
LOOKING AHEAD TO 2006:

Concurrent meetings with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America and the Presbyterian Church (USA)

by Stated Clerk Dr. Robert D. Rush

In 2006 the General Assemblies of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church will meet concurrently in Birmingham, Alabama. Although the three denominations will share in some joint worship services, have one exhibit hall, and will hear a panel presentation on the history of the three denominations, each denomination will have its own General Assembly.

The agenda of each General Assembly will pertain to business of that particular denomination. In order to give us a proper perspective, it is essential to know some background of the decision to have concurrent General Assemblies.

In 1995 the Historical Foundation of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church recommended that the two General Assemblies approve celebrating the following events/years.

- In 1999 we should celebrate the 125th anniversary of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America.
- In 2000 we should celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Great Revival.
- In 2006 we should give thanks for congregations and institutions which were born in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and continue to offer a ministry either in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church or the Presbyterian Church (USA)
- In 2010 we should celebrate the 200th anniversary of the founding of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

During the rebuilding of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church after 1906, the Presbyterian Church (USA) was instrumental in providing assistance to the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America. In 1996 the Historical Foundation proposed that celebration in 2006 be promoted in geographic regions where there is a presence of

Cumberland Presbyterian and Presbyterian (USA) and institutions which were born by the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Although the 165th General Assembly had approved a celebration in 2006, the 166th General Assembly decided not to have any celebration in 2006.

In 1997 the Reverend Clifton Kirkpatrick, the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA), wrote to the two Cumberland Presbyterian Churches and extended an invitation to hold concurrent General Assemblies in 1999 or 2001. The 1997 Minutes of the General Assembly, pages 313, 314, declined to approve concurrent (not joint) General Assemblies in 1999 or 2001 due to decisions previously made to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America and previous commitments for the year 2001. The 167th General Assembly affirmed that concurrent (not joint) General Assemblies would afford opportunities for worship, fellowship, and dialogue with other Presbyterian and Reformed bodies, as well as to recognize beneficial joint projects in Christian education, stewardship, and other areas. The 167th General Assembly of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church expressed gratitude to the Presbyterian Church (USA) for the invitation to hold concurrent General Assemblies and expressed a desire to hold a meeting in a year and city that would be convenient to all.

In 1998 the Report of the Moderator, included a resolution requesting that the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America, and the Presbyterian Church (USA) have concurrent General Assemblies in the year 2006. The 168th General Assembly adopted the resolution.

In 1999 and early 2000, representatives of the Presbyterian Church (USA), the executive director of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America, and the stated clerk of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, began to consider cities in which all three denominations have congregations. There are not many cities in which there are congregations of all three denominations.

Nashville, Birmingham, and Memphis were all visited by the representatives. Even though the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America does not have a congregation in Memphis, both Cumberland Presbyterian Churches met in Memphis in 1999. Nashville is to be the site of the General Assemblies of both Cumberland Presbyterian Churches in 2010. After discussing various cities, visiting with the Convention Bureaus, and seeing facilities in the three cities mentioned here, it was determined that Birmingham would be the best choice. The three presbyteries involved were requested to extend an invitation for hosting the concurrent General Assemblies in 2006.

The 170th General Assembly approved the naming of persons to work on a cooperative committee with representatives from the CPCA and the PCUSA. The 171st General Assembly approved a statement of purpose in which it was affirmed that there is no attempt to have an organic union, but it would be good to recognize and to rejoice for the mutual ministries. 2006 marks the 300th anniversary of Presbyterianism in America affording the opportunity to recognize our common Presbyterian heritage, while affirming unique gifts which the CPCA, PCUSA, and CPC bring to the Presbyterian and Reformed Family.

The concurrent General Assemblies will permit us to recognize many ministry opportunities in which we are involved.

- The Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church (USA) are partners in ministry to migrant workers in Florida; Project Vida on the Texas/Mexico border, and the Presbyterian

Appalachian Broadcasting Company which is housed in the Brenthaven Church in Nashville.

- The Presbyterian Church (USA), the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America, and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church are responsible for the Youth Triennium which is an opportunity for youth to meet on an international basis.
- A few years ago, the three denominations produced *The Book of Common Worship*; and they provide writers for *These Days*.
- In 1973 the two Cumberland Presbyterian Churches, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church organized the Presbyterian Council on Chaplains and Military Personnel which endorses military chaplains and chaplains in Veterans Hospitals. In addition to being the endorsing agency for chaplains, the PCCMP also provides emotional and spiritual support for military personnel.
- The two Cumberland Presbyterian Churches and the Presbyterian Church (USA) are members of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Caribbean and North American Council of the World Alliance.
- The Presbyterian Church (USA), the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America, and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church are partners with some other denominational groups in providing a ministry to the Appalachian region. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church is involved in many different ecumenical relationships for ministry. The Cumberland Presbyterian Children's Home is affiliated with other Presbyterian Children's Homes. Various Presbyterian bodies provide ministries on college campuses.

Contrary to what some may believe, there are no efforts to move toward organic union of the three denominations. Obviously the witness of the Church is strengthened when Christians do things together instead of separately as evidenced by our shared ministries or those ministries held in common. The three denominations have many occasions for thanksgiving. Members of the Presbyterian and Reformed family need to be united in ministry; three members of the family are meeting concurrently in 2006 to recognize our call to unity, but not a call to union or reunion.