

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON
THEOLOGICAL ISSUES
AND INSTITUTIONS

08

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)
216TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY (2004)

[The full text of the items referred to this committee may be found in the Reports to the General Assembly under tab 08.]

Moderator: Michelle Moe
Vice Moderator: Jorge Cartagena-Cruz

There are recommendations contained in this report that will be moved as part of a consent agenda. Such items are marked with an asterisk (“*”) and are so indicated in the Table of Contents below.

There are recommendations contained in this report that have financial implications and are indicated with a “\$” sign next to the item. The details of the financial implication are provided with the item in the context of the report, and are so indicated in the Table of Contents below.

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The Assembly Committee on Theological Issues and Institutions recommends that the 216th General Assembly (2004) approve the following recommendations:

Presbyterian Publishing Corporation

Item 08-01. Regarding Production of New Presbyterian Hymnal

That the recommendation be approved with amendment: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through and with brackets; text to be added or inserted is shown with an underline and with brackets.]

“The Presbyterian Publishing Corporation (PPC) recommends that the 216th General Assembly (2004) authorize the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, the Office of Theology and Worship, and the Presbyterian Association of Musicians to begin research into the

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feasibility of a new Presbyterian hymnal, [that the feasibility report be given to the 217th General Assembly (2006),] and further that, subject to action of a future General Assembly upon presentation and approval of a comprehensive publication plan, the 216th General Assembly (2004) designate the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation as the prospective publisher of the next Presbyterian hymnal, which would be developed in partnership with the Office of Theology and Worship and the Presbyterian Association of Musicians.”

Vote: 52 / 2 / 1

***Item 08-02. PPC Bylaws, Articles of Incorporation, Organization for Mission Changes.**

That the recommendation be approved.

Vote: 57 / 0 / 0

Lord's Supper

***Item 08-03. Grant Permission to Theological Institutions to Celebrate the Lord's Supper.**

That the recommendation be approved.

Vote: 57 / 0 / 0

***Item 08-04. Authorize the Celebration of the Lord's Supper at Listed Conference Centers and at Listed Events.**

That the recommendation be approved.

Vote: 57 / 0 / 0

Book of Order

Item 08-05. On Reorganizing and Improving the Presentation of G-2.0300, G-2.0400, and G-2.0500 Without Material Alteration to its Actual Content—From the Presbytery of John Calvin. *ACC +OGA +GAC

In response to this recommendation, that the 216th General Assembly (2004) approve the following statement:

The 216th General Assembly (2004) affirms the right and responsibility of presbyteries to determine whether candidates and ministers “sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church,” together with all other matters expressed in ordination and installation vows.

Ordination vows and essential tenets have a long and complex history in the Presbyterian church. The church has worked through the issue of “essential tenets” many times before, so attention to that history is essential.

From the beginning, the church has lived in the space between two tendencies. One stressed the more “objective” aspects of Christian faith such as theological precision, the distinct character of the ministry, and ordered church government. The other placed more emphasis on spontaneity, vital experience, and adaptability. In 1729, division was averted by recognizing the concerns of both groups in the “Adopting Act.” The Adopting Act required:

1. That all ministers and candidates accept the Westminster Confession, together with the Larger and Shorter catechisms . . .
2. . . . but not categorically.
3. That all ministers and candidates must declare “agreement in and approbation of” the confessional standards “as being in all the essential and necessary articles, good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine.”
4. That any minister who did not accept any particular part of the Confession or catechisms should state his scruple concerning that part, and the presbytery should then decide whether or not the scruple involved “essential and necessary articles of faith.”

The Adopting Act regularized confessional standards, but it did not require adherence to every confessional articulation. “Essential and necessary articles” were not identified. The Adopting Act was refined in 1758 at the repair of the Old Side/New Side schism:

1. With respect to any action deemed essential and necessary by the church, “every member shall actively concur . . . or passively submit . . . or peaceably withdraw.”
2. It became a censurable offense irresponsibly to accuse other ministers.
3. Presbyteries were to examine candidates on “religious experience” as well as doctrine.
4. Five questions were to be asked at ordinations and installations, including, “Do you sincerely receive and adopt the confession of faith of this church as contained in the system of doctrine taught in the holy Scriptures?” The “system of doctrine” was interpreted in the spirit of “essential and necessary.”

The 1910 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America declared that the Adopting Act of 1729 called upon judicatories to determine which articles of faith are “essential and necessary.” The assembly then identified five doctrines as “essential” (although the assembly added, “others are equally so.”) (1) inerrancy of Scripture, (2) virgin birth, (3) sacrificial atonement, (4) bodily resurrection, (5) Christ’s miracles.

Although the 1910 deliverance was challenged repeatedly, it was not repealed. Following the 1923 General Assembly, and in reaction against the 1910/1916/1923 doctrinal deliverance, more than 1,200 ministers signed the “Auburn Affirmation” declaring that the five-point deliverance

attempts to commit our church to certain theories concerning the Inspiration of the Bible, and the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection, and the Continuing Life and Supernatural Power of our Lord Jesus Christ. We all hold most earnestly to these great facts and doctrines... .

Some of us regard the particular themes contained in the deliverance of the General Assembly of 1923 as satisfactory explanations of these facts and doctrines. But we are united in believing that these are not the only themes allowed by the Scriptures and our standards as explanations of these facts and doctrines of our religion, and that all who hold to these facts and doctrines, whatever theories they may employ to explain them, are worthy of our confidence and fellowship.

The issue was set: narrowly defined confessional subscription or broadly defined confessional subscription. The question was not *whether* confessional subscription was required, but the specific nature of that confessional subscription.

The matter was referred to a special commission that reported in 1926 and 1927. The upshot of the special commission's report, adopted by the 1927 General Assembly, was that:

1. The *General Assembly* does not have the constitutional power to give binding definition to the church's essential faith. By denying that the assembly has the right to define authoritatively the "essentials" of the church's faith, the commission eliminated the five points as a source of controversy.

2. While a measure of tolerance was embedded in the church, it was made clear that the church, and not the individual, must decide the limits of tolerated diversity, "either *generally*, by amendment to the constitution, or *particularly*, by Presbyterial authority."

The church has decided limits *generally*, by amending the constitution to create *The Book of Confessions*, and *particularly*, by the continuing examination for ordination of candidates and for reception into membership of ministers. To this end, it must be acknowledged that in ordination the presbytery has historically demonstrated its power and responsibility in determining confirmation with the church's theology.

Vote: 53 / 2 / 1

Item 08-06. On Amending W-2.4006 and W-2.4011 Concerning Who May Participate—From the Presbytery of Central Washington. *ACC +GAC

That the recommendation be referred to the General Assembly Council, Office of Theology and Worship, which is conducting work on sacramental study; with a report due to the 217th General Assembly (2006).

Vote: 56 / 0 / 0

Trustees

***Item 08-07. Approve the New Trustees Elected by PC(USA) Theological Institutions in 2003.**

That the recommendation be approved.

Vote: 53 / 0 / 2

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***Item 08-08. Approve the Nominees for Mountain Retreat Association Trustees of Stock Board of Directors.**

That the recommendation be approved.

Vote: 55 / 0 / 2

Other

\$ Item 08-09. Trinity Work Group Report.

That the recommendations be approved.

Vote: 55 / 1 / 0

[Financial Implication: 2005: \$18,700 (Mission-Restricted)]

Item 08-10. Encourage Gatherings of Presbyterians of Varied Views to Covenant Together to Discuss the Affirmations in the Task Force's Preliminary Report.

That the recommendation be approved.

Vote: 56 / 0 / 0

Item 08-11. On Appropriate Language to Describe the Ministry of All Believers—From the Presbytery of New Brunswick.

That the recommendation be approved.

Vote: 43 / 13 / 0

Item 08-12. On Examining the Conscience of Candidates—From the Presbytery of Hudson River.

That the recommendation be answered by the action taken on Item 08-05 of this report, with the following statement added:

The 216th General Assembly (2004) affirms the primary role of *The Book of Confessions* as guide to interpreting Scripture in the examination of candidates for ordination as ministers, elders, and deacons, and their reception or transfer into new installed calls, congregations, or appointments to mission service

Vote: 54 / 0 / 0

Item 08-13. Approve Iain R. Torrance as President of Princeton Theological Seminary.

That the recommendation be approved.

Vote: 54 / 0 / 1

Item 08-14. Approve Dean K. Thompson as President of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

That the recommendation be approved.

Vote: 54 / 0 / 2

***Item 08-15. Louisville Seminary Articles of Incorporation.**

That the recommendation be approved.

Vote: 56 / 0 / 0

Commissioners' Resolutions

\$ Item 08-16. Commissioners' Resolution. Regarding the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Developing an Online Commentary to the Bible.

That the recommendation be disapproved with comment:

Comment: The assembly thanks the authors of the resolution and encourages the General Assembly Council Office of Communication and Office of Theology and Worship, and the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation to explore the concept of an on-line Bible commentary for free, or at a reasonable cost, and to implement it, if possible, as soon as possible, and report to the 217th General Assembly.

Vote: 37/13/4

**[Original Financial Implication: 2005: \$34,825; 2006: \$32,825 (Mission-Unrestricted)]
[Committee Action: 2005: \$0; 2006: \$0]**

\$ Item 08-17. Commissioners' Resolution. Regarding the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Call for Presbyterians to Lead a Simpler Life.

That the recommendation be disapproved and that the assembly note the comment from the General Assembly Council:

Comment: The General Assembly Council (GAC) welcomes the attention that this commissioners' resolution brings to the encouragement of simpler lifestyles. We believe that several components of the requested action are already in place. The GAC suggests that the most effective approach to accomplishing the commissioners' intent would be a communication from the assembly that calls Presbyterians to use existing programs as resources in a journey toward simpler, more faithful lifestyles.

Encouragement of simpler, less consumption-oriented, living finds expression in various programs of the General Assembly Council. The Spiritual Formation office commends simplicity as a spiritual practice; the Stewardship Education office interprets simpler living as a matter of Christian stewardship; and the Presbyterian Hunger Program encourages simpler lifestyles as a way to assure that all people share in God's abundance. All see a commitment to simpler lives as an expression of Christian discipleship.

The Presbyterian Hunger Program supports and promotes the work of the ecumenical organization Alternatives for Simple Living and distributes its "Whose Birthday Is It Anyway?" resource each year as an encouragement to a simpler observance of Christmas. Alternatives' resources deal with many dimensions of simpler lifestyles, from wedding plans to energy conservation.

For the past three years, several programs of the General Assembly Council have jointly sponsored the Enough for Everyone program, which promotes a related approach to congregational lifestyles. Through the Presbyterian Coffee Project, Sweat-Free T-Shirts, Electric Stewardship, and Investing in Hope, congregations are invited to engage in activities that represent a more just participation in the global economy.

Vote: 48/1/2

Item 08-17, Rec (2): [Original Financial Implication: 2005: \$4,250 (Per Capita-OGA)]

Item 08-17, Rec (2): [Committee Action: 2005: \$0]

Item 08-17, Rec (3): [Original Financial Implication: 2005: \$14,793 (Mission-Unrestricted)]

Item 08-17, Rec (3): [Committee Action: 2005: \$0]

\$ Item 08-18. Commissioner's Resolution. On Celebrating the "Social Creed" of the Churches and Considering a 21st Century Social Creed.

That the recommendation be approved.

Vote: 30/25/ 1

[Financial Implication: 2005: \$25,066; 2006: \$31,957 (Per Capita-GAC)]

Item 08-19. Commissioners Resolution 20. On Recognition That One of the Great Ends of the Church (G-1.0200) Is the Preservation of the Truth.

That the recommendation be disapproved.

Vote: 46 / 4 / 3

Committee Final Action and Report to Plenary

[The items listed below were acted upon and approved by the assembly committee. No further action is needed, and is here for information only.]

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Item 08-A. Minutes, Committee on Theological Education.

That the minutes are approved.

Vote: 56 / 1 / 0

Item 08-B. Minutes, Presbyterian Publishing Corporation.

That the minutes are approved.

Vote: 57 / 0 / 0