

A New Way for a New Day Part II Executive Summary

September 18-19, 2007 GAC-MGB Gathering

As a planning team for our 2007 GAC-MGB meeting we have designed a process whereby anyone can propose a topic for us to address in our time together. However, in order to be good stewards of work that has already been done, the planning team collated, reviewed and summarized the work from the 2006 GAC-MGB meeting, including the 23 table groups, into the following topics:

1. Renewing our vision and purpose as the PCUSA
2. Putting the Connect back into our Connectional Church
3. The Leadership Challenges and Opportunities of our Polity
4. Missional Ecclesiology and Praxis (Moving From Membership to Missional focus)
5. Funding our Mission [Do GAC, Presbyteries and congregations have a stewardship, fund-raising or spiritual problem?]
6. Strategies for Communication and Mission interpretation [Who's talking... who's listening... and what is the person in the pew hearing?]
7. Moving beyond Compartmentalization into Communication, Cooperation and Coordination between GAC and MGB and the alphabet soup of everyone else
8. Practices, Protocol and Values for Cultivating Healthy Congregations, Healthy Presbyteries and a Healthy PCUSA [including GAC].

If you would like to suggest a topic for our meeting for which you have some passion and would propose for further conversation, we encourage you to write a brief summary of the topic. As an example, we have included in this packet two additional topics that members of the planning team have written. Our design is that whoever else has some interest and passion on that topic may join with them in a small group to address the topic in an in-depth and solution-focused way. If you are suggesting a topic, it would be helpful to bring a one page brief description of the issues, leading questions, and some possible solutions.

9. New 2007 Topic: Re-inventing General Assembly Decision-Making processes and protocol [How can we begin focusing on the Important, not just the urgent?] –Note: this builds on one of our topics from last year
10. New 2007 Topic: Organizational Implosion [i.e. Learning a new dance step or finding new ways for Presbyteries-GAC-mission entities to partner]

In case you were not at last year's meeting, or want to refresh your memory, the paper that was written for our 2006 meeting that has a narrative on those topics can be found on the MGB web-site.

<http://www.pcusa.org/mgbconnect/pubs/out-of-the-maze-into-the-labyrinth.pdf>

Due to the time constraints of a 24 hour meeting format, as well as the GA mandate/purpose for having these meetings, our design is not for us to have a finished product at 3:00pm on September 19. Rather, this meeting provides a forum for GAC-MGB leaders [both elected and staff] to have discussion on critical topics facing the PCUSA in general, as well as the specific issues that can enable us to be more faithful, fruitful and effective in our work with and responsibility to our constituents, especially congregations without which there is no PCUSA. The hope is that we will be able to continue the discussion through various forums, gatherings, and internet discussions so we keep building on our learnings.

What follows is an edited summary of our 2006 conversation on these topics, including possibility propositions (what we might envision by 2010 if we positively addressed that particular issue), possible next steps and questions for further consideration. This summary is taken directly from the presentations from the table groups, each of which addressed one issue using an Appreciative Inquiry process.

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A New Way for a New Day Part II

Eight topics from our 2006 Gathering [this is detailed summary based on our work from last year]

Two new topic for 2007[see #9 and #10]

More to come when we arrive – but that is up to you

1. Topic: Renewing our vision and purpose as the PCUSA

Ways to address this topic (possibility propositions from 2006):

- a. By 2010 the PCUSA will be known as The “Nexus” Denomination.
 - i. The PCUSA will weave together a tapestry of our connectional strengths and congregational gifts (warp & woof) that witnesses to the world our deep unity that allows for diversity.
 - ii. GAC-MGB will develop at the national level an alignment of the six entities working with 173 Presbyteries based on accountability to the common vision.
 - iii. The GAC-MGB will facilitate conversations with congregations concerning norms for congregational vitality and connectional strength.
 - iv. The leadership of GAC-MGB will foster an ethos of hope, courage, patience, grace while the vision is being developed.
 - v. The warp and woof of the Presbyterian tapestry will focus on:
 1. Connectional strengths
 2. Norms for congregational vitality
 3. Confessional heritage
 4. Presbytery community
 5. Denominational advocacy
 6. Educate ministry
 7. Judicial process
 8. Articulate faith
 9. Public ministry
 10. Empowered laity
 - vi. Presbyteries will engage congregations at the nexus points, work to unleash congregational strengths for the good of the whole, and link our connectional strengths for the good of congregations.
- b. Alternative vision and purpose statement - The Presbyterian Church is a “provisional” demonstration of God’s generous hospitality called to feed, nurture, educate and reconcile one another and the world.
- c. Alternative vision and purpose statement: The Presbyterian Church corporately, congregationally and individually is sent by God as Apostles, making disciples of Jesus Christ so as to transform the world:
 - vii. As the GAC-MGB we claim this purpose ourselves.
 - viii. Invite reflection and ways to discuss, understand and own it.
 - ix. With the next year in all governing bodies we assess the structural/program/staff implications of this purpose.

Suggested next steps for addressing issues related to vision and purpose.

- Mission must be at heart of any vision. (Missio Dei). Mission is given; it is who we are and not “figured out.” The only reason GAC, Presbyteries and congregations exist is to participate and carry out the mission of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Asking what God’s mission for us is at this time and place must become the first question we ask, not just an after-thought.
- We find ways to name and engage the transitions in which we find ourselves so as to create a renewed identity.
- Begin every meeting GAC, Synod, and Presbytery meeting with sharing and Bible study, worship and community building (before conducting any business).
- We intentionally find new language for our governing bodies as well as new metaphors for our governing body work (i.e. we create structures so people and relationships relate and function as part of a tapestry rather than a bureaucratic top-down pyramid).
- The denomination needs to focus on the transformational power in congregations, and Presbyteries need to structure themselves so their #1 job is understood to be empowering congregational vitality and mission.
- We find new ways to nurture community in presbytery by creating networks for mission involvement, interest, and support.
- If Polity is our theology embodied, every governing body would have a discernment implementation task force to study how can we use our polity to live into our vision, deepen relationships and make connections, and be given the authority to implement its suggested processes in that governing body.
- GAC-MGB develops a consultative process to address the ever-changing and problematic issues that always have the potential to split the church. In that process GAC is one player in finding solutions and directions, not the only player.
- GAC must be empowered and structure itself to become more proactive with problematic issues (e.g. divestment, publications). For example, before the end of every General Assembly there is an interpretive guide available and e-mailed to every congregation on what really happened; as opposed to what various advocacy groups or outside groups said happened (i.e. Israeli divestment, ordination, etc).
- Establish a national academy to further train elders with regard to theology.
- We are making polarities into problems and conflicts. We must learn to recognize, talk about, and name the polarities.[i.e. we cannot keep evangelism and social justice apart.]
- Vision must have real sharing not just “informing” or catch phrases (e.g. “we are connectional”). GAC cannot simply inform presbyteries, but must find ways to hear, understand, and have mutual “ownership.” Congregations, on the other side, need to have real relationships with each other. Our polity provides a way for us to live into this kind of sharing.
- The purpose of national church structures is to respond to requests of regional bodies, by creating resources for effective ministry whereby Presbyteries who are responsible for congregations have the resources necessary to support growing, faithful, and healthy congregations. In summary, the purpose of the governing body system is to help congregations in its mission. However, is that how we currently are structured and function?
- Develop a Vision Accountability Team that keeps us [GAC-MGB] on message, and keeps us focused on what is essential to the church’s ministry at every level and do it well!
- Develop short, direct descriptions of the judicatory’s mission and use it in communicating our common ministry.
- Education of the all members in the Presbyterian Church is essential. Can members in the pew articulate the core of what is the Presbyterian identity?

- Do everything possible to empower elders and congregations to do mission that demonstrates the church's provisional identity as Christ's body on earth
- We will be able to make our case and live into our vision when the majority in the church:
 - Recognize baptism as call into ministry - empower ministry of laity
 - All governing bodies develop attitude of permission giving and risk taking
 - We express our vision and purpose in concise messages with a well-aimed focus.
 - We need to do all our communication with press secretary.

Some suggested questions for farther clarification and collegial discussion:

- *Can the PCUSA in the 21st century find our voice and a common vision?*
- *Do we already have a vision that needs to be lifted up and celebrated? Where?*
- *Can chapter one of the Peace, Unity, Purity report (Discerning our Christian Identity in and for the 21st Century) be instructive?*
- *In a purpose-driven world, what is our purpose as the PCUSA?*
- *As we continue to learn the implications of living in a 21st century post-modern post-Christendom culture, why should we as the PCUSA continue to exist?*
- *Can we make a compelling case for GAC or Synods or Presbyteries?*
- *Do we have an ecclesiology for Middle Governing Body work?*
- *In an age when churches are an eclectic mix of religious traditions and experience, whose job is it to gather the resources and testimony to make a clear witness and persuasive case for the PCUSA to every new members class, session, and Presbytery?*

2. Topic -- Putting the Connect back in our Connectional Church: The Care and Nurture of Relationships and Connections

Ways to address this topic (possibility propositions from 2006)

We envision that by 2010 the PCUSA:

1. Has experienced a new Pentecost
2. Knows everyone by name
3. Lifts each other up in prayer
4. Practices spirituality with love
5. Has a mission large enough to bring us together in relationship
6. Practices hospitality
7. Gathers together joyfully and energetically
8. Embraces affirmative accountability

Suggested next steps for addressing issues related to strengthening our connective tissue

- Key is recognition of the importance of having cultivated a spirit of “approachability” between the various groups of the church: GA, synod, presbyteries, and congregation. This could be accomplished through mutual work on mission projects, open discussions, etc. which build the level of approachability.
- We dream of the day when we deal with issues, big or small, in the pattern of a family - a family in the sense of addressing the issue with mutual care, supporting the relationship, while steering away from the potential characteristic of being an “exclusionary” family.
- There is a great need to spread the good news of what different churches, presbyteries are doing. This will better show the true commonality of purpose and belief that exists among us all. Too often only the differences are spotlighted.

- The societal pressures of our age are working against the goal of restoring the connectivity that is at the heart of our denomination. However, our dream is that in 5 years we will have been able to restore this connectivity, and thereby show the world around us that it is possible to work through differences to create a stronger bond in the end.
- We dream of when we will see the priority of relationships, and structure time for the building of relationships

Some suggested questions for further clarification and collegial discussion:

- *Who nurtures the relationships and honors the connections that are at the heart of this network of congregations, pastors, educators and Presbyteries?*
- *How can Presbyteries cultivate a relationship with the person in the pew and with each local pastor and session?*
- *If the heart and soul of the Presbyterian Church USA is our congregations, without which there is no Presbytery, or Synod or GA, and if there is a gap between local, regional, and national bodies, then what is the role and responsibility of GAC-MGB in closing the gap?*
- *How do the GAC and OGA and other GA entities look at and connect with Presbyteries and Synods and vice versa?*

3. Topic: Leadership Challenges and Opportunities of our Polity (Polity - Governance - Power)

Ways to address this topic (possibility propositions from 2006)

By 2010 because of our reformed faith, tradition and common life, we are united in Jesus Christ who frees and empowers us to fulfill diverse visions for the sake of the emerging reign of God. This is evidenced by how we resolve disputes faith-fully, humbly, decently, in order, and with ardor. Our common polity enables and encourages improved relationship, faithful mission and mutual accountability at all levels of the church's bodies. By 2010 we will have:

- i. formed intentional spiritual growth and leadership development groups and built collaborative flexible relationships.
- ii. developed collaborative regional ministry teams to focus on implementing mission work plan and governance of the church.
- iii. continued our efforts to rewrite the Book of Order so that communication and relationships are strengthened.
- iv. updated the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) system.
- v. all levels of the church members feel free to convene informal decision making groups, as well as engage the formal process whenever needed so as to consider and discuss issues that emerge.

Suggested next steps for addressing issues related to leadership

- Support and grow Presbyterian Youth Connection.
- Develop guidelines (suggested protocol) in each Presbytery and Synod for how the Moderator, Stated Clerk, EP work together to share information and dialogue.
- At all governing bodies, the consultative, interpretative, and pastoral role of moderator needs to be emphasized.
- New guidelines and conversation regarding accountability of PCUSA institutions, the 6 separate entities of GA and all PCUSA organizations (including Seminaries, the Publishing Corp., Foundation, and Board of Pensions).

- Make sure we provide structures and support to create stronger churches (i.e. Church Leadership Connection, COM work in congregations, CPM. Commissioned Lay Pastors, etc.)
- Note the impact of GA or Presbytery decisions on other parts of denomination.
- Leaders are taught how to be vision casters and communicators
- Educate and nurture leaders who demonstrate a willingness to collaborate around the tough issue.
- Leader's model taking time to do theological reflection that is grounded in our strengths and builds faithful and diverse communities.

Some suggested questions for farther clarification and collegial discussion:

- *What does leadership at the GAC, Synod and Presbytery level look like and act like in our 21st century context?*
- *In the PCUSA, honoring our polity, who leads... when... why and how?*
- *Who has the power and how can it be better shared?*
- *Who has the time and the responsibility to insure that structures are working and our mission accomplished?*
- *Who is working overtly or covertly to change those structures?*
- *How is the church supporting and training this current generation of leaders?*
- *How are we training the next generation of leaders?*
- *If we as church leaders were running a business and each franchise had lost money for 40 years running, where would that business focus its corporate strategy and resources? What have we done?*

4. Topic: Missional Ecclesiology and Praxis (Moving From Membership Focus to Missional Focus).

Ways to address this topic (possibility propositions from 2006)

By 2010 we are discovering where God is at work in the world and our church; and we are re-discovering how we can again be a movement of the Spirit, not just an institution in search of members.

- i. The annual statistical report describes the disciple making and discipleship and Missional activity of a congregation. This we celebrate.
- ii. Members are encouraged to discover their passions and then are challenged and commissioned to do the work they feel called to. The community celebrates this.
- iii. We have moved from a professional ministry model to discipleship serving models, for clergy and laity.
- iv. By 2010 all governing bodies from the session to General Assembly have been involved in a season of surrender and discernment.
- v. Governing bodies are now viewed as Missional communities.

Suggested next steps for addressing issues related to Missional Ecclesiology.

- Every congregation forms hospitality groups (led by the elders) One thing they could do and learn from is to visit the folks who are no longer in church and ask why they are not coming.
- Does our hospitality translate into discipleship? Who are they when they come into our doors and are they any different when they leave?

- We must take the risk of reaching out even if it is someone different. Courage to break out of the old routine.
- I dream that we will become a denomination of Missional churches instead of facilities that house lots of activities. For example, we find a space for worship but use community center for activities. Do a book study at the local café. Coffee houses are great gathering places for sharing faith, experiences, hopes, dreams.
- Seek out where God is at work. [i.e going where people are rather than waiting for people to come to us].
- Clergy will not be paid by the church. They will have other means of income but their spiritual job will allow them freedom to go out into the world.
- Every member of every congregation knows their gifts for ministry, the church affirms them in that ministry, and that ministry is not limited to what happens inside the 4 walls of the church.
- In our organization structures, we need to design processes and protocols that encourage us to be task oriented (ministry teams) and not continue with our endless parade of committee meetings who job is to meet. Is the purpose of structure to meet, or is it to form spiritual communities actively participating in mission?
- 2008 GA – no actions; only discernment related to becoming a Missional church
- All leaders (pastors, elders, GAC, MGB) participate in a once a week dawn to dusk fast by leaders.
- Do away with statistical reports; replace with “discernment sharings”.
- Executive service has been re-conceived as a church office of ministry and mission with stated expectations and authority.

Some suggested questions for farther clarification and collegial discussion:

- *Is mission the primary work of the church universal and particular congregations? If not how do we strengthen that understanding?*
- *What role and responsibility do the GAC, Synods and Presbyteries have in the support of mission and in the support of congregations as the denomination’s mission centers?*
- *How can we better support our global mission in 72 countries with 500 mission co-workers? What could a new mission funding system look like?*
- *Is GAC, Synod, or the Presbyteries’ role best understood as the primary agent for mission or as a broker of mission opportunities connecting resources with needs with personnel?*
- *How can Presbyteries partner more effectively with local congregations in planting new congregations?*
- *Is job one for congregations membership recruitment or making disciples?*
- *Is job one for GAC and MBG partnering with congregations and Presbyteries birthing new churches, helping churches in decline find new momentum to grow, or encouraging the transformation of congregations from a membership/fellowship model to one that is contagiously Missional?*

5. Topic: Funding our Mission - Do GAC, Presbyteries and congregations have a Stewardship, Fund raising or Spiritual Problem?

Ways to address this topic (possibility propositions from 2006)

By 2010 the PCUSA will have comprehensively addressed issues related to Fundraising, Stewardship, and Spirituality.

- i. Presbyterians will see their giving as a spiritual discipline/grace.
- ii. The primary focus of the MGB, as supported by GAC, is the mission of congregations with governing bodies providing a network of support.
- iii. We will have created structures that link mission to members in the pew. Our mission and support of it is adaptive and creative while clearly distinctively reformed.
- iv. GAC continues to invite conversations in Presbyteries on the theme: What is mission? How can GAC be supportive?
- v. Execs work to build family ties inviting conversations and creative linking for mission.
- vi. GAC shapes work to facilitate networks, not deliver products and resources except in response to defined goals at local regional levels.
- vii. All mission is done at the level where it can be done best.

Suggested next steps for addressing issues related to Stewardship

- All MGB staff and GAC members and staff will lead by committing to a tithe and moving to extravagant giving. Church officers (elders, deacons, ministers) will model trust in the providence of God through tithing and moving to extravagant giving.
- Stewardship today is about members giving their Time/Talent/Money to what people have passion for and trust. Are our members passionate about the PCUSA, and do they trust us?
- We need to develop a whole church understanding of theology of abundance and develop stewardship approaches based on that which includes having the GAC, Foundation, and Board of Pension work together for the benefit of the whole church, not self preservation and self-interest.
- A new mission funding system must be developed (or emerge) that supports our new vision of being a church, rather than just keeping old structures in place.
- Explore issues related to discovering God's abundance (Fundraising, stewardship and Spirituality).
- Fundraising ≠ stewardship [we need to ground what we do in a theology of stewardship and God's grace, not just techniques from Philanthropy 101, even though that is important, too]
- Partnership creates ownership.
- We need to encourage stories from our personal experiences. Stewardship is a personal response to God's grace – abundance/scarcity.
- Seeming to have fewer resources moves us back to the basics, opens us to alternative approaches, helps us get clear on the difference between the practices of good fundraising and spiritually-based stewardship (spirituality affects both) doesn't have to be an either/or but both/and), and may lead us to again value the traditional mission emphasis of PCUSA.
- We need to figure out how to do basic mission and encourage designated mission.

Some suggested questions for farther clarification and collegial discussion:

- *If we believe that “Christ calls and gives... the church... all that is necessary for its mission to the world”, what are the current funding issues saying to us?*
- *How do we become solution focused, rather than just being focused on solving the funding shortfalls?*
- *Whose problem is it? Whose job is it to get the discussion going and find solutions: GAC? Presbyteries? Sessions? Pastors? Or the person in the pew?*
- *How are we touching people in their hearts related to the mission and its support?*
- *How can technology help close the gap between a local congregation and a mission opportunity?*
- *Do we have a fundraising problem, stewardship problem, or Spiritual Problem?*

6. Topic: Strategies for Communication and Mission interpretation [Who’s talking... who’s listening... and what is the person in the pew hearing?]

Ways to address this topic (possibility propositions from 2006)

By 2010 the PCUSA will have a unified communication system that is both external and internal, that will be a potent vehicle of the Holy Spirit for communication that is interactive, engaging, responsive, clear, positive and empowering.

- i. The PCUSA is providing and delivering daily media access for all Presbyterians with clear, reliable official denominational (one-voice) statements and stories of who we are and what we do.
- ii. GAC/OGA, etc. (all entities together) will hire a Press Secretary to speak for/to the church.
- iii. Televised and internet coverage as well as print (use some of our famous Presbyterians).
- iv. An enhanced communicator’s network.
- v. Change radically how we do GA meetings so that we will have positive news to report and stories to tell.

Suggested next steps for addressing issues related to communication.

- Hold Presbyterian News Service accountable. Need good/excellent Communications Director to “tell our story”. Need press secretary for OGA/GAC. One voice.
- GAC should promote its activities via media. The news organizations and briefs should be focusing on mission interpretation, not just “news” or reaction.
- Web: Blog. Updated website. Links to PCUSA news from church websites.
- Print: alternative views/commentaries in PCUSA news. GA/presbytery news in local newsletters.
- We need to tell the good news. Let our light shine so we are saying things of value that people want to hear, not just defending ourselves.
- Pastors are part of the key to communications. They are busy. How do we generate interest?
 - Some pastors whose churches are growing are not active in the presbytery. We need to find a way to strengthen a pastor’s ability to pastor.
 - Maybe we need something real to say
 - People should be nurtured and nourished by what is being said.

- Put news in local church newsletters. Link on local church websites to important news.
- Alternative voices for Presbyterian news. What about the unchurched? What do they hear? Accountability for continuing educators.
- Get out our word early in the news cycle.
- We need video clips: good news stories, electronic communication.
- Regular email Communication; newsletter; tabloid, highlights, short and sweet; links if people want more detail.
- Continue to have annual meetings with both GAC and MGB involved in the planning process. Both must be involved in goal setting.
- Must learn to use well the electronic technologies – Perhaps video conferencing a synod meeting concurrent with a GAC meetings with both listening and talking. Develop ways for us to stay connected between meetings [i.e. virtual community or internet groups].
- Mission trips to 100 Witherspoon.
- Bi-weekly situation briefing from GA Stated Clerk alerting executives/stated clerks of “hot” issues – facts – current negative publicity – situation room model.
- Inviting presbyters/clergy/elders to GAC as observers - EP/GP - “feedback loop” - establish trust/personal relationships/ties/”social capital.”
- Regional GAC meetings of geographic gatherings – e.g. half of GAC could cover East cost/West coast – invite pastors, elders to a half-day meeting – build trust – dialog with clergy/elders who have issues.
- Need: Currently there is an absence of national positive side stories of PCUSA (we let “others tell our story and spin it negatively).
 - Methods: National audio/visual TV “spots” of what PCUSA stands for, quarterly DVDs of mission highlights suitable for use in worship, meals, church school.
 - Notes: Our work isn’t perfecting communication, it is spiritual/ Missional (train companies thought they were in “train” business-didn’t remember they were in “shipping/transportation” business and almost went bankrupt – we are in the business of proclaiming the gospel).

Some suggested questions for farther clarification and collegial discussion:

- *Is our communication network effective in an Internet age? Who is telling our story? Who is listening?*
- *Who speaks for the church, nationally? Is it the Stated Clerk, Executive Director of the GAC, or Moderator of GA? Is that model still effective? Who speaks regionally?*
- *What if a GA press release, GA decision, or GA entity’s action does not play well on the home front? What can we do? Who does the damage control? How do we get a heads-up that we might have to do damage control?*
- *How is the mission story and work of the church interpreted to the person in the pew?*
- *Whose story and agenda are they hearing? What stories are GAC and each Presbytery telling? How? Who’s listening? Who’s doing the talking?*
- *Have we made it easy for pastors to have concise and powerful stories of how God is at work in and through our church that could be used as sermon illustrations?*

7. Topic: Moving beyond Compartmentalization into Communication, Cooperation and Coordination between GAC and MGB and the alphabet soup of everyone else.

Ways to address this topic (possibility propositions from 2006)

In 2010 the PCUSA will “Meet more, eat more, and talk less.

- i. Build collaboration and community across the church – starting with us.
- ii. Work collaboratively with seminaries and all governing bodies.
- iii. Reclaim and teach our reformed theology and understanding of God’s call.

Suggested next steps for addressing issues related to structures that encourage cooperation and collaboration.

- Clarify roles of each level of church for strength of each level.
- What must we do together to do well?
- Opportunities to develop a common vision of what it means to be church (not just a business).
- Cultivate an attitude of “one another-in”, seeing ourselves related.
- Leadership development and loyalty.
- Wish for role clarification on all levels. When we know who we are we can better cooperate and coordinate.
- Wish for flexibility in grants for new church development.
- Wish for - given that we are a more diverse body - nationally, culturally, racially and denominationally, how can we be proactive and effective in our connectionalism, communicating and cooperation: Regional gatherings of EP/Synod/GAC members, longer meetings.
- Has there been a historical reflection on reunion?
- GAC-MGB develops a consultative process to address the ever-changing and problematic issues that always have the potential to split the church. In that process GAC is one player/partner in finding solutions and directions, not the only player
- GAC must be empowered and structure itself to become more proactive with problematic issues (e.g. divestment, publications). For example, before the end of every General Assembly there is an interpretive guide available and e-mailed to every congregation on what really happened; as opposed to what various advocacy groups or outside groups said happened (i.e. Israeli divestment, ordination, etc).
- GAC should promote its activities via media. The news organizations and briefs should be focusing on mission interpretation, not just “news” or reaction.
- OGA should be perceived as more neutral on issues – not perceived as an advocate who makes conservative members angry.
- GAC cannot simply inform presbyteries, but find ways to hear understand and have mutual “ownership.” Congregations, on the other side, need to have real relationships with each other. Our polity provides way for us to live into this kind of sharing.

Some suggested questions for farther clarification and collegial discussion:

- *How do we begin talking about these issues of structure and accountability and cooperation and not shoot ourselves in the foot?*

- *Among OGA-GAC-MGB-BOP-PILP-PF-PPH, is there adequate communication, coordination, understanding and a shared vision?*
- *Are there better ways to make decisions in all levels of the church? (See the PUP report chapter 4).*

8. Topic – Practices, Protocol and Values for Cultivating Healthy Congregations, Healthy Presbyteries and a Healthy PCUSA [including GAC].

Ways to address this topic (possibility propositions from 2006)

As a whole church by 2010 we will remember, embrace, and act on the reality that Christ sent us to make disciples, not members.

- i. Use chaos to nurture change, strengthen and reinforce excellence in worship.
- ii. Every church is training sessions in what it means to be Presbyterian - provide resource
- iii. Posted in every church are a PCUSA Mission/Vision statement (who we are, what we believe, what we do, and our mission).
- iv. The church has developed various and appropriate ways (antibodies) to help the body deal with infection.
 1. Antibodies are people who have developed strong, positive relationships of credibility with congregations and who provide year round visions of health.
 2. Antibodies are available to respond to crises by providing accurate information of positive vision.
 3. Antibodies are networked resources in collaboration with the GAC & national resources.
 4. Antibodies represent the theological and cultural diversity of their constituencies

Suggested next steps for addressing issues related to becoming a healthy denomination

- We will send a thank you letter for each donation that includes the story of a life changed by the donation, and you can change more with more support. Churches would get such a communication each month – mailed to pastor and clerk.
- Weekly e-mail with mission story.
- Provide messages that can be used for newsletter, minute for mission.
- Communicate in various media – including short e-mail.
- Theological reflection – larger mailing list.
- Daily prayer. Send postcard saying the staff has prayed for you.
- Email messages interpreting GA events before press stories get out (or other events).
- Develop relationship with religion writer. Be pro-active with them for example on GA.
- National church needs to be mindful of how an event will play out in the media back home to avoid unnecessarily controversy.
- Before GA or OGA or the Stated Clerk or entity of GA makes a potentially controversial decision, consult a sounding board.
- Share the rationale for an action and the Q&A to equip presbyteries and synod executives to respond.

- Be more clear and focused about what we do - concentrate.
- On the things of value/priorities – people lose trust when they see us wasting resources on things not valued.
- Celebrate what we do well and really tell the story.
- Positive church with vision for now – set the agenda with positives.
- Immune system built on what we did best in the past, especially planting churches overseas. We need to tell who God is and what He does through us his children.
- Small churches part of community – tutoring programs, safe places, after school, if they stop people would be harmed.
- Being Presbyterian based on reformed theology not governing system.

Some suggested questions for farther clarification and collegial discussion:

- What is the talk around the water cooler and congregational parking lots about the PCUSA? How can that change?*
- What does a healthy denomination look like?*
- How can we develop a healthier immune system and still honor our democratic, Spirit-led, open process? Note: disease in the body happens when the immune system is not working properly, when pathogens are not stopped. Vision, core values, clear boundaries, effective, respected and strong leadership are all part of an organization’s immune system. Do we have an immune system as the PCUSA or Presbyteries? And is it working?*

9. New Topic: Re-inventing General Assembly Decision-Making processes and protocol [How can we begin focusing on the Important, not just the urgent?]

Note: this builds on one of our topics from last year

Suggested topic by Sue Krummel(c) and Graham Hart (a, b, d, e)

- Does each General Assembly have a pastoral responsibility to the whole church? At GA, 600 commissioners vote, as best they can, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. However, some actions of GA have significant unintended consequences that are left for pastors, GA and Presbytery staffs to address. What if before a vote, the commissioners are given a checklist that outlines the pastoral implications, communication strategies, and educational-interpretive plans that this action, if it passes, will require? This may help the commissioners be aware of the larger implications of an action, as well as a strategy to fulfill the Assembly’s implied pastoral responsibility for the whole church [G-13.0100] in a way that “builds up the body in love” [Eph. 4:16].

Currently, if there are financial implications regarding a recommendation or overture before the General Assembly, the cost is given to Commissioners before they vote. In the same way, GA would be wise to consider the pastoral implications for the whole church of particular GA actions. In no way is this meant to silence the prophetic voice of the church, but it would help each assembly and be wise, pastoral, and thoughtful concerning the implications of its actions.

It is naïve to believe that a letter from the Stated Clerk explaining what a GA did or didn’t do will either marshal forces in support of an action, or calm the waters troubled by an action. In an internet age, we need to be better aware and prepared for the actions we take. Having each

General Assembly think through its pastoral responsibility for the whole church may be a helpful step.

For example, In 2004, when the assembly voted at 11:00 p.m. on the Iraq war, calling it immoral and illegal, or when the 217th G.A. said at 1:00 a.m. what a particular meat packing company in one town should or shouldn't do, these actions brought the whole church into the discussion for much longer than the 5 minutes it took for the assembly to take the actions. But the assembly gave no thought to how, who, when, where, and by what means would these actions be communicated, so as to have others enter into the conversation in a collaborative way rather than confrontational.

- B. Each General Assembly by current design is responsive to overtures sent to it by the Presbyteries. Of the 140 overtures in 2006, which ones were expressions of our essential values and core business, which ones were merely urgent, and which ones contributed to the perspective that we were just arranging deck chairs on the Titanic? Where is the discipline?
- C. Is the method by which we expect people to make wise decisions at a GA flawed? We bring together 600 strangers, some of whom have never been in a meeting of this size before, and expect that over a very few hours in a committee meeting, they will be able to make a decision that will be helpful in some way to the church as a whole. None of us would write a book advocating this as a way to make good decisions--not if we wanted to get it published. Some committees can clearly finish their work within the span of the few days of committee meetings at the Assembly. Others need more time to think and pray and seek other opinions. Some of our worst decisions as a GA have been made when we imposed some false sense of urgency upon ourselves, or when we were focused on some other upcoming "big" topic or when we were just too tired and too hungry and too homesick to be able to concentrate.

It does not do us any good as leaders in the church to defend every decision of a GA as if it were engraved on tablets, and it also does not do us any good to defend a decision-making system that constricts time in a way that is often not helpful.

Why not somehow combine the current standing committees of the GA and the commissioner committees? If there are topics that need a longer time of discernment, then convene committees between assemblies to spend that time and to bring a recommendation back to the next assembly.

- D. We have 6 separate corporations and 173 Presbyteries and 11,000 plus congregations and 500 mission co-workers all working for the global entity called the PCUSA. GA entities operate in separate silos, and they report and are accountable to biennial General Assemblies. However, with Assemblies that only meet for one week every other year, and by design go out of business after each meeting and bring a whole new set of folks to the table (assembly) in two years, is there adequate communication, coordination, understanding and a shared vision between and among OGA-GAC-MGB-BOP-PILP-PF-PPH and each succeeding GA?
- E.. As leaders we understand the various complexities of GA structures, but for the person in the pew there is little understanding of and no distinction between the Stated Clerk, PPC, and the moderator, GAC, GAC Executive Director, and the 216th or 217th GA. It all one big blob...one cloth. When the Stated Clerk writes a letter, he writes for the whole church. When a denominational official goes to an area, the whole church goes as well. When a book gets published by PPH, it affects the whole church.

**Ways to address this topic were beginning to be explored at our 2006 gathering
[possibility propositions from 2006]**

By 2010 the GA-GAC-OGA-MGB will have realized all over again that:
It's Congregations, Stupid! That means that:

- i. Clarity of vision and purpose is essential.
- ii. A radical course is needed and a process where-by we will intentionally re-invent the denomination needs to begin (or it will happen anyway in spite of us).
- iii. We have begun a shift of norms and cultural change in the PCUSA that we need to be aware of and intentionally address
- iv. with Jesus in the world -- all parts of the church will learn how to aim their resources and support at developing communities of disciples that exemplify faithfulness, passion, integrity.

Suggested next steps for addressing issues related to decision-making.

- Vision - keep vision in front of everyone; we need a tag-line – some memorable phrase that captures who we are.
- People must know and feel they are more important than rules.
- Devote significant chunk of time (at meetings, etc.) to one important item; then get to other stuff.
- Find our niche as PCUSA instead of trying to be all things to all people.
- Evaluate – keep the feedback loop going.
- Build trust.
- Focus on nurturing the health of Presbyterian Church – organize around strengths of churches/Presbyteries rather than focusing on dysfunctional actions/activities.
- An intentional focus on and study of the Theology of “Call.”
- Allow people (clergy and elders) to use their uniqueness, gifts, “voice,” for the greater good without great criticism.
- We don't have to do everything!
- Continue to facilitate mission wherever it is happening.
- Streamline the organization – are we trying to do too many things at once? Narrow our focus.
- We are moving into chaos, but from the chaos God created.
- 2008 GA – no actions; only discernment related to becoming a Missional church
 - i. Steps toward the culture change
 - ii. Identify and nurture hundreds of “change agents” who are willing to cross theological boundaries to pursue and support passion
 - iii. Daily lifting up of the “stories of passion” from #1 - celebrates passion.
 - iv. Develop strategies to build consensus that precedes change (this is about integrity).

Some suggested questions for further clarification and collegial discussion:

- a. *Without constraining the movement of the Holy Spirit, how can a better process be put in place to help each particular General Assembly focus on what is vital and important to our long-term health as well as our core business?*
- b. *What role do Presbyteries have in insuring that each Assembly pays attention to what would be called our core business and also to the brutal facts?*
- c. *If we were to do an analysis of the overtures that have come to the last 10 General Assemblies, what would they tell us about the concerns Presbyteries have? Do those concerns get at what it will mean for us to be a church in the 21st century?*

10. New 2007 Topic: Organizational Implosion - Learning a new dance step or finding new ways for Presbyteries-GAC-mission entities to partner.

topic proposed by Sam Robinson

In the recent restructuring of the General Assembly Council, an annual meeting between the General Assembly Council and Middle Governing Bodies was mandated. Bottom line: these are groups with different vantage points and inter-related responsibilities in the current mix of the PCUSA.

Building relationships and promoting productive interactions between these groups are critical to the future of the PCUSA.

The church stage on which these entities inter-act changes scenes rapidly, and it is difficult for complex historical governing bodies to be nimble.

As the scenes on the stage shift, there is awkwardness, if not lots of crashing and banging, and the overall attendance slips and applause lessens.

One of the biggest conundrums involves whether the stage is flat or multi-tiered. On a flat stage, set movement is quick and efficient and actors come and go with ease. On a multi-tiered stage, hydraulics, trap doors, ladders, and steps are used to move sets and actors in a disciplined, timed sequence.

The PCUSA is becoming a flat stage, and we are trapped on a multi-tiered one.

On a flat stage, Para church organizations, individual congregational efforts, presbytery sponsored mission, and national initiatives directed to congregations, affinity groups, and mission groups, validated or not, dance together randomly and interdependently. The energy level of the Holy Spirit responds to the vision, work, and presented needs. In life cycle language, flat stages encourage incline and recline activity.

On our multi-tiered church stage, groups, structures, and organizations exist in mandated or established forms... At the dance, everyone wants to dance using his or her assigned or claimed dance step. Not the dance, but the dance step dominates time and Holy Spirit energy. The value is on teaching the dance steps, not on having a great dance. In life cycle language, multi-tiered stages entrench decline activity.

On a flat stage, the General Assembly, Synods, Presbyteries, and Congregations go to the dance and dance with the partners who want to dance with them. On a multi-tiered stage, all the governing bodies assign or claim their steps at the dance, and tell their partners how, when, where, with whom, and how much to dance.

We can have as many partners on the flat stage as works and makes sense.

We need a lot fewer partners on the multi-tiered stage because of all the stepping on feet, kicking of shins, and stumbling all over each other.

-----**APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY – explanation of possibility propositions**-----

A Possibility (or provocative) Proposition is a statement the bridges the best of what is and what might be. It provides a clear, shared vision for the organization’s destiny.

Criteria

1. Provocative. It stretches challenges or interrupts the status quo.
2. It is grounded in the interviews. There are examples that illustrate the idea as a real possibility
3. It is desired. The organization wants this to be fully actualized.
4. It is stated in the affirmative and bold term
5. It provides guidance for the organization’s future
6. It expands the zone of possible change and development
7. It is the future written in the present tense – as if it were already true. One way to think of this is as a newspaper account written at some time in the future.

“A Possibility Proposition is a statement that bridges the best of what is with what might be. It stretches the status quo and challenges common assumptions or routines. It suggest how the image of the future will enhance elements for the organizations social architecture such as the organizations purpose, structure leadership, values, norms, decision making, communication systems, relationships, roles, policies, products, services, etc. It offers real possibilities that represent a desired image for the organization and its people. It implies action but does not prescribe a specific course of action.” Glen Rediehs, The Kilgore Group

Examples-

Topic - Organizational Structure

First _____ Church has implemented organizational structures that enhance ministry and mission, deploy and equip members according to their gifts and passions, and nourish respect and mutual growth for all members. Structures are streamlined, responsibilities and authority are clear, leaders and participants learn from each other, and prayerful discernment grounds all decisions.

Topic – An Organization’s Shared Vision

Co-workers in all regions share basic common vision of the organization’s core mission, intent and direction. It is an exciting, challenging, and meaningful direction, which helps give all partners a feeling of significance, purpose, pride, and unity. The organization uses whatever time and resources are needed to bring everyone on board and this continuously cultivates the thrill of having a ‘one organization feeling’ of being a valued member of one outstanding national partnership.