

Item REC-004

***Resolution to Explore the Study of the Status of Women at All Levels in the PCUSA
from the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns***

The Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (ACWC) recommends that the 218th General Assembly (2008) do the following:

- 1. Create a task force to design a mechanism for the study of the status of women at all levels in the church that will:**
 - a. Assess the presence, participation, and effectiveness of women at all levels of the PCUSA, both elected and employed;**
 - b. Explore and analyze attitudes about women in leadership, and**
 - c. Describe the treatment of women in leadership positions including how they are compensated as compared with men.**

This task force of seven members shall include two current or past members of ACWC, one current or past member of the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns, and four people chosen for their statistical and sociological expertise. A majority of the task force members shall be women. This task force will report to the 219th General Assembly (2010);

- 2. Direct the General Assembly Council (GAC) to:**
 - a. Provide sufficient funding and staff support for the task force;**
 - b. Explore additional funding for research, data collection and analysis in consultation with the task force; and,**
 - c. Report to the 219th General Assembly (2010);**
- 3. Equip all GAC staff and members to be responsive to the needs of all women as part of their continuing commitment to valuing the gifts that all persons bring to the PCUSA. Continue to encourage General Assembly Council staff and members to reflect on and incorporate the values articulated in the "Report on Creating a Climate for Change Within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)," approved by the 216th General Assembly (2004) (*Minutes, 2004, Part I, pp. 540ff.*).**

Rationale

On the day of Pentecost, Peter quoted the prophet Joel saying,

"In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy..." Acts 2:17

Almost two thousand years later, in the *Brief Statement of Faith*, we publicly affirm that "God created the world good and makes everyone equally in God's image, male and female, of every race and people, to live as one community,"¹ and that the Spirit "calls women and men to all ministries of the Church."² We declare that "the Spirit gives us courage / to pray... / to witness... / to unmask idolatries in church and culture, / to hear the voices of people long silenced, / and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace."³

In our Constitution we affirm that

the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall give full expression to the rich diversity within its membership and shall provide means which will assure a greater inclusiveness leading to wholeness in its emerging life. Persons of all racial ethnic group, different ages, both sexes... shall be guaranteed full participation and access to representation in the decision making of the church.⁴

¹ *Book of Confessions*, 10.3, line 30.

² *Ibid*, 10.4, line 64.

³ *Ibid*, 10.4, lines 66-71.

⁴ *Book of Order*, G-4.0403

How do we “provide means which will assure greater inclusiveness?” How do we know when we have achieved inclusiveness? First, we need a baseline measurement. This will allow us to accurately assess the various levels of privilege and discrimination that women experience.⁵

The Assembly has acted before. In 1999, the 211th General Assembly directed the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy and the Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns to “initiate a churchwide study on the current status of women in the church and society, with particular attention to issues of aging women, pay equity, child care, family/medical leave, and relations between women and men in places of work, home and family; . . .” (*Minutes*, 1999, Part I, p. 80, 591). Due to the funding being small and the workload of the advisory committee being considerable, this action was not reported on until this year. The action taken was to convene a resolution team on pay equity. The Assembly declared in 1999 that “fullness of life in Christ and Christ’s prayer for unity require women’s full participation in church life, and that the image of God in women be fully recognized and valued” (*Minutes*, 1999, Part I, p. 80, 591). This is still the case and we are no closer to being able to recognize the status of women in the church.

A comprehensive study on the status of women in the PCUSA will incorporate an examination of the status of women of color and will help the church identify the ways in which women of color are impacted by both systemic racism and gender bias. This action will better equip the PCUSA to respond to the challenge of the *Report from the Women of Color Consultation (2005)* and the *Report and Recommendations from the Women of Color Consultation Task Force* [presented to the 218th General Assembly (2008)] and move towards the vision of the PCUSA to become a truly diverse and inclusive community of faith. The task force will also look at alternative statistical methods that can get at this kind of information -- routine methods of collecting data don’t capture the different ways that women serve in the church. This effort will take time and expertise to design a process to move forward.

While Scripture and our constitution recognize and affirm the gifts of women and men, a recent Presbyterian Panel (November 2007) survey on attitudes toward women in leadership in the PCUSA indicates that we, as a denomination, are not living up to God’s vision for the church. Preferences are still biased toward men for leadership. The write-in comments revealed deeper concerns. Two examples from different respondents:⁶

In general, men don’t seem to give women the same belief that they know what they are talking about unless they have degrees to back it up. And women will stop and listen to a deep voice and give his idea consideration even when I have said the same idea earlier.

Is anyone really surprised that the advent of ordaining women and the effort to establish gender and race balance has resulted in the departure of male leadership and support for our churches? I am not suggesting that these moves are wrong, but their effect cannot be denied.

The comments written in were either/or -- rejecting the questions or relieved to be asked. The systemic nature of how bias shapes perceptions and expectations are at work in these responses. Without data, some will never be able to acknowledge the reality of the church for all women. If leadership matched membership representation, leadership would be over 60% female. At best, the PCUSA is half of that, but most women continue to serve in “other” ministries and few rise to lead congregations with multiple clergy staff or memberships over 500.

There is a widely held perception that women, who have faithfully provided leadership for the church at every level of service, whether compensated or not, are often not honored, respected, or paid the same as men. These stories do not have data to support them. We simply don’t know.

The ecumenical community has begun to respond. ACWC read studies and reports from the Episcopal Church, USA (*The State of the Clergy: 2006*) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).⁷ The Episcopal Church, USA – routinely reports disaggregated data to the church that helps identify where women are serving in

⁵ Women are females over the age of 18 – all races and ethnicities, languages and abilities.

⁶ The Presbyterian Panel, November 2007 Questionnaire, *Women in the Church*, Comments, B-3 and B-5

⁷ *25th Anniversary of Women’s Ordination Survey of Clergywomen and Clergymen*, ELCA for example; first call data here <http://www.elca.org/research/reports/cw/frstcall.pdf>

more helpful ways.⁸ These efforts provide their communions valuable input into the budgeting of women's programs and continue to provide measurement of inclusiveness and change. These efforts strengthen their witness in ecumenical and international contexts. The United Methodist Church has a General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, which provides this function.

The ecumenical community demonstrates converging efforts to address gender bias within communions. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches launched (in 2007) a call for the Reformed family of churches to study gender leadership and power within the alliance as well as in their individual communions. There are recommendations from the General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations (GACOR) and from the Women of Color Consultation Task Force.

Now is the opportune time for the PCUSA to enter into a comprehensive study of the status of women in the church. This survey will provide areas for celebration. It is also expected to identify specific areas needing attention, identifying specific barriers that need to be addressed to bring about full acceptance and equitable treatment of women in the PCUSA.

A study of the status of women would aid in bringing wholeness to the church by providing a progress report to the church on how it is recognizing and welcoming the gifts God gives women. Our Scripture reminds us that the Light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it...women have been faithful throughout the 300 years of Presbyterianism in the USA though they have been allowed into ordained leadership for only a small portion of that time. Women servants lead in all levels of the church. The task force will assess the data available and design a mechanism for studying the status of women throughout the PCUSA.

We celebrate the gifts of women each year in worship as a way of symbolizing the continuing struggle against gender bias in church and society. The PCUSA celebrated three milestones for women's ordination and in the shadow of these achievements we still hear stories of exclusion, oppression, and exploitation. From a liturgical resource:⁹

The Spirit of the Lord was upon [Jesus] to let the oppressed go free.

The Spirit cries: " Listen!" Women's voices are often missing from the public arena, from pulpits, from textbooks and literature. Their images are degraded on billboards and magazine covers; their character in films and television shows.

How shall we measure bias that diminishes possibilities? How do we measure the missing? the silenced? This is something that needs study and resources. Discrimination and devaluing based on gender, race and class undergirds scourges like poverty and other destructive forces in society. Real change can happen if we focus our efforts where action is needed. We need a map to show us the places where we need to send our time, talent and treasure and the paths to true inclusion and equity. Doing so will help us be light and salt in society and help move toward the Reign of God being revealed.

⁸ *Episcopal Parish Clergy by Diocese, Gender and Position: 2004*. Episcopal Church, USA, available online at http://www.episcopalchurch.org/documents/WM_WomenClergyDiocese04.pdf

⁹ *The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women Education and Information Packet*, Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, UN office, <http://www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/un/discrimination.htm>