**Update on the 48th Stated General Assembly of the PCA**

**June 28th – July 1st, 2021**

How did God bless the PCA in 2020? What were some of the actions taken in 2021?

1. **Overview of Terms:**

* **General Assembly –** the highest “court” in the PCA. The GA’s decisions have jurisdiction over all lower courts (presbytery or session) of the PCA in accordance with the constitution of the PCA. On another level General Assembly functions as a place to build and renew relationships.
* **Presbytery** – consists of Ruling Elders and Teaching Elders in a particular region or area. The PCA is a “grass roots” denomination and that means that Presbyteries and local church session have a lot of influence and flexibility in the BCO.
* **BCO –** The Book of Church Order. A binding constitutional document for the PCA.
* **Moderator** – highest office of the General Assembly or Presbytery. Tasked with presiding over the meeting of the assembly, keeping the business moving forward in an efficient manner via the Rules of Assembly Operation and Roberts Rules of Order. He is helped by multiple Parliamentarians who are well versed in the RAO or RONR.
* **Stated Clerk** – serves as chief administrator of the Administrative Committee and the GA.
* **Standing Agencies of the PCA** 
  + **Administrative Committee –** gives administrative leadership and oversight to all the other committees of the PCA and to the General Assembly
  + **Ridge Haven –** retreat center for the PCA
  + **Covenant College and Seminary –** official college and seminary of the PCA since 1982
  + **Reformed University Fellowship –** campus ministry organization of the PCA
  + **Mission to the World –** organizes and oversees missions off continent
  + **Mission to North America –** oversees missions and outreach in North America
  + **Committee on Discipleship Ministries –** discipleship arm of the PCA
  + **Retirement, Benefits and Insurance –** provides financial services for PCA ministries
* **Overture –** a resolution, motion or declaration made by a lower court and sent to the General Assembly for decision. These overtures are initially presented to an Overtures Committee who meet the same week of the Assembly. After being examined and debated by the committee, they are then passed on to the Assembly for a vote with a recommendation, unless ruled out of order, referred back to the presbytery, or answered by a similar overture originally submitted.**The General Assembly then votes on the overture, resulting in an affirmative (voted for) or a negative (voted down) decision.**

1. **How did God bless the PCA in 2020?**

* In 2020 more than $1 Billion dollars was contributed to PCA churches.
* More than 2,000 adults and 4,500 children were baptized in 2020.
* A net gain of 13 individual congregations within the PCA. This includes newly particularized church plants as well as congregations joining the PCA from independency or such denominations like the EPC (1) or the RCA (3).
* At the end of 2020 we had 1,928 churches. With over 383,000 members. We have 5,117 ministers or Teaching Elders serving in 88 Presbyteries.
* MNA has 37 church planters in the field and 219 chaplains. MTW – 619 long term missionaries in 102 countries. RUF – is found on 148 campuses in 41 states. Covenant College – educated 846 students from 43 states and 18 countries. Covenant Seminary – finished a capital campaign and Tom Gibbs is the new president w/ Mark Dalbey retiring this year. Ridge Haven – had a full year even with Covid 19 – hosting 5,600 campers in 2020.
* This year’s GA held in St. Louis, MO, consisted of 1,503 Teaching Elders (TE) and 613 Ruling Elders (RE) that assembled to vote on overtures and standing committee recommendations. This was a 500 commissioner increase from the last GA in 2019. A 31% increase from the 47th GA.
* There was an overall increase in TE’s and RE’s. Some seem to suggest that the increase was due to the canceled General Assembly in 2020 due to Covid. But I also think that the increased participation was the result of concerned folks throughout the PCA insisting their teaching and ruling elders attend the assembly.

1. **What were some of the actions taken in 2021?**
2. **Helpful Items to Know about Leadership and Committees within the PCA**

* TE Bryan Chapel was voted Stated Clerk of the PCA GA. He has taken the place of TE Roy Taylor who served the PCA faithfully in this position for over 22 years.
* Dr. Roy Taylor was the only nominee for moderator for the 48th General Assembly of the PCA. He was approved unanimously. Not only did he serve efficiently as a moderator. He served with humor and humility. Pray for Dr. Taylor as he has official retired to care for his wife.
* There were a number of presbyteries (e.g., Northwest Georgia, Calvary Presbytery) that the Review of Presbytery Records Committee (RPR) wanted to be referred to the Standing Judicial Commission because they (the presbyteries) have instructed men who hold views that deviate from the Westminster Standards not to teach those deviant views. This year’s assembly decided a presbytery is free to restrict a man from teaching and preaching a view inconsistent w/ the WCF.

1. **Overtures for Focus – Overture 38, 23, 37, 14, 1, and 48**

* **Constitutional Changes** – if an overture is passed to change language in the BCO, a two-thirds vote is required by all presbyteries within the next year. The results are then presented to the following GA for a final vote. This exemplifies the difficulty in changing language in the BCO. Other overtures simply consist of nonbinding declarations or memorials.
* **Overture 38:** - **“Commend Human Sexuality Report”**
  + The Assembly voted to answer Overture 38 in the **affirmative** (by show of hands).
  + You can find the report at <https://pcaga.org/aicreport/> This report has had a significant impact on helping elders understand how to apply Biblical, confessional and pastoral standards to the current cultural issues on human sexuality.
  + Several overtures petitioned the assembly to form Study Committees for a variety of topics and issues. All the overtures for these Study Committees were voted down. Study committees are expensive, time consuming, and not binding. If a Study Committee is approved, the moderator of that Assembly chooses the committee members, and they are given a time frame and budget to complete the task.
* **Overture 23**: “Amend BCO 16 by Adding a Clause Which Prohibits Ordination for Men who Self-Identify as ‘Gay Christians,’ ‘Same-sex Attracted Christians,’ ‘Homosexual Christians,’ etc.
  + The Assembly voted in the affirmative as amended. **The vote was 1438-417**. There was debate on this overture as well as #37. The primary issues revolve around whether a person who identifies as same sex attracted —using the orientation language of the LGBTQ+ community— is qualified for office.
  + If approved by two-thirds of the Presbyteries the amended language will read as follows: BCO 16-4 (which would be an additional clause) - “Officers in the Presbyterian Church in America must be above reproach in their walk and Christlike in their character. Those who profess an identity (such as, but not limited to, “gay Christian,” “same sex attracted Christian,” “homosexual Christian,” or like terms) that undermined or contradicts their identity as new creations in Christ, either by denying the sinfulness of fallen desires (such as, but not limited to, same sex attraction), or by denying the reality and hope of progressive sanctification, or by failing to pursue Spirit-empowered victory over their sinful temptations, inclinations, and actions are not qualified for ordained office.”
* **Overture 37: “Amend BCO 21-4 and 24-1 Clarifying Moral Requirements for Church Office”**
  + The assembly voted to answer Overture 37 in the affirmative. The vote was **1130-692**.
  + If approved by two-thirds of the Presbyteries the amended language will read as follows:

BCO 21-4 e. In the examination of the candidate’s personal character, the presbytery shall give specific attention to potential notorious concerns, such as but not limited to relational sins, sexual immorality (including homosexuality, child sex abuse, fornication, and pornography), addictions, abusive behavior, racism, and financial mismanagement. Careful attention must be given to his practical struggle against sinful actions, as well as to persistent sinful desires. The candidate must give clear testimony of reliance upon his union with Christ and the benefits thereof by the Holy Spirit, depending on this work of grace to make progress over sin (Psalm 103:2-5, Romans 8:29) and to bear fruit (Psalm 1:3, Gal. 5:22-23). While imperfection will remain, he must not be known by reputation or self-profession according to his remaining sinfulness, but rather by the work of the Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 6:9-11). In order to maintain discretion and protect the honor of the pastoral office, Presbyteries are encouraged to appoint a committee to conduct detailed examinations of these matters and to give prayerful support to candidates.

* + The paragraph is also to be amended to BCO 24-1 for the election, ordination and installation of Ruling Elders and Deacons.
* **Overture 14:** - **“Revise MTW Manual”**
  + The Assembly voted to answer Overture 14 in the **affirmative**. The vote was **961-814**.
  + Several missionaries took the floor to debate the notion that MTW does not align with the standards of church planting on foreign soil. Those who debated in favor of the overture said that MTW has opened church planting and development ministries to men and women who are not ordained elders. This contrasts with other PCA ministries such as Mission to North America and Reformed University Fellowship. With the passing of this overture, the language inserted into the MTW manual is as follows:All MTW leaders **in line of authority** over church planting or church development ministry shall be ordained elders.
* **Overture 1: - “Amend BCO 8-7 Regarding Chaplains”**
  + The Assembly voted to answer Overture 1 in the **negative**. The vote was **1285-415**.
  + This overture would have added language to the BCO indicating that chaplains in the PCA must go through the endorsing agency approved by the General Assembly. Many felt that this overture would interfere with the jurisdiction that presbyteries have to approve and regulate the call of their chaplains. Currently the approved agency is the Presbyterian and Reformed Commission on Chaplains (PRCC). Those who are in support of the newly added language argue that chaplains who choose another endorsing agency would find themselves without the backing of the established organization. Currently the PRCC is the only agency used by confessionally reformed churches. Because this overture failed, chaplains are free to choose another endorsing agency outside of the PRCC and thus could be susceptible to conflict within their ranks given the lack of military alignment with their vows in the Westminster Standards.
* **Overture 48: - “Repudiate Anti-Asian Racism”**
  + The Assembly voted to answer in the **affirmative** and to commend the following statement:
  + The report of the Ad Interim Committee on Racial and Ethnic Reconciliation to the 46th General Assembly speaks clearly both to the reality of the Imago Dei in all people and to the sin of racism, particularly when it affirms: a) the vision of the redeemed in Revelation 7:9-11, where all nations and ethnicities are fulfilled in Christ; b) the image of God is reflected in all people; and c) the image of Christ reflected in His body. At the same time, we recognize the pain, and, at times, violence, that the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) community has experienced, particularly due to events of the past year. We express our grief together with our AAPI brothers and sisters over the pain and suffering that has occurred, whether this has happened due to unbiblical religious claims, racist pride, or any other cause. We, finally, assure our AAPI brothers and sisters of our love and support, and of our desire to walk together in ways that reflect the commitments of the Racial Reconciliation Report.