

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON
NATIONAL ISSUES

10

*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 10.]

*Moderator: James H. Y. Kim
Vice Moderator: Margo Tomlinson*

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 National Issues recommends that the 216th General Assembly (2004) approve the following recommendations:

Part I

Item 10-01. Analysis of Church’s Effort to Combat Racism.

That the recommendations be approved.

Vote: 61/0/0

June 30, 2004, 4:39 PM

\$ Item 10-02. Task Force on Election Report.

That the recommendations be approved.

[Note: *The Assembly Committee on Bills and Overtures points out that this item comes from the General Assembly Council and could be funded within its budget.*]

Vote: 45/14/3

[Financial Implications: 2006: \$10,500; 2007: \$12,630; 2008: \$3,235 (Per Capita GAC)]

\$ Item 10-03. Task Force to Study Reparations Report. +OGA

That the recommendations be approved with amendment.

Amend Recommendation 4. as follows: [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.]

~~“[4. — Direct the Stated Clerk to initiate the process described in G-18.0201b by appointing a committee to consider designing a confessional statement repenting of the sin of racism and its various expressions, including slavery and genocide for inclusion in *The Book of Confessions* and to report to the 217th General Assembly (2006).]~~

“[4. a. Commends the Belhar Confession to the church for reflection, study, and response, as a means of deepening the commitment of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to dealing with racism and a means of strengthening its unity;

“[b. Requests the General Assembly Council, Office of Theology and Worship, to prepare materials to facilitate churchwide reflection and study;

“[c. Urges each presbytery and all congregations to undertake a study of the Belhar Confession before the 218th General Assembly (2008);

“[d. Directs the Office of the General Assembly and the General Assembly Council, Office of Theology and Worship, to receive responses, prepare a summary, and report results to the 218th General Assembly (2008), together with possible recommendations for further engagement with the Belhar Confession.]”

Vote: 60/0/3

[Original Financial Implications: 2004: \$12,430; 2005: \$45,165; 2006: \$14,925 (Per Capita OGA)]

[Original Financial Implications: 2005: \$7,019; (Mission Restricted)]

[Committee Action 2004 - \$0; 2005 - \$0; 2006 - \$0]

§ Item 10-05. Resolution Calling for a Comprehensive Legalization Program for Immigrants Living and Working in the U.S. +COGA

That the recommendations be approved.

Vote: 58/4/1

[Financial Implications: 2005: \$111,626; 2006: \$115,771 (Per Capita OGA)]

Item 10-04. Report on Limited Water Resources and Takings.

That the recommendations be approved.

Vote: 55/6/1

Part II**Item 10-06. Transforming Families.**

That the recommendations be approved with the following amendments:

1. On page 5, Section “2. Marriage as Basic to Human Relationships,” amend the first paragraph as follows: [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.]

“2. Marriage as Basic to Human Relationships

“Affirmation of marriage’s significance in the Christian tradition is by no means a claim that marriage exhausts what the church means by family. The church upholds the meaning and significance of marriage between a man and a woman, but it does not denigrate other forms of family life [that demonstrate and nurture godly character]. The language of the Confession of 1967 is instructive. The marital-biological family that is basic to human relationships is just that: basic. The marital-biological family is neither exhaustive nor exclusive as a family form. Rather, as the Confession of 1967 affirms, the marital-biological family ‘exemplifies in a basic way God’s ordering of the interpersonal life for which [God] created humankind,’ but it is not the only form of interpersonal life; and it does not fully exemplify God’s ordering of interpersonal life.”

2. On page 8, amend the second paragraph as follows: [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.]

“[Parents and guardians have the primary responsibility to care for their children, while [€] [c]hurches are called to be communities that support and complete the nurture of children. Teaching children who they are in Christ is an honorable and important duty for the entire community. We should strive to provide for them, to keep them safe, to ensure that they will not be hungry or homeless, to prepare them for life, and to encourage their participation in the mission of the Triune God. In this way, families, individuals, and the entire church learn to live lives of service and love for the whole world.”

3. On page 11, amend the fifth paragraph under “A Vision of Transforming Families” as follows: [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.]

“We envision a society in which the well-being of every child is nurtured and supported. In light of sociological data indicating that a loving, lasting marriage of the mother and father is the most successful (90 percent) context for children’s flourishing and that children who experience divorce flourish in a smaller, though significant, majority of cases (75–80 percent), the church urges both parents or guardians to be active in the nurture of children and recognizes the important assistance that congregations and other family support systems can offer. ¹ The church commits itself to give special attention to those families [~~both single-parent and two-parent,~~] where the well-being of children is most at risk. With support from church and other institutions, [~~stepfamilies, adoptive families, and single-parent~~] [even at risk] families can successfully move through difficult times and their children can grow into healthy adulthood.”

4. On page 14, insert a new item, “q.”:

“[q. That ACSWP report back to the 217th General Assembly (2006) on the progress it has made implementing these recommendations.]”

Vote: 60/0/2

Item 10-11. On Endorsing “A Christian Declaration of Marriage—From the Presbytery of Santa Barbara. +GAC +ACSWP +ACWC

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

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) ask all church members to join in a year of prayer for marriage renewal and reconciliation, and urge synods, presbyteries, and local congregations to seek ways of working with other Christian bodies in their areas toward these same purposes.

Vote: 54/4/4

Item 10-15. Denial of Civil Rights in Virginia.

That the recommendation be approved.

Vote: 42/19/4

§ Item 10-17. Recognize Civil Marriage for Same-Gender Couples.

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

Recognize Civil Rights for Same-Gender Couples

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) affirm the following statement and request the Office of the General Assembly to communicate this action to all middle and lower governing bodies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), as well as to the president of the United States of America and to all members of the Congress of the United States of America.

Statement

The 216th General Assembly (2004) does the following:

- Offers prayerful thanks for the Scriptures informing us that all persons are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27).**
- Declares that all persons are entitled to equal treatment under the law (Constitution of the United States of America); therefore**
- Urges state legislations to change state laws to include the right of same-gender persons to civil union and, thereby, to extend to them all the benefits, privileges, and responsibilities of civil union, and urges all persons to support such changes in state laws.**
- Urges the Congress of the United States of America to recognize those state laws that allow same-gender union and to change federal laws to recognize all civil unions licensed and solemnized under state law to apply in all federal laws that provide benefits, privileges, and/or responsibilities to married persons.**

Vote: 35/27/2

[Financial Implication: 2005 - \$4,250; (Per Capita OGA)]

Item 10-16. On Supporting the Federal Marriage Amendment.

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

Nothing the 216th General Assembly (2004) has said or acted upon is to be construed to state or imply a position for or against the Federal Marriage Amendment. General Assembly entities shall not advocate for or against the Federal Marriage Amendment.

Vote: 41/19/2

Part III

§ Item 10-12. Resolution on Allegations of Child Abuse Against Educators.

That the recommendations be approved with amendment:

1. Amend Recommendation “2.a.” as follows: [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.]

“a. adequate policies on child abuse that set forth the responsibilities and rights of both students [when they are abused] and educators [when they are falsely accused];”

2. Strike Recommendation 7. and re-number the following recommendation.

~~“[7.—Direct the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) to conduct a study of the future of contemporary public education in the context of the long history of Presbyterian support for public education. The study of the systemic issues confronting public education should focus on the individual’s role in supporting public education, and the appropriate citizenship for a multicultural and interfaith society and report to the 218th General Assembly (2008).]”~~

Vote: 55/5/0

[Original Financial Implications: 2006: \$55,500; 2007: \$32,850; 2008: \$6,335 (Per Capita GAC)]

[Committee Action 2006 - \$0; 2007 - \$0; 2008 - \$0]

Item 10-07. On Setting Compensation Standards—From the Presbytery of New Hope. +ACSWP

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

The 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) commends the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) for raising the issue of corporate compensation standards through proxy voting recommendations, and instruct MRTI to develop a comprehensive plan for increased advocacy on compensation standards, including dialogues with corporations, filing of shareholder resolutions, and public education. The MRTI should proceed to increase advocacy as it can within its mandate, and report its actions, and any recommendations, to the 217th General Assembly (2006).

Vote: 63/0/0

\$ Item 10-09. On Preparing a Policy Statement on Usury in the United States—From the Presbytery of Utah. +ACSWP, ACREC, ACWC

That the recommendations be approved with amendment:

1. Amend the first paragraph as follows: [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 Presbytery of Utah overtures the 216th General Assembly (2004) to direct the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy to investigate the question of usury in the United States and to prepare a [~~policy statement~~] [resolution] for the 217th General Assembly (2006) that would do the following:”

2. Add a Recommendation 4. to read as follows:

“[4. Develop ethical criteria consistent with the Reformed Tradition for evaluating usury laws and other legislation to address various forms of lending such as payday loans, sub-prime loans, predatory lending, and cash-back tax preparation arrangements.”

Vote: 57/7/0

[Financial Implications: 2005 - \$5,980 (Per Capita GAC)]

\$ Item 10-10. On Reaffirming the Importance of our Nation’s Social Insurance System (Social Security and Medicare)—From the Presbytery of Hudson River. +ACSWP, ACREC

That the recommendations be approved.

Vote: 54/6/3

[Financial Implications: 2005 - \$9,050; 2006: \$3,860 (Per Capita GAC)]

Item 10-14. On Appointing an Action Committee That Will Identify Media and Advertising That Has Excessive Sex, Violence, and Other Immoral Content for the Purpose of Influencing Producers and Sponsors.

That the recommendation be disapproved with comment:

Comment: Entities within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) sufficiently address the concern of Item 10-14:

- Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) partners with Interfaith Centers on Corporate Responsibility to advocate for change in business entities that create and market violent video games;**
- The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) includes on its Web page a link to “the Electronic Great Awakening” with the purpose of making Presbyterians more aware of the immoral content in much of the media that we consume, including music, movies, and television;**

- **The Child Advocacy Office, with its focus on The Decade of the Child, disseminates information concerning the detrimental effects of violent video games on children and youth;**
- **The Presbyterian Peacemaking Office emphasizes the World Council of Churches' Decade to Overcome Violence.**

Vote: 59/3/1

Part IV

Item 10-08. On Expressing the Desire that the Patriot Act be Repealed—From the Presbytery of Northern New York. +ACSWP, ACREC

That the recommendation be disapproved.

Vote: 33/22/6

Item 10-13. On Seeking a Thorough, Calm, and Reasoned Review of the USA Patriot Act.

That the recommendations be approved.

Vote: 53/4/2

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.]

Item 10-A. Minutes, Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy

That the minutes be approved with exception.

Exception: The minutes of the meeting of January 22, 2003, were not approved by the committee itself.

Vote: 47/0/1

Item 10-B Recipients of Awards

The Assembly Committee on National Issues reports to the 216th General Assembly (2004) that the awards were acknowledged and will be presented to the recipients at meetings of their respective presbyteries.

1. *Women of Faith Awards*—Christine Mann Darden, Rogene F. Henderson, Ruth Rivera Lane.

2. *Partners in Mission Awards*—The Trinity Restoring Creation House Church, Representative Bobby Scott.

2. *Sam and Helen R. Walton Awards*—Cornerstone Presbyterian Church, Synod of the Northeast, Presbytery of Monmouth; Oconee Presbyterian Church, Synod of South Atlantic, Presbytery of Northeast Georgia; Shelton Presbyterian Church, Synod of Alaska-Northwest, Presbytery of Olympia.

3. *Restorative Justice Award*—Presbyterian Interracial Dialogue of Winston-Salem, N.C.

Vote: 55/0/1

**Minority Report
Assembly Committee on National Issues**

Please refer to Item 10-11, on page 4 of the report of the Assembly Committee on National Issues.

In place of the committee's recommendation on Item 10-11, that the 216th General Assembly (2004) approve Item 10-11.

Rationale

This overture enable us to express to a wider audience an appreciation of marriage that is shared by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) along with virtually every major branch of the Christian tradition. Our *Book of Order* says in W.4.9000: "Marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being of the entire human family. Marriage is a civil contract between a woman and a man. For Christians marriage is a covenant through which a man and a woman are called to live out together before God their lives of discipleship." This is affirmed in "A Declaration of Marriage".

The text is relatively brief and user-friendly giving us practical ways of strengthening families. Endorsing it would be a way of communicating our teaching and implementing these practical ministries more publicly in a larger community of voices, to a wider audience. It would give greater opportunity to share and act upon the recommendations in our recently adopted "Transforming Families" paper.

Endorsing "A Declaration of Marriage" gives us another opportunity to affirm that we are truly ecumenical in our service of Jesus Christ.

Donald Wade	Greater Atlanta Presbytery
Rebecca Dodson	San Joaquin Presbytery
Dellene L. Gudger	Salem Presbytery

In accordance with Standing Rule C.5.d., I affirm that the above positions expressed as recommendations for action by the assembly were presented to the whole committee during its consideration of the matter.