



222nd General Assembly – Portland, Oregon. “The Hope in Our Calling” A Historic Assembly Framed in Worship and a Call to Reconciliation

[Major Decisions and/or Recommendations to Presbyteries for Consideration](#)
(prepared by the Rev. Ruth Santana-Grace on June 25, 2016, with information gathered from both personal witness and “General Assembly News”)

This is a brief summary of major actions or statements. Please note that in addition to actions indicated below, there were many other actions as well as overtures that were either defeated in committee or on the floor of the Assembly. For a full and detailed accounting of debates and decisions, please connect to Presbyterian Church (USA) website - <http://oga.pcusa.org/section/ga/222nd-general-assembly-2016/ganews/>

1. Co-Moderators Elected: The Rev. Denise Anderson (National Capital Presbytery) and the Rev. Dr. Jan Edmiston (Presbytery of Chicago) were overwhelmingly elected by the 222nd General Assembly – making it the first time that two women have been elected in this role. This historic moment came on the 60th anniversary of allowing women to be pastors and on the 85th anniversary of ordaining the first woman elder.

2. Belhar Confession: The Belhar Confession was adopted as our 12th confession into The Book of Confessions by vote of 540-33. This decision comes after a four-year process of study and votes. This confession was written 50 years ago by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa in response to apartheid. By embracing this confession, we join our voices to Christians in other continents in the struggle against racism and divisions among people.

3. Election of New Stated Clerk: By a vote of 447-112, the Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson was elected Stated Clerk of the PCUSA. This historic vote makes Dr. Nelson the first African-American elected to this, our highest ecclesiastical office. Succeeding outgoing Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons, Dr. Nelson has served in the office of Public Witness in Washington DC.

4. New Directory of Worship: The Assembly overwhelmingly approved a revised Director for Worship that has been ten years in the making. The Directory of Worship is part of our Book of Order. The purpose of these revisions was to “provide bearings and direction – giving glory to God – and navigating between form and freedom and encouraging a variety of styles. *This will require approval by a majority of the 171 presbyteries. The Presbytery of Philadelphia will vote in November.*”

5. The Way Forward: The Assembly authorized the creation of a 12-person Administrative Commission “to study and identify a vision for the structure and function of the General Assembly agencies of the PCUSA. The focus of this commission will be the Presbyterian Mission Agency and the Office of the General Assembly.

6. Assembly Reverses 2014 action to Reduce Synods: By a vote of 421-158, the decision to reduce the number of synods (2014) within our denomination was rescinded. The current Synods will continue to exist as is with the encouragement to creatively work across geographic boundaries in an effort to equip and encourage the presbyteries and congregations.

7. Leadership in Denominational Agencies: *Presbyterian Publishing Corporation* – Assembly confirmed Marc Lewis for a third term as President and Publisher; *Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program*– Assembly confirmed the first term for James G. Rissler as President and Chief Executive Officer.

8. Statements of Regret, Sadness, and Apology: In a vote of 463-51, the Assembly expressed “deep regret” to members of the LGBTQ community for ways those minorities of “God’s beloved children” have been led to feel that they stand outside the grace of God and are unwelcome in the denomination. The Assembly also expressed sadness at the loss of those who have left the PCUSA for theological reasons. Apologies were also offered to citizens of Native American ancestry “dishonored” by our Presbyterian ancestors and the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly directed to communicate with the President of the United States, Senate, and House of Representatives in acknowledgement of and statement of apology in regards to the known killing of Korean civilians during the Korean War.

9. “No” to Divestment of Fossil Fuels: The Assembly voted to continue its investment in fossil-fuel companies. Although still concerned for impact on the environment, this decision was strategically focused on encouraging corporate engagement – while also allowing for selective phased divestment in the future.

10. Restoration of Ministry Titles: By vote of 320-218, the Assembly voted to recommend restoring former titles for church leadership: Teaching Elders would be Ministers of Word and Sacrament; Ruling Elders would be “Ruling Elders”; and Commissioned Ruling Elders would become Commissioned Lay Pastors. These titles were changed with the New Form of Government in 2012. *This will require approval by a majority of the 171 presbyteries. The Presbytery of Philadelphia will vote in November.*

11. Renunciation of Jurisdiction and Disciplinary Process: By a 6-1 margin, the Assembly voted to forbid teaching elders who have renounced jurisdiction while under disciplinary proceeding, to work in any capacity in any church. They would be able to return should he/she resubmit to the disciplinary process.

12. Approval of Report Re-evaluating Two-State Solution in Israel/Palestine: The Assembly approved a report entitled “Israel-Palestine: For Human Values in the Absence of a Just Peace.” The report affirms that the PCUSA “should advance those efforts that best accord with its values . . . including, but not limited to, that of two sovereign states - Israel and Palestine.”

13. Policy to Protect Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults: In a unanimous vote – the Assembly passed a comprehensive policy to protect children, youth and vulnerable adults. Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons publicly apologized to the Rev. Kris Schondelmeyer, who has become the face of victims of sexual abuse. Kris had been sexually abused as a young man while attending a national Presbyterian youth conference.

14. Report on Centrality of Peacemaking in Christian Faith: With a vote of 332-169, the Assembly voted to affirm the Gospel call to be peacemakers in a violent world, offering and embodying alternatives to violence. This report is grounded on the conviction that we are to be agents of reconciliation in the world, following the life of Jesus, “whose love and justice challenged evil and hatred.”

15. Korean-Language Presbytery: The Assembly approved to allow for the formation of a non-geographic presbytery in western US while encouraging all Korean-speaking congregations located in the six western synods to remain in contact with the synod in which they are physically located.





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