

Item 03-25

Commissioner's Resolution. On Providing Disability Awareness Training for Commissioners to the 217th General Assembly (2006).

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) instruct the Office of the General Assembly to provide disability awareness training for commissioners, committee leadership, and committee on local arrangements to the 217th General Assembly (2006) to the end that the 217th General Assembly (2006) and all subsequent General Assembly meeting be made as accessible to all peoples as possible.

Rationale

Members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), like members of all churches of Jesus Christ, are all members of the body of Christ, “baptized into one body and made to drink of one Spirit.”

The Holy Scriptures declare that “love is patient and kind.”

“Persons of all racial ethnic groups, different ages, both sexes, various disabilities, diverse geographical areas, different theological positions consistent with the Reformed tradition, as well as different marital conditions shall be guaranteed full participation and access to representation in the decision making of the church.”

“Governing bodies of the church shall be responsible for implementing the church’s commitment to inclusiveness and participation.

Members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) with physical disabilities have experienced barriers to their full and joyous participation in the events of the General Assembly meetings both in the past years and in this year.

A lack of awareness of these barriers among brothers and sisters in Christ has caused physically disabled brothers and sisters in Christ to be excluded and hindered from full and joyous participation in the proceedings of General Assembly meetings.

The Office of the General Assembly, through the General Assembly Council, is fully equipped to provide disability awareness training and, in fact, has already produced materials sufficient for this purpose.

George Houston Waters—Presbytery of East Tennessee
Cynthia Jennison—Presbytery of Ohio Valley

Item 03-26

Commissioners' Resolution. Emphasizing the Importance of Scripture.

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) direct the Office of the General Assembly to do the following:

- 1. To be careful to include and emphasize fidelity to Scripture in the commissioning service at future General Assemblies.**
- 2. Amend “Life Together in the Community of Faith: Standards of Ethical Conduct for Members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)” to include in the introductory paragraph and further in the body of the document an emphasis on obedience and faithfulness to Scripture.**

Rationale

The General Assembly needs to underscore and emphasize the importance of Scripture in all that we do, and keep with our Reformed tradition.

At this year's General Assembly, the commissioning service did not contain a mandate of fidelity to Scripture. The pre-assembly document “Life Together in the Community of Faith: Standards of Ethical Conduct for Members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)” was also lacking in this area.

Jennifer Kirkbride—Presbytery of Upper Ohio Valley
Richard Mumaugh—Presbytery of Philadelphia

Item 03-27

Commissioners Resolution. Recording Commissioners' Votes in the Minutes of the General Assembly, Part I.

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) direct that all votes of the General Assembly plenary sessions, other than those taken by voice vote or show of hands, shall be recorded showing each commissioners' vote and shall be published in the *Minutes of the General Assembly, Part I.*

Rationale

“... people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God” (John 3:19–20, NRSV).

Mark Roulea—Presbytery of Blackhawk

Dennis Kitterman—Presbytery of Lake Erie

Item 06-12

Commissioners' Resolution. On Calling on the Stated Clerk to Justify His Endorsement of the World Council of Churches and Reviewing PC(USA) Relationship with the World Council of Churches.

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) do the following:

1. Call the Stated Clerk, the Reverend Clifton Kirkpatrick, to define the intention of the World Council of Churches' (WCC) request to "prosecute," to discuss the relevant Scriptures, confessions, General Assembly Council (GAC) directives, and General Assembly statements in justifying his endorsement, and to defend his authority as Stated Clerk to make such endorsements that are contrary to the stated position of the General Assembly in regards to Item 12-08 of the 215th General Assembly (2003) of the PC(USA) (*Minutes*, 2003, Part I, pp. 656ff). [Note: This recommendation was sent to 12 Assembly Committee on Peacemaking as Item 12-10.]

2. Review the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) relationship with the World Council of Churches at each General Assembly through the committee charged with that work to ensure the WCC's actions and positions more closely represent those of the majority of PC(USA).

Rationale

The 215th General Assembly (2003) of the PC(USA) approved the statement entitled "Iraq and Beyond" as a resource for study and reflection; and acknowledged that there are ongoing disagreements regarding the war and urges tolerance for differing opinions.

"Iraq and Beyond" clearly states that the position of the PC(USA) is "to encourage a process of reflection, discussion, and understanding ..." (*Minutes*, 2003, Part I, p. 656). [Editor's Note: This quote originally came from a statement of the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, which followed the recommendation section and was rationale for writing "Iraq and Beyond." That statement reads as follows: "The U.S.-led war against Iraq, the motives, dynamics, and process leading up to it, and the consequences that will flow from it have presented our church and its members with serious issues around which much reflection, theological debate, and prayerful discussion is yet to be done. To encourage a process of reflection, discussion, and understanding, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy made the above recommendations."]

"Iraq and Beyond" explains that, "The church must urge every jurisdiction within the land, from the federal government to the local governing body, to make every effort to protect the right of disagreement, to sustain the civility of policy debate, and to tolerate demonstrations in support of all viewpoints" (Ibid, p. 658).

"Iraq and Beyond" goes further to say, "The anguish of those who feel that this war is unjustifiable and the conviction of those who support the war must be acknowledged as legitimate moral responses that should not be condemned" (Ibid).

"Iraq and Beyond" emphasizes the need for continued debate on differences of moral judgment regarding U.S. military doctrine "with poise and graceful thoughtfulness."

"Iraq and Beyond" warns of tabling debate "for the sake of maintaining an assumed sense of peace," which is contrary to "American political, social, and religious life."

In contrast, the World Council of Churches issued a "Statement on Iraq," which clearly states that the war was an "immoral" and "illegal resort to war." Additionally, the WCC's "Statement on Iraq" calls for the United Nations to "promptly investigate" and "prosecute" the democratically elected officials of the coalition forces in Iraq. Finally note, the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, the Reverend Clifton Kirkpatrick, endorsed the WCC's "Statement on Iraq" during the 8/26/03–9/6/03 meeting of the WCC without the consent of the General Assembly or in consultation with its council.

David Andrew IV—Presbytery of Glacier
Ted Worley—Presbytery of Cherokee

Item 06-13

Commissioners' Resolution. On Cooperative Ecumenical Strategy.

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) encourage the leadership of synods and presbyteries, in cooperation with long-time ecumenical partners, to

- 1. develop or renew regional plans to ensure ministry in areas of declining population and/or resources;**
- 2. coordinate meeting locations, fellowship, and educational experiences when feasible;**
- 3. meet with leaders of partner denominations, to share reports, public communications and visits;**
- 4. cooperate in efforts of evangelism, witness, and service in new ways.**

Rationale

Our Full Communion partner denominations (The Reformed Church, the United Church of Christ, the Evangelical Lutheran Church) and our partners in the Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC) face many of the same demographic and cultural changes we face.

In urban and rural areas where most needed, interdenominational strategy and cooperation have frequently weakened, despite mutual recognition of each other's ministries.

Gordon V. Webster—Presbytery of Genesee Valley

Lou McAlister East—Presbytery of Salem

Item 07-10

Commissioners' Resolution. On Creation of a Presbyterian Credit Card.

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) refer for study to the General Assembly Council, to report to the 217th General Assembly (2006), the feasibility of contracting with a bank, credit card company, and/or other lending institution to create a “Presbyterian credit card,” which through voluntary, private subscription, issuance, and usage, could generate usage credits that would accrue to and translate into mission dollars directly enhancing the funding of validated Presbyterian mission accounts and causes.

Rationale

We are increasingly becoming a cashless society.

Personal credit cards now routinely earn for their owners such private benefits as video rental dollars (Blockbuster), free gasoline (Shell), and dollars toward the purchase of a new car (General Motors).

Many secular, not-for-profit, and charitable organizations (such as the Nature Conservancy, etc.) are harnessing the electronic spending habits of their constituencies by asking them to voluntarily forego personal remunerations such as those named above to otherwise earn and contribute dollar rewards to directly enhance the funding and thereby the mission of the philanthropic cause to which they belong and in which they believe.

This would also help to educate Presbyterians by helping them to make the theological connection between faith and money as individuals regularly, repeatedly made the choice to link what and how they spend with what they believe in, what they choose to support, and how they choose to give.

This would increase personal connection to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as individuals take regular, repeating actions to contribute to it.

The potential benefit of a “Presbyterian credit card” for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) could result in significant gains and substantial resources to augment our mission.

It therefore seems prudent to study and explore this possibility so that what we now currently earn for ourselves in terms of video rentals and free gas could instead be shared to bless the mission of the church by directly funding such worthwhile mission causes such as Basic Mission Support, One Great Hour of Sharing, The Fund for Theological Education, racial/ethnic schools—even individually chosen validated mission accounts listed as Extra Commitment Giving Opportunities.

We should check this out. What have we got to lose—except a few Blockbuster rentals!

Kelly Furlong—Presbytery of Wabash Valley

John C. Van Nuys—Presbytery of Wabash Valley

Item 07-11

Commissioners' Resolution. On Developing a "Conceptual Framework for a New Mission Funding System."

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) do the following:

- 1. Acknowledge that our declining giving indicates a serious spiritual problem.**
- 2. Recognize that our present funding system has become inadequate and regressive.**
- 3. Encourage the General Assembly Council to refrain from implementation of the 5 percent/1 percent "contribution" on designated giving and require the GAC to inform donors affected by this policy if it is implemented.**
- 4. Commend the General Assembly Council for its commitment to develop a new mission funding system and require that the GAC bring a recommendation for a "conceptual framework for a new mission funding system for the PC(USA)" [John Detterick, 12/19/03] to the 217th General Assembly (2006).**

Rationale

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has been in a funding crisis for at least twenty years.

Presbyterians are part of the most affluent Christian denomination in history, but giving a decreasing percent of their income to their church.

Support of Presbyterian mission continues to decline both in total dollars and in inflation-adjusted dollars.

Patterns of mission support have changed from undesignated to designated, resulting in serious cutbacks in mission work and a third major General Assembly budget slashing in recent years.

The General Assembly Council has taken action to begin charging a variable rate "contribution to shared mission" of 5 percent or 1 percent on designated giving.

Jeffrey P. Black—Presbytery of Shenango

David Breckenridge—Presbytery of Western New York

Item 07-12

Commissioners' Resolution. On Strengthening Hispanic Latino Ministry.

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) do the following:

- 1. Direct the General Assembly Council (GAC) to host a conversation prior to the September GAC meeting with representatives from GAC staff and elected members of the Hispanic-Latino Presbyterian Caucus, the Hispanic Advisory Committee, and the associate for Hispanic Congregational Enhancement, and others mutually determined, for the purposes of**
 - a. identifying areas of mutual ministry;**
 - b. exploring ways in which the Hispanic-Latino Ministry Strategy can be implemented over the next several years in partnership with the GAC, synods, and presbyteries;**
 - c. identifying opportunities for future conversations that assure open communication and shared commitment to development of materials and strategy;**
 - d. exploring ways in which the GAC and middle governing bodies can respond to the growing Hispanic-Latino population in the United States.**
- 2. To make the hiring of Hispanic-Latino staff a priority in filling staff positions until the racial ethnic percentages exceed those of the most immediate staff reduction.**
- 3. To commit sufficient budget resources to assure the implementation of the Hispanic Strategy Report.**

Rationale

The Racial Ethnic/Immigrant Church Growth Report, approved by the 208th General Assembly (1996), acknowledges the compelling needs for an intentional churchwide strategy for racial ethnic church growth. That General Assembly affirmed the goal of increasing the racial ethnic membership of PC(USA) to 10 percent by 2005 and 20 percent by 2010. Hispanic/Latino Presbyterians are committed to work in partnership with the GAC, synods, and presbyteries.

The most recent GAC budget cuts eliminated two of three Hispanic staff positions working directly with Hispano-Latino congregations, and simultaneously eliminated Presbyterian publishing of adult Spanish-language curriculum. This decision was unfortunately made without direct consultation with either the Hispanic Advisory Committee of the GAC or the National Hispanic-Latino Presbyterian Caucus. It is imperative that adequate support and resources be available in order to nurture and educate all of God's children.

There is no single population in the United States growing more rapidly than that of Hispanics and Latinos, according to the 2000 census. In the last three years alone, Hispanic and Latino Presbyterians have increased in number from 27,000 to 40,000, with every indication that the growth will continue. Resources are urgently needed to support fellowships, leadership development, new church developments, and training of pastors and commissioned lay pastors.

Juan Sarmiento—Presbytery of San Fernando
Hernan Rodriguez-Morales—Presbiterio de Suroeste

Item 08-16

Commissioners' Resolution. Regarding the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Developing an Online Commentary to the Bible.

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) do the following:

- 1. Commit the church to develop an online commentary to the Bible that would be accessible for free to anyone seeking to learn more about the Bible in “order to hear the Word of God more clearly and to obey more faithfully.”**
- 2. Request the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation to allow the *Layman's Bible Commentary* (out of print) to be made available online as the first step to the development of a new online commentary.**
- 3. Request the General Assembly Council, the Office of Theology and Worship, the Office of Spiritual Formation, the Office of Theological Education, the Office of Youth Ministry, and the Association of Presbyterian Church Educators to create an editorial committee of volunteers with backgrounds in biblical studies, theology, spirituality, Christian education, youth ministry, and Web site design. The editorial committee will encourage pastors, seminary and college professors, educators, youth workers and others will be encouraged to volunteer to write new commentaries to each book of the Bible that will be reviewed by the editorial committee before the commentaries are posted online. This Web site for online commentary to the Bible will include links for PC(USA) Web page for daily reading of the Bible (<http://horeb.pcusa.org/search/dailyreadings.htm>), ordering commentaries published by Westminster/John Knox Press (<http://www.ppcpub.com/>), the General Assembly documents on Biblical Authority and Interpretation (<http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/scripture-use.pdf>), and local PCUSA congregations for worship, Bible study, and service (<http://www.pcusa.org/search/churches/default.jsp>).**

Rationale

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, used the Scriptures to teach his followers about himself (Luke 4:16–21, 24:27) and the great commandments for eternal life of loving God and neighbor (Mark 10:28–31).

The gospel was written “so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30).

Jesus Christ told his followers “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19–20).

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in its confessions affirms the Bible “to be the rule of faith and life” (*The Book of Confessions*, Westminster Confession of Faith, 6.002) and “The same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture (Ibid, A Brief Statement of Faith, 10.4).

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) affirms the importance of the study and interpretation of the Bible,

The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written. The Scriptures are not a witness among others, but the witness without parallel. The church has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as prophetic and apostolic testimony in which it hears the word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated... The Bible is to be interpreted in the light of its witness to God's work of reconciliation in Christ. The Scriptures, given under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are nevertheless the words of men, conditioned by the language, thought forms, and literary fashions of the places and times at which they were written. They reflect views of life, history, and the cosmos which were then current. The church, therefore, has an obligation to approach the Scriptures with literary and historical understanding. As God has spoken his word in diverse cultural situa-

tions, the church is confident that he will continue to speak through the Scriptures in a changing world and in every form of human culture” (Ibid, The Confession of 1967, 9.27, 9.29)

The “church affirms “Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda,” that is, “The church reformed, always reforming,” according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit (*Book of Order*, G-2.0200),

The church encourages the use of Scripture in personal worship because “Scripture is the record of God’s self-revelation through which the Holy Spirit speaks to bear witness to Jesus Christ and to give authoritative direction for the life of faith. Personal worship centers upon Scripture as one reads and listens for God’s Spirit to speak. One may read Scripture for the guidance, support, comfort, encouragement, and challenge which the Word of God presents. One may study the Scriptures to understand them in their literary forms and in their historical and cultural contexts in order to hear the Word of God more clearly and to obey more faithfully (W-5.3001–.3002).

The excellent commentaries published by Westminster/John Knox Press (*Interpretation, Westminster Bible Companion, Daily Study Bible* by William Barclay, N.T. Wright and others) are rarely displayed at popular, large bookstores like Borders or Barnes & Noble or even “Christian” bookstores.

In April 2004 it was reported nearly two-thirds of online Americans use the Internet for faith-related reasons. The 64 percent of Internet users who perform spiritual and religious activities online represent nearly 82 million Americans according to a new national survey by the Pew Internet & American Life Project (see May 19th Presbyterian News Service report at <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2004/04236.htm> and the “Faith Online” report at http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Faith_Online_2004.pdf).

The Presbyterian Panel reported that half the members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and a majority of elders access the Internet daily or more often (*Background Report 2003–2005 Presbyterian Panel*, p. 16, but there is not a free, online commentary to the whole Bible.

The Internet is an increasing useful tool for the church to help people learn about the Bible, Jesus Christ, and the Christian life and because of its worldwide appeal can be assist the church in following the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16–20).

Our Presbyterian tradition has always placed a strong emphasis on the importance of the Bible for daily living. The development of such an online resource would enrich the countless lives of Presbyterians and potentially millions of others.

The editorial committee for an on-line Bible commentary could do their work online without having to meet in person. These gifted volunteers would represent the diversity in the church and encourage the commentary to also have differing views. Controversial biblical passages could present differing interpretations to witness that good people of faith can differ.

There need not be any cost to the church for the development of this online Bible commentary, but many rewards:

1. The minor expense for the Web site for the online Bible commentary could be donated Presbyterian Publishing House (that would benefit from the promotion and sales of its books) or other supporters of the project.
2. Volunteers are ready scan the out of print *Layman’s Bible Commentaries* for posting online. Volunteers with computer expertise would enjoy using their gifts for the work of the church as well.
3. Local PC(USA) churches could link to their congregation’s Web sites to the online Bible commentary knowing it offers quality resource for their church members. These members would have a chance to see resources (online and in print) that can nurture their faith and life.

4. People surfing the Internet and using the online Bible commentary might want to check out the local congregation mentioned on the Web site.

5. The free online commentary makes a resource available to those who might not be able to afford such resources otherwise. The poor in this country and overseas would be helped.

6. The online Bible commentary would be accessible worldwide and thus help in the church's global mission effort to share the gospel.

7. The project can be a unifying one for Presbyterians. This shared service project can be supported by conservatives, liberals, and everyone else who understands the need to increase biblical literacy and Christian discipleship today.

Bruce P. Gillette—Presbytery of West Jersey

William C. Teng—Presbytery of National Capital

Item 08-17

Commissioners' Resolution. Regarding the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Call for Presbyterians to Lead a Simpler Life.

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) do the following:

- 1. Create an environment within the PC(USA) presbyteries and churches, and for Presbyterian followers of Christ, to lead a simpler life in the United States of America.**
- 2. Direct the Moderator to issue a letter to fellow Presbyterians explaining the rationale for the simpler life.**
- 3. Research and distribute a reading list on the subject of a simple life through appropriate PC(USA) channels: for example, a study group format during the Lenten period to be widely distributed within our denomination.**
- 4. Set an objective to stop and then reduce the gap within the affluent and the poor in the U.S.A. and most especially in the underdeveloped nations in the southern hemisphere.**

Rationale

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth ...” (Matt. 6:19).

“No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and wealth” (Matt. 6:24).

“But strive first for the kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt. 6:33).

... “‘Teacher,’ he said, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him, ... [Love] your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:25).

“For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another” (Gal. 5:14–15).

In these Scriptures, Jesus and Paul make clear the command and the benefit to lead a simpler life. By treating our fellow human beings equally, we will follow the call of this 216th General Assembly (2004) (that all may have life in fullness, John 10:10b).

By leading the simpler life, we will have a fuller life guided by the Spirit.

John Ewer—Presbytery of Miami

Lane S. Hart II—Presbytery of Baltimore

Item 08-18

Commissioner's Resolution. On Celebrating the "Social Creed" of the Churches and Considering a 21st Century Social Creed.

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) direct the Office of the General Assembly and the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy to initiate the following ecumenical conversations and studies in preparation for the centennial of the 1908 Social Creed of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.:

1. That the Office of the General Assembly initiate consideration of a celebration of that prophetic and influential "social creed" within the National Council of Churches of Christ and other appropriate bodies, honoring the role the Presbyterian and other Protestant denominations played in advocating an end to child labor, the six-day week, occupational safety, a living wage, and other concerns that a "Christ-like God" was believed to want for all Americans.

2. That the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy initiate a survey of key Christian principles to guide 21st century Presbyterians and others in addressing major and likely future concerns, such as the lack of health insurance for 44 million Americans, the outsourcing of jobs to countries without human rights or environmental safeguards, and the impact of growing economic inequality on our democracy, using cost-effective measures such as the Presbyterian Panel, literature surveys, and the use of volunteer experts, and informed by past General Assembly statements.

3. That these bodies and other appropriate agencies of our denomination develop recommendations for the 217th General Assembly (2006) concerning the possible goals, basic commitments, and effectiveness of an updated social creed for the 21st century.

Rationale

We take for granted today many of the gains won by concerned Christians in previous generations, people who helped make our country a land of opportunity and a beacon of hope to the world. The goal of the 1908 creed was clear: "...to lift the crushing burdens of the poor, and to reduce the hardships and uphold the dignity of labor, this Council sends the greeting of human brotherhood and the pledge of sympathy and of help in a cause which belongs to all who follow Christ." The creed briefly developed fourteen positive points: "For the suppression of the 'sweating system'"; "For a release from employment one day in seven"; "For a living wage as a minimum"; "For suitable provision for the old age..."; and ends, "For the abatement of poverty."

Certainly the 1908 creed was idealistic, but it was also very concrete. It gained force because it prompted prayer and discussion, not only in the churches, but in government and industry. The church used its voice on matters of principle and was respected for it. The topics of industrialization, urbanization, and mass immigration were not simple. The churches—with strong Presbyterian leadership—helped raised the standards so that families could live decently in a country dedicated to more than unlimited greed or consumption. The churches themselves were helped indirectly, as churches for the educated middle class depend on there being an educated middle class, even in a high-tech economy.

The model of a clear statement of Christian principles still seems valuable, especially in this climate of globalization, secularization, and the host of special interests using the influence of wealth on politics. Jesus' call, in Matthew 5 and Luke 4, remains our standard and bottom line. Jesus was also not afraid to take the lead. This is a way for the church to stand up for Christ's values, and to focus on those basics in a nonpartisan way.

Charles Brewster—Presbytery of New York City

Richard Murdoch—Presbytery of Hudson River

Item 08-19

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

That the 216th General Assembly (2004), recognizing that one of the great ends of the church (G-1.0200) is the preservation of the truth, do the following:

- 1. Affirm the historical Christian faith and declare that the novel, *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown, contains many distortions that can lead people to question their faith and be weakened in their belief.**
- 2. Call upon churches to use novels like this one as instruments of education and re-education into Christian essentials.**

Rationale

The Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown continues to be the number one selling novel in America, having sold more than six million copies. Although it is plainly a novel, it opens with this statement (in part): “FACT: all descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate” (page 1). Many Christians and non-Christians are being misled about the nature of Jesus Christ, the history of the church, and the basis of our historical faith by this book.

For instance, on page 233 the character Teabing declares, “Jesus’ establishment as ‘the son of God’ was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicaea ... until *that* moment in history, Jesus was viewed by his followers as a mortal prophet ... a great and powerful man, but a *man* nonetheless. A mortal” (italics as in the novel). The Gospels and Paul’s epistles affirmed the divinity of Jesus long before the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. (See Col. 1:15–20; John 1:1, 14; Matt. 16:16.) Many early church leaders such as Ignatius (105 A.D.), Clement (150 A.D.), and Justin Martyr (160 A.D.) also affirm the divinity of Jesus.

This is just one example of the numerous distortions and outright heretical views expressed in the novel. Far from being harmless, one family could not reaffirm their faith because of being caught up in the distortions of the book. Others have been distressed, puzzled, and alarmed by the statements of this book.

To preserve the truth, we must stand up against falsehood and point out error. This book is doing harm to the Body of Christ and the church should say so and warn people about the distortions presented here.

Ted Worley—Cherokee Presbytery
Pat Mason—Presbytery of Pittsburgh

Item 10-13

Commissioners' Resolution. On Seeking a Thorough, Calm, and Reasoned Review of the USA Patriot ACT.

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) instruct the Stated Clerk and the Moderator to express to the president of the United States and the United States Congress the desire that

- 1. there should be a careful, unhurried review of all parts of the USA Patriot Act;**
- 2. there should be no rush to renew aspects of the USA Patriot Act, which are not due to expire until December 2005;**
- 3. the clear division between intelligence and criminal investigation should be restored;**
- 4. the wording of the renewed/revisited USA Patriot Act should grant the government only those powers that we, as a people acting through our representatives, actually intend that the government shall use.**

Rationale

There is no reason based on the threat of terrorist action to rush to renew the nonpermanent provisions of the USA Patriot Act eighteen months before their expiration dates.

Given the haste with which the USA Patriot Act was approved, a complete review of all aspects of the USA Patriot Act is called for.

It is the nature of nations to do whatever they need to do in order to inform themselves fully about perceived threats. Therefore, if the distinction between intelligence gathering and criminal investigation is breached, individuals have no rights in the areas of free speech, free association, privacy, and security.

It has been suggested that the USA Patriot Act does not need stringent review because some parts have not been put into action yet. Such an argument goes against original historical basis of our Bill of Rights. We have a Bill of Rights because in 1789 a significant number of Americans were not willing to ratify a constitution on the basis that the resulting government would honor their rights even though those rights were not spelled out. A right that we have only as long as wise and benevolent leaders in Washington choose not to violate it, it is not a right.

Margaret Anne Fohl—Presbytery of Philadelphia
Justin M. Johnson—Presbytery of Pittsburgh

Item 10-14

Commissioners' Resolution. 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 216th General Assembly (2004) direct the General Assembly Council to establish a Media Committee that will create and maintain a list of television programs, movies, video games, music, and other media considered violent or with inappropriate sexual content for the purpose of encouraging church members to make calls, write letters, and, if necessary, boycott those listed. The committee will be composed of one member from each presbytery and a coordinator in Louisville, Kentucky, and with a simple majority vote, create and maintain a list of offending programs. Each committee member shall distribute updated reports at their presbytery meetings containing the names, along with comments, about media on the list. The list will also be made available to the News Service editor. All communication and voting shall be done by e-mail.

Rationale

The eroding of moral standards in our country is evident in the actions from those holding positions of responsibility in the public and corporate world to children in the classrooms and playgrounds across America. For more than fifty years, the PC(USA) has been concerned and has continually advocated for the reduction of sex, violence, and other immoral content in media. We haven't been heard. This resolution is a plan of action, a plan that *identifies, involves* and *influences*. The Media Committee will do the *identification*. *Involvement* starts when the offending program, CD, video game, etc. is reported to the presbyteries. Presbyteries in turn inform pastors, who then carry the information to their congregation for member *involvement*. The church members will then be encouraged to exert their *influence* through calling, letter writing, or sending e-mails to producers and sponsors informing them of their displeasure and their intent to abstain from viewing or buying the offending product. Profit should not replace moral standards. Our families and children deserve better.

Inappropriate material in the media has been a concern of the church as far back as the 1947 General Assembly and was again addressed in the General Assemblies of 1949, 1953, 1956, 1977, 1984, and 1992. It is addressed again in this the 216th General Assembly (2004) in the "Transforming Families" paper by quoting, as written below, from the 1993 overture to "bring the church's influence to bear so that the media will act to strengthen moral values" (*Minutes*, 1993, Part I, p. 13, Item 10-06, Part 3.i.

In 1993, the following statement was made (*Minutes*, 1993, Part I, p. 884, *Overture 93-54*):

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):

1. Calls upon its members, congregations, and governing bodies to join in condemnation of immorality communicated through the media;
2. Shall develop and implement a plan of action for the General Assembly, the presbyteries, and the churches through their members to "bring the church's influence to bear so that the media will act to strengthen moral values." The plan shall address ways and means to stimulate members of the church to act in support of this objective and shall address whether the following approaches, among others, would have such influence to
 - a. identify the moral or immoral content of specific media presentation in order to assist parents in directing the activities of their children, and
 - b. influence producers and sponsors to cease producing media that emphasize, promote, or condone immoral conduct...

In 1995, the General Assembly Council responded to this overture (*Minutes*, 1995, Part I, p. 324) without creating a plan for implementation.

Phyllis Spielmann—Presbytery of Los Ranchos
Drew Smith—Presbytery of South Alabama

Item 10-15

Commissioners' Resolution. Denial of Civil Rights in Virginia.

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) urge the legislature and the people of Virginia to reconsider the recently passed law that will end all contractual rights between same-sex partners, and to direct the Stated Clerk to communicate to the appropriate officials in the Commonwealth of Virginia the church's support of equal access to civil rights to all.

Rationale

The 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), while enjoying the hospitality of the great Commonwealth of Virginia, is nonetheless aware that we are in the days moving toward a radical denial of civil rights to gays and lesbian person. This new legislation—due to take effect July 1st while the 216th General Assembly (2004) is in session—will ban any “partnership contract or other arrangement between persons of the same sex purporting to bestow the privileges or obligations of marriage.”

This assembly notes with shock and dismay the far-reaching effort to reject any claims of gay and lesbian persons to basic respect or legal standing for their long-term, committed relationships.

We continue as a church to deal with differences concerning the legitimacy of marriage for same-sex couples, and have disagreements about the full participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons of faith in the leaderships of our church. Nevertheless, as a denomination we have been committed “to work for the passage of laws that prohibit discrimination in the areas of employment, housing, and public accommodations based on the sexual orientation of a person” since the 190th General Assembly (1978) of the PCUSA. Additionally, the 214th General Assembly (2002) reaffirmed and expanded this stance, saying, “there is no legal, social, moral, or biblical justification for denying lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons access to the basic requirements of human social existence.”

John Rhodes—Presbytery of New York City
William Dummer—Presbytery of Milwaukee

Item 10-16

Commissioners' Resolution. On Supporting the Federal Marriage Amendment.

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) direct the Stated Clerk and the Presbyterian Washington Office—and encourage all governing bodies and church members—to communicate to Congress and, as appropriate, state legislatures the following:

- 1. The historic and continuing support of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for the institution of marriage, defined as “a civil contract between a woman and a man” (Book of Order, W-4.9001).**
- 2. The desire of the church to see that definition safeguarded in civil law by all appropriate means, including the Federal Marriage Amendment now proposed in Congress.**

Rationale

The Federal Marriage Amendment has been introduced in both houses of Congress, with more than 100 co-sponsors from both major political parties. The text of the proposed amendment (Senate Joint Resolution 30) reads: “Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman. Neither this Constitution nor the constitution of any State shall be construed to require that marriage or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon any union other than the union of a man and a woman.”

It has become necessary to take measures to preserve the definition of marriage under civil law as “the union of a man and a woman.” Laws regarding marriage and family life have traditionally been the domains of the state legislatures, elected by the people of the various states. To date, no legislature has acted to redefine marriage under the laws of its state. A large majority of the American people is opposed to any redefinition of marriage. Nevertheless, a small contingent of activists is on the verge of redefining marriage for the entire nation. The strategy has been to file civil suits, alleging that state and federal constitutions require the abolition of legal distinctions between marriage and other sexual relationships. As a result of one such suit, four justices on the Supreme Judicial Court in one state have compelled the recognition of “same-sex marriages.”

Proponents of such marriages have announced their intention of asserting “federal constitutional claims” that would require all other states to recognize these “same-sex marriages.” Meanwhile, a polygamist in Utah has filed suit, lodging similar constitutional objections to the limitation of marriage to two persons. Legal observers think it highly likely that some litigants will succeed in finding sympathetic judges who will impose a redefinition of marriage all across the United States.

Many Americans would be happy to avoid making a “federal case” out of marriage. However, it is the advocates for non-marital, sexual relationships that have turned the debate over marriage into a federal and constitutional question. For this reason, the remedy to preserve marriage must be federal and constitutional. At this point, only an amendment to the U.S. Constitution can ensure that the historic and universal definition of marriage under civil law will be upheld.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) defines marriage clearly and succinctly in its *Constitution*. The Directory for Worship declares marriage to be “a civil contract between a woman and a man.” It adds that “marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being of the entire human family” (Book of Order, W-4.9001). The rites of marriage found in the Book of Common Worship affirm the benefits that God intends marriage should bring not only to the man and woman who marry, but also to the church that blesses their marriage and the civil society that recognizes it.

Moreover, *The Book of Confessions* teaches that marriage “was instituted by the Lord God himself, who blessed it most bountifully, and willed man and woman to cleave one to the other inseparably” (Second Helvetic Confession, 5.246); that marriage is “an institution ordained of God, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, established and sanctified for the happiness and welfare of mankind into which spiritual and physical union one man and one

woman enter” (The Westminster Confession of Faith, UPCUSA version, 6.131); and that it “exemplifies in a basic way God’s ordering of the interpersonal life for which he created mankind” (Confession of 1967, 9.47).

There are many other valuable human relationships. But marriage is unique in the mysterious physical and spiritual union of man and woman that it constitutes and in the combination of personal and religious and social purposes that it serves. Neither our Reformed church tradition nor our U.S. legal tradition has treated any other human relationship as the equivalent of marriage. In many other cultures and religions around the world, too, the marriage of man and woman has been recognized as a special relationship of great importance.

Recent sociological research has confirmed the many benefits of marriage. The report on “Transforming Families” from the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy states: “Marriage remains a blessing for most people. Married people continue to report higher levels of happiness and health than do single individuals. They live longer, are less likely to engage in risky behavior, and show fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression. Marriage continues to provide an economic benefit as two adults share resources. Household incomes of married people are higher, on average, than those of single people. . . . Moreover, family research provides strong evidence that, on average, children do better in healthy, intact two-parent (biological) families than they do in step-families, adopted families, or single-parent families” (p. 23).

State recognition of marriage expresses a public policy preference that a mother and a father, committed to each other for life, should rear children. Any redefinition of marriage would vitiate that public policy preference, so crucial in shaping the next generation of citizens.

General Assemblies have asserted “the need for the church to stand for just treatment of homosexual persons in our society in regard to their civil liberties, equal rights and protection under the law from social and economic discrimination which is due all its citizens” (Minutes, PCUS, 1979, Part I) and to support their “access to the basic requirements of human social existence” (Minutes, UPCUSA, 1978, Part I). The 208th General Assembly (1996) affirmed “the Presbyterian church’s historic definition of marriage as a civil contract between a man and a woman,” while urging the Stated Clerk “to explore the feasibility of entering friend-of-the-court briefs and supporting legislation in favor of giving civil rights to same-sex partners.” Nothing in this resolution contradicts these statements of earlier General Assemblies. The proposed Federal Marriage Amendment would not prevent any state legislature from enacting benefits for same-sex partners. Nor would it prevent private employers from providing such benefits.

Finally, and perhaps more importantly, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has been sending confusing signals on this subject. In spite of the church’s historic stance on marriage and in spite of a clear word in March of 2004 from Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick, which reaffirms that stance, the PC(USA)’s Washington Office has been vigorously lobbying congress to disapprove the Federal Marriage Amendment. Those staff members are basing their actions on the fact that, when given the opportunity, the 214th General Assembly (2002) did not choose to support a commissioners’ resolution that would have endorsed the amendment. In fact, many commissioners simply saw no need for the church to take a position on a piece of legislation designed to address what was then a hypothetical future situation. The commissioners in 2002 also chose not to speak a word against the Federal Marriage Amendment, yet this one entity of the PC(USA) has interpreted their work as having done so.

The 216th General Assembly (2004) should resolve this confusion by clearly affirming the church’s long-standing conviction regarding marriage, which can thereby give appropriate guidance to the Washington Office and other General Assembly entities. That is the purpose of this resolution.

William C. Teng—Presbytery of National Capital
Patricia Mason—Presbytery of Pittsburgh

Item 10-17

Commissioners' Resolution. Recognize Civil Marriage 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).
- Celebrates that full participation and access to representation in the decisions of the church is guaranteed in the *Book of Order*, G-4.0403.
- Declares that all persons are entitled to equal treatment under the law (Constitution of the United States of America).
- Recognizes that thousands of benefits, privileges, and responsibilities that are provided to married persons by federal, state, and local laws are unjustly denied to those joined in marriage or civil unions of same-gender persons and asks that such discrimination by all federal, state, and local civil jurisdictions be eliminated.
- Rejects laws that deny the right to a civil marriage to persons based on their gender or sexual preference.
- Urges state legislations to change state laws to include the right of same-gender persons to civil marriage and, thereby, to extend to them all the benefits, privileges, and responsibilities of civil marriage, 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 marriage and to change federal laws to recognize all civil marriages licensed and solemnized under state to apply in all federal laws that provide benefits, privileges, and/or responsibilities to married persons.
- Urges Congress to reject any proposed amendment to the federal Constitution that would prohibit the marriage of same-gender persons.

Todd B. Freeman—Presbytery of Grace

Gordon V. Webster—Presbytery of Genesee Valley

Item 11-06

Commissioner's Resolution. On Reaffirming Ethical Values of Fetal Research.

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) reaffirm the “Ethical Guidelines for Fetal Tissue and Stem Cell Research” approved by the 213th General Assembly (2001) in order to add the faithful voice of the PC(USA) to the rapidly progressive debate about fetal tissue and stem cell research.

Rationale

In light of current national and international discussions pertaining to stem cell research, it is important our denominational voice be once again heard. And as we remember former President Ronald Reagan and share in expressing our compassion and condolences to Nancy Reagan, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), through its General Assembly, should make our feelings visible by affirming the theological and moral support of the “Ethical Guidelines for Fetal Tissue and Stem Cell Research.” As noted in the overture presented in the 213th General Assembly (2001), the words of the Prophet Micah, sets a broad and critical stage for the theological perspectives of our denomination to be heard, “... what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8, NRSV).

It is desirable that the hope of many may be rekindled in light of tremendous strides in bio/medical research involving stem cells. The research community continues to fund stem cell research through many diverse sources, one of them being pre-embryonic in form. The most recent research testifies to the continued discovery of a multitude of sources for human stem cells. The theological and ethical concerns previously developed will assure our denomination's voice in this rapidly progressive debate.

Nancy Reagan has pleaded with the current United States of America administration to increase funding and encourage stem cell research so that other patients and their families may so reap the benefits of healing from diseases such as Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, spinal cord injuries, and other conditions that have been considered hopeless in the past. “A lot of people who could be helped are not being helped,” Mrs. Reagan has stated. It is hoped that our presence in Washington, D.C., and our voice being heard in the ongoing political debate can result in many lives being improved through this applied research and future medical advancements. Our ability to speak with a unanimous and prophetic voice will provide hope and eventually cure to many people whose voices have been lost to the other priority sounds of our culture.

This commissioners' resolution is submitted with great hope and prayers for all those who suffer.

Kim L. Nelson—Presbytery of San Jose
Wendy Warner—Presbytery of Stockton

Item 12-09

Commissioners' Resolution. On Establishing a Palestine Working Group.

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) do the following:

1. Direct the General Assembly Council to do the following:

a. Establish a Palestine Working Group to develop strategies (in consultation with representatives of the affected communities) aimed at changing the conditions that erode the humanity of Palestinians living on the West Bank and in Gaza.

b. Ensure that the working group is not bound to programmatic or policy tasks, but rather, is free to counter the harsh realities of humiliation, economic deprivation, and collective punishment experienced by Palestinians under the occupation. For example, Palestinian contractors could be hired to build housing for displaced or disadvantaged Palestinians, medical professionals and mental health experts could be trained and hired from members of the Palestinian population, a business representative could be included as a member of the Palestine Working Group, Oikocredit could be tapped for help in small business opportunities for women whose husbands have been detained or killed, and other creative ideas for economic development and local empowerment could be explored.

2. Instruct the Moderator of the General Assembly to appoint the five-member working group for four years, at which time its effectiveness will be evaluated by a team of Palestinian pastors and elected members of the General Assembly Council, as well as the denomination's area coordinator to the Middle East. Results of its work must be measurable (for example, the number of jobs created, the number of houses built by local contractors, etc.).

Rationale

Our Christian sisters and brothers in Palestine have expressed a deep sense of abandonment by Christians in the United States as the Christian population is being decimated in the very birthplace of Christianity.

The support that does exist is often limited to statements that often do not address the basic living needs of Palestinians who are treated as aliens in their own land.

Our new moderator, Rick Ufford-Chase, has challenged us to go out into the world, not merely talking about our faith, but actually taking bold strides to act on it.

The General Assembly has joined with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to declare that we would "cross ten seas" to bolster the fellowship of Christians worldwide, "that all may have life in fullness" (John 10:10).

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has long-standing policies supporting the right of Palestinians to self-determination. It has directed the Stated Clerk to advocate for peace. It has conducted travel seminars, urged its members to pray and to write Congress. It has put mission personnel in place.

However, there are limited concrete ways of addressing basic unmet needs in a situation that is rapidly deteriorating. The church has demonstrated a desire to open itself to new ways of hearing and responding to the needs of persons in the world, and there is a need to respond in untraditional ways, "to hear the voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace" (*The Book of Confessions*, A Brief Statement of Faith, 10.4, lines 70–71).

The study and reflection guide approved by the 211th General Assembly (1999), called "Transforming Churches and Society Through Encounters with New Neighbors," calls churches and Christians to seek justice for

refugees and asylum seekers, and to advocate for the rights of displaced persons. The United Nations “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” has also affirmed that everyone has the right to leave and return to their own country, to claim their own nationality, and to have a standard of living within their homeland adequate to support themselves and their families. The Reverend Mitri Raheb, in his book *I Am a Palestinian Christian*, has clearly articulated the plight of the Palestinian Christian community, which is being decimated by emigration (55 percent or 175,000 of the Palestinian Christians reside in the diaspora, compared to 145,000 still living in Palestine). Once having left, they are often denied the right to return, losing their right to a homeland.

There have been other successful models of proactive actions that has resulted in concrete, measurable improvement in the midst of devastating conflict (see, for example, the approach taken by the Northern Ireland Working Group in recruiting businesses to invest in the troubled cities in the 1990s, thereby bringing economic progress for these communities and hope as well as jobs for their residents).

For further information from the perspective of a Palestinian Christian, we commend to the committee assigned to study this resolution and the General Assembly the book referenced above by Rev. Raheb (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1995).

Cynthia A. Jennison—Presbytery of Ohio Valley
Gilda Bonnemere—Presbytery of Palisades

Item 12-10

Commissioners' Resolution. On Calling on the Stated Clerk to Justify His Endorsement of the World Council of Churches and Reviewing PC(USA) Relationship with the World Council of Churches.

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) do the following:

1. Call the Stated Clerk, the Reverend Clifton Kirkpatrick, to define the intention of the World Council of Churches' (WCC) request to "prosecute," to discuss the relevant Scriptures, confessions, General Assembly Council (GAC) directives, and General Assembly statements in justifying his endorsement, and to defend his authority as Stated Clerk to make such endorsements that are contrary to the stated position of the General Assembly in regards to Item 12-08 of the 215th General Assembly (2003) of the PC(USA) (*Minutes, 2003, Part I, pp. 656ff*).

2. Review the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) relationship with the World Council of Churches at each General Assembly through the committee charged with that work to ensure the WCC's actions and positions more closely represent those of the majority of PC(USA). [Note: This recommendation was sent to 06 Assembly Committee on Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations as Item 06-12.]

Rationale

The 215th General Assembly (2003) of the PC(USA) approved the statement entitled "Iraq and Beyond" as a resource for study and reflection; and acknowledged that there are ongoing disagreements regarding the war and urges tolerance for differing opinions.

"Iraq and Beyond" clearly states that the position of the PC(USA) is "to encourage a process of reflection, discussion, and understanding . . ." (*Minutes, 2003, Part I, p. 656*). [Editor's Note: This quote originally came from a statement of the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, which followed the recommendation section and was rationale for writing "Iraq and Beyond." That statement reads as follows: "The U.S.-led war against Iraq, the motives, dynamics, and process leading up to it, and the consequences that will flow from it have presented our church and its members with serious issues around which much reflection, theological debate, and prayerful discussion is yet to be done. To encourage a process of reflection, discussion, and understanding, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy made the above recommendations."]

"Iraq and Beyond" explains that, "The church must urge every jurisdiction within the land, from the federal government to the local governing body, to make every effort to protect the right of disagreement, to sustain the civility of policy debate, and to tolerate demonstrations in support of all viewpoints" (*Ibid, p. 658*).

"Iraq and Beyond" goes further to say, "The anguish of those who feel that this war is unjustifiable and the conviction of those who support the war must be acknowledged as legitimate moral responses that should not be condemned" (*Ibid*).

"Iraq and Beyond" emphasizes the need for continued debate on differences of moral judgment regarding U.S. military doctrine "with poise and graceful thoughtfulness."

"Iraq and Beyond" warns of tabling debate "for the sake of maintaining an assumed sense of peace," which is contrary to "American political, social, and religious life."

In contrast, the World Council of Churches issued a "Statement on Iraq," which clearly states that the war was an "immoral" and "illegal resort to war." Additionally, the WCC's "Statement on Iraq" calls for the United Nations to "promptly investigate" and "prosecute" the democratically elected officials of the coalition forces in Iraq. Finally note, the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, the Reverend Clifton Kirkpatrick, endorsed the WCC's "Statement on Iraq" during the 8/26/03–9/6/03 meeting of the WCC without the consent of the General Assembly or in consultation with its council.

David Andrew IV—Presbytery of Glacier

Ted Worley—Presbytery of Cherokee

Item 13-08

Commissioner's Resolution—On the Murders of Women in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) do the following:

- 1. Instruct the Stated Clerk to express the concern, dismay, and grief of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to Governor Patricio Martinez Garcia, State of Chihuahua, Mexico, over the systematic murder and disappearance of large numbers of young women in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, over the last eleven years.**
- 2. Request that wherever they are able, representatives of Pasos de Fe Border Ministry, our bi-national ministry in the Ciudad Juarez area, express the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s deepest sympathy to the families and friends of the more than 350 young women murdered and the more than 4,500 young women who have disappeared.**
- 3. Instruct the General Assembly Council to communicate our concern to appropriate ecclesiastical partners and civil institutions to help focus international attention on the violence and marshal regional and national support for competent, timely, and complete investigation.**
- 4. Direct the General Assembly Council to participate in a service to be planned by *Pesas de Fe*, the presbyteries of Sierra Blanca and Tres Rios, in dialogue with the church in Mexico and other ecumenical partners to join in public witness and worship that cries out for justice and claims the promise of the Resurrection.**

Rationale

The number of murders of women in Ciudad Juarez over the last eleven years range in estimate from 269 to more than 350, and as many as 4,500 women are said to be missing. The majority suffered sexual violence before being killed. In 1990, 2.1 women were murdered per every 100,000 women in the state of Chihuahua. By 2003, that figure rose to 4.7 per 100,000. There is evidence of a pattern in that particular types of women have been targeted—most were between 13 and 22 years of age and were either students or wage earners at low-paying jobs. More than 70 percent of these murders were by strangulation or beating, and the manner of disposal of the bodies indicates a predetermined pattern by which victims were selected and murdered.

Public confidence in the ability of police and government authorities to investigate and prosecute these crimes has collapsed. Amnesty International reports that investigations of murdered women in Chihuahua State has been marred by negligence, police tampering and destruction of evidence, and accusations of official corruption. Both the major political parties of Mexico have reneged on campaign promises to pursue and solve these cases. Further, the impunity of a large number of perpetrators sends to the public a message that violence against women is condoned, tacitly endorsing an attitude that possibly perpetuates such crime.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has an interest and investment in the Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua/ El Paso, Texas/Sunland Park, New Mexico, area through Presbyterian Border Ministry and our project sited there. Our joint ministry and witness with partners in the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico calls us to concern for the physical safety, mental and spiritual welfare, and public good of all the citizens of this part of our shared international border. Our common witness may serve to curb the politicization of crime, urge effective intervention by authorities responsible for justice, and bring the consolation of solidarity to a troubled people.

Phyllis Zumwalt—Presbytery of Sierra Blanca
Linda T. Martinez—Presbytery of Tres Rios

Item 13-09

Commissioners' Resolution. On Opposition to the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) #07.

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) do the following:

- 1. Declare our opposition to the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA).**
- 2. Direct the Stated Clerk to communicate with the president of the United States and members of Congress the opposition of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to the Central American Free Trade Agreement.**
- 3. Direct the General Assembly Council, in consultation with borderlands synods and presbyteries, to prepare a study document on the Central American Free Trade Agreement, with emphasis on those sections that negatively affect our partners in Central America.**
- 4. Urge synods, presbyteries, and congregations to study the impact of the Central America Free Trade Agreement on our sisters and brothers in Central America and to communicate their concerns to members of Congress.**
- 5. Direct the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment to explore the implications of CAFTA and advise the General Assembly.**

Rationale

In 2003, numerous religious, humanitarian, development, labor, and public policy organizations called on the United States to honor a set of standards of fairness and justice in trade negotiations with Central America.¹ CAFTA, as negotiated, will harm, rather than help, farmers and workers in Central America who are struggling to overcome poverty. We believe as well that CAFTA will not benefit ordinary people in the United States. The CAFTA will not contribute to equitable, just, and sustainable development in the United States or Central America.

The following impacts would occur in Central American countries and in the United States:

1. *Central American Countries*
 - a. Destroy subsistence farming.
 - b. Create a threat to food security.
 - c. Create inadequate environmental protections.
 - d. Cause negative impact on fair trade enterprises and cooperatives.
 - e. Erode essential services.
 - f. Create loss of national sovereignty.
2. *United States*
 - a. Increase forced migration of people from Central America to the United States.
 - b. Increase militarization of the border between Mexico and the United States.
 - c. Export additional jobs from the United States.

The Central America Free Trade Agreement builds on the foundation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which went into effect in 1994. Ten years of NAFTA are indicative of some of what can be

expected under CAFTA. Additional information is available online at www.citizenstrade.org, which includes signatures from forty-eight organizations, including the PC(USA) Washington Office.

1. Under NAFTA, more than a million Mexican farmers and their families have had to abandon their land and livelihood because they are unable to compete with subsidized food crops from the United States. They migrate to cities, where jobs are scarce and wages low, or migrate to the United States, through dangerous border crossings.

2. Between 1994 and 2003, the percentage of the Mexican population living in poverty rose from 58 to 79 percent. This represents a 36 percent increase in the poverty suffered. For women-headed households, poverty increased by 50 percent. Increasing poverty both arises out of, and leads to, lower wages, sweatshop conditions, deterioration of health, increased marginalization, and instability.

3. Food security has been threatened by the export to Mexico of subsidized corporate foodstuffs from the U.S. and Canada, undercutting local producers in Mexico.

4. Threats to the environment have increased as industrialized agriculture has replaced small farms, and export-driven economic growth has led to over-use of natural resources. Dumping of hazardous wastes near factories has caused birth defects in children and other illnesses.

5. Foreign corporations have been allowed to bring lawsuits against governments that pass labor, public health, or environmental laws that reduce corporate profits.

In addition, the Central American Free Trade Agreement:

1. does not include adequate enforcement for violations of internationally recognized labor and environmental standards;

2. threatens essential services, in that it promotes privatization and deregulation of services including education, health care, postal service, construction, energy, transportation, and water supply;

3. specifically discriminates against products of nongovernment organizations and producer cooperatives. This would include fair-trade enterprises such as Equal Exchange and Just Coffee, which provide a living wage to farmers and producers.

The trade agreement was not negotiated within a framework of democratic accountability and did not include broad-based citizen participation. The text was only made public after the negotiations were completed. There were no social reviews or impact assessments by independent bodies on the potential impact of CAFTA on workers, people living in poverty, women, indigenous and ethnic groups, or the environment. The CID Initiative, a Central American coalition that participated in a side room of the negotiations, called for a moratorium mid-way through the process, due to the limited participation.

WORKER RIGHTS: The agreement merely states, “[a] Party shall not fail to effectively enforce its labor laws, through a sustained or recurring course of action or inaction, in a manner affecting trade between the Parties.”² For countries where labor violations are egregious and systemic, this clause is insufficient to guarantee protection of workers’ rights. Although fines may be levied against a trading partner, the money collected is not required to be used to remedy the labor rights violation, but is designated vaguely for “appropriate” labor initiatives. Suitable labor initiatives are never defined. The CAFTA allows a trading partner to re-impose import duties if the violating government does not pay the fine, but not for failure to correct the labor rights violation. The labor provision in CAFTA will also replace the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), which includes a petition process, leading to the loss of a useful, if modest enforcement mechanism. Finally, no protection systems are established for rural or urban workers adversely affected by the trade agreement.

AGRICULTURE: Central American countries will be required to eliminate import tariffs on rice, beans, yellow corn, and dairy products, staple products on which the livelihoods of 5.5 million small and medium producers

depend. The U.S. refused to negotiate the agricultural subsidies and supports it provides that enable U.S. agribusinesses to export goods at below the costs of production, undermining Central American farmers. Without the compensating protection of tariffs, Central America's doors will be opened to the dumping of U.S. farm products, risking massive displacement of rural workers and increased food insecurity in Central America.

TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE & THE RIGHT TO ACCESS TO MEDICINE: CAFTA provisions on intellectual property threaten to place HIV/AIDS treatment beyond the reach of many Central Americans in need. CAFTA provides for expanded patent rights for brand-name medicines and new restrictions on using inexpensive generic versions. This will drive up the cost of lifesaving drugs, and delay or obstruct generic competition. It will become almost impossible for Central Americans to acquire affordable medicines for HIV/AIDS and other diseases. In addition, CAFTA will place restrictions on Central America farmers' ability to use and save certain seeds, undermining traditional agricultural practices. The CAFTA goes beyond World Trade Organization (WTO) regulations, and violates the spirit of the Doha Agreement and the Convention on Biodiversity.

INVESTMENT RULES: Under CAFTA, national development needs will be secondary to the rights of foreign investors. A USTR fact sheet on free trade with Central America states that U.S. investors will enjoy "in almost all circumstances the right to establish, acquire and operate investments in Central American countries on an equal footing with local investors, and with investors of other countries."³ Accordingly, governments will not be able to harness foreign investment for economic development strategies that promote domestically oriented growth or support new domestic industries. "Furthermore, CAFTA includes NAFTA-like investor-to-state lawsuits, which will allow corporations to sue governments over regulations that they believe infringe on their business interests." Finally, investors do not have binding responsibility to comply with International Labor Organization (ILO) standards.

ESSENTIAL PUBLIC SERVICES: CAFTA negotiators did not exempt essential public services from the national treatment standards. Governments will lose the flexibility to subsidize these services and guarantee adequate provision of these services to citizens.

As Presbyterians, we affirm the right of all people to meet their basic needs, including enough food, clean water, housing, healthcare, and education, all of which presuppose a living wage. We affirm the right of farmers to make an adequate living on their lands, and of local businesses to succeed without the threat of competition of large foreign corporations. We affirm the rights of nations to set their own standards for labor, public health, and the environment, without the threat of lawsuits by corporations. We support trade that is fair. We therefore stand in opposition to the Central American Free Trade Agreement.

Endnotes

1. These standards were expressed in two documents: "Principles of Unity on Trade with Central America," October 2003, and "Equitable Trade and Central America: Does CAFTA Measure Up?," July 2003.
2. See <http://www.ustr.gov/new/fta/Cafta/text/index.htm>).
3. See <http://www.ustr.gov/new/fta/Cafta/2003-12-17-factsheet.pdf>.

Juan Sarmiento—Presbytery of San Fernando
David Winters—Presbytery of the Pacific

Item 13-10

Commissioners' Resolution. On Rescinding Policies Regarding Cuba That Cause Hardship to Families.

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) call upon the U.S. Department of State to rescind the recent policies that restrict travel to Cuba and limit family contacts, by restoring the following regulations:

- 1. Enable annual visits to Cuba.**
- 2. Extend travel privileges to extended family members.**
- 3. Remove restrictions on the amount of money permitted to be sent to family members, including extended family.**
- 4. Permit travel in the case of illness or hardship.**

Rationale

New State Department resolutions radically restrict travel and family support by Cuban Americans, which cause hardship and raise constitutional questions regarding the right of Americans to unrestricted travel.

Diane Lacey Winley—Presbytery of New York City

Jeff Krehbiel—Presbytery of National Capital

Item 13-11

Commissioners' Resolution. Regarding Adult Basic Education

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) direct the General Assembly Council to establish a commission on adult basic education to foster projects and programs to functionally illiterate adults, most of whom are in developing countries.

Rationale

While the Presbyterian church has traditionally sponsored education for children and has emphasized higher education for leaders and the elite of society, the poor, illiterate adults have been left to remain in ignorance and poverty. This imbalance needs to be corrected by a concerted effort to give mothers and fathers an opportunity to become fully human and have life in its fullness. Illiteracy is dehumanizing.

While formal education for children is a long-term process, non-formal education for adults is a short-term achievement, which is both efficient and economical. In six to nine months, for only one hour per day, a mother or father can reach the third to fifth grade reading and writing levels. Thus, a man can either get a better job or do his own job better. A mother reads booklets on preventive health measures for herself and for her family, boiling the drinking water and feeding her family with a more nutritious diet.

Educated parents can read God's Word in private and family devotions. Elders can study the Bible as well as other literature to have a fullness in their ministry.

Formal education without non-formal education for adults and parents leads to tremendous wastage in educational inputs. Up to 50 percent of children of school-going age are not sent to school by their parents. And up to 75 percent of the students in the primary classes drop out and become functionally illiterate. However, newly literate parents realize the value of education and not only send both their boys and girls to school but sacrifice to keep them in school. In many societies, only one out of ten children who start school finish high school.

Just as the Commission on Higher Education has enabled many potential leaders to escape their ghetto-type societies and find jobs in developed countries, a commission on adult basic education will enable many of the poor laity to become functionally literate and continue to contribute to their own societies.

May the Presbyterian church again become a pioneer in education by filling the void and give adult basic education a top priority, especially for developing countries around the world.

Edwin Carlson—Presbytery of Beaver-Butler

Ronald McKissick—Presbytery of Beaver-Butler

Item 13-12

Commissioners' Resolution. On Commissioning 2005 Mission Co-Workers During 100th New Wilmington Missionary Conference.

That the 216th General Assembly (2004), meeting in Richmond, Virginia, from June 26–July 3, 2004, direct that the commissioning of mission co-workers in 2005 shall take place during the meeting of the 100th New Wilmington Missionary Conference, July 23–30, 2005.

Rationale

The General Assembly has annually commissioned all mission co-workers.

In 2005, the General Assembly is not scheduled to meet.

Prior to the 1958 merger of the United Presbyterian Church in North America (UPNA) and the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA), missionaries serving the UPNA were commissioned at the New Wilmington Missionary Conference on the campus of Westminster College in New Wilmington, Pennsylvania.

The celebration of the 100th New Wilmington Missionary Conference will take place in July of 2005.

These events provide an opportunity to return to our historic roots.

The New Wilmington Missionary Conference is the only national, Presbyterian-related, annual mission conference.

The New Wilmington Missionary Conference is the logical place for the commissioning of mission co-workers of The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in 2005 when the General Assembly is not in session.

Approximately 2,000 people attend some portion of the New Wilmington Missionary Conference.

Pamela Maloney—Presbytery of Shenango

David Breckenridge—Presbytery of Western New York

Item 14-15

Commissioners' Resolution. Benefits Feasibility Study

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) request the Board of Pensions to explore the feasibility of implementing the policy of the church by providing domestic partners in long-term committed relationships the same benefits accorded to married couples, and to report its findings to the 217th General Assembly (2006).

Rationale

The 117th General Assembly (1977) of the Presbyterian Church in the United States affirmed “the need for the Church to stand for just treatment of homosexual persons in our society in regard to their civil liberties, equal rights, and protection under the law from social and economic discrimination, which is due to all citizens” (*Minutes*, PCUS, 1977, Part I, p. 174).

The 214th General Assembly (2002) reaffirmed the call of the 190th General Assembly (1978) of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America for members to work for the passage of laws that prohibit discrimination in the areas of employment, housing, and public accommodations based on the sexual orientation of a person (*Minutes*, UPCUSA, 2002, Part I, p.265).

The 208th General Assembly (1996) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) urged the Office of the Stated Clerk to explore the feasibility of entering friends-of-the court briefs and supporting legislation in favor of granting civil rights to same-sex partners, and did so by affirming the Presbyterian church’s historic definition of marriage as a civil contract between a man and a woman, yet recognizing that committed same-sex partners seek civil liberties in contractual relationship with all the civil rights of married couples.

The Stated Clerk, on April 1, 1997, wrote to the members of the Legislature of the State of Hawaii, “It is the conviction of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that both married couples and other couples in long-term relationships should have equal rights to hospital visitation, to making health-care choices for one another, to pension benefits, to holding property together, and to inheritance of one another’s estate.”

These rights, which married couples in our society take for granted, are routinely denied to same-sex couples in long-term relationships.

A rapidly increasing number of corporations are granting domestic partner benefits to their employees in same-sex, long-term relationships, including health, dental, and vision-care insurance, beneficiary designations for pensions and other income benefits, funeral and bereavement leave, flexible spending accounts for health and childcare expenses.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce reports that benefits account for close to 40 percent of employee compensation, meaning that providing the same benefits to employees involved in long-term, same-sex relationships as are given to married employees results in equal pay for equal work.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment advocates “a policy of nondiscrimination on the basis of sexual orientation” for corporate entities. Integrity with this position requires that our own Board of Pensions not discriminate in its administration of benefits.

The General Assembly has also asserted, “to affirm standards of humane treatment and justice within the agencies and institutions of the church which are less compassionate than those of the civil order is a contradiction to the gospel” (*Minutes*, PCUSA, 1985, Part I, p. 53).

John Rhodes—Presbytery of New York City
William Dummer—Presbytery of Milwaukee