

Top Ten Issues for the 215th General Assembly (2003)
Clifton Kirkpatrick

At the beginning of each year, Cliff Kirkpatrick, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly shares what he thinks, as of mid-January, will be the top ten issues for the upcoming General Assembly. What follows is his top-ten (non-prioritized) list for the 215th General Assembly that will convene in Denver on May 24, 2003.

1. **National Ministry Strategies:** The National Ministries Division is bringing to the assembly two strategy papers concerning the church's activities in two crucial areas—higher education and ministries to Hispanic-Latino constituencies in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).
2. **Procedures to Implement Biennial Assemblies:** The 214th General Assembly (2002) voted to move to every-other-year assemblies after the 216th assembly in 2004. This year's assembly will need to take action on a variety of implementing actions, such as changing terms and election years to match and adjusting the number of commissioners at each assembly.
3. **War and Peace:** The prospect of the United States launching a war against Iraq has generated actions in many presbyteries calling for restraint, for peace in the Middle East, for support of the United Nations, and for upholding civil liberties. These matters will undoubtedly be a major concern of the assembly.
4. **Abortion Policy:** Overtures have been received to modify the action taken by the 214th General Assembly (2002) on late-term abortions, and various groups are seeking to change the church's position on abortion.
5. **Agency and Ecumenical Reviews:** The review committee from the first of six General Assembly agencies will present its report on the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Also, the Committee on Ecumenical Relations will report on its review of the World Council of Churches. Both reports express appreciation for the good work of the bodies being reviewed.
6. **Women Ministers:** The Advocacy Committee on Women's Concerns will bring to the assembly its report and recommendations on "Clergywomen's Experiences in Ministry: Reality and Challenges." This report recommends ways for the church to support the full participation of women in the ordained ministry of the church.
7. **Changing Patterns of Family Life:** The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy will ask the assembly to approve a policy paper and recommendations to strengthen the church's ministry to people in a variety of family contexts, and advocate for public policies that support family life.
8. **Budget Concerns:** This has been a difficult year financially for the agencies of the General Assembly. The General Assembly Council will present a proposed 2004 budget

that is approximately \$3 million smaller than proposed initially last year. The Presbyterian Foundation is impacted by declines in the stock market; and rising health-care expenses are forcing the Board of Pensions to raise dues for coverage. Budget matters are likely to be a major concern at the assembly.

9. Abolition of For-Profit Prisons: The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Polity has completed a major study on private, for-profit prisons that it will bring to the assembly with its recommendation that the church work for the abolition of such institutions.

10. Resolution on Africa: The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, working with a variety of other assembly agencies, will call the commissioners' attention to the scourges of poverty, violence, and AIDS that are ravaging the continent, and call on the church to take action to counter them.