

ITEM B.111
ACTION ITEM FOR GAC BUSINESS

<i>FOR GAC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S OFFICE USE ONLY</i>					
	A. Evangelism		D. Vocation		G. PC(USA), A Corporation
x	B. Justice		E. Stewardship		H. Executive Committee
	C. Discipleship		F. Audit		I. Personnel Committee
	P. Plenary				

Subject: Comment on Overture 055 to the 218th GA (2008)

Recommendation:

That the General Assembly Council approve the following comment to the 218th General Assembly on Overture 055:

The General Assembly Council recognizes that abortion is a highly sensitive issue that needs to be approached with prayerful consideration. The General Assembly has acknowledged that within our church there is a wide range of deeply held convictions about the matter. The 204th General Assembly (1992) reflected this diversity of opinion, in its adoption of the report of the Special Committee on Problem Pregnancies and Abortion.

Clearly there is both agreement and disagreement in our use and interpretation of Scripture. There is also agreement and disagreement on the basic issue of abortion. The committee agreed that there are no biblical texts that speak expressly to the topic of abortion, but that taken in their totality the Holy Scriptures are filled with messages that advocate respect for the woman and child before and after birth. Therefore the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) encourages an atmosphere of open debate and mutual respect for a variety of opinions concerning the issues related to problem pregnancies and abortion. [*Minutes of the 204th General Assembly (1992)*, p. 367-368, 372-374]

Consequently, as the policies of the General Assembly regarding abortion and related issues have developed, they do not fit neatly into the frequently used forced-choice between “pro-life” and “pro-choice.” There are several points in the rationale of this overture that need to be clarified to accurately reflect General Assembly Council’s role as it fulfills the directives of this policy. The overture expresses concern that General Assembly Council ministries “*produce material and advocate specifically and diligently only for the “pro-choice” position.*” This concern is not accurate. The 217th General Assembly (2006) affirmed the monitoring report from the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP), which reviews the implementation of problem pregnancies and abortion policies. General Assembly Council ministries preparing resources on problem pregnancies and abortion strive to reflect a diversity of opinion in the resources that are produced. Resources prepared by ministries of the General Assembly Council cover the range of faithful responses in these difficult situations. Examples include: *Problem Pregnancy: When No Choice is Easy, There's Always a Father - Does the Father Have a Problem, Too?*, *When Pregnancy Involves Loss, When You Need the Wisdom of Solomon – Helping Others Face Problem Pregnancies*, *Life Abundant: Values, Choices and Health Care*, and *Nurturing the Children of God: The Call to Foster Parenting and Adoption*.

One concern raised in the overture is about the role of the Presbyterian Washington Office as it reflects General Assembly policy when legislation about abortion is before Congress or is deliberated upon in the Supreme Court. The Washington Office is mandated to express the policy of the General Assembly, and the General Assembly has been very clear on the issue of abortion legislation which states, “We do not wish to see laws enacted that would attach criminal penalties to those who seek abortions or to appropriately qualified and licensed persons who perform abortions in medically approved facilities.” [*Minutes of the 204th General Assembly (1992)*, p. 368]

The overture also questions the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s membership in several organizations that do not, from the overture's perspective, reflect the comprehensive nature of the denomination's 1992 statement on abortion. As a matter of clarification, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is not a member of Clergy for Choice and Progressive Religious Partnership, two organizations which were listed in the overture. The PCUSA is a member of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) but does not provide any financial support to this organization. RCRC literature, which cites Presbyterian policy, is in line with the 1992 policy statement. The Religious Coalition appends to all of its documents the following reminder: "Coalition membership does not require or imply conformity to all the actions and initiatives of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice."

The General Assembly Council mission and ministries continue to be guided by the 1992 policy on abortion and problem pregnancies and encourages the church to continue to approach this challenging issue with the atmosphere of "open debate and mutual respect" for a variety of opinions [*Minutes* of the 204th General Assembly (1992), p. 374].

Ovt 055

*On Directing PC(USA) Entities to Reflect Balance in Advocating Both Sides of the Abortion Issue—
From the Presbytery of Pittsburgh.*

The Presbytery of Pittsburgh overtures the 218th General Assembly (2008) to direct all PC (USA) entities in both funding and in publications to reflect balance and equality in advocating both sides of the abortion issue so that any advocacy is in full compliance with our 1992 Abortion Policy.

Therefore, we direct our national offices to uphold this policy in any and all of their communications with both church and society.

Rationale

The 1992 Abortion Policy states that "we as Presbyterians hold both Position A ("pro-life") and Position B ("pro-choice") positions".

Recommendation III.B. (page 16) states "We recommend that future publications of the denomination and its ministry units reflect the diversity of positions about problem pregnancies and abortion found herein."

Recommendation III.D. then states "We recommend that the General Assembly acknowledge the prerogative of Presbyterian entities to participate in ecumenical and interfaith organizations that represent different points of view concerning abortion. We also urge the General Assembly Council and the presbyteries to affirm procedures by which particular churches may be assured that their mission funds will not be used in violation of conscience on this issue."

However, the only groups that receive funding or produce material or advocate on behalf of the PC(USA) are Presbyterians Affirming Reproductive Choice (PARO), the Washington Office, Women's Ministries, and the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP). All of these organizations produce material and advocate specifically and diligently *only* for the "pro-choice" position.

Thus not only do publications not reflect Position A found in the 1992 Policy (but only Position B), but in addition the Washington Office, ACSWP, and Women's Ministries are funded with undesignated funds,

thus violating the call to see that churches be assured that their mission funds not be used in violation of their conscience on this issue.

There is currently no organization advocating a pro-life position that is funded by the PC (USA). This one-sidedness is not in compliance with our 1992 Abortion Policy, thus violating the 1992 Policy's call for the ecumenical and interfaith organizations to "represent different points of view concerning abortion." While Presbyterian entities have joined and pay dues to RCRC, an entity which supports all abortions, no entity funded by the PC(USA) has joined or pays dues to the National Pro-Life Religious Council. (Presbyterians Pro-Life is totally funded by the contributions of individuals and some individual Presbyterian churches but is not funded by undesignated PC(USA) mission funds and is not part of the Presbyterian Health, Education and Welfare Association (PHEWA) or any other PC (USA) entity).

If the PC (USA) cannot comply with the 1992 policy and be equitable and even handed in its funding, advocacy, and published materials, then funding in support of any one side of this critical issue should cease immediately. This fairness would then be in compliance with the 1992 Abortion Policy and would affirm the policy's statement that the church provide for freedom and exercise of conscience on this matter which so clearly divides us.

Examples for consideration by sessions and presbyteries:

- The Washington Office has advocated to Congress on behalf of the PC (USA) in support of all abortions including late-term abortions.
- The PC(USA) is a member of Religious Coalition of Reproductive Choice (RCRC) We support them with non-designated money. None of their literature or advocacies reflects the current 1992 Abortion Policy, including their 2006 Late-Term Abortion statement.
- The PC(USA) is a member of Clergy for Choice.
- The PC(USA) is a member of Progressive Religious Partnership.