

Introduction

This is a time of change across the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Office of the General Assembly has been working to meet the changes head on. From technology and guiding values, to changing leadership and unification, OGA is working to ensure mid councils and congregations are prepared for a new vision and direction.

Stated Clerk transition

The Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II, was first elected as Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the PC(U.S.A.) at the 222nd General Assembly in Portland, Oregon in 2016. He was elected to a second term during the 224th General Assembly in 2020. On April 25, 2023, Nelson announced he would be stepping down after seven years, effective June 30.

The Committee on the Office of the General Assembly (COGA) named the Rev. Bronwen Boswell as Acting Stated Clerk effective July 10, 2023. Boswell is the first women to serve in that capacity in the denomination's more than 300-year history. She will serve through the 226th General Assembly (2024).

The Stated Clerk Nominating Committee heard from as many as nine applicants for stated clerk and will bring a nominee to the 226th General Assembly (2024).

OGA Guiding Values for 23-24

Many view the Office of the General Assembly with one major task: planning and implementing the General Assembly every two years. And while that is a major function of the office, OGA is the ecclesial arm of the denomination, supporting church governance and structure, helping to discern the mind of Christ in mission and ministry. OGA relies on five key values to provide the foundation and path for moving forward.

Relationships

OGA leadership works closely with the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly in support of monthly meetings, partnering with the committee in General Assembly planning as well as transition around the stated clerk. Agency leaders have established regular communications with mid councils through monthly Zoom meetings and a bi-weekly newsletter. OGA collaborates with other agencies such as the Board of Pension and Presbyterian Mission Agency on the planning for the Polity Benefits and Missions Conference, Association of Mid Council Leaders/ Association of Stated Clerks annual meetings.

Ecumenical

The world is in crisis as bloodshed continues across the globe. Since the 19th century, Presbyterians have been among the founders and principal supporters of global and national ecumenical bodies, working to find solutions and common ground. Some of that work includes:

- Working with partners to re-envision work of Christian Churches Together and Churches Uniting in Christ

- Continued engagement with conciliar bodies, including coordinating PC(USA) leaders who serve on their committees, and ecumenical partners, including attending assemblies of partner denominations
- Connecting with mid councils on calling pastors from other denominations, both domestic and global
- Partnering with PMA to develop a global vision for the church, and the creation of Global Partners Roundtable
- Working with other partners through the Presbyterian Historical society:
 - NEH grant to PHS to digitize the RNS photograph collection; Lilly grant to develop a RNS travelling exhibition
 - PHS work with Community College of Philadelphia and the Building Knowledge: Breaking Barriers exhibit

Leadership (re)formation

The Office of the General Assembly works to provide new and innovative leadership training opportunities for mid councils, deacons, ruling elders, and more. Leaders are always working to ensure training is thorough, up-to-date, and meaningful to all who participate. Sometimes it means ending a program in order to create something that has more of an impact.

- Mid Council Leaders Orientation- Throughout the year, OGA staff bring mid council leaders to the national offices in Louisville for several days of training as well as opportunities to learn more about the work across the denomination. Attendees have opportunities to meet with OGA staff and learn about all the work.
- Deacons/Ruling Elder training- Resources specifically geared toward the ministries of ruling elders and deacons are provided through webinars, articles, podcasts and more.
- Discerning Ecclesial Formation- In 2023, the Office of the General Assembly hosted “Crossing Currents” an experiment in open collaboration with approximately thirty participants from PC(USA) mid councils and congregations as well as staff from the Presbyterian Mission Agency. The focus included discussions around ecclesial hopes and holy discontent along with shared and varied experiences of different church contexts. The hope is to build on this experiment for future gatherings.

Equity and Justice

The work of equity and justice may come in the form of a community march on issues such as police violence or systemic poverty. It may be a public statement or the act of preserving historical records of Black congregations and LGBTQIA rights advocates. It can be a show of support to mid councils and congregations who are in the midst of calling immigrant pastors or working for the civil and human rights of immigrants.

The work also means ensuring staff across the national office are well-prepared to share this work with others. The Office of the General Assembly holds quarterly events focusing on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Part of the Presbyterian Historical Society’s ’24-’25 funds development campaign is to make the office’s entrance more accessible by rebuilding an access

ramp and making improvements to the reading room so it can be more accessible to researchers.

The General Assembly Planning Team is working to ensure that equity managers are well-prepared at the 226th General Assembly, to ensure every voice is heard and that all participants feel included and welcome. The PHS Reparative Description Committee reviews and updates harmful and offensive language in collection descriptions.

Innovation and Courage

In recent years, the Office of the General Assembly has become innovative in the way it conducts business, communicates with mid councils and congregations, and plans for the future.

- GA planning
The 226th General Assembly will be the fourth iteration since 2018, the last traditional assembly gathering. The COVID pandemic forced assembly planners to move to a fully on-line assembly in 2020 and to a hybrid version in 2022, which included in-person committee meetings followed by on-line plenaries. This year's assembly will also be hybrid, with on-line committees and the more traditional in-person plenaries. The assembly will also be scaled back in terms of events, exhibit halls, and activities often associated with the traditional gatherings. Planning for the assembly has required evaluation for each component.
- Church Leadership Connection
The CLC has been bringing call seekers, congregations, mid councils, and other church groups together since 1999. The PC(USA)'s internet-based matching and referral system has undergone a comprehensive upgrade- making it more efficient, inclusive, and easier to access. The new system now serves even more people, with a public opportunity search tool that anyone can use to explore postings. The automated matching system also helps congregations identify, invite, and discern between call seeker candidates.
- PC-biz
PC-Biz is critical to the work done by the General Assembly, allowing participants to access all the business on-line in an accurate and timely manner. Since its launch in 2006, it has undergone numerous updates to keep up with changing technology. It continues to undergo an evolution so that commissioners and advisory delegates can get the most out of the system.
- IT integration
As OGA moves closer to unification, work has been underway to integrate the Presbyterian Historical Society's systems and processes with A Corp.

Faithful and Spirit-led

The Book of Order is a work of faithfulness to the denomination. In 2023, an updated version of the book was printed after presbytery votes were recorded and as many as thirty amendments were ratified. In addition to an English version, there are now new and comprehensive translations in Korean and Spanish.

The pandemic changed the way the OGA staff interacted with one another as remote work became the norm for more than two years. As a result, the use of communications tools such as Zoom, Teams, and others provided more opportunities for staff interaction, information sharing, and conversation. Weekly Zoom meetings began as a means of creating community, allowing staff to share personal joys, concerns, and prayer. Even as some have returned to the workplace, online conversations and the weekly staff calls continue.

Unification Work

In 2022, the 225th General Assembly approved the formation of the Unification Commission to begin the work of bringing together the Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Historical Society, and the Presbyterian Mission Agency as one. For nearly two years now, OGA has worked to support the enormous task in a number of ways:

- Representatives from OGA, PMA and ASG have provided staff support to the Unification Commission for all meetings
- The Stated Clerk and Deputy Executive for Vision & Innovation with the Presbyterian Mission Agency have led the initiative to unify the communications ministries of both agencies with a target of completion by mid-April
- Numerous meetings have been held by OGA leadership to prepare staff for transition
- A series of regular meetings now occur between top executives within both OGA and PMA
- The Coordinating Table, a mix of leaders within both agencies, meet regularly to address ways to collaborate, including the 2025-26 budget
- Interagency peer groups are now focusing initiatives on IDI work.
- An interagency team has been working for two years toward the launch of a unified website that focuses on the work of OGA, PMA, and PHS with a target launch date of June 5, 2024.