve as Hostess to 31<sup>st</sup> PCA General Assembly

In the Piedmont of North Carolina, just above the South Carolina border, lies the "Queen City of the Carolinas"—Charlotte. From June 10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup>, it will act as hostess to the 31<sup>st</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA).

From colonial days, the Carolinas have been a place for Presbyterians. Many of the early settlers were Scotch-Irish, who brought their Calvinistic beliefs along with a thirst for freedom to the new land.

That love of liberty led to the Mecklenburg Declaration, the first formal call for independence from Great Britain. The Scotch-Irish Presbyterians in and around Charlotte were largely responsible for that May 20, 1775, document. Their guerrilla tactics were also largely responsible for Charlotte being dubbed by British officers during the American Revolution as a "hornet's nest." The sobriquet has stuck; until just recently, the city was home to a professional basketball team called the Hornets.

Charlotte has once before been the site of a PCA General Assembly. In 1979, the 7<sup>th</sup> General Assembly convened at a Baptist church—a congregation which, because of its dress code, requested that women be dressed

in dresses and skirts and not pants outfits.

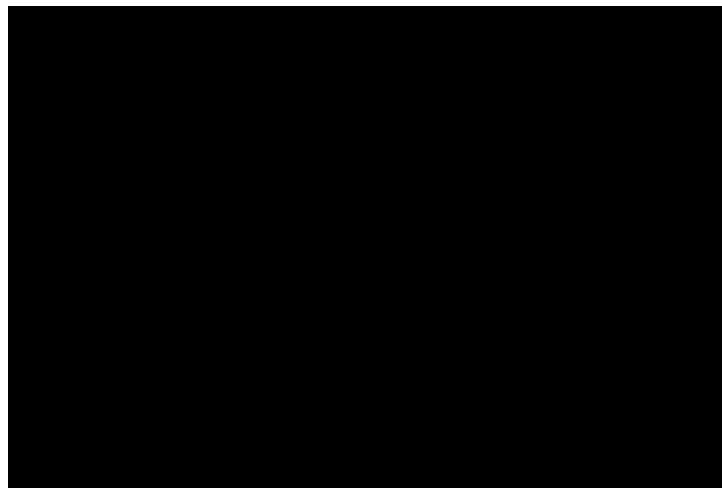
Since that Assembly twenty-four years ago, the denomination has grown across the nation, and it has greatly expanded numerically in greater Charlotte. A generation ago, there were only 2 congregations—one organized church and one mission work—in Mecklenburg County, with a total membership

also witnessed tremendous expansion. In 1979, the middle judicatory had 13 churches and missions with a membership of approximately 1,500. Today, the presbytery has 36 churches and missions, with a membership of more than 8,000.

There will almost certainly be a noticeable difference in the number of General Assembly participants as well. In 1979, the total enrollment was 681. The expectation is that this year's registration will exceed the record-setting number of about 1,600 commissioners who came to Assembly in 2002.

Preaching for the opening communion service will be the retiring Moderator, the Rev. Dr. Joseph F. "Skip" Ryan, Senior Pastor of Park Cities Presbyterian Church, Dallas, Texas. Other speakers scheduled during the week include Dr. Bryan Chapell, Dr. Richard Pratt, Dr. Tim Keller, and the Rev. Bruce Marcey.

The Moderator of the 1979 General Assembly was the Honorable William F. "Bill" Joseph, Jr. This year, if the PCA follows its historic pattern, another ruling elder will be selected to moderate the sessions of the Assembly.



The Charlotte Skyline

of 212. Today in Mecklenburg County, there are 12 organized churches and missions, boasting a total membership of close to 5,000.

The host presbytery, Central Carolina, has

### Presbyterianism in The Carolinas

In North Carolina, Presbyterian churches and institutions have played a significant role. Among the Presbyterian institutions of higher learning in the Tar Heel State are Warren Wilson College, Montreat College, Peace College, Barber-Scotia College, Lees-McRae College, St. Andrews College, Davidson College (just to the north of Charlotte), and Queens College (in Charlotte itself). South of the border, about ten percent of South Carolinians are Presbyterians. Among Presbyterian institutions there are Presbyterian College, Erskine College and Theological Seminary, and Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

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(Photos on pages 1-3, courtesy of Visit Charlotte)

# Overtures Express Concerns of the Presbyteries

## Subscription, Women in Military, and Racism Could Prove to be the Most Controversial Matters Considered by the General Assembly

Every year, presbyteries send up overtures to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) for its consideration. According to the Rules of Assembly Operation (RAO), Every overture must be in the hands of the Stated Clerk's office at least thirty-one (31) days prior to the convening of the Assembly in order to be placed on the docket.

If judged on the basis of the overtures alone, the docket this year appears to be relatively light. To date, only twenty-four overtures have been sent to the higher court.

However, the subject matter may stir considerable debate, as several of the overtures touch on highly-emotional issues.

### Theological Subscription

At least six overtures from seven presbyteries deal with the on-going discussion on theological subscription.

#### Changing the RAO

Early in the year, Illiana Presbytery proposed an amendment to the RAO which would mandate the recording of exceptions on the minutes of presbyteries. However, the proposal also states: "The Committee on Review of Presbytery Records reports to the General Assembly only for informational purposes. Neither the report of the committee nor the General Assembly's approval or disapproval of this report establishes doctrinal precedent without appropriate judicial action." Eastern Canada signalled its agreement with this overture (#5) at its meeting in late winter.

Illiana's proposal came after criticism had been voiced around the denomination, that the *Book of Church Order (BCO)* amendment which was being voted on by the presbyteries did not contain the requirement of recording exceptions in presbytery minutes. Efforts at last year's General Assembly, to add such a requirement to the Constitutional amendment, failed.

Covenant Presbytery has sent in its own overture on the matter, one which would not state that the report of the Committee on Review of Presbytery Records is only for informational purposes. Overture 18 calls simply for the following sentence to be added to the RAO: "Presbytery minutes shall record ministers' and ministerial candidates' stated differences with our Standards that the presbytery approves as doctrinal exceptions."

#### New BCO Proposals

New Jersey Presbytery wants a new *BCO* provision regarding subscription. Overture 6 proposes a "good faith" subscription that would define what is meant by an "exception" to the Standards: "the Presbytery shall require the candidate to state the specific instances in which he is doubtful about, or in disagreement with, the biblical fidelity of any of the propositions or sentences of these doctrinal standards, which doubts or disagreements shall be called exceptions." If the exception "makes implausible the candidate's profession of that system" or would "make impossible the candidate's conscientious practice under that system; in either of which cases, the exception cannot be permitted and the candidate must be disappointed."

New Jersey's proposal also calls for the following language to be added to the *BCO*: "If the exception is found permissible, the candidate shall be approved only under the following conditions: (a) he must be able and willing to explain the teaching of the doctrinal standards in the excepted part with sympathy and deference, and/or to submit himself to the requirements of the excepted part; (b) he shall be permitted to express his own conscience on the matter in the course of his teaching on the subject; and (c) he shall be permitted peacefully and respectfully to advocate his views before the courts of the church in order to persuade the church to modify its doctrinal standards." Finally, the proposal would specify in the Constitution that "The Presbytery shall not permit an exception except as set forth above, subject always to the review of the General Assembly. Whenever an exception is permitted, the Presbytery shall make a full record of the exception, including a citation of the portion of the Constitution excepted, and a brief statement, agreeable to the candidate, of the candidate's views."

Westminster Presbytery has also proposed a new approach in the subscription matter. Overture 20 largely parallels Westminster's suggestion to the 2002 General Assembly. It would add the following language to the *BCO*: "It is the right and responsibility of the Presbytery, as the court of original jurisdiction, to determine if the candidate is out of accord with any of the statements of these doctrinal standards and, as a consequence, may not be able sincerely to receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures (cf. BCO 21-5, Q. 2; 24-5, Q. 2).

"In examining a candidate for ordination the Presbytery shall inquire not only into the candidate's knowledge and views in the areas specified above, but also shall require the candidate to state the specific instances in which he

Presbytery's action on the exception(s), to be recorded in the minutes of Presbytery along with the ministerial obligation he is required to sign. All exceptions permitted by Presbyteries will be reported to the General Assembly Stated Clerk, to be included in his report to the General Assembly."

#### Calls for a Study Committee

At least two presbyteries—Mississippi Valley and Western Carolina—want the General Assembly to study the whole subscription matter a bit longer. Mississippi Valley's overture (#8) presents five points in favor of an ad interim committee. One, the 22<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly recommended a study of subscription prior to the enactment of a Constitutional amendment on the matter. "Had this wise advice and counsel been followed, the consciences of many good men would not have been offended and we would have had a better opportunity to heal rather than perpetuate and exacerbate some of our divisions."

Two, with reference to the current amendment that was sent down for vote by last year's Assembly, Mississippi Valley says: "It seems exceedingly unwise to begin one's public affirmation of the Church's Confession by saying, first and foremost, that one doesn't necessarily embrace it!"

Three, "The proposed amendment fails to define 'an exception.' This deficiency is almost fatal to the accomplishment of the noble goals of the drafters of this overture. Indeed, the General Assembly's Committee on Constitutional Business cited precisely such a fatal flaw in another overture offered at last year's GA as a ground for rejecting it because its language created 'constitutional ambiguity.'"

Four, "The proposed amendment, though it has been promoted as a solution to our problems (or at least a significant step toward that), fails to deal with the two most important issues regarding subscription in the PCA: (1) can exceptions be taught? and (2) what are the non-negotiables? In other words, to frame the subscription debate in the PCA as if the two 'sides' are 'those who believe that exceptions can be taken to the Confession' (loose subscriptionists) and 'those who do not believe that exceptions can be taken to the Confession' (strict subscriptionists) is grossly unfair and inaccurate. The real issues are as follows. (1) Can one teach one's exceptions? Does a presbytery have a right to say to a man, 'yes we will ordain you, we will also love and respect you, we find your theology, in general, to be excellent, but we ask you not teach such-and-such a view that you hold because it is unbiblical, out of accord with the Standards and potentially harmful to the peace and unity of the church – even though you think it is biblical'? (2) How far can we go with granting allowable exceptions? Is there anything non-negotiable in the PCA standards? What if presbytery A allows an exception to a man who, for instance, denies the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity in WCF 2.3 (surely a doctrine at the heart of the faith) and he wishes to transfer to presbytery B, who decides either that he cannot teach views he once taught or, even more traumatically, that he is not acceptable to the presbytery? These are the real questions that bedevil us, and on these issues the 'sides' are less clearly drawn, as was patently apparent on the floor of GA last summer."

Five, "The proposed amendment lacks a provision that exceptions be presented in writing and recorded. Even the



"Top Gun" roller coaster ride at Carowinds amusement park

may differ with the Confession of Faith and Catechisms in any of their statements and/or propositions. The court may grant an exception if the candidate's declared difference does not strike at the vitals of religion, and is not a serious departure from the system of doctrine.

"When a Presbytery allows a man to hold an exception to the Standards, it shall also determine whether the man may hold the exception in belief only, whether he may teach it, or whether he may practice it so long as he does not disturb the peace and purity of the Church. The Stated Clerk of Presbytery shall cause the man's allowed exceptions(s) stated in his own words, along with the

### Western Carolina's Overture

The following was offered by Western Carolina Presbytery in support of its call for an ad interim committee on subscription:

Whereas, "the wisdom from above" is "pure," "peaceable," "open to reason," and "impartial" (James 3:17); and  
 Whereas, with respect to the issues of subscription to and exceptions to our confessional standards, the Presbyterian Church in America is in need of "wisdom from above;" and  
 Whereas, we members of Western Carolina Presbytery represent a wide variety of views on subscription ourselves, but are united in our concern that we, as a church, handle this matter as wisely and peacefully and definitively as possible; and  
 Whereas, we have concerns about the process by which the amendment on Good-Faith Subscription currently proposed to the General Assembly has come before us; and  
 Whereas, we are deeply concerned that passage of the currently proposed amendment may well provoke needless and harmful discontent and even division across the church . . .

Evangelical Presbyterian Church (a fellowship far more loosely connected to the Confession than is our own denomination) requires this! Many of our own presbyteries already require this, but to fail to bring about uniformity on this matter is to invite abuse of this statute in our denomination."

Mississippi Valley's overture then asks for a twelve-man committee, which it specifically names. The eight ministers would be: Will Barker, Bryan Chapell, David Coffin, Harry Reeder, Ligon Duncan, Joseph Wheat, Phil Ryken, Ric Cannada. The four ruling elders would be: Jay Neikirk (Ascension), Sam Duncan (Grace), Mark Belz (Missouri), and Mark Baxter (Central Georgia). The General Assembly Stated Clerk, Roy Taylor, would serve as an advisory (non-voting) member of the committee.



Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden

This committee, which would complete its work within two years, would be authorized to report its findings for information only. Presbyteries being encouraged to send up proposed *BCO* amendments.

Western Carolina Presbytery also wants an ad interim committee, but would limit its membership to seven. Four of those men would be the presenters at the pre-Assembly seminar on subscription held at the 2001 General Assembly, viz., Bryan Chapell, David Coffin, Tim Keller, and Joseph Pipa. The other three elders would be selected by common agreement among these four men. This committee would report to next year's Assembly with recommendations for the perfecting of our *Book of Church Order* language with respect to subscription to and exceptions to our confessional standards."

Overture 16 asks that this special committee be appointed "regardless of how the vote on the currently proposed amendment on Good-Faith Subscription may fare" [see box for the Whereases of Western Carolina's overture.—Ed.]

## Women in the Military

The adoption of the majority report of the Ad Interim Committee on Women in the Military at last year's General Assembly represented the culmination of several years of efforts to have the denomination go on record as being opposed to the use of women in combat. However, the adoption of that position has apparently not totally settled the issue in the PCA.

Potomac Presbytery is concerned that "the oral report of the Ad Interim Committee on Women in the Military included a lengthy section discussing how the full scope of church discipline should be employed to further the ends of its resolutions." Overture 1 says that "members of our congregations both those serving in the Armed Forces of the United States and others, have expressed concern over such potential use of church discipline" and that "officers of our churches have expressed concern over whether they may, by the Assembly's action, be 'out of accord' with the law of the church, and potentially the subjects of discipline." Potomac cites the historic view of Presbyterianism, that *in these* statements by General Assemblies are not binding on the church. The overture asks the 31<sup>st</sup> General Assembly to agree with the Presbytery's unanimous declaration "that the action of the 30<sup>th</sup> General Assembly with respect to the report of the Ad Interim Committee on Women in the Military, though to be given 'due and serious consideration,' does not oblige any officer of the PCA, as a part of his ordination commitments, to concur in the Assembly's judgment, nor does it oblige any court of original or appellate jurisdiction to bring under disciplinary proceedings views or behaviors, of members or church officers, which may be contrary to the Assembly's judgment."

Overture 3 from Chesapeake Presbytery states that "one teaching elder from Chesapeake Presbytery has already

notified the Shepherding Committee of the violation of his conscience by the requirements of the report," and notes that the Session of Pasadena (Md.) Evangelical Presbyterian Church "would find it a violation of our conscience to discipline any female member, who voluntarily takes up a combat position." Chesapeake is asking that, "for the sake of clarification and for the peace of the church," this year's Assembly "rule that discipline of either members or elders relating to the issues of the *Ad Interim Report on Women in the Military* is not necessarily required and that the Report remain the position of the PCA as pious advice."

## Racism

Nashville Presbytery last year sponsored an overture condemning racism, which overture was overwhelmingly adopted by the General Assembly. This year, Nashville has proposed that an ad interim committee on racism and the gospel be established.

Overture 17 to the 2003 Assembly alleges that the adoption of the statement last year "has exposed some divisions within the PCA regarding the issue of racism." The overture argues "that the connections of faith and practice, truth and duty have been historically and currently severely compromised"; that "the confusion over that compromise continues even to the degree that the Gospel is in jeopardy, understanding that racism is a clear contradiction to the Gospel in that it stakes our identity as the Church on something other than the truth of Scripture (Gal. 3.26-29; Eph. 2.14-18; Col. 3.11)"; and that "we believe sin has brought division between the races and that God's goal is the healing of these divisions, in anticipation of that great day when there will be a multitude that no one can count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before the throne in front of the Lamb crying out



Features of Charlotte's "Discovery Place" Science Center include an IMAX theatre and planetarium.

'Salvation belongs to our God, Who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb' (Rev. 7.9-10)."

Giving thanks "for the growing ethnic and racial diversity in our midst" and expressing a "desire to see it increase to the glory of God," Nashville is proposing that a seven-man committee, reflecting racial and geographical diversity, be appointed, for the purpose of writing a pastoral letter on race and the gospel. "This letter would be in a manner consistent with the gospel imperatives, for the encouragement of racial reconciliation, the establishment of urban and minority congregations, and the enhancement of existing ministries of mercy in our cities, among the poor, and across all social, racial, and economic boundaries, to the glory of God."

## The Definition of Marriage

Philadelphia Presbytery is concerned about the attack in the United States of America upon the traditional marriage. Accordingly, Overture 19 from Philadelphia asks the General Assembly to "declare its support for the Marriage Amendment which states: 'Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and woman. Neither this Constitution or the constitution of any State, nor state or federal law, shall be construed to require that marital status or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon unmarried couples or groups.'" The overture also asks the Assembly "to declare its support for this Amendment to the President of the United States, both Houses of the U.S. Congress, as well as to all U.S. State legislatures, and to encourage its pastors, people, churches and institutions to exercise their appropriate and respective roles as citizens to further the process of the adoption of the Marriage Amendment to the U.S. Constitution."

Philadelphia Presbytery recognizes the reticence of the

PCA to address the civil magistrate, especially given the Confession of Faith's strictures on the church intermeddling in civil affairs. Nevertheless, the Presbytery argues that the PCA "is willing to [address the magistrate] in extraordinary cases such as it has done in the matters of the sanctity of life and the deleterious impact of homosexuality on families, churches, and both state and culture"; and urges that "the redefinition of marriage from heterosexual monogamy is a matter of enormous and extraordinary importance for our PCA families, our churches, our denomination and indeed for our entire nation." The overture also states that "there is a definite movement in the U.S. and beyond to overthrow and destroy [the] biblical definition of marriage as is manifested by recent court decisions."

## General Assembly Procedural Matters

General Assembly procedures are the subject of at least six overtures this year.

### Floor Nominations

The issue of floor nominations has been a touchy one over the years. In 1992, it was reported that a "caucus" of the "establishment people" had targeted a whole host of Nominating Committee nominees and had prepared a list of candidates for whom to vote. Virtually every one of the targeted nominees from the Nominating Committee was defeated.

The strategy of targeting particular nominees for defeat is aided by the long-time practice of having a floor nominee to be placed in opposition to a particular candidate.

This year, both James River and Central Carolina Presbyteries are targeting the current PCA practice, and are asking the Assembly to provide for nominations to be made for the office and not in opposition to any particular person.

Overture 4 from James River proposes the following amendment to the RAO: "Each nominee shall run for the applicable office and not against another designated nominee. If the number of nominees exceeds the number of positions to be filled (for example, if three ruling elders have been nominated to fill a class of two), then each commissioner eligible to vote shall have one vote per position. A vote shall be taken as to each nominee in the order in which they were nominated. The nominees receiving the most votes shall be elected, to the extent necessary to fill the open positions."

Overture 12 from Central Carolina proposes amending the RAO by adding this terminology: "When there are multiple vacancies on a committee, board or commission, no nominee will run directly against another. If a ballot is not used (i.e., voting by voice, standing, show of hands or cards), then the candidates are voted on in the order they were nominated. As soon as one of the nominees receives



The Charlotte Trolley

a majority vote, the chair declares him elected and this procedure continues until all vacancies are filled."

Both overtures note that the current PCA practice is not mandated by any of the denominational documents; and also that the procedure currently in use goes counter to *Robert's Rules of Order*.

### Name that Nominator

Central Carolina Presbytery also wants whoever makes a nomination to be reported publicly to the General Assembly. Overture 11 asks for the RAO to be amended so as to require the Assembly to know who makes a floor nomination. The overture states that "*Robert's Rules of Order* does not seem to recognize such a thing as an

'anonymous' floor nomination. . . . It is normally assumed, whether a nominating committee is used or not, that a floor nomination is made verbally from the floor." The overture also notes that "the nominator is already required to record his name on the Floor Nomination Form, but it is not published to the [General Assembly]"; and argues: "There is no reason to keep unknown the name of the person making a nomination from the floor."

#### B&O Railroad?

One of the most emotional issues on the floor of last year's General Assembly was not a substantive matter, but was a procedural one. Historically, the Bills & Overtures (B&O) Committee has been given broad latitude to propose alternative language and approaches to matters raised in overtures. However, at the 2002 Assembly, a successful challenge was mounted to this long-standing practice. Tensions rose over the change in procedure—a procedure that was not applied consistently.

Ascension Presbytery has sent up an overture (#23) which would add this language to the RAO: "Germane amendments to overtures and recommendations shall not be understood to constitute new business." Other new language to be added includes the following: "Reference to overtures by number with brief statement of content and recommended answer. Amendments to the original overture shall be reported and explained. While deference should be shown to the intent of the body presenting the overture, any amendment that is germane according to *Robert's Rules of Order* may be proposed by the Committee. If the Committee of Commissioners proposes an amendment to a proposal to change the Constitution, the Committee on Constitutional Business shall provide advice as per 'RAO' 7-2." Out of concern that the practice manifest at last year's Assembly might be enforced again this year, the Presbytery specifically stated "that if the Bills and Overtures Committee would like to propose alternative language that accomplishes the purposes noted above, the Presbytery will consider this to be a friendly amendment."

#### Moderator-in-Nomination

Mississippi Valley Presbytery has proposed that there be a Moderator in Nomination elected at each General Assembly. The Presbytery believes that this would give the prospective Moderator an opportunity to prepare in the year leading up to the time that he would serve. Overture 2 also states that "there is often some tension as to whom the new moderator shall be, thus establishing a certain mood at the beginning of that particular General Assembly that might pervade throughout the meeting of the General Assembly."

## Who Should Vote in Church Courts?

Currently, any teaching elder may vote in presbytery and General Assembly meetings. A proposal out of Grace Presbytery (though not adopted by that court) would restrict the privilege of voting to teaching elders who are either pastors or associate pastors. If enacted into church law, the proposal in Overture 22 would prohibit teaching elders who are administrators, missionaries, honorably retired, teachers, organizing pastors, assistant pastors, and anyone not a member of a Session from voting in one of the higher courts.

## Complaints in Judicial Matters

Central Carolina Presbytery is asking that the *BCO* be amended regarding complaints filed in judicial matters. If approved, Overture 10 would add this language to Chapter 43-1: "However, if a complaint is against the court's approval of a non-debatable judicial commission judgment (*BCO* 15-3), that complaint shall be filed directly with the next higher court." Central Carolina gives as rationale the following:

"If the original court considered such a complaint, it would be hearing debate on what was originally a non-debatable report. Thus, anyone who wished to debate a judicial commission report could do so at the next meeting by filing a complaint."

"If the original court considered such a complaint, they would be doing so without its members having heard the oral arguments presented to the judicial commission. Nor would they have likely read any of the written material reviewed by the commission (record of case, briefs, etc.)."

"Some Presbyterian denominations do not require any complaints to first be made to the court whose act is alleged to be in error. While the OPC [Orthodox Presbyterian Church] practice is like ours, the EPC [Evangelical Presbyterian Church] and PCUSA [Presbyterian Church (USA)] require all formal complaints to go directly to the next higher court."

"Regardless of formal complaint procedures in *BCO* 43, if any member of the court is dissatisfied with an act or decision, Robert's Rules already provides a broad avenue for redress – a motion to 'rescind' or to 'amend something previously adopted' (RONR, 10<sup>th</sup> ed., p. 293-299). Such a motion can be made by any member of the court regardless of how, or even if, he voted on the decision in question. There is no time limit for making such a motion. And if it's announced prior to the meeting at which it will be considered, it only takes a simple majority to adopt. However, if the original motion was non-debatable, so should be any motion to rescind or to amend: 'A motion to Amend an undebatable motion is undebatable, because to allow debate on it would be contrary to the purposes of the other motion's undebatability. (RONR p. 385, lines 6-9).'"

## SJC Procedures

Central Carolina also has two overtures dealing with the Standing Judicial Commission (SJC).

#### Temperate Language

Overture 9 desires the addition of this sentence to *BCO* 15-5: "Upon a 2/3 vote, the Assembly may strike from the minutes, in whole or in part, any concurring or dissenting opinion for intemperate language."

This overture can trace its origin to a concurring opinion, signed by six members of the SJC (Jack Williamson, Bill Lyle, Dominic Aquila, John B. White, Jr., Charles McGowan, and Ben Konopa). That concurring opinion, filed in 2001 conjunction with the John Wood matter, mentioned Dr. Morton Smith, Dr. Joseph Pipa, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, and *Presbyterian & Reformed News*. The opinion also stated that those who had contributed "by creating . . . an emotional mood" among the General Assembly Commissioners "had not made a sufficiently thorough investigation to justify their incitement of the Commissioners. We deplore such conduct even though it may have been made with good intentions. We suggest to our Brothers, who participated in such publicity, that a wiser course of action would have been to make a more thorough investigation of the facts."

The language employed in that concurring opinion sparked considerable concern at the 2001 General Assembly. In an overture, Western Carolina Presbytery said that "to allow the personal allegations against individual members of the Assembly to be placed in the minutes of the General Assembly can only bring hurt to the individuals concerned, and cause resentments that are destructive of the purity, peace and unity of the Church." The Presbytery added that "this is not the proper venue for such allegations, since [teaching elders] who have acted improperly should be charged in the courts of original jurisdiction, where they can have a fair trial; and . . . we do not believe that provision for concurring opinions was ever intended to provide a forum for personal attacks as occurs in this report. The overture concluded: "Western Carolina urges that all of the concurring opinions be removed from the SJC report, and that they not appear in the Minutes of the General Assembly."

The 2001 Bills & Overtures Committee recommended that the concurring opinion reference above "be removed on the basis of justice and fairness (Micah 6:8; Matthew 18:15-17; I Timothy 5:19; and James 3:5-6)" (bold in the original). However, the Moderator ruled this recommendation out of order, based on the opinion of the Committee on Constitutional Business (CCB) that "it is not constitutional for the [General Assembly] to amend the SJC report on Case 99-1 (the John Wood matter) by deleting any or all-concurring opinions." The 2001 Assembly sustained the Chair's ruling on appeal. The Assembly also instructed the SJC "to draft and present to the 30<sup>th</sup> General Assembly [2002] procedures to be placed in the SJC Manual for examining concurring and dissenting opinions to be sure such opinions are in temperate language before they are added to SJC reports" (bold in the original).

Noting that the SJC has now carried out that assignment from the 2001 General Assembly, the overture argues that it is better to place such a provision in the *BCO* rather than in the SJC Manual. The overture says that although there are four places in the SJC Manual which speak of the necessity for temperate language, "there is no

procedure specifying how such 'temperate language' determination should be made." The overture argues: "Even without any changes in the SJCM or *BCO*, any SJC judge who believes a concurring or dissenting opinion contains questionable language can already express that concern to the author. The author can then consider revising his opinion"; and adds: "It is highly unusual for anyone to have the authority or responsibility to police the language in a judge's opinion. It is even more unusual to task fellow judges to do so, especially with regard to a dissenting opinion. It would be unthinkable in the U.S. Supreme Court for Justice Ginsburg or Souter to have any part in policing the language in a dissenting opinion filed by Justice Scalia or Thomas. Giving judges such authority is, at best, a potential conflict of interest and at worst, a policy open to potential abuse. With such a policy, it is possible a majority could even disallow a dissenting opinion."

Overture 9 continues: "If the temperance of language in concurring or dissenting opinions needs review, the Assembly, not the SJC, should have the final word. If this overture is adopted, and the Assembly believes a concurring or dissenting opinion contains intemperate language, it can delete it, in part or in whole, from the Minutes. Granted, it would already have been published to the parties and in the GA Commissioners' Handbook, but the GA could prevent it from being recorded for history. In the rare event there is a question about the language in a concurring or dissenting opinion, the Assembly itself should decide the question."

". . . If the Assembly simply revises the SJC Manual, a concurring opinion like the one in question in Dallas might still be approved by the SJC and the Assembly would have no recourse. Given the fact that 6 out of the 17 SJC members voting in the case signed the concurring opinion in question, including three of four SJC officers, it is questionable whether the majority of the SJC would have judged the language as intemperate even if there had been an SJC Manual procedure to do so. (Note: Central Carolina Presbytery is not saying it believes the language in that concurring opinion was intemperate, but is just using it to illustrate the point.)"

The overture concludes by saying: "Alternatively, if the Committee of Commissioners on Bills & Overtures would prefer recommending that the Assembly delete the SJC temperate language oversight altogether, Central Carolina would concur with that recommendation and consider it a friendly amendment and not a 'new item of business' (RAO 13-5.d). That would entail striking the words 'if couched in temperate language' from SJCM 13.10, 14.7, 15.7 and 18.7.k. Clearly, SJC judges are expected to use temperate language. If the Assembly is concerned about the opinions written by a judge, they can express their dissatisfaction if he is nominated for reelection. Or, in an extreme case, the provisions of *BCO* 31-2 are available." [*BCO* 31-2 refers to judicial process.—Ed.]

#### Decisions Being Made Public

Overture 13 asks for the addition of five words to the SJC Manual regarding the public nature of judicial decisions. If granted, the overture would specify that when a report on a case is approved by the SJC, "a copy thereof shall be mailed immediately to the parties and shall then be public" (the underlined words being added).

Central Carolina argues: "Currently, these decisions are not normally publicized until they appear in the GA Commissioner's Handbook, which is mailed in May only to registered commissioners. These SJC decisions should be available more promptly. Furthermore, they should be more broadly readable. A wider and more-timely reading may help instruct Sessions and Presbyteries in similar cases." The Presbytery also notes that one Presbyterian denomination—the PC(USA)—"even posts such decisions promptly on their website."

## Church Union

Overture 24 from Ascension Presbytery asks this year's General Assembly to "urge its Interchurch Relations Committee make conscientious and good faith efforts to fulfill organic union between the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches which are members of NAPARC [North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council] as defined by the subcommittee of NAPARC."

This overture begins by stating that "one of the major proposals at the establishment of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council in 1974 was organic union between the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches; and . . . some success was achieved in this between the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America and the

American Presbyterian Church, and between the Presbyterian Church in America and the Reformed Presbyterian Church (Evangelical Synod). However, the overture also says “this goal has fallen into abeyance due to many disappointments in relation to the failure of the union of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in America, and the energy expended in dealing with the posture of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.” Ascension’s overture notes that “a subcommittee of NAPARC has now defined organic union as two or more the Churches which constitute NAPARC joining their diverse gifts, heritage and calling on the basis of the Scriptural mandate (John 17, Acts 15-16:5, I Cor. 12:12-31, Ephesians 4:1-16.), to form one Church by uniting together in theology, polity and ministry” and it concludes the Whereas section by declaring: “this mandate remains in force for us.”

## Officer Elections

In Overture 14, Eastern Canada Presbytery suggests that a cross-reference in *BCO* 24 might be redundant, and that perhaps the cross-reference is a typographical error. Furthermore, the Presbytery believes that a reference to *BCO* 20-5, which “gives directions about dealing with highly divided votes which are not found in *BCO* 24, . . . might be to the point.” Accordingly, the Presbytery is asking that the reference in *BCO* 24-3 be changed, to refer to how to deal with a situation in which there is not an overwhelming majority in favour of electing a ruling elder or a deacon.

## Words of Institution

Ascension Presbytery believes that the words of institution for the Lord’s Supper which are mandated by the Directory for Worship are inaccurate. Therefore, the Presbytery wants *BCO* 58 amended so that the officiant would use these words: “This is my body which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” The proposal would also allow flexibility, by stating: “Some other biblical account of the institution of this part of the Supper may be substituted [for these words].”

Overture 21 argues that the current reading of the Constitution conflates part of Matthew’s account (‘Take, eat’) and part of 1 Cor. 11:24 (‘broken for you’), an account that is therefore not found in any Bible in any language.” It also argues that “there are significant text-critical questions associated with the Authorized Version’s rendering, ‘broken for you’ at 1 Cor. 11:24”; and also states that “ministers of the word and sacrament are ordinarily permitted by the Constitution to select the translation that most concurs with their judgment about the original text.” Moreover, the overture says that “for a minister to read *as* the Word of God what he honestly believes is *not* the Word of God is a violation of his conscience.”

## New Presbyteries

South Texas and Central Georgia Presbyteries have asked that they be divided.

In the case of South Texas, that court is asking that there be three presbyteries in its present territory instead of one: Central Texas (“focused on and around the state capital of Austin”), South Texas (“focused on and around the San Antonio area and south to the border with Mexico”), Houston Metro (“the sprawling metro area of Houston in the eastern area of the present South Texas Presbytery”). The Presbytery notes that this proposal, which was unanimously adopted in January 2003, comes after “two and one half years of research, discussions and planning.” The overture states that “the above distinct geographical regions have developed out of the history and culture of Texas, out of the growth patterns presently taking place within Texas, and out of the extensive driving times involved and other travel issues associated with ministering to the churches spread all across the vast area of the South Texas Presbytery.” Overture 7 also says that the goal is “the further advancement of church planting and for the better coordination of the ministries of both new and established churches in the southern and eastern areas of south Texas.”

Overture 15 from Central Georgia Presbytery craves the formation of a new Savannah River Presbytery. This proposal, like the one from South Texas, was adopted unanimously.

If both overtures are approved, there will be three new presbyteries in the PCA, bringing the total to 67.

# Item 1 Defeated, Item 2 Still in Play

## “Good Faith” Subscription Hangs in the Balance

With all of the drama of a close Presidential election, the voting in the presbyteries on Items 1 and 2 of the *Book of Church Order (BCO)* amendments in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) has reflected how close the contest is for the heart and soul of the denomination. Both items have been part of a vision for the denomination fostered by the Presbyterian Pastoral Leadership Network (PPLN).

Item 1 would have required ten percent of the presbyteries, rather than a total of two presbyteries, to petition the General Assembly to assume original jurisdiction over a minister in a judicial matter in which his own presbytery failed to act. Item 2 is the “good faith” subscription amendment, which proposes amending *BCO* 21-4 with respect to the ordination of ministers.

Under PCA rules, an amendment to the *BCO* must garner a simple majority at a General Assembly, two-thirds of the presbyteries, and a simple majority at a subsequent General Assembly. With 64 presbyteries, the affirmative vote of 43 presbyteries is necessary for approval.

Over the past several months, the battle has swung back and forth. By April, enough votes had been cast to defeat Item 1. At the same time, Item 2 had garnered a sufficient number of affirmative votes to be considered by the 2003 General Assembly.

However, one presbytery (Korean Capital) has voted to rescind its prior affirmative vote, and efforts are underway in several more presbyteries to do the same. Notice has been given that at the stated meetings of three presbyteries—Southern New England (May 17), Covenant (May 27), and Potomac (June 3)—motions to rescind will be presented.

In those three presbyteries, the margin was close: Southern New England, 16-11; Covenant, 42-33-3; Potomac, 34-28-2. If all three presbyteries vote to rescind and to oppose the amendment, then it will be defeated.

The voting across the denomination has produced numerous surprises. Very few expected that Northern Illinois Presbytery would vote against Item 2; nor that Philadelphia Presbytery would also defeat it. On the other hand, opponents to the measure had expected to win presbyteries such as Covenant, Potomac, and Southwest Florida, but were defeated there.

The proposed amendment has demonstrated the highly-divided nature of the denomination. In several presbyteries, the margin of passage has been razor-thin. In Blue Ridge, the vote was 17-15; in Chesapeake, it was 27-23-2; in Korean Southwest, 17-12-2.

On the other side of the ledger, the vote in Fellowship went against the amendment, 17-18-1; and Northern Illinois opposed it, 8-13-2.

Perhaps epitomizing the closeness of the matter is the scene in Northern New England Presbytery. When the Moderator there tallied the hand-vote, he declared that the measure had carried, 7-6-1. However, it turns out that there was more than abstention: since no one there realized that the Moderator could vote in order to create a tie, he did not vote; if he had voted against the amendment, it would have been defeated in that presbytery.

Adding up the total number of votes within all the presbyteries also illustrates the lack of denominational consensus. With all presbyteries reporting (except Korean Northwest), there were 1,440 votes in favor, 907 opposed, with 100 abstentions. Based on a total of 2,447 voters, about 59 percent voted for it; if the abstentions are not counted, there would be about 2,347 voters, with about 61 percent in favor. (On the defeated Item 1, the numbers are 1,336 in favor, 958 opposed, and 77 abstentions.)

In such a competitive climate, supporters and opponents have been fighting hard for their perspective. Supporters of the amendment tried to induce Northern Illinois in January to rescind its prior negative vote. The motion to rescind seemingly passed, 20-19-2; but, upon challenge, the chair ruled that the abstentions had to be included in the vote and a majority of all the voters necessary for passage of the motion to rescind.

Opponents of the amendment have already obtained the reversal of Korean Capital Presbytery. On April 7<sup>th</sup>, that court voted to rescind its prior unanimous (21-0-0) approval, and then defeated the amendment, 4-17-4.

In past years, other *BCO* amendments have been defeated because of the reversal of presbytery votes. In 1992, the change in votes by several presbyteries caused the failure, by one vote, of an amendment to *BCO* 58 regarding the fencing of the Lord’s Supper. In 1996, four presbyteries rescinded their prior approval of an amendment to *BCO* 13-9 regarding the power of presbyteries with respect to the dismissal and dissolution of congregations; and that amendment, too, lost by one vote.

Even if the amendment carries in the presbyteries, it could still fail to achieve approval at the General Assembly. On several occasions, items which have received the requisite vote in the presbyteries were not finally enacted into church law.

Meanwhile, the other two *BCO* amendments have been passed in the presbyteries without difficulty. Item 3, which would add the word “unity” to the ministerial ordination vows, has received the votes of at least 56 presbyteries. At least 62 presbyteries have voted for Item 4, which officially changes the name of Insurance, Annuities, and Relief to PCA Benefits and Retirement, Inc.

## MTW National Worker Participates in Ecumenical Service at Roman Catholic Church

A national worker who operates in conjunction with Mission to the World (MTW) of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) participated in an ecumenical worship at a Roman Catholic Church. The incident occurred in Zlin, Czech Republic, and was reported in the country’s largest newspaper, *I-Dnes*, on January 24, 2003.

The front-page article consisted of a color photograph with the following caption: “The divines of five Christian churches operating in Zlin—Roman-Catholic, Czech Brethren, Hussite, Reformed and Baptist—met over one altar in the parochial church at the common worship service yesterday night. The ecumenical worship service was part of the Week of prayer for the uniting of Christians.” The photo had the following headline: “Worship Service of the Divines from Five Churches.”

The Reformed minister, who is in the picture, is Rene Drapala, a young man who has been discipled by the MTW team in the Czech Republic. Another photograph of the event appeared in the same newspaper three days later, on January 27, 2003.

The Reformed Church was founded in Zlin by the Rev. Pavel Bartos, a native Czech. Currently a member of Calvary Presbytery (PCA), Mr. Bartos was forced out of his leadership role in that congregation by the MTW team and

by the so-called “Provisional Presbytery of the Czech Republic.” The status of “provisional presbyteries” on the mission field has been controverted. Although the PCA’s *Book of Church Order (BCO)* allows for the establishment of such presbyteries through special commissions, the General Assembly has never specifically authorized their erection. Instead, MTW has assumed that power to itself. Furthermore, the *BCO* mandates that every commission must submit minutes of its proceedings at least every year to the body appointing it; said minutes have never been submitted to the General Assembly and spread on the record, as is Constitutionally required for any commission actions to be legal.

The other Protestant churches listed in the newspaper article all have a long-standing commitment to ecumenism. For example, the Hussite Church and the Czech Brethren Church are members of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

For many years MTW missionaries have been working with the Church of the Brethren, another Brethren church which is affiliated with the WCC by virtue of membership in the national Ecumenical Council of Churches in the Czech Republic. This, despite the position of the PCA of maintaining separation from the WCC.

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## Bryan Chapell Encourages the Troops

[The following is a recent email by Bryan Chapell, President of Covenant Theological Seminary.—Ed.]

### Nashville Conversation:

I look forward to seeing many of you at the National Conversation on Church Renewal and Outreach next Monday and Tuesday. Please be prayer for our time of worship, mutual encouragement and shared instruction. Our goal is to help each other discern healthy and Biblical means that will enable our churches and our denomination in both renewal and outreach efforts. Leaders from many different kinds of churches and parts of the country will share ideas from their experience and will help us talk to each other about various ways that we can further the Gospel in our own communities. Agendas and maps are available on the Pastoral-leadership.org web site.

### Presbytery Encouragement:

I am also thankful for all of you that have engaged in the work of the church this past year for the sake of the Gospel. Two-thirds of the presbyteries have passed the "good faith" subscription amendment. This is a tremendous blessing that the Lord has granted, and provides the footing that we have so long desired to enable us to move forward with Gospel priorities and a unified Spirit. The procedural matters that we have needed to address have been pleasant for no one, but you have worked with courage and zeal because you have kept the larger purposes of the Kingdom in mind. I praise God for your participation in his blessing.

This blessing has not been granted without challenge, and even the gaining of this ground continues to be challenged. Two presbyteries (South[ern] Florida and Potomac) have scheduled reconsiderations of their approval of the Amendment. Two other presbyteries have explored reconsideration but, so far, have not scheduled it.



Christ Community Church, Franklin, Tennessee

Four presbyteries remain to vote: SW Florida (April 8), Blue Ridge (April 11), Korean NW (April 15), Central Carolina (April 26).

Some of our leaders have offered to make encouraging phone calls to friends in these presbyteries. However, if you have personal friends in these presbyteries, please contact them and encourage them to become informed and make every effort to attend their presbytery meeting with elders. Please make your calls now. Please do not presume that someone else will do it.

The most important thing that you can do is simply to tell persons how important it is that they go to their presbytery meeting and encourage others to do the same.

Do not be weary in well doing. We are in the bell lap of this race, and we must not tire nor presume that great effort is not needed in these last strides. Please direct others to the Pastoral-leadership.org web site, if they desire background information and "talking points" for the BCO amendments.

It takes 43 presbyteries to achieve the two-thirds approval needed for approval of a BCO amendment. Currently 43 have passed the good faith subscription amendment (but the reconsiderations could cause us to fall short of the necessary approvals if some of the remaining four presbyteries do not also pass the amendment). The 10 percent original jurisdiction amendment has been passed by 39 presbyteries (all of the remaining presbyteries would need to approve it in order to achieve the necessary two-thirds approval).

We have been given a great privilege of serving Christ's church in a significant way at a crucial time. If you would like a little inspiration then consider the words of the new hymn attached. It is sung to the tune of "Highland Cathedral," the bagpipe tune that has become popular in ceremonies and weddings since the 1990's.

Blessings, Bryan

PS Please remember that PPLN women leaders will make presentations and lead discussions in the Nashville town meeting sessions for women on the subjects of their contributions to local church renewal and outreach.

PPS We cannot assume that the subscription amendment that was so overwhelmingly approved at the last General Assembly will pass easily at the coming General Assembly being held in the Carolinas where so much opposition has been based. We all must go to GA, and encourage others to attend so that our church can experience the kind of broad-based unity that the Lord granted last year.

## PPLN Meets in Nashville

Franklin, Tennessee (April 7-8, 2003)—The second meeting of the Presbyterian Pastoral Leadership Network (PPLN) was held at Christ Community Church. Unlike PPLN's first general meeting a year ago in Atlanta, the gathering this year was far less politically-oriented.

The meeting began at 6 o'clock Monday evening with a worship service. More than half a dozen songs, words flashed on a central screen, were sung, as the congregation was led by guitarists, a keyboardist, a drummer, a pianist, and four vocalists. A number of the people, including at least three of the songleaders, lifted up their hands during the singing, while virtually the entire congregation gently swayed to the beat.

Other acts of worship included a corporate confession of sin, corporate prayer, a "holy kiss" (greeting one another), and a choir singing a portion of Psalm 73 *a capella*.

Billed as a "National Conversation on Outreach and Renewal," the two-day meeting featured five "town meetings": Small Church, Urban Church, Suburban Church, Transitional/Community Church, and Women's Roles. The first evening, about two hours were spent talking about the theme of "renewal" in each of those contexts. On Tuesday morning, the theme of "outreach" in each of those categories was explored.

In the Urban Church town meeting on renewal, Jim Ward, famed musician at New City Fellowship in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and the Rev. Howard Brown, Pastor of Forest Park Community Church in Baltimore, Maryland, were the presenters. Mr. Ward, while acknowledging that "urban" does not necessarily mean African-American, nevertheless concentrated on how his congregation has worked to incorporate blacks into the church. He commended for use the United Methodist hymnal, *Songs of Zion*, as providing



George Robertson



Tim Keller

"really authentic sources" of black music. In his estimation, it is important to have a choir in order to reach the African-American community; but it is even more important to have a good band, which can feature a combination of blues and a lot of jazz. Really important for the band is its sound—he urged a "lot of bass."

Pastor Brown, who was ordained just a couple of years ago to serve the inner-city church where he presently ministers, told of his transition to the community. He also related the necessity for renewal among the leaders, before renewal can occur in the congregation. He emphasized the importance of the covenant and infant baptism. At his church, the elders had not baptized their own children—they didn't trust the promise for their own children, and therefore they didn't believe it for themselves. By not baptizing children, this led to legalism, which drove out many of those who had

grown up in the church.

On Tuesday morning, Pastor Petros Roukos preached from Acts 2:42ff. He asked rhetorically, "How does the church express that it really does take God to grow the church?" He suggested the following ways: through her worship; through the communion of the saints; and through her ministry and service. "I believe that when the church seeks God, . . . and translates that in community, . . . that outreach inevitably results." He continued: "It's not a matter of technique, . . . of technology, . . . of style of worship."

After the morning "town meetings" and lunch, George Robertson gave a brief perspective on various overtures which will be coming to the General Assembly. In his view, the overtures which would modify the elections process at the Assembly would not be good. He was also strongly opposed to the calls for a study committee on subscription. On the other hand, he applauded the overture from Nashville Presbytery which asks for a committee on racism and the gospel.

During a plenary address, Dr. Tim Keller reiterated his vision for the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) to be a leader denomination, but he also conceded that neither of the two "parties" in the PCA—the "majority" party of "good faith" subscription and the "minority" party of strict subscription—is doing a good job of reaching the "post-everything" generation. He believes, however, that within the Reformed faith, the resources are present for being effective in the twenty-first century.

The meeting concluded with a worship service, at which George Robertson preached on the theme of reconciliation.

## Women Discuss Their Role in Renewal and Outreach

Franklin Tennessee (April 7-8, 2003)

Judy Honeycutt from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama, and Mary Beth McGreevy, from Covenant Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, led the town meetings on the role of women in renewal and outreach. Judy (formerly a practicing lawyer) presently serves as Coordinator and Team Teacher for Southwood's weekday women's Bible study and has served as a member of Evangel PresWIC Council for the last two years. Mary Beth (formerly Personal Assistant to James Montgomery Boice) teaches Women of the Word Bible studies at Covenant Presbyterian Church. The goal of the presenters was to provide information in the form of principles, lessons and examples from their own experiences, and to encourage and stimulate questions and discussion in order to help equip those attending with some practical ideas for strengthening their own churches.

Judy and Mary Beth began by sharing WIC (Women in the Church) resources provided by the PCA Christian Education and Publications Committee. They include books, particularly those by Susan Hunt, and Bible study guides (such as the WIC curriculum, *Biblical Foundations for Womanhood*) which have been designed specifically for women. It is important, they believe, to look for study opportunities based not on "what shall we study next?" but on foundational questions such as, "what is the goal we are trying to achieve, and how will this glorify God?" They went on to describe women's Bible study programs that they have set up in their own churches, giving detailed descriptions of their planning and leadership functions. They indicated that they have found that it is very good for church families if the women's and men's Bible studies, and even the children's programs, are all coordinated so that the family can hold discussions at home on the topics being taught. As resources employing this philosophy are not readily available, it is necessary to put some thought and planning into such a project. For example, Mary Beth's pastor, George Robertson, has produced materials with exactly this in mind. Other resources that were explained and discussed included the annual Leadership Training Seminars using materials produced by the Atlanta office, and the WIC Resource Newsletters.

Many women in the group asked questions or made comments relating to their own situations. One lady, concerned about the small size of the congregation at her church, was encouraged to look for another PCA church in her area with which to combine for women's Bible studies. Another lady, who became a pastor's wife later in life, shared her initial fear of teaching, given her lack of teaching credentials, but went on to share the blessings that she received as a result of making the effort.

As the evening progressed, some of the women indicated a desire to discuss ways of improving the level of communication between churchwomen and their pastors and Sessions. This seems to vary greatly from church to church.

Some women indicated that theirs is a very good relationship, while one expressed concern that although she herself has ready access to her church leaders, it was not clear to other women how to approach their leaders or voice their concerns. This led to discussion on who should take the initiative in improving communication, men or women, if communication is not what it should be. One lady voiced the opinion that women need to serve their churches well and be supportive of their pastor in order to have the right to approach the leaders in this way.

It was agreed that the Biblical principle of male headship did not mean that female distinctives should not be taken into consideration by church leaders. One practical suggestion was that pastors could ask a group of women periodically, "What do you hear me saying from the pulpit?" acknowledging



Mary Beth McGreevy and Judy Honeycutt

that what pastors think they are saying and what women may be hearing can be two very different things. This type of miscommunication could unintentionally cause problems. For example, if a pastor preaches on pride, and exhorts the congregation to "smash self", then women, many of whom already have a low self-esteem, may be harmed by this suggestion.

Presenter Judy Honeycutt said she believed that a healthy Session should be able to identify the women leaders and influencers in its church. This identification process is important in order that the Session may provide regular prayer support, finances for training opportunities, affirmation, and accountability for and to these women. It was also mentioned at this point that it was unfortunate that women heavily outnumbered men in this town meeting, and that there was, therefore, little chance for helpful interaction between men and women on this subject.

The town meeting continued the following morning with discussion and practical suggestions on the role of women in outreach, affecting the community as well as the church. It was noted that this can be a challenge because the longer we are Christians, the fewer non-Christian acquaintances we tend

to have, and we can forget how to communicate with those outside our "holy huddle".

In reaching out to women, it is important to know what they perceive as important. Secular surveys have shown that health is a topic often on the minds of most women. Health-related issues include stress, burnout, depression, anxiety, heart disease, nutrition, exercise, hormones, addictions and eating disorders. Secular authors tell us that the average woman has a greater interest in improving her body than her character. This is a change since Victorian times, when entries made by young women in their diaries showed concern for the growth of their virtues. Nowadays they show concern for their appearance. It was suggested that one way to foster a concern for spiritual growth among the women and girls in the church is to give affirming comments on their character and strengths rather than on what they are wearing on the Lord's Day.

Among the stumbling blocks that we face in reaching women in the community, it was suggested, is the superior attitude that some Christian women have. As unintentional as it may be, we do not want to give the impression that other women have nothing to give. We must not forget that it is only by God's grace that we have been brought into the fold. In all kinds of situations around town (in the market, beauty shop, etc.) we can develop relationships with other women by showing an interest in them and asking them questions about themselves. Just listen to them, we were encouraged, and, over time, let them get to the point that they will want to ask us questions, hopefully as a result of their seeing that we have something to offer.

It was the opinion of many in the town meeting that more people come to know the Lord by first attending a Bible study than any other way. So, use this resource, and invite neighbours, co-workers, and those with whom we are developing a relationship to our women's Bible study group. One practical suggestion is to make sure that everyone feels welcome, whether a stay-at-home mom or working; whether nursing or bottle-feeding, etc. Another idea is to allow time for testimonies, which can be of enormous benefit, especially to those who are hurting or are in need of reassurance that this is a "safe place" to come.

Other suggestions for building bridges into the community were: getting active in the public schools; engaging in community sports, civic affairs, or exercise class; starting a food pantry or clothes closet.

This town meeting, designed to discuss the role women can play in renewal and outreach, was a most useful and enjoyable experience for those in attendance. The results of the stimulating leadership by Judy and Mary Beth, and the active participation by the group, will undoubtedly be of benefit not only on a church and community level, but also in the personal lives and sanctification of those in attendance.

Penelope Smith

# Editorials and Letters

## Building Bridges

During our time at the Presbyterian Pastoral Leadership Network (PPLN) meeting, we were engaged in conversation by a denominational staffer, who encouraged us to write an article along the lines of “building bridges.” Although not many people have realized it, building those bridges has been one of our long-time dreams.

We recognize that there is a reason that those in the Reformed community have earned the title “frozen chosen.” We believe that many of the “conservatives” in the PCA could learn from some of the more “practical” types. To the extent that the practical suggestions do not violate Biblical principles or our Presbyterian heritage, we believe that they could and should be utilized.

However, while a bridge could be built from only one end, it is much easier to build from both directions. At this time, we haven’t seen much willingness by folks on the other side of the aisle to begin their end of the construction.

We expressed to the denominational staffer mentioned above, among others, that it would be wonderful if the deeper theological reflection that was manifest at (to name but one example) the Greenville Seminary conference could be wedded with the practical insights for the ministry expressed at (for instance) the PPLN conference. Now *that* would create a powerful combination — so much so that perhaps the PCA could finally assume the leadership role that it has always craved.

Of course, one of these issues must be seen as foundational for the other. We believe that, of necessity, theological considerations must be the foundation on top of which the rest of ministry is laid; if anything else is considered foundational, then the house is built, not upon a solid rock, but upon sinking sand.

The differences among evangelical Presbyterians has sometimes been described in terms of the mutual antagonism in a corporation between the sales department, with its “forget the testing, full speed ahead!” mentality; and the research and development department, which cares nothing about sales figures and wants to produce a perfect product. Of course, even though a product which makes it to the market first may initially garner a great deal of interest, sales will evaporate unless the product is a good one.

Are there any takers—on either side—who are willing to engage in this bridge-building project? Perhaps if we remember another metaphor—that of the body of Christ, in which we are members, every one needing every other one—then we will take much more interest in the seemingly daunting task of stretching out a welcoming hand to those who have been viewed as our opponents within the church.

Frank J. Smith

## Impressions from Nashville

Having attended the latest Presbyterian Pastoral Leadership Network (PPLN) meeting, and having been asked by several people what our thoughts were of the meeting, we figured he might as well share them here.

First, with respect to the preaching, we thought that Petros Roukos’ sermon on Acts 2 was a fine specimen. We were particularly pleased with George Robertson’s sermon on reconciliation within the body of Christ. However, the sermon on the first evening was less than impressive. Instead of being focused, it tended to be more of a stream of consciousness.

Second, we believe that those gathered were genuine in their desire to worship the Lord and do Him reverence; in at least one of the times of worship, the congregation was asked to stand for the reading of the Word. However, the worship was definitely “contemporary,” and would not have been recognized by John Calvin, John Knox, Charles Hodge, or John Murray as being Presbyterian.

Third, there was a real effort to make practical suggestions, and at least some of them were valuable. An example of this would be ideas for outreach to a community, such as activities at a church which would give opportunity for the presentation of the gospel.

Fourth, in his presentation, Tim Keller was his usual witty and insightful self, as he laid out why he believes that within Calvinism there are answers to the questions which the “post-everything” generation is asking. However, although it is true that Calvinism, being consistent Christianity, does contain the appropriate answers to these various questions, we believe that what Dr. Keller failed to emphasize is that we should adhere to Calvinism because it’s true, not because it works. Also, his comments on worship could be taken to justify high-church liturgy (or anything else deemed to be “ancient”), as well as the type of worship witnessed at the meeting. As such, we felt his remarks are part and parcel of a widespread contemporary attack on historic Presbyterian worship.

Fifth, we couldn’t help but notice that the attendance was noticeably down from last year’s gathering. The low attendance figures also contrasted with the numbers present the month before at the Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary conference. Furthermore, there was an ‘energy’ at the Greenville Seminary conference which was noticeably lacking in Nashville.

All in all, the meeting could be characterized as non-controversial. There were numerous statements with which we could agree, and we are sure that many people benefited from various practical suggestions that were made.

Without question, PPLN has used its influence—including the considerable influence of denominational officials—in order to try to push a political agenda—one which, in our estimation, will not serve the church well. If PPLN would eschew political activism, we believe that the church would be a whole lot better off.

Frank J. Smith

## Courageous Churchmen

Throughout history, men and women have paid the ultimate sacrifice for the cause of Christ and His church. In contemplating their martyrdom, many of us undoubtedly have wondered if we would be able, in the same resolute manner, to face death for the sake of Jesus.

But while not all of us may have the privilege of dying for our Savior, all of us are faced with other challenges—opportunities to bear witness to the reality of our profession of His Lordship. In those situations, we are called upon to manifest courage, being willing to pay whatever price is necessary in order to remain faithful.

Such is the situation that churchmen are facing in several of our presbyteries, which are on the verge of reconsidering their prior approval of Item 2 of the *Book of Church Order (BCO)* amendments. It is so easy to go along with the crowd, to go with the flow, to “get with the program” lest you be considered out of step with the establishment and the powers-that-be. It can be so difficult to buck the contemporary trends, to go against the flow, perhaps even to risk career advancement because of standing on principle.

And yet, it is precisely that type of courage to which we are called.

At least three presbyteries—Southern New England, Covenant, and Potomac—will vote on whether to rescind their prior approval of Item 2. The margins in those three presbyteries were small—a switch of three votes, five votes, and three votes, respectively, and the original vote would have gone the other way. As our brethren in these and perhaps other presbyteries cast momentous ballots, it is good for us to consider the bravery that has already been displayed by Korean Capital Presbytery. On April 7<sup>th</sup>, that court reversed itself, and overwhelmingly voted to rescind its prior approval of Item 2.

The fact that one of our Korean presbyteries took this action is even more remarkable than if it occurred in an Anglo presbytery. Although it is hard enough for any of us to reverse course in a matter, it is particularly difficult to do so within the Korean culture.

Our brethren in Korean Capital have shown the way. They have shown great courage. Now, the only question is, Will churchmen in the Anglo presbyteries do the same? On that issue may rest, humanly speaking, the future of our beloved denomination.

Bob Shapiro

## Letters

Dear sirs,

I hesitated to write this article 1st because I wondered what it might accomplish and 2nd because I do not want to come across as opposing someone who I admire greatly, that being Terry Johnson. We’ve had Terry in our church and I appreciate much of what he says about Biblical worship. Yet in the end, I believe it’s important to write a brief response to your articles on the worship conference at Greenville Seminary.

In brief, when Jesus gives His summation of true worship in John 4, I do not believe He is primarily speaking of sincere worship or worship from the heart; Jesus is speaking of Spirit-led worship. In other words, the text should be translated “in the Spirit and in Truth,” with Spirit and Truth being synonyms. If one looks at all the times the word “Spirit” is used in just the first 4 chapters of John, a person notices that a major theme is the Spirit’s operation and work: If you don’t have God’s Spirit you are dead, you are not in the light, you do not recognize Jesus for who He really is, you are not a member of God’s kingdom, you are not born from above, and your ‘belief in Jesus’ is not real nor salvific. Even in John 4:23 ff, one notices that every other translation of *Pneumati* is translated with a big ‘S.’ It is true that when the Spirit is present and operating, one’s worship will be sincere, generated from the depths of a person’s heart, and be in accord with the guidelines of God’s word, but all these things will be true as they are an operation of the Spirit!

What made the tabernacle more than a mere tent? What made the temple more than a mere building? What makes us living temples? Is it our sincerity? NO! It’s the presence of The Spirit—it’s His work to engender and produce worship which is pleasing to the Father and a blessing to us!

The first regulative principle is that only a Spirit filled person can worship and unless the Spirit is present and operating, all the sincerity in the world is useless and displeasing to God!

Rev. Henry Beaulieu

Greetings!

I am only just now reading the January-March 2003 *P & R News*, and wanted to write and thank you for such a great issue! For those of us who are unable to get to such conferences such as the recent one on Worship at Greenville, you have done us a great service in laying before us the current thinking and theological discussions/debates that are taking place within our denomination.

I am also writing to inquire re: renewing my current subscription. What is the current price and has it changed from last year? I find it well worth every penny as you help to keep us abreast of what is happening at the top of our denominational pyramid; something we would not be aware of otherwise. Please continue your excellent reporting; your work is a great gift and of tremendous benefit to the church at large. May the Lord bless you, and may all you do promote the church’s peace and purity.

Your sister in Christ,

Joann M. Longton

[*P&R News* is still offered at the bargain price of \$15.00 per year.—Ed.]



## Open Forum

## When the Commissions Act

By Ken Lont

I belong to a small mission church. We've had problems that resulted in the removal of two Teaching Elders and left us with a Temporary Session. A Judicial Commission and a Shepherding Committee have acted within our congregation.

Commission members are Godly men who have tried to do the correct thing. They are essentially volunteers to this work, work which adds to already full schedules. Ultimately the decisions were made. One minister was removed because of significant flaws. The other was removed even though he was exonerated of any wrong doing, but was considered a lightning rod to the events of the past. The church has been encouraged to "turn the page" and move on. The ministers were told they should have not contact with the people of the church in any ministerial way.

So the question is, "why am I writing this?" Shouldn't I move on? Is there any purpose in considering other alternatives?

Here's a very brief history of the events leading to this night. I was asked by the church to mediate some difficulties among the leaders. I insisted some promises of commitment be agreed upon by the men. They agreed. Two months later one of the ministers dismissed the other. The following day, I spoke to the dismissing minister prior to church asking him why he violated the agreement he signed. There was an errant announcement made in the service regarding the dismissal. I stood up to correct it. It went uncorrected. I brought allegations to the attention of the Presbytery. They acted. Obviously there is more to it than this, but I do not want to focus on the initial problems, I want to focus on the resolution.

I'm just a member of the church. My wife and I have been attending there since the church's beginning. I don't want to impugn the character of the people involved in the decisions. I do want to question the wisdom of some of the decisions. I want other churches and presbyteries to learn from these events. In Frank Smith's words, I am a theological leftist in PCA circles, fully at rest with the theology of our church. However, I believe that the lessons to be learned can, and must, cross all political lines.

There was a recent meeting between the Judicial Commission, the Temporary session and the church members. In fact, in an effort to be all inclusive, the session called many who had not attended the church in years. At this meeting, the leaders were very direct in assessing the condition of both ministers. It was a full seven months after the events exploded in the church. The leaders were also very willing to admit their errors in not having more substantive meetings with the congregation to keep them informed of the developments. During the seven months, members of the various commissions and committees held two or three meetings after church in which they informed us of what was happening at that stage.

But, after seven months, we were drawn together for four reasons. We were to hear the views of the Commissions, they were to hear our views, we were to focus on the future and we were to hear the decisions that were made by the government who made them.

The minister who was originally dismissed was never again allowed to participate in an active role in the church service. The minister who dismissed the first person, was allowed to continue serving until January when he was asked to step down from preaching but asked to

continue operations.

On March 2nd, the ministers both had their resignations announced to the congregation.

No formal charges were ever registered against either of the ministers. One was openly encouraged to seek a new pastorate. Although he has been called only once in the last few months, it was announced the Presbytery was anxious to find him a new location. The second minister was required to receive counseling and mentoring. Due to some additional events, the Judicial Commission was reinstated a few weeks later.

Here are the remaining problems and questions I have.

1. There was no opportunity for the congregation to show their concerns for the pastor, especially the pastor who "resigned" and was exonerated by the Commissions.
2. Why should an exonerated man be asked to resign rather than encourage the congregation to work through the problems that might remain?
3. When events like this take place, how informed should the congregation be?
4. If a general meeting is called to discuss the matters, whose opinions should be sought? In this case, everyone was invited, those who have left, those who were visitors and those who remain.
5. Perhaps the most important, is there a difference in solving a problem and managing a problem?

We were told that it is the opinion of the various committees that the request for the resignation of the exonerated pastor and subsequent acceptance was "unjust" but "wise." I have a grave theological problem with that decision. It was also somewhat justified by a previous experience where another innocent Assistant Minister was let go along with a guilty senior pastor because he Assistant Minister was a polarizing person.

My belief is that one wrong act was used to support a second wrong act. I believe the Presbytery had the responsibility to support the exonerated parties within their respective churches regardless of the feelings of the congregation. If the ministers are asked to resign because they serve as a lightning rod to past events, no congregation will ever learn the necessary process of spiritual rehabilitation. Christians must learn to overcome their feelings. A penalty of doing this is the failure of reconciliation. Pushed to a logical conclusion, bad feelings will continue to be evident and people with those feelings will have to deny themselves communion and leaving an offering. I willingly grant the possibility that solving the problems may result in the resignation of either the members or the minister. However, it must only be done after attempted healing and then only if there is no bitterness or continued strife. Simply removing the minister from the presence of the congregation accomplishes none of this. It is wrong and dangerous.

More pragmatically, there is the question of what happens immediately after these events begin to unfold. How informed should the leaders keep the congregation? In the church at Jerusalem, the apostles asked the very young church to chose men from among them. What was the responsibility to be to each other as groups? There is also the picture of the church as a body, when one part suffers, the entire body suffers. That seems to imply a body-wide amount of consistent communication. I do believe there are also applications of maturity that must be measured as well and we must rely on our leaders for some of that

analysis. But just like parents, they must accurately estimate the maturity of their children. The communications must be open.

In the situation that has just been experienced, an ideal church would not lose any people. However, for any number of reasons, some may choose to leave the church prior to the final resolution of the problem. The question is, if a meeting is held to re-examine and seek opinions, should the people who have left the church be encouraged to give their opinions? These opinions will affect those who are remaining. If allowing these opinions will help re-attract the resigned people back to the church, then their opinions should be sought. If, however, they are not attempting to return, are the opinions for their vision of the church necessary?

Finally there is the matter of difference between managing a problem and solving a problem. Simply stated, managing a problem will work in terms of what causes the least short-term damage, reaches the perceived goals in the easiest fashion, essentially gets rid of the problem. You've heard the expression, "I don't care, just make it go away." Solving the problem will bring people where they ought to be whether or not they want to go there. If I follow the logic of the solution that has been announced, I believe the application should apply in other areas. Applying the given solution to a parallel problem would have us send arguing

husbands and wives away from each other rather than solve the problem before them. You would have to conclude sending them away would be better for the children. The parents would serve as lightning rods to past events. All analogies ultimately fail, ultimately this one does. However, I am certain anyone reading this diary can identify with a time they have managed a problem rather than solved it.

If you have persevered this far, I want you to know I have great respect for the efforts and personal holiness of the men who worked to direct our church. My wife and I continue to attend as the church seeks a new pastor—a pursuit I think is unnecessary because the church must learn how to heal in all aspects. The minister to the people and the people to the minister relationships must heal, not simply end. Given repentance, there is no reason both ministers cannot be welcomed.

All facets of the problems must be solved in a Biblical fashion. This includes the rehabilitation and restoration of the emotions and actions of the congregation. Modern pragmatism cannot replace sound Biblical disciplines in problem solving. Rather, the church should lead the world in resolving difficult problems and restoring the relationships.

[Mr. Lont, who is a seminary graduate and holds Baptist ministerial credentials, writes from northern New Jersey.—Ed.]

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# Of Synods and Councils

*[It is the long-standing custom of Westminster Presbytery to have its ministers preach, on a rotational basis, on successive chapters of the Confession of Faith. The following is based on the message preached on Chapter XXXI, "Of Synods and Councils," at the January 11, 2003, stated meeting of the Presbytery.—Ed.]*

Text: Acts 15:1-35

Theme: Dr. Luke instructs us regarding higher church courts.

Beloved people of God, we come today to consider Chapter XXXI of our Confession of Faith, "Of Synods and Councils." And as we do so, we must ask the question, Why are we even bothering to deal with this subject?

Beyond the fact that this is the next chapter in our Confession of Faith, there are at least four reasons why we should deal with this subject. First, we believe in the whole counsel of God; and since He has revealed these truths in Scripture, we should seek to practice them. Secondly, proper church government is for the well-being of the church. This is not to say that the church cannot exist apart from a presbyterial form of government. But it is to say that the representative form of government we find in Scripture is for the good of the Body. Third, King Jesus is the church's only law-giver; and since He has commanded that she have a certain form of government, we must follow His dictate. Fourth, as we shall see, there is much practical wisdom in having higher church courts.

Historically, synods and councils have played significant roles. We have, of course, the first church council, that of the gathering we see here in Acts 15. There was the Council of Nicea in AD 325, which bore testimony against Arius, who said, "There was a time when the Son was not." The Council of Constantinople in AD 381 opposed the teaching of Appolinarius. The Council of Ephesus in AD 431 took issue with Nestorius. The Council of Chalcedon in AD 451 bore witness against Eutyches. The Synod of Orange in AD 529 affirmed Augustinian teaching in opposition to Semi-Pelagianism. Coming more into the modern era, the Synod of Dort in 1618-19 formulated what we know today as the Five Points of Calvinism. And the Westminster Assembly met between 1643 and 1649, in developing what has been called the greatest confessional creed ever written.

What I propose to do this morning is to do an exposition of Acts 15; then an exposition of the teaching of the Westminster Standards; and then make practical application to the contemporary ecclesiastical scene.

## Exposition of Acts 15

As we look at Acts 15, we note that there was a serious controversy. Judaizers—people who literally were from Judea—were troubling the church. They were mixing Judaism and Christianity. Explicitly, they were requiring circumcision for salvation and for inclusion in the community of believers. Or, to put it another way, they believed that one must become a Jew in order to be a Christian.

This notion went directly contrary to Pauline teaching. Paul, that great Pharisee of the Pharisees, had had his eyes opened, quite literally, on the road to Damascus. Paul had come to understand divine grace. Peter, too, after his vision of the sheets of unclean animals and his experience of the conversion of Cornelius, had come to appreciate the fact that he should not consider unclean that which God had proclaimed clean.

Yet, the danger of slipping back into the old way of thinking was still present, as seen in Galatians 2. You remember that Peter had come to visit the church and had at first mingled freely with the Gentile believers; but that he then had come under the sway of Judaizers. Paul had to rebuke him sharply. It would appear that the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 was called shortly thereafter, as a way of the church officially settling the matter.

How significant was this controversy? Obviously, it helps to define what the gospel is, so it was crucially significant from that viewpoint alone. Furthermore, it deals with ethics—how believers ought to live. Finally, the controversy was creating a rift in the Body of Christ. It was threatening the unity between Jewish and Gentile believers. The text says that there was "no small dissension." The word used there can indicate the disruption of Greek city-states—a notion of insurrection, uproar, sedition. Another word used in verse 1 is "disputation," which has polemical overtones.

### The Means of Resolution

Our text gives us the means for resolving the controversy. Notice that it proved impossible to resolve locally. Handled only locally, the controversy could have divided the church into Jewish and Gentile parts. This would have gone against the grain of the Pauline vision of church unity, exemplified in passages such as Ephesians 2, where the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile has been broken down, and Ephesians 4, where we are called upon to maintain the unity of the body in the bonds of love. It would also have gone against our Lord's high priestly prayer (John 17), "that they may be one."

Furthermore, the matter could not be handled only locally, because the wisdom and counsel of the whole church—of the broader assembly—was necessary for settling such a theological dispute.

What we have here, if we were to use contemporary parlance, was a judicial reference. Now, there was a personal aspect to this—a delegation was sent to Jerusalem. But, it is also true that the matter itself was referred. It was referred to Jerusalem—still the "mother church." It was referred to Jerusalem—where the apostles still resided.

Between the time that the matter was referred and the time it was able to be heard, there was great mutual joy along the way. As the delegation passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, they brought the glad tidings of the conversion of the Gentiles. We always like to hear good news, and it was no different back then. Here, there was the declaration that the Gentiles were turning from idols, to serve the one, true, and living God.

But even at this point, there was a reminder of the dark cloud on the horizon. Of those of the sect of the Pharisees who believed, there were those who insisted on the Judaistic position. There were Pharisees who had embraced Jesus as Messiah. They were of the strictest sect, and wanted to do the right thing. They had named the name of Christ. But, they had not gotten out of the Judaistic trap.

They had a two-prong contention. First, it was needful to circumcise the Gentile believers. Secondly, it was necessary to command them to keep the law of Moses—i.e., the ceremonial law; or, for them to become Jewish proselytes in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.

### The First General Assembly

We come in verses 7 and following to the first General Assembly of the New Testament church. The members of the court were apostles and elders. Now, they probably didn't have badges from the Stated Clerk's office; nevertheless, they were "credentialed." That is to say, they didn't take up their offices upon their own authority. Rather, they had been called by the ascended Christ, and recognized as such by the church.

Both apostles and elders were present as voting members of this court. There was no pulling of rank on the part of the apostles. The elders were regarded as equal for the purposes of discussion and vote.

Observers were also present. Verse 22 speaks of the "whole church." In verse 12, we are told that "all the multitude" kept silent when Barnabas and Paul stood up to speak.

What is important to grasp is that although a representative assembly made the decision, it was not done in isolation from the church as a whole. The church is a commonwealth with representative government, not an oligarchy where the leaders lord over the others.

### The Debate

As these apostles and elders engaged in the discussion, we are told that there was "much disputing." At that point, Peter stood up. Notice how he began his address: he addressed them, "Men and brethren." This is comparable to the standard way in which we address church courts today, viz., "Fathers and brethren." Peter makes an appeal to the incident about a decade earlier, that is, his experience described in Acts 10. He argues from that reality, that since no one could bear the yoke of the Mosaic law, why should the church bind the Gentiles similarly? In verse 11, he affirms divine grace.

Then Barnabas and Paul speak. All the multitude kept silence, as these veteran missionaries declared the miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles.

Then James, the brother of our Lord, arose. He referred to Peter's experience (Acts 10), and then he appealed to the prophet Amos. It is interesting that the quotation he gave of Amos follows the Septuagint more than the Masoretic Text. The reference is to David's tabernacle or tent. The

restoration pictured in Amos is in order that the kingdom in its fullness might come. However, the coming of the kingdom, as applied by James, is with reference to the Gentiles flocking into that kingdom.

In verse 19, James proposed a soft answer. In verse 20, he gave his proposal. This was not a papal decree—it was a proposal, a judgment, which the court accepted. He concluded his speech with a reference to Moses being read every week in the synagogues.

### The Resolution

In the next several verses, we have the resolution itself. We are told that "it seemed good" or it "pleased" the assembly to take this action. The first action mentioned is the sending of a delegation. Once against, this shows the personal and pastoral dimension. However, the delegation was sent with an actual letter. As Christians and as Presbyterians, we realize the importance of language, and especially of the written word. We value things like logic and reason, and the importance of having things in writing. That is what we see here.

The letter began with a greeting or salutation. There followed a confession regarding those who Judaizers who had gone out from Jerusalem (verse 24). Notice that these Judaizers were not cast out of the church—there was the desire that this resolution of the matter would be used to bring everyone together (and, in point of fact, the text indicates that this resolution was pleasing to the whole church). Nevertheless, there was the open recognition that these Judaizers had "troubled" the Gentile believers; and there was the mention of the fact that they had not been authorized.

The letter set forth the persons who would carry the message (verses 25-27). Then, the judgment was given.

Notice that this was an authoritative judgment. "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us." There is nothing blasphemous with this conjunction between the third Person of the Trinity and the church council. There are other places in Scripture where we similar conjoining of divine and human—for example, in Judges 7, the people cry, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon." No, it is not blasphemous. Rather, it shows the fact that the General Assembly was an instrument being used by God.

The letter then celebrated liberty.

And then the letter did lay down certain restrictions.

There are several different interpretations with regard to what exactly these restrictions were. Some commentators believe that these are all moral matters. Others believe that they were all ceremonial, and are found in Leviticus 17 and 18. This would include the prohibition regarding "fornication," which in this view would be a reference to a violation of the laws of consanguinity in marriage.

My own view is that the law of love was being applied, authoritatively. These restrictions were the necessary minimal requirements in order to remove friction and animus in the relationship between Jewish and Gentile believers. These restrictions were transitional and temporary.

The church at Antioch received the letter with great joy and consolation. There was also exhortation and teaching.

The end result was that there was great healing of the Body.

## Exposition of the Confession of Faith

Now that we've looked at Acts 15, let's look at the Confession of Faith, Chapter XXXI. Acts 15 is indeed the great proof text for this chapter of the Confession, although there are other Scriptures adduced as well. As we look at Chapter XXXI, we will explore the American version.

### The Purpose of Synods and Councils

The first paragraph of Chapter XXXI gives the purpose of synods and councils. We are told that they are "For the better government of the church"—that is, for the better ordering of its affairs.

They are also for "its further edification." Later in the paragraph, we have the phrase, "for edification and not destruction." This is truly the purpose of church courts, but, sadly, throughout history, how often have church courts not lived up to this ideal!

Paragraph one also tells us how synods and councils are called. Overseers (or "bishops") and other rulers of the

particular churches act to call them.

As one who has held to the two-and-a-half office view espoused by the Presbyterian Church in America, let me say that it appears to me that the Confession at this point implicitly rejects the two-office view of the church, by making a distinction between bishops (or ministers) and other officers (ruling elders). In any case, it is the representatives of the church who are to act.

They act to appoint synods and councils “upon occasion,” “as often as they are expedient.” It would appear that synods are national meetings, while councils are international in scope.

#### The Function of Synods and Councils

Paragraph two gives the function of synods and councils. The first function has to do with faith. They are to resolve controversies of faith. Notice that church councils are for the settling of theological disputes. But notice also that the church does not determine doctrine, but rather resolves controversies regarding the divinely-given doctrine.

The second function mentioned is that of determining “cases of conscience.” This is a reference to determining right and wrong. Here it is important to note that the Confession’s view of liberty of conscience is not the current secularized one, which is that every man can do what is right in his own eyes (as was the popular opinion in the book of Judges). Chapter XX of the Confession of Faith is clear that no one can maintain a notion of liberty of conscience so as to oppose lawful authority. Chapter XX delicately balances several truths. One is that no one may require obedience to that which goes contrary to Scripture, or is in addition to Scripture in matters of faith and worship. Another is that we are free from the commandments of men when they go beyond the proper parameters. And another is that no one may use the cloak of liberty of conscience to hide behind, in order to rebel against lawful authority or to refrain from doing what God requires. Here in Chapter XXXI, by virtue of the reference to the authoritative determination of “case of conscience” by church courts, there is the re-affirmation that liberty of conscience is not autonomous.

The third function is the “better ordering of public worship.” Please notice that the church may not institute its own elements or practices of worship. Instead, the church may only formulate what may be characterized as circumstances of worship. The elements of worship are set forth in Chapter XXI of the Confession of Faith: they and they only are to be employed. But the precise order of those elements in a service of public worship is a matter of circumstance which higher church courts can regulate. Higher church courts can also determine what language can be used in administering oaths and vows.

In the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), we have examples of this principle. *Book of Church Order (BCO)* Chapter 5 prescribes the order of service when a mission work is organized. Chapter 21-5 gives the precise language to be used in the ordination of a minister, even as Chapter 24 gives the precise language for the ordination of an elder or a deacon. Chapters 56 and 57 prescribe the words of parental vows in infant baptism and the words of vows of church membership. And Chapter 58 mandates the manner in which the Lord’s Supper is to be administered.

The fourth function is for the “better ordering of government.” Again, the church does not determine which polity is proper; rather, the church may determine circumstantial details regarding polity (such as the quorum for meetings of church courts).

The fifth function is that of receiving complaints “in cases of maladministration.” For this function, I would appeal Scripturally to at least a couple of places. In Exodus 18:13ff, we see Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, helping Moses to establish the principle of gradation of courts, in which difficult matters could be decided by higher courts. In Ezra 10, people from throughout the land were involved in unlawful marriages; and the court at Jerusalem convened in order to redress the situation that had gotten out of hand at the local level.

The Confession of Faith also counsels that these decrees and determinations are to be received with reverence and submission. However, it also issues a cautionary word. It says that they are to be so received “if consonant to the Word of God.”

#### An Ordinance of God

There’s one other principle which the Confession enunciates in the second paragraph of Chapter XXXI. It is that these decrees and determinations are to be received with reverence and submission not only because they are in agreement with the Word of God, but also because they

are an ordinance appointed by God in His Word.

Support for this doctrine is found not only in Acts 15, but also Matthew 16 and 18, where Jesus gives to the church the keys of the kingdom, and promises His presence in the midst of the church when it gathers for the administration of discipline—even when only two or three are gathered in His name.

#### Limitations on Synods and Councils

Paragraphs three and four of Chapter XXXI lay out some limitations of church courts. The first limitation is because of their fallibility. Paragraph three says that all synods and councils today may err, and many have erred. We might think of Martin Luther’s defense, when he noted that councils had sometimes contradicted each other. The Confession adds the phrase that this is the case “since the Apostles’ times”: the Apostles, in accord with Jesus’ promise, were led unerringly by the Holy Spirit into all truth. However, since the time of the Apostles, we have no such guarantee. This applies to synods and councils whether general or particular.

Because of their fallibility, councils and synods are not to be made the rule of faith, but a help thereunto. You may recall that part of J. Gresham Machen’s defense in his trial in the 1930s was that the PCUSA General Assembly edict was not lawful, and therefore he could not be tried on the basis of having disobeyed it.

#### The Spiritual Nature of the Church

Paragraph four gives the other limitation, which revolves around the nature of the church. The church is a spiritual institution. The spirituality of the church, which doctrine was celebrated so much in our Southern Presbyterian heritage, comes into play here.

Paragraph four indicates that there is a proper separation of church and state. Indeed, the church is not to intermeddle in civil affairs. However, there are two exceptions to this general policy: by way of petition in cases extraordinary (as when the civil magistrate countenances the slaughter of innocent babies), and by way of advice if required by the civil magistrate in matters of conscience.

## Application to the Contemporary Scene

Well, this chapter of our Confession of Faith can be applied in several ways to the contemporary scene. First, let me apply it under the category of Purity, Unity, and Peace.

#### Purity

With regard to purity, notice that the appeal to Scripture is foundational. Similarly, doctrine is paramount for the establishment of the church and for her purity.

This is not the contemporary perspective in much of the putatively Reformed world. The notion that doctrine is paramount in the church goes against what is called tri-perspectivalism; one of the chief proponents of that view said in seminary class that the normative, the situational, and the existential are equally ultimate. Furthermore, the notion that doctrine is paramount also goes against notions that piety, cultural concerns, and piety are mutually-stimulating, interlocking, and interdependent, as a prominent organization within the PCA has been advocating.

False doctrine, as seen in Acts 15, subverts souls—and that’s not very loving, either.

#### Unity

With regard to unity, let me suggest that a genuine unity is based on purity. It is important to have the proper order.

Regarding unity in worship, please note that pluriformity in worship is contrary to the teaching of our Confession of Faith. The idea that worship may be legitimately expressed in a variety of forms, which would essentially constitute elements or practices of worship, is a violation of Chapter XX, where we are told that man-made rules may not institute worship practices that are beside or in addition to the Word of God. Pluriformity in worship is contrary to Chapter XXI, which sets forth the regulative principle of worship as well as the particular elements of worship. Pluriformity in worship is contrary to Chapter XXV, which proclaims Christ’s kingship over His church, which includes His prescribing her worship. Pluriformity in worship is contradicted by Chapter XXXI of the Confession of Faith, which, as we have seen, allows church

courts to determine the better ordering of public worship, but not the worship practices themselves.

This principle of providing for the better ordering of public worship means that higher church courts may mandate not only the particular order of service, but other circumstantial matters as well. It is on the basis of this principle that higher church courts, such as the Westminster Assembly, provided for a uniform psalter.

We have already acknowledged the fact that having the Jerusalem Council deal with the explosive issue of Gentile acceptance into the church was important and necessary, in order to avoid the appearance of a provincial settlement of the matter. Similarly, having a higher church court involved in circumstantial matters of worship helps to avoid provincial worship peculiarities.

Concomitantly, there should be a willingness to accommodate one another in the one church, so as not to give offense. The law of love in Acts 15 dictated that the Gentiles refrain from certain practices. In today’s church, the law of love, informed by sanctified common sense, would also dictate that the manner in which the church worships should not be bizarre. A ready example would be with respect to the type of music that is employed. Whatever music is used, should not be such as to give offense to a group of people within the church.

Moreover, there is a beauty to having a predictability to worship. Terry Johnson, who spearheaded the development of the *Trinity Psalter*, wanted especially to have one psalm identified with one tune. With a few exceptions, that is how the *Trinity Psalter* was designed. There’s a beauty to having that type of unified worship.

#### Peace

With regard to peace, once again, there is a proper order: first purity, then unity, then peace.

The peace which should be the goal of the actions of church councils is to be reflective of the fact that we are called into one Body by the Holy Spirit.

Surely it is significant that the dispute in Acts 15 was handled swiftly, before long-term damage could be done. Church councils, our Confession of Faith reminds us, are for the edification of the church and not her destruction; and we see in Acts 15 an example of how the church acted quickly in order to foster the peace of the church.

#### Polity

Secondly by way of application, let us consider various polity issues today.

#### Spirituality of the Church

The first such has to do with the spirituality of the church. Today, however, we are seeing this doctrine increasingly under attack, as there are those who want the PCA to be a major player in the cultural wars.

A couple of months ago, I attended the meeting of Abingdon Presbytery of the PC(USA), mostly out of curiosity. During the course of that meeting, there was the reminder of the PC(USA) General Assembly’s boycott of Taco Bell because of its tomato-picking practices. These are the kinds of issues about which the church has no business speaking.

#### Episcopacy

A second polity issue is that of episcopacy. Obviously, in the Presbyterian Church, we believe in the parity or equality of ruling and teaching elders. However, have we perhaps succumbed to a hierarchical mindset? In our General Assemblies, there is a lack of genuine deliberation, contrary to the clear teaching of Acts 15.

We are also witnessing an increasing bureaucracy. Gordon Keddie, a native Scotsman who currently pastors the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America congregation in State College, Pennsylvania, had this to say in his commentary on the book of Acts: “So often they [church meetings] are about power, or money, or procedure. The ‘committee men’ manoeuvre to pass motions on reports and programmes, prepared long before behind closed doors by ‘task forces’ and ‘think-tanks’ drawn from a well-vetted ecclesiastical oligarchy. When the elders come together—if they ever do—they are invited to approve the work of others. For those who disapprove, a short time for ineffectual carping is allowed. Of deliberative debate, there is nothing. Even in Presbyterian assemblies, where, one might think, this principle would be most carefully preserved, the elder are either not expected to contribute much of any use to theological debate, or are prevented from doing so by the rules of order. The other ‘E’s—experts, executives, ecclesiastics and elitists—have hijacked the church’s counsels! The Jerusalem Council calls the church of Jesus Christ back to God’s way of seeking the mind of the Spirit on the issues confronting the doctrinal purity

See SYNODS, page 14

# News From The Presbyteries

## Blue Ridge

### October 2002

The Presbytery of the Blue Ridge met for its stated meeting on October 18-19, 2002, at Grace Presbyterian Church, Lexington, Virginia. The Moderator, the Rev. Essen Daley, called the meeting to order and presided.

The Rev. Don Clements presented two overtures with recommended changes to the Rules of Assembly Operations. The matter was assigned to the Facilitating Committee, with instructions to report at the April, 2003, stated meeting.

The Moderator, assisted by Ruling Elder John Bennetch (music director at Covenant Church, Harrisonburg), led the Presbytery in an hour long service of worship and prayer.

The Moderator, after encouraging the members of Presbytery to break into small groups of four to five people each to share concerns and prayers for a 30 minute period, recessed the Meeting at 9:00 PM with prayer to reconvene at 8:30 the next morning.

The next morning, the Moderator led the Presbytery in worship, preaching a sermon from the text Luke 9:51-56 entitled "His Face Like Flint". Assisted by host pastor TE Carter, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was administered. The Treasurer, Ruling Elder Bill Porter, presented his report. It shows an account balance of \$470.94.

In response to an assignment from the Presbytery's Advisory Convention, the Stated Clerk, Dr. Clements, reported that his research of Roberts Rules of Order and informal advice from RE John While, North Georgia Presbytery (and a long standing parliamentarian at many past General Assemblies) has resulted in the judgment that the proposed Standing Rule Section VI-3-4-D is in fact correct in regards to Roberts Rules of Order. The court approved this recommendation for inclusion in the Standing Rules: "All motions that come to a vote recorded and whether the motion was lost or carried. Motion makers, seconders, and discussion of motion need not be recorded."

The following budget was approved for 2003: Leadership Development Committee: \$1,000.00; Church Nurture Committee: \$1,000.00; World Missions Committee: \$300.00; Collegiate Engagement Committee: \$23,000.00; Church Planting Committee: \$1,000.00; Facilitation Committee: Office of Stated Clerk: \$700.00; Travel: \$3,500.00; Web Site Development: \$2,600.00; Director's & Officers Insurance: \$900.00; Total Annual Budget: \$34,000.00.

Presbytery appointed the Rev. Gordon Woolard as the Presbytery facilitator for the PCA General Assembly Strategic Direction long range planning process to gather input from the Presbytery committees and to report the results through the Facilitating Committee; to report no later than the January meeting of Presbytery. Ruling Elder Bill Bebout was elected to a one-year term on the Committee on Review of Presbytery Records, and Don Clements to a one-year term on the General Assembly Nominating Committee.

The Moderator was authorized to appoint fraternal delegates whenever possible to the Mid-Atlantic Presbytery of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Virginia Presbytery of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.

The Presbytery added the following language to its Standing Rules with respect to the duties of the Church Planting Committee: "to seek the establishment of new churches which reflect the racial and cultural diversity of this region." The Committee Chairman, Dr. Cortez Cooper, reported that a fund-raising plan for Church Planting would be prepared for presentation at the January stated meeting. He also reported on the current church planting activities within the Presbytery, including: daughter plant of Westminster, Roanoke at Collinsville (designated mission church); daughter plant of Westminster, Roanoke on the east side of Roanoke; daughter plant of Covenant, Harrisonburg at Waynesboro (designated mission church); daughter Hispanic plant of Covenant, Harrisonburg; possible daughter plant of Covenant, Harrisonburg in eastern Rockingham County; future potential Presbytery sponsored church plants in Lynchburg and Christiansburg.

On a first reading, the Presbytery voted to change its Standing Rules in order to increase the membership on the Collegiate Engagement Committee to three teaching elders and three ruling elders. The Rev. John Pearson, RUF Minister at Washington and Lee University, gave a brief report of the ongoing ministries at W&L and at UVA in Charlottesville.

Presbytery granted honorably retired status to Dr. Cooper as of December 31, 2002, pending a vote of the congregation of Draper's Valley Presbyterian Church, Draper, Virginia, on December 2, 2002.

Mr. Kenneth Aldrich, a member of Covenant Presbyterian Church, Harrisonburg, Virginia, was received as a ministerial candidate. A graduate of Reformed Theological Seminary, he has experience as an unordained pastor in an Evangelical Covenant Church in Michigan. He has been called to be the Minister of Evangelism and Assimilation at the Covenant Church and will be seeking ordination at the January meeting. The Rev. Joe Slater gave the candidate a brief charge from II Timothy 2 and 4 and from Jeremiah 1 and closed the proceedings with prayer.

Presbytery directed the Leadership Development Committee to limit their January Stated Meeting report to four candidates, who are to be selected by urgency, or if not, by lottery.

On a first reading, Presbytery approved the following addition to its Standing Rules with regard to the duties of the World Missions Committee: "To encourage and facilitate the training, support, and sending of career missionaries either by the Presbytery or through MTW, as well as through other evangelical agencies."

A young lady, who is a native of Turkey, a Ph.D. graduate of Virginia Tech, and a member of the Grace Covenant Church, Blacksburg, Virginia, gave a brief report to the Presbytery. She serves as career missionary with The Navigators ministering in New Zealand among South Pacific Island university students.

### January 2003

Trinity Presbyterian Church, Charlottesville, Virginia, hosted the second stated meeting of the Presbytery of the Blue Ridge on January 11, 2003. The Rev. Tony Giles, who is on staff at the host church, assisted by Ruling Elder Bill Porter, led the opening worship service. The Rev. Dr. Edmund Clowney of South Texas Presbytery preached a sermon from John 7:28, 29, entitled, "When Jesus Shouted." Senior Pastor John Hall of the host church administered the sacrament of communion.

The Rev. Tony Monaghan, fraternal delegate of the OPC Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic, brought "warm regards" from his presbytery.

The Rev. Greg Thompson, RUF campus minister at UVA in Charlottesville, gave a brief report on the ongoing ministries at UVA and Washington & Lee University.

The Rev. Jack Howell of James River Presbytery, Chairman of the Virginia Joint Committee on RUF, addressed the court. He reviewed the work of the Joint Committee. He then distributed a document and explained that the Joint Committee was ready to proceed with the formation of a new work at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. Blue Ridge Presbytery approved this action and instructed the Moderator to sign the agreement document in behalf of the Presbytery.

It was moved, seconded, and carried on second reading to amend the Standing Rules to include three teaching elders and three ruling elders on the Collegiate Engagement Committee.

It was moved, seconded, and carried "that the Presbytery NOT respond to the General Assembly Strategic Direction long range-planning group. (Note: While no official statement of reasons was included in the motion, TE Gordon Woolard volunteered to make an informal verbal report to RE Frank Brock, chairman of the group.)"

Postponed until April was a report on the idea to approach Trigon Health Care with the idea of developing a new group for employees of all PCA churches in Virginia. The Stated Clerk reported that the Presbytery unable to obtain Directors and Officers insurance because it had missed the early fall deadline, but would enroll next year.

It was reported that the Presbytery has received a check for \$5,857.19 as the proceeds of the 'Walthall-Wood Scholarship Fund'. This was received by transfer from New River Presbytery (original funds given by members of Draper's Valley Church). This fund was set up to provide grants and/or loans to members of churches of the Presbytery who are doing undergraduate work and intending to pursue 'full time Christian ministry' after college. The Treasurer has been instructed to deposit the funds in an interest bearing account in accordance with the will setting up the fund. Action of oversight and selection process was assigned to the Church Nurture Committee, asking them to present to the April Stated Meeting a set of guidelines to be distributed to our churches to solicit applications.

The Moderator made the following appointments of fraternal delegates to upcoming meetings: ARP Presbytery, March 15, 2003 in Spottswood, Virginia, the Rev. TE Paul Carter; OPC Presbytery, May 3, 2003 in Purcellville, Virginia, the Rev. Jim Creech (Don Clements, Alternate).

Based on recommendations from the Facilitating Committee and due to a conflict with the first joint youth retreat for Blue Ridge and James River Presbyteries, the Standing Rules were suspended in order to change the dates for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Stated Meeting to April 4-5, 2003.

A possible Presbytery prayer chain was discussed. Action will be deferred until the new Presbytery directory is completed.

It was reported that Dr. Clements had been given permission to withdraw his two proposed overtures to the General Assembly which were presented at the 1<sup>st</sup> Stated Meeting and substitute a new, shorter overture dealing with the same issues. The new proposed overture has been assigned to the Facilitating Committee and will be acted on at the April Stated Meeting.

The Facilitating Committee Chairman reported that the Committee is recommending that for the April meeting members arrive early on Friday and form informal fellowship groups to eat together to get to know each other better (with the host church providing maps and info on area restaurants in Blacksburg, especially those with international cuisine). The theme of 'the missional nature of the regional church' was adopted for the April meeting.

The Rev. Don Ward, newly-elected chairman of the Church Planting Committee, reported that Dr. Cooper has resigned as chairman due to his move to live in Mississippi for 6 months (as an interim pastor). The Chairman updated the Presbytery on the current church planting activities within the Presbytery, including several encouraging contacts in Danville and Lynchburg.

Presbytery approved the resignation of Dr. Clements as Pastor of Valley Church, Narrows, Virginia, effective January 1, 2003, and also approved him as Stated Supply for up to one year. Presbytery approved his serving out of bounds with full-time service as an evangelist with Metokos Ministries, an affiliated PEF ministry.

It was reported that the congregation of Draper's Valley Church had voted on to approve the resignation of Dr. Cortez Cooper as pastor (he had been approved at the last meeting for Honorable Retirement status pending this action). The Draper's Valley congregation voted (by more than the required 4/5) to call their Assistant Pastor Kenneth Pierce to serve as Senior Pastor; it was moved, seconded, and carried to approve the call (by the requisite 3/4 vote).

By a 3/4 vote, the Presbytery divided into two committees to hear the trial sermons of two candidates, Kenneth Aldrich and David Saville.

Mr. Aldrich, who has been called to serve as an Associate Pastor at the Covenant Church, Harrisonburg, was examined and approved for ordination. The Presbytery voted by the requisite 3/4 vote to approve his previous experience as an unordained assistant pastor as an equivalent to internship.

Candidate David Saville who has been called to serve as an Assistant Pastor at the Grace Community Church, Charlottesville, was also examined and approved for ordination. He completed his internship at Westminster Presbyterian Church, Roanoke. Presbytery voted to find his views on the Sabbath (which would allow for personal and family recreation) to be an allowable exception of Confession of Faith 21-8. While not finding him out of accord with the standards, it was moved, seconded, and carried to ask Mr. Saville to work with Don Ward to clarify his views on the regulative principle and to report to the April meeting of Presbytery through the Leadership Development Committee.

The Rev. Drew Trotter, President of the Center for Christian Study in Charlottesville, Virginia, was examined and transferred from Tennessee Valley to Blue Ridge Presbytery, as his work is located in the bounds of our presbytery. Mr. Trotter stated he believed personal and family recreation were appropriate on the Sabbath. He also stated that while he fully believed in ex nihilo creation and the humanity of a real Adam and Eve, he believed that Chapter 1 of Genesis was best understood through what is commonly known as the 'framework view'. He stated that he believed the Bible (especially in 1 Tim 3:11) allowed for women to serve in the office of deacon. He stated that he believed that there were appropriate, specific elements of worship not listed in the Confession of Faith 21-5, such as drama and dance, as long as such events were circumstances related to the preaching of the word. It was

moved, seconded, and carried to arrest the examination and excuse him from the meeting. It was moved, seconded, and carried that the Presbytery finds his views on the Sabbath to be an allowable exception of WCF 21-8. It was moved, seconded, and carried that the Presbytery finds his views on creation to be an allowable exception of WCF 4-1. It was moved, seconded, and carried that the Presbytery finds his views on women holding the office of Deacon to be an allowable exception of BCO 7-2. It was moved, seconded, and carried to suspend the discussion and ask him to return for additional questions in the area of regulative principles of worship. After a further period of question, it was moved, seconded, and carried again to suspend the examination and excuse him from the floor. It was moved, seconded, and carried that the Presbytery finds his views on the regulative principle to be an allowable exception to WCF 21-1.5. Gordon Woolard asked that his negative vote be recorded. Presbytery sustained his examination as a whole and voted to enroll him as a member pending transfer from Tennessee Valley.

Miss Dana Patterson, a member of the Covenant Presbyterian Church, Harrisonburg, who is an approved itinerating missionary who will be serving with MTW on the Arabian Peninsula, gave a brief presentation concerning her expected work.

On second reading, it was moved and seconded to add this amendment to the Standing Rules as follows: Revise Section V-7-2 to read as follows: "To encourage and facilitate the training, support, and sending of career missionaries either by the Presbytery or through MTW, as well as through other evangelical agencies." With the support of the Chairman, the motion failed.

Church Nurture Committee Chairman, Ruling Elder Wayne Dymacek, announced that there would be a joint youth retreat with the James River Presbytery to be held in Rockbridge, Virginia, the weekend of April 11-13 and that all churches should have received specific information by this date. Presbytery voted to increase the Committee's budget by \$1,700 in order to offset some of the retreat expenses and thus keep individual registration costs as low as possible.

## James River

The One Hundredth and Ninth Meeting of James River Presbytery was held at New Covenant Presbyterian Church, Norfolk, Virginia, on January 17-18, 2003. The Moderator, the Rev. Harry Long, called the meeting to order and led the Presbytery in a season of prayer.

Ruling Elder Dan Carrell, the designated facilitator, opened a discussion of the Framework of Strategic Direction of the PCA. He read from Proverbs 15:22, 16:3, 9; 19:21; 20:18; and 21:30, and led in prayer. Mr. Carrell and Ruling Elder Tom Taylor were to compile the comments of the presbyters raised during the discussion period and present a report at the next stated meeting of the Presbytery.

The next morning, Mr. Long conducted the worship service, reading from I Samuel 10 and preaching on the topic, "What is at hand for us to do?"

A memorial was given in honor of the life and ministry of Ruling Elder Robert Ranson, an elder emeritus at Stony Point Reformed Presbyterian Church, Richmond, Virginia.

On a second reading, the Presbytery approved a change to its bylaws, establishing a Joint Reformed University Ministries Committee between James River and Blue Ridge Presbyteries.

By about two-to-one margins, the Presbytery defeated Item 1 (regarding assumption of original jurisdiction) and Item 2 (regarding "good faith" subscription) of the Book of Church Order amendments. It also defeated, overwhelmingly, the addition of "unity" to the ministerial ordination vows, but unanimously gave its blessing to changing the name of Insurance, Annuities, and Relief, to PCA Retirement and Benefits, Inc.

The Treasurer, Mr. Charles Parker, presented the financial report for 2002. It shows a beginning balance of \$13,968.88, receipts of \$40,086.86, disbursements of \$44,353.24, and an ending balance of \$9,702.50.

Presbytery licensed to preach the Rev. John Andrew Paul, who had been ordained by an independent Bible church. Presbytery then approved a call to him from River's Edge Bible Church, Hopewell, Virginia, and recognized his ministerial credentials and authorized him to administer the sacraments.

Mr. George Lacy, a member of the Stony Point Church, was taken under care as a ministerial candidate.

Internship reports from Messrs. Stephane Jeanrenaud, Frank Sindler, Robert Rink, and Dennis Bullock were approved.

A motion was made and seconded to remove \$17,280

earmarked for a new Reformed University Fellowship work and revisit this proposal when sufficient funding can be promised to fund the work. The motion failed.

A complaint was received from the River's Edge Bible Church against the Presbytery. The Session then withdrew the complaint.

Eastminster Presbyterian Church, Virginia Beach, Virginia, presented an overture which proposed amending a section of the Rules of Discipline (Chapter 32) in the Book of Church Order. The amendment would have required ecclesiastical courts which, during judicial process, discovered a possible violation of civil law to report such immediately to the civil authorities and to "deliver to such authority all evidence, copies of testimony and any other pertinent information in [its] possession." The amendment would also specify that "if the offence is moral or criminal in nature, then the accused will be immediately removed from all duties in the church, such as preaching, teaching, youth leader, choir member, etc., and will remain suspended from their duties until the case is resolved." In support of this amendment, and with apparent reference to the recent sex scandal in the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastminster Church argued that "some churches calling themselves by the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, have allowed some of their officials to commit unspeakable acts upon the bodies of some children in their care"; "these same officials have protected the same criminals by moving them to other locations in some cases"; "these same officials, when receiving complaints have, in some instances, claimed that no criminal act has occurred and refused to validate the claims"; and "these same officials, knowing that their actions were also criminal in nature, declined or refused to reveal their knowledge of these acts." The Presbytery declined to adopt the overture.

The Presbytery did approve an overture submitted by Mr. Carrell, which asks the General Assembly to change the current practice of having a floor nominee placed in opposition to particular candidate for a position on an Assembly committee or agency. The overture notes that the current Assembly practice "runs counter to Robert's Rules of Order . . . , which recognizes that a candidate is nominated to run for an office, not to run against a designated nominee for that office"; and argues that "it is the General Assembly itself that should determine, by its vote, the preference among multiple nominees."

Complaint 02-03 Pearson vs. New Covenant Presbyterian Church was found in order, and a commission was appointed to adjudicate it and report to the April stated meeting of Presbytery.

The Ministerial and Church Relations Committee, acting as a commission, dissolved the pastoral relationship between Assistant Pastor Ken Brown and New Covenant Presbyterian Church. He is seeking a call in Northern California Presbytery. Acting as a commission, the Committee dissolved the pastoral relationship between the Rev. Joseph C. Paul and the Eastminster Presbyterian Church.

The Presbytery honorably retired the Rev. Norman "Scotty" McLeod. He has cancer of the throat and is undergoing chemotherapy.

A report was heard as to the progress of the King George County Mission Church. Mr. David Dixon, a member of the Westminster Presbyterian Church, Suffolk, Virginia, was given the privilege of the floor to give a brief report on the Southside Network. About a year ago, pastors and church leaders of the seven Southside churches began meeting informally for prayer and discussion regarding church planting. The group would like to become a subcommittee of the Mission of Presbytery Committee.

Reports were heard as to the Reformed University Ministries (RUM) works at the University of Virginia and Washington & Lee University. Efforts are underway to organize RUM at other universities in the Commonwealth, including Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), Virginia Tech, and the College of William and Mary. Presbytery voted to sign the agreement with RUM to establish an RUF campus ministry at VCU in the fall of 2003. Toward that end, \$15,000 has already been given and pledged for VCU, and accounts have been set up for the others.

Ruling Elder Ron Rice was elected as Moderator in Nomination.

## North Texas

Fort Worth, Texas (February 7-8, 2003)—The seventy-third meeting of North Texas Presbytery met at the Fort Worth Presbyterian Church. The Moderator, Ruling Elder Cub Culbertson, opened the meeting with prayer at 8:40 PM on a Friday evening. The Presbytery had informally

gathered at 4:00 in the afternoon to discuss "The Framework of Strategic Direction of the PCA," as counseled by the General Assembly.

Host pastor Mike Sharrett welcomed the commissioners and led a worship service. Col. David Peterson, US Army (Ret), Chaplain Ministries Coordinator for the denomination, preached from Joshua 3-4 and the sacrament of communion was administered.

PresWIC President Linda Clark reported on Women in the Church programs for 2003.

Also addressing the court were three missionaries: Miss Dawn Brady, Howard Sheldon, and Paul Fischer. The Rev. Jeff Weir, Chairman of the Mission to the World Committee, thanked the Presbytery for its support of his missions trip to Thailand.

The reports of the commissions to install and ordain Mike McLaughlin and Jacob Yohannon were spread on the record, and the commissions dismissed with thanks.

The Rev. Paul Hahn, a member of South Texas Presbytery, presented the proposal from his presbytery that it be divided into three presbyteries. He asked for the support of North Texas in this endeavor.

On Saturday morning, Daryl Soward preached from I Peter 1:13-16 as part of his trials for licensure. Presbytery voted to approve the sermon as part of the licensure process. The Presbytery later examined him and licensed him to preach.

The Rev. Josh Geiger, Hispanic church planter in Dallas, reported on God's work in his life in the past four months since his ordination. The Presbytery later voted to increase his salary, retroactive to January 1, 2003.

The Rev. Ron Dunton, Pastor of Metrocrest PCA, Carrollton, Texas, was elected Moderator by acclamation.

Dr. Culbertson was elected by acclamation as Administration Committee Chairman.

Ruling Elder John Mulkey was elected by acclamation as Stated Clerk for a three-year term.

Ruling Elder Bruce Breeding was elected by acclamation as Treasurer for a three-year term.

Presbytery approved the petition from Trinity Harbor PCA, Rowlett, Texas, to be a particular church. The Mission to North America Committee was commissioned for this purpose, as well as to install a pastor when the church is organized. The Presbytery later approved a call from Trinity Harbor to the Rev. Jim Ungaro, who has been serving as organizing pastor.

Retroactive to January 1, 2003, the Presbytery transferred \$43,000 from the MNA Committee Budget for Reformed University Fellowship, to the newly-constituted Reformed University Fellowship Committee of North Texas Presbytery.

The Presbytery authorized its MNA Committee to offer to Licentiate Marvin C. Williams of Tennessee Valley Presbytery the unordained position of African-American Outreach Planner, retroactively effective February 1, 2003. The Presbytery also authorized his move to the field. The Presbytery authorized the Committee to determine the initial required compensation level and take other necessary actions to insure his move to the field is done in a fully-responsible manner; further, that such authorization includes permission for the Presbytery to make an interest-free loan to him for the purpose of securing a home, that is made solely from planner raised funds over and above the stated requirement and that said funds be repaid to the same account in the Presbytery within five years of the date of the loan.

Reports were heard from the following campus ministers: Pete Hatton (Baylor University); Marc Corbett (Texas Tech); David Rea (SMU); Dustin Salter (TCU); and Doug Serven (Oklahoma University).

Reports were given by Ruling Elder Brad Bradley from the Southwest Church Planting Network. Reports from all the church planters in the Presbytery were heard as follows: Jim Ungaro (Trinity Harbor PCA, Rowlett, Texas); Russ McAnulty (Lone Star Presbyterian Church in the Keller-Alliance area north-northeast of Fort Worth); Josh Geiger (Dallas Hispanic work); Doug Serven, reporting for Mike Biggs (Christ the King PCA, Norman, Oklahoma); Marc Corbett, reporting for Rob Bailey (Providence PCA, Lubbock, Texas); and Rich Lambert (East Dallas). A joint work is being pursued in Temple, Texas, in conjunction with Redeemer PCA, Austin, Texas (a congregation in South Texas Presbytery).

The Presbytery approved the work of the Sessional Records Committee.

The Rev. Ron Brady, Chairman of the Administration and Stewardship Committee, reported that all distribution of assets of the defunct Christ Community Church, Mesquite, Texas, had been completed according to Presbytery's instructions including the conveyance of the

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**SYNODS***From page 11*

and the practical peace of the body of Christ—namely, by God-appointed elders in deliberative assemblies. The way the discussion unfolded in Jerusalem is the most vivid recommendation for God's way to solve the church's challenges" (*You are my witnesses: The message of the ACTS of the Apostles* [Darlington, Co. Durham, UK: Evangelical Press, 1993], pp. 173-74).

**Independency**

A third polity issue is that of independency. "Each church is an island" is a mentality which is rampant in this area of the country—a celebration of independency, as if that were a Christian virtue.

In opposition to that notion, please note that denominations are not bad. Denominations actually give expression to unity, in that churches who are in denominations are able to walk together with one another.

But in the PCA today, there is a tendency toward this independent mindset, at both the congregational and the presbytery levels. Presbyteries often today "do their own thing."

In the PCA today, there is a practical denial of the organic unity of the church. Actions by lower courts are not seen as being taken on behalf of the whole. Moreover, it is not understood that the Assembly is not merely an appendage, but arises necessarily as the broader expression of the church. There is not the understanding that the General Assembly is a manifestation of the church, rather than simply a convention.

**'Pious Advice' or Authoritative?**

A fourth polity issue is the notion that decisions by higher church courts are merely "pious advice." At least some of the reason for this wrong view is a misunderstanding of the relationship between a "ministerial" act and power. Chapter XXXI of the Confession of Faith says that synods and councils act "ministerially." This does not mean that they have no power. It means that they act in a servant-like capacity, subservient to King Jesus. The term "ministerially" implies servanthood. Nevertheless, there is real power—spiritual power—when a church court acts Biblically. The

Confession of Faith is not contradicting itself when it says "ministerially" and "authoritatively" in reference to synods and councils.

**Erastianism**

A fifth polity concern is that of Erastianism, or the belief that the church acts under the authority of the civil government and essentially as a department of the state. No, church and state are separate and distinct from each other (though they also properly bear a relationship toward each other). We might not think that Erastianism would be an issue in the PCA today. However, listen to this quote from two leading statesmen of our denomination: "Each presbytery and each session has the power, *acting through the civil entity that each has formed and organized*, to dismiss members from its membership for such reason as it determines to be appropriate *subject to the applicable civil laws of the State*" (emphasis added). That quotation is taken from a textbook on polity being used in at least one of the major seminaries supplying the PCA with ministers. Prima facie, the language is that of Erastianism.

**The Public Nature of the Church**

A sixth polity issue is that of the public nature of the church. Preliminary Principle of the *Book of Church Order* says that the approbation of an impartial public is necessary for the decisions of the church to have moral weight.

Certainly one of the implications of this preliminary principle is that church leaders must not act autonomously. In Acts 15, the text indicates that the whole church agreed with the decision rendered by the Jerusalem Council. The church is not to have an oligarchy, or rule by a few. The church is a commonwealth with representative government. As our *Book of Church Order* reminds us, church rulers must have the respect and hence the consent of the governed.

But the "impartial public" mentioned in Preliminary Principle 8 is more than just the church public; the term means the public at large. Notice that in Acts 15, the decision of the Jerusalem Council was publicly announced—there was the proclamation of what the church had done.

I long for the day when the actions of church courts will again be front-page news in the *New York Times*, as

once was the case—but not since the Machen trial in the 1930s. I long for the day when the church will no longer be considered irrelevant by society. I long for the day when presbyteries no longer seek to hide their actions and treat their minutes as if they are secret documents.

Of course, if church courts are ashamed of their actions, then it is no wonder why they would try to keep them confidential. Perhaps the worst problem we have in the church today is the manifestation of injustice, sometimes perpetrated with the most pious of phrases. But if a church court has done justly, then it should be willing openly to declare to the watching world what it has done and why. The church is the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and the church is to manifest His righteousness on earth.

**Person and Work of Christ**

Finally, by way of application, I would like to relate this passage to the Person and Work of Christ.

First of all, Christ as prophet. As prophet, He works and leads by His Word and Spirit. He uses church councils as instruments to mine the treasures of Scripture.

Secondly, Christ as priest. As priest, He cares for the church very deeply. Indeed, He gave Himself for her.

Thirdly, Christ as king. Part of His just rule over His church is by means of synods and councils. They turn the keys of the kingdom as courts of the church, and declare that which heaven has already determined.

One of the great needs in our denomination today is a rediscovery of the Scriptural and Confessional teaching regarding synods and councils. We need to realize that when we meet in General Assemblies we are standing in a great line of churchmen—from Jerusalem, to Nicea, to Constantinople, to Ephesus, to Chalcedon, to Orange, to Dordt, to Westminster. We need to realize that it is not just a meeting, but that it is a time and place where the Lord Himself has promised to be, in authority and power. We need to make sure that when we gather in an Assembly, we are governed not by pragmatic considerations, but solely by the Word of God. We need to ensure a full deliberation of matters, with appeal to Scripture, not to statistics and worldly models.

May the Lord be pleased to grant that to us in our generation. Amen.

## Controversy in Idaho

Over the past year and a half, the doctrinal views of well-known author Douglas Wilson have been subject to severe criticism. Last June, Covenant Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States (RPCUS) condemned the views of Mr. Wilson and three other churchmen who had spoken at the annual pastors' conference at Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church, Monroe, Louisiana. The RPCUS called on these men to repent for their views on several matters, including justification and the nature of the church.

In February 2003, Pastor Wilson faced another challenge. Ninety-four ecclesiastical charges have been filed against the Rev. Douglas Wilson, pastor of Christ Church, Moscow, Idaho. The charges, which were placed in the hands of Christ Church and the Confederation of Reformed Evangelicals (CRE) on February 26, 2003, allege various unethical practices, including lying, stealing, and the misuse of benevolence funds.

Within hours of the filing of the charges, Christ Church had responded to several of them.

Several of the charges revolve around the giving of \$1,000 in benevolence funds in order to pay off the gambling debts of young men in the congregation. Those charges focus on how the Christ Church Session dealt with an illegal gambling casino/wet bar (the Morton Street Casino), which was managed by a son of one of the church's elders.

Mr. Wilson is well-known in the Reformed church world for his writings, including books on doctrine, the church, and the family. His numerous articles have appeared in *Credenda/Agenda*, a magazine which he edits, as well as other publications, such as *Tabletalk*, the publication of Ligonier Ministries.

The Idaho pastor has been a controversial figure in Reformed circles, not least of which as a result of his severe criticisms of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). His theological views have also recently come into question, as he has been charged by the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States (RPCUS) with heresy with regard to justification and the nature of the church.

The charges comprise a document 106 pages in length ("Solemn Charges & Specifications of Sins Alleged Against Teaching Elder Douglas Wilson and the Christ Church Session". Supplementing that document are another 334 pages of exhibits and evidence, for a total of 440 pages.

Since the controversy has arisen, another congregation, an evangelical church across the border in Pullman, Washington, has become involved. The elders of the Pullman church were compelled to investigate statements which one of their members had made in the case. A former elder at Christ Church, Dr. Terry Morin had filed affidavits with regard to the behavior of Pastor Wilson ten years ago. After an extensive investigation, Dr. Morin's elders have vindicated him and the veracity of his sworn statements.

Christ Church's elders have dismissed the charges against Mr. Wilson, because of the fact that his accusers, Charles Nolan and Charles Craig (and their families), left the church simultaneously with the lodging of the accusations. The Moderator of the CRE, the Rev. Brett Baker, has offered to Messrs. Nolan and Craig the opportunity to summarize the charges in a five page brief, with an opportunity for Christ Church to respond similarly. No adjudication of the charges has been scheduled.

The charges and the response to them by Christ Church are on the church's website ([www.christkirk.com](http://www.christkirk.com)). The material may be accessed through the button labeled "Bizarre Charges."

[Editor's note: The developments in Moscow, Idaho, are sad indeed, and there are many questions that remain to be answered. P&R News, which has been following this story for several months, held off on going to press in the January/March edition, in order to give parties opportunity to reconcile. Toward that same end, we have held off in this edition on relating all but the barest of facts. We remain interested in the story, and hope perhaps to be a catalyst toward bringing about reconciliation and, where needed, repentance.—Ed.]

**PRESBYTERIES***From page 13*

land to the New Beginnings Evangelical Free Church (NBEFC) by Deed without warranty. All former members not joining the NBEFC have been placed or have joined other PCA congregations.

The Presbytery budget for the first six months of 2003 was approved as recommended.

Presbytery approved the Administrative Committee's recommendation that an Ad Hoc Committee of Presbytery be formed to "consider specific recommendations for the reorganization of the way North Texas Presbytery conducts its meetings including consideration of means of providing more time for mutual ministry and encouragement in pastoral ministry and collegial relations." Four ministers (David Boxerman, Jeff Weir, Mike Biggs, and David Sherwood) and four ruling elders (Brad Bradley, Mr. McNalley, Mr. Vanderveld, and Fred Muse) were appointed by the Moderator, with Skip Ryan to serve as "Consultant."

The under-care status of Candidate Todd Hickerson was transferred from Central Florida to North Texas Presbytery. Glen Carey (Westminster PCA, Gainesville, Texas), Aaron Jeffrey (Fort Worth PCA), Kelly Buffaloe (Westminster PCA, Greenville, Texas), and Stacy Croft (Park Cities PCA, Dallas) were also received under care as ministerial candidates. Two of these men have been ministers: Mr. Carey, who was a Pentecostal preacher, and Mr. Buffaloe, who was a pastor. Dr. David McWilliams gave the men a brief charge from I Timothy.

Presbytery approved the internship of Tom Savage at Kirk o' the Hills PCA, St. Louis, Missouri, and transferred him as a candidate to Northern California Presbytery.

The internship of David Rapp at Redeemer PCA, Waco, Texas, and with Missouri Presbytery was approved. The internships of Daryl Soward at Arlington (Tex.) Presbyterian Church and Stacy Croft at Park Cities Presbyterian Church were approved.

At his request, Bill Hines' licensure was terminated.

Candidate Eric Walter was removed from the under-care roll, as he has transferred to Fellowship Presbytery and was received there.

It was reported that Dr. McWilliams had accepted a call back to his old church in Lakeland, Florida, and has

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## PCA Tax Collector Goes to Jail—For a Good Cause

Wise, Virginia (May 8, 2003)—Rita Holbrook, County Treasurer for Wise County, Virginia, was sent to jail in handcuffs. But it was all for a good cause.



**Wise County (Va.) Treasurer Rita Holbrook finds herself the prisoner of Sheriff Ronnie Oakes.**

The arrest, which occurred on May 8, 2003, was staged in order to raise money for electronic tracking devices to help the Sheriff's Office track Alzheimer's patients who may wander away from home. To be released from custody, each of the arrestees had to raise at least \$213—the cost of

one of the tracking units.

Mrs. Holbrook had actually raised more than \$300 even before her arrest, enabling her to post bail without difficulty. But before being let go, the tax collector, sporting a shiny pair of bracelets, was escorted from her office downstairs to the Sheriff's department.

It was the latest in a series of community-minded events in which the veteran GOP politician has participated.

First elected in 1987, Rita Holbrook has served with distinction as County Treasurer. She has held many posts in the State Treasurer's Association, and she is one of only a few in the Commonwealth of Virginia to have completed a difficult certification course for treasurers.

Mrs. Holbrook will be facing another election in November. A victory in that race would give her another four years in office.

Rita Holbrook is a long-time member of Coeburn (Va.) Presbyterian Church, where her husband, Kirby, is a ruling elder. He is also a member of the Gideons, and as Rita was being led away, she quipped that they had to keep her in jail that evening, as she was promised a visitor who would bring her a Gideon Bible.

Rita's predecessor as County Treasurer, Maude Hawkins, was also a long-time member of Coeburn Presbyterian Church. The first Republican to be elected to one of the constitutional offices in Wise County, Mrs. Hawkins was County Treasurer from 1980 to 1987. In 1984, she was selected as the National Treasurer of the Year.

It is that proud tradition of service which Rita Holbrook seeks to uphold—whether it's collecting taxes, or going to jail for a good cause.

## English Sons Recite Catechism

Isaiah and Josiah English have successfully memorized the Westminster Shorter Catechism and demonstrated this to the satisfaction of their pastor. Isaiah and Josiah are the sons of Paul and Judi English and are members at Bible



Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Concord, North Carolina. Paul is a ruling elder in the church and the son of OPC minister Ralph English (retired). The boys studied the Shorter Catechism over a two year period and also learned many supporting scripture verses along with the catechism. As a reward for their efforts they received the hardbound edition of the Westminster Standards (Free Presbyterian Press).

### PRESBYTERIES

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been accepted into Southwest Florida Presbytery pending dismissal. He was released to Southwest Florida Presbytery pending his acceptance there.

The Rev. Tom Barnes and Ruling Elder David Feezel gave the report of the Resolution of Thanks Committee, as follows: "When Solomon had finished the building of the house of the Lord. . . . The Lord said unto him. . . . I have hallowed this house which thou hast built, to put my name there forever, and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually." (I Kings 9:1-3)

"Such would be our desire for Fort Worth Presbyterian Church after you have hosted this 73<sup>rd</sup> stated meeting of the North Texas Presbytery.

"We praise our Gracious God for this beautiful facility and thank you for the Christian hospitality you have shown us.

"You have given a very warm welcome, in spite of the cool weather. You have attended our every need or perceived need.

"Thanks to your ministerial staff, all their support staff, your officers, your ladies, your musicians, your architect through whom God gave this lovely building, and all the congregation. Most of all, thanks to our sovereign, Triune God for His grace to such as we."

[This report was submitted by John Owen Butler, pastor of Beal Heights Presbyterian Church, Lawton, Oklahoma.—Ed.]

## Westminster

### April Stated Meeting

Jonesboro, Tennessee (April 12, 2003)—Midway Presbyterian Church hosted the April stated meeting of Westminster Presbytery. The Rev. Carel van der Merwe was re-elected Moderator.

Presbytery denied a complaint brought against its action in a judicial matter.

Upon examination, the Rev. Curt Rabe was received from Calvary Presbytery. He has been called to be Pastor of Memorial Presbyterian Church, Elizabethton, Tennessee.

Also examined was Mr. Jim Powell, who is graduating from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois. Presbytery approved his ordination exam, and his call to be Pastor of Harmony Presbyterian Church, Kingsport, Tennessee.

The court voted to instruct its Overtures & Judicial Business Committee to bring recommendations regarding how the Presbytery should hear complaints. The court also approved a resolution, offered by the Rev. Larry Ball and the Rev. Brent Bradley, which sought to redress concerns of a member who was aggrieved by the handling of a prior complaint. In February, the Presbytery had granted to the man's wife the right to divorce him; in the adjudication

of the matter, remarks were made by the complainant's representative which the husband believed were unjust [see "Westminster Presbytery Sustains Complaint in Divorce Case, P&R News (January/March, 2003, p. 14)].

### Adjourned Meeting

Abingdon, Virginia (April 22, 2003)—Westminster Presbytery continued its April stated meeting at an adjourned meeting ten days later, at the Abingdon Presbyterian Church.

The court sustained a complaint which had been filed by the Session of Westminster Presbyterian Church, Kingsport, Tennessee. The complaint revolved around the Constitutional question of whether a person who is not in good standing can file a complaint, even when the action being complained concerns himself. The Westminster Session indicated that it would abide by the actual decision, which granted the complainant the right to divorce her husband. However, the lower court was concerned about the precedent which would be set if the procedural matter were not redressed.

The court then ruled out of order a complaint which the husband had lodged with the Presbytery, on the basis that, because he is under censure, he is not a member in good standing.

## SUPPORTERS

### ALABAMA

**EBENEZER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
2478 Hobbs Island Road/Huntsville  
S.S., 9:45 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM/6:00 PM  
Bible Study, Wednesday, 7:00 PM  
Fellowship Supper, 2nd Wednesday, 6:30 PM  
(205)883-7298

**TALUCAH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
2374 Talucah Road/Valhermoso Springs  
S.S., 10:00 AM; Worship, 10:45 AM  
(205)778-8288

### ARIZONA

**CALVIN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (OPC)†**  
4150 Acoma Road/Phoenix  
S.S., 9:15 AM; Worship, 10:30 AM/6 PM  
Wednesday Bible Study, 7 PM  
(602)992-4454

**DESERT SPRINGS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
1555 W. Overton Road/Tucson  
S.S., 9:20 AM; Worship, 10:30 AM  
(520)742-8990

### CALIFORNIA

**GRACE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH†**  
Meeting at Costa Mesa 7th Day Adventist Church, 271 Avocado St./Costa Mesa  
S.S., 11:30 AM; Worship, 9:30 AM  
(714)526-3153

**CALVARY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
610 North Glendale Avenue/Glendale  
S.S., 10:00 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM  
(818)244-3747

### CONNECTICUT

**PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF MANCHESTER**  
43 Spruce Street/Manchester  
S.S., 9:15 AM; Worship, 10:30 AM  
(860)643-0906

### FLORIDA

**GRACE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
1875 N. W. Britt Road/Stuart  
S.S., 9:30 AM;  
Worship, 11:00 AM/6:00 PM  
(561) 692-1995

**SHARON ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH†**  
17680 NW 78 Avenue/Hialeah  
S.S. 11:20; Worship 10:00 AM/5:00 PM  
(305)821-5761

**TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH†**  
44 Southview Avenue/Valparaiso  
S.S., 9:15 AM/Worship, 10:30 AM  
Third Sunday Service and Supper, 6:00 PM  
(850)678-0060

### GEORGIA

**CRAWFORDVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
Crawfordville  
S.S., 10:00 AM;  
Worship, 11:00 AM (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday)  
**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
One Harker Road/Ft. Oglethorpe  
S.S. 10:00 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM/6:00 PM  
(706)866-2521

**BETHANY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
Bethany Church Road/Greensboro  
S.S., 10:00 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM (4<sup>th</sup> Sunday)  
(706)486-2682

**SOUTHLIBERTY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
Sharon Barnett Road/Sharon  
S.S., 10:00 AM;  
Worship, 11:00 AM (1st/5th Sun.)  
(706)456-2377

**CHEROKEE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
5549 Hwy. 92E/Woodstock  
S.S., 9:35 AM; Worship, 8:00/10:45 AM  
(770)928-2051

### LOUISIANA

**AUBURN AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
224 Auburn Avenue/Monroe  
S.S., 9:15 AM  
Worship, 10:30 AM/6:00 PM  
(318)323-3061  
**BETHEL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
2040 East McNeese Street/Lake Charles  
S.S., 9:30 AM; Worship, 8:15 AM/10:45 PM  
(318)478-5672

**WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
146 E. Cherry Street/Opelousas  
S.S., 9:30 AM; Worship, 10:45 AM  
(318)948-9339

### MARYLAND

**CHRIST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
209 East Main Street/Elkton  
Worship, 3:00 PM  
(410)398-3192  
www/christpresbyterianchurch.com

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| <p><b>CHRIST REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>Diplomat Building, 13992 Baltimore Avenue, Suite 300/Laurel<br/>S.S., 9:30 AM; Worship 10:30 AM/6:00 PM<br/>(301) 498-3700</p> <p><b>MINNESOTA</b><br/>GOOD SHEPHERD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH<br/>15321 Wayzata Blvd./Minnetonka<br/>S.S., 11:15 AM; Worship, 9:30 AM<br/>Sunday Evening Bible Study, 6:00 PM<br/>(952) 835-6358</p>                                                                                                                     | <p><b>WHITESIDE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>Highway 74/Cashiers<br/>S.S., 10:00 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM<br/>Wednesday, 7:00 PM Prayer Meeting<br/>(828) 743-2122</p> <p><b>WHITE OAK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>699 Polly Watson Road/Fremont<br/>S.S., 10:00 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM<br/>(919) 284-4196</p> <p><b>HAZELWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>117 E. Main Street/Hazelwood<br/>S.S., 9:30 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM/6:15 PM<br/>Wednesday, 7:00 PM<br/>(828) 456-3912</p>    | <p><b>GRACE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>1955 Riverside Drive/Conway<br/>S.S., 9:30 AM/Worship, 10:45 AM<br/>(843) 347-5550</p> <p><b>FAITH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>1800 Third Loop Road/Florence<br/>S.S., 9:45 AM; Worship 11:00 AM/6:00 PM<br/>(843) 665-9235</p> <p><b>BEECH STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>1403 Beech Street/Gaffney<br/>S.S., 10:00 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM/6:00 PM<br/>(864) 489-2014</p>                                                                                                                | <p><b>CALVARY REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>403 Whealton Road/Hampton<br/>S.S. 10:00 AM; Worship: 8:30 AM/11:00 AM<br/>Evening Gathering: 6:00 PM<br/>(757) 826-5942</p> <p><b>WEST END PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>1600 Atlantic Street/Hopewell<br/>S.S., 9:45 AM; Worship, 10:50 AM/6:00 PM<br/>Wednesday Prayer Meeting, 7:00 PM<br/>(804) 458-6765</p> <p><b>CORNERSTONE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>Seventh Day Adventist<br/>9858 Fairmont Avenue/Manassas<br/>S.S., 11:15 AM/Worship, 9:30 AM<br/>Wednesday Bible Study, 7:00 PM<br/>(703) 368-8594</p> |
| <p><b>MISSISSIPPI</b><br/><b>MCDONALD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>295 E. Williamsburg Road/Collins<br/>S.S., 10:00 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM/6:00 PM<br/>Wednesday prayer meeting, 7:00 PM<br/>(601) 765-6437</p> <p><b>FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>East Beach Blvd. at 24th Ave./Gulfport<br/>S.S., 9:30 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM/6:00 PM<br/>Wed., Family Dinner (6:00)/Bible Study (6:30)<br/>(228) 863-2664</p>                                                                                    | <p><b>SHEARER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>684 Presbyterian Road/Mooresville<br/>S.S., 9:45 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM/5:00 PM<br/>Wednesday, 7:00 PM<br/>(704) 892-8866</p> <p><b>TRINITY REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>3701 South College Road/Wilmington<br/>Worship 10:30 AM<br/>(910) 395-1252</p> <p><b>NOVA SCOTIA</b><br/><b>BEDFORD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>49 Nelson's Landing Blvd./Bedford<br/>S.S., 11:30 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM/7:00 PM<br/>(902) 864-1587</p> | <p><b>CALVARY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>9201 Old White Horse Road/Greenville<br/>S.S. 10:00 AM; Worship 11:00 AM/6:00 PM<br/>Wednesday Prayer Meeting 7:00 PM<br/>(864) 294-0895</p> <p><b>SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>105 River Street/Greenville<br/>S.S., 9:45 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM/6:00 PM<br/>Wednesday, 5:45 PM<br/>(864) 232-7621</p> <p><b>TENNESSEE</b><br/><b>BRAINERD HILLS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>6388 East Brainerd Road/Chattanooga<br/>S.S., 9:45 AM; Worship, 10:45 AM/6:30 PM<br/>(423) 892-5308</p> | <p><b>KNOX REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>4883 Southard Lane/Mechanicsville<br/>S.S., 9:30 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM<br/>Sunday Evening, 6:00 PM<br/>(804) 779-7608</p> <p><b>IMMANUEL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>4700 Colley Avenue/Norfolk<br/>Worship, 10:30 AM/6:30 PM<br/>Wed. Christian Education Classes, 7:00 PM<br/>Sat. Prayer Meeting, 7:00 PM<br/>(757) 440-1100</p> <p><b>TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH†</b><br/>108 Hill Street/Tazewell<br/>S.S., 9:45 AM; Worship, 11:00/7:00 PM<br/>(540) 988-9541</p>                                               |
| <p><b>ST. PAUL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>5125 Robinson Road/Jackson<br/>S.S., 9:45 AM; Worship, 10:55 AM/6:00 PM<br/>(601) 372-7497</p> <p><b>COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>625 N. Church Ave./Louisville<br/>Worship 11:00 AM and 6:00 PM<br/>2nd Sunday, Fellowship Meal, 12:15 PM,<br/>Evening Studies at 1:00 PM.<br/>Wed Supper 6:00 PM; Prayer Mtg, 6:30 PM<br/>(601) 773-5282</p>                                                                                                     | <p><b>OHIO</b><br/><b>FAITH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>2540 S. Main Street/Akron<br/>S.S., 9:30 AM<br/>Worship, 10:45 AM/6:00 PM<br/>Wednesday, 7:00 PM<br/>(330) 644-9654</p> <p><b>CHRIST COVENANT REFORMED (PCA)</b><br/>14787 Palmer Road SW/Reynoldsburg<br/>Psalter Service, 9:30 AM/Worship, 10:45 AM<br/>Thurs. Bible Study, 7 PM<br/>(740) 964-0889</p>                                                                                                                | <p><b>MIDWAY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>4011 Old Jonesborough Road/<br/>Jonesborough<br/>S.S., 10:00 AM; Worship 11:00 AM/7:00 PM<br/>(423) 753-941</p> <p><b>BRIDWELL HEIGHTS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>108 Bridwell Heights Drive/Kingsport<br/>S.S., 9:45 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM/6:00 PM<br/>(423) 288-3664</p> <p><b>FELLOWSHIP PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>Highway 25/70/Newport<br/>S.S., 9:30 AM/Worship, 11:00 AM/7:00 PM<br/>Wednesday Prayer Meeting, 6:00 PM<br/>(423) 623-8652</p>                                     | <p><b>WASHINGTON</b><br/><b>WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>2700 Andresen Road/Vancouver<br/>Worship, 10:00 AM<br/>Sunday Bible Study, 6:30 PM<br/>(360) 254-1726</p> <p><b>WEST VIRGINIA</b><br/><b>PROVIDENCE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>5865 Davis Creek Road/Barboursville<br/>S.S. 11:30; Worship 10:00 AM/6:00 PM<br/>(304) 736-0487</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <p><b>PEARL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>2933 Old Brandon Road/Pearl<br/>S.S., 9:45 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM/6:00 PM<br/>(601) 939-1064</p> <p><b>TCHULA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>109 E. Main Street/Tchula<br/>S.S., 10:00 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM/5:00 PM<br/>Wednesday Prayer Meeting, 7:30 PM<br/>(601) 924-7334</p> <p><b>FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>600 Main Street/Woodville<br/>S.S., 10:00 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM/6:00 PM<br/>Wed. Prayer Mtg. (Oct.-May), 6:00 PM<br/>(601) 888-4837</p> | <p><b>PENNSYLVANIA</b><br/><b>NEW LIFE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF HOPEWELL TOWNSHIP</b><br/>2795 Patterson Drive/Alquippa<br/>S.S., 9:30 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM<br/>(724) 378-4389</p> <p><b>LEHIGH VALLEY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>31 S. 13th Street/Allentown<br/>S.S., 9:45 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM/6:00 PM<br/>(610) 797-8320</p> <p><b>FAITH REFORMED CHURCH</b><br/>2953 Saltsman Road/Erie<br/>S.S., 9:45 AM/Worship, 11:00 AM<br/>(814) 899-3037</p>                         | <p><b>WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>900 Watauga Street/Kingsport<br/>S.S., 10:00 AM<br/>Worship, 11:00 AM/7:00 PM<br/>(423) 247-7341</p> <p><b>TEXAS</b><br/><b>COLLEYVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>715 Cheek Sparger Road/Colleyville<br/>S.S., 11:10 AM; Worship, 9:30 AM/6:00 PM<br/>(817) 498-2626</p> <p><b>COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>2701 N. 7th Street/Harlingen<br/>S.S., 9:30 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM<br/>Midweek service, 7:00 PM Wednesday<br/>(956) 425-3136</p>                                  | <p><b>WISCONSIN</b><br/><b>CALVARY ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH†</b><br/>136 West Union Avenue/Cedar Grove<br/>S.S., 10:30 AM; Worship 9:00 AM/7:00 PM<br/>(920) 668-6463</p> <p><b>REFORMATION PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH†</b><br/>Aurora Medical Center, I-94 at Highway<br/>164/Waukesha<br/>Bible Study, 10:00 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM<br/>Wednesday Prayer Service, 7:00 PM<br/>(262) 246-2421</p>                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <p><b>NEW JERSEY</b><br/><b>LOCKTOWN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>197 Locktown-Flemington Road/Flemington<br/>S.S., 10:30 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM<br/>(908) 996-7707</p> <p><b>MOUNT CARMEL CHURCH†</b><br/>350 Franklin Blvd./Somerset<br/>S.S., 10:00 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM/6:00 PM<br/>(732) 846-8777</p> <p><b>EMMANUEL ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH†</b><br/>325 Whippany Road/Whippany<br/>S.S., 9:30 AM; Worship, 11 AM/6:15 PM<br/>(973) 539-1171</p>                                            | <p><b>ROCKY SPRINGS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>123 Rocky Springs Road/Harrisville<br/>S.S., 10:00 AM<br/>Worship, 11:00 AM/6:00 PM<br/>(724) 735-2743</p> <p><b>HILLCREST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>Route 19, three miles south of Leesburg/<br/>Volant<br/>S.S., 9:45 AM; Worship 10:55 AM/6:30 PM<br/>(724) 533-4315</p>                                                                                                                                                    | <p><b>COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>SDA Church, 1209 S. John Redditt Rd./<br/>Lufkin<br/>S.S., 9:30 AM; Worship, 10:45 AM/5:30 PM<br/>(409) 637-6043</p> <p><b>CHRIST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>1620 E. Common Street/New Braunfels<br/>S.S., 9:30 AM; Worship, 10:45 AM<br/>(830) 629-0405</p> <p><b>PROVIDENCE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>3510 Austin Parkway/Sugar Land<br/>S.S., 9:45 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM and 6:00 PM (except 1st Sun.)<br/>(281) 980-2522</p>                                                       | <p><b>LAKESIDE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>Seventh Day Adventist Church, 21380 W.<br/>Cleveland Ave./New Berlin<br/>S.S., 10:45 AM; Worship, 9:30 AM<br/>(262) 968-6769</p> <p><b>GRIEVING WITH HOPE</b><br/>The Rev. James Alexander<br/>PO Box 7100<br/>Florence, SC 29502-7100<br/>(843) 664-9759<br/>Website: www.griefwithhope.com<br/>Email: griefwithhope@abac.com</p>                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <p><b>NEW YORK</b><br/><b>AFFIRMATION PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>Routes 100 and 139/Somers<br/>S.S., 10:00 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM<br/>(914) 232-0546</p> <p><b>NORTH CAROLINA</b><br/><b>DILLINGHAM PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>16 Stoney Fork Road/Barnardsville<br/>S.S., 9:45 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM<br/>(828) 626-3668</p> <p><b>COUNTRYSIDE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>127 Ponderosa Road/Cameron<br/>S.S., 9:30 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM<br/>(919) 499-2362</p>                                    | <p><b>SOUTH CAROLINA</b><br/><b>REEDY RIVER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>46 Main Street/Connestee<br/>S.S., 10:00 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM/6:30 PM<br/>(864) 277-5455</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <p><b>VIRGINIA</b><br/><b>COEBURN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>220 Second Street SW/Coeburn<br/>S.S., 9:45 AM; Worship, 11:00 AM/6:30 PM<br/>Wednesday Prayer Meeting, 7:00 PM<br/>(276) 395-2866</p> <p><b>NEW HOPE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b><br/>Fairfax Fire Station #3 (Williams Memorial Hall),<br/>4081 University Blvd./Fairfax<br/>S.S., 11:15 AM<br/>Worship, 9:30 AM/5:30 PM<br/>(703) 385-9056</p>                                                                                                                           | <p><b>WE ARE PLEASED TO HAVE CONGREGATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS JOIN US AS COSPONSORS OF THIS VENTURE. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO BECOME A SPONSOR, JUST LET US KNOW: PINS Financial Office, P. O. Box 60, Coeburn, VA 24230. Checks should be made payable to Presbyterian International News Service.</b><br/>† Indicates a non-PCA church.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |