

emphasis on children by declaring the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the "Decade of the Child."

The commissioners to this Assembly were serious, thoughtful, and responsible. From day one they listened patiently to one another and voted decisively. Many people indicated that the Holy Spirit had been at work changing their minds on particular issues during the Assembly. Considering all that was done, what this Assembly accomplished validates the health and strength of the church despite our differences. Reports of disbelief or disrepair are not validated by a fair and comprehensive look at what this Assembly actually said and did.

I ask that pastors and sessions communicate this pastoral letter to members of their congregations and make available to them information about the Assembly by commissioners and observers who saw the whole picture. Further information is available on the denominational website: [www.pcusa.org](http://www.pcusa.org).

Personally, my wife, Sharon, and I were encouraged and sustained by the countless numbers of people who said they were praying for us and would continue to do so throughout the year. We long for the church to move beyond contentious issues and to focus on evangelism, family life, making good on our promise to increase racial and ethnic diversity, and encouraging the full inclusion of persons with disabilities.

I look forward to meeting with many of you in the coming year. I believe we can move beyond our current deadlock over sexuality. I ask you to help us all to move forward in the multiple ministries to which God has called us. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Jack Rogers  
Moderator of the 213<sup>th</sup> General Assembly  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

## PRESBYTERIAN HEADLINE NEWS



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### **Moderator sends a letter to church interpreting Assembly's action on G-6.0106b**

(Editor's note: When the 213<sup>th</sup> General Assembly sent out a proposed constitutional amendment that would delete G-6.0106b from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Order, it asked Moderator the Rev. Jack Rogers to write a letter to the church interpreting its action. There follows the complete text of that letter. — Jerry L. Van Marter)



July, 2001

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Apostle Paul urges that we rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. I find myself in that position as Moderator. By a vote of 317-208, or 60%, the 213<sup>th</sup> General Assembly sent a proposed constitutional amendment to the presbyteries that — if ratified by a majority of the 173 presbyteries — would return us to the status prior to 1978 when our struggle over gay and lesbian ordination began. I rejoice with those who feel that what has seemed an unjust restriction might be removed. I weep with those who feel that the church has violated their understanding of its foundational belief and morality. It is my hope as Moderator this year to listen well to those on all sides and to seek ways to work toward bridging our differences with integrity and love.

I was asked by the Assembly to interpret its actions regarding G-6.0106 of the Book of Order. The Assembly's action would return to our traditional Presbyterian polity of allowing sessions and presbyteries to determine who should be ordained. This does not open the door to immorality or ignoring Scripture. Governing bodies are to be guided by “scriptural and constitutional standards, under the authority and Lordship of Jesus Christ.” We are asked to trust the elders and ministers in our governing bodies to uphold the highest standards of morality for those called to church office. The Assembly’s action would neither require nor prohibit the ordination of gay and lesbian persons. Candidates for church office would be considered as individuals. The actions of governing bodies would still be subject to judicial review.

Commissioners voting against the change believed that there is a clear word of Scripture that all homosexual practice is sin. Those voting for change were equally sincere in believing that Scripture, interpreted through the lens of Christ’s life and ministry, does not permit us to exclude a category of baptized Presbyterians from full rights of membership. The Assembly majority believed that we can not, by legislation, resolve the differences among Presbyterians in their understandings of sexual morality in Scripture and the confessions. We do not yet understand each other well. It is unfair to impugn the motives of opponents on matters of such moment.

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- I believe it is easier to understand the Assembly’s action on G-6.0106 when we look at all the Assembly did. One very hopeful action, taken by a 91% vote of the Assembly, was the establishment of a task force to seek the peace, unity and purity of the church. I am asked, along with former Moderators Syngman Rhee and Freda Gardner, to appoint a task force of seventeen members reflecting the theological and cultural diversity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). who will lead the church in a time of spiritual discernment regarding our future. The Task Force is charged to confer widely with congregations and presbyteries and invite all of us to unite in a sustained period of prayer and reflection on Scripture and our confessions. This endeavor offers an unparalleled opportunity for the whole church to be heard and to have a role in moving the church faithfully into the new millennium.
- Our 213<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, daily, worshiped and responded to biblical preaching. We confessed our faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Sovereign frequently and with clarity. In each of the plenary sessions that I moderated, we took time from business to stand and affirm our faith in Christ using words from one of our confessions. The Assembly chose this way of affirming our common commitment to Christ as Savior rather than creating new legislation.
- The Assembly dealt with over 750 items of business covering a wide range of issues. We adopted a strategy to revitalize ministry on college campuses, confronted the issue of domestic violence, and acted on global matters, reflecting our commitment to 165 partner churches in over 80 countries, where 346 of our mission personnel are working.
- Commissioners attended a workshop on anti-racism training before the business of the Assembly began. For the first time in our history, the General Assembly acknowledged the church’s “common complicity in the institution of slavery and its oppressive inequities that linger to this day.” The Assembly acted to extend the PC(USA)’s