



48TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY | *Highlights, June 28-July 2, 2021*

2,115 commissioners (largest enrolment ever!), 616 Ruling Elders and 1499 Teaching Elders, meeting in St. Louis, Missouri

The theme of the Assembly was “Proclaiming the Unhindered Kingdom,” drawn from Acts 28:30–31 “He [Paul] lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.” The Assembly continued for another year electronic voting and there were far fewer glitches in the use of the keypad than in previous years. In addition, for the second year the Overtures Committee had their own version of electronic voting. Clearly, the devices are here to stay. Video recordings of sessions of the Assembly can be found here:

<https://livestream.com/accounts/8521918/events/9731338>

TUESDAY EVENING

Opening Worship

- Outgoing moderator, Ruling Elder J. Howard “Howie” Donahoe of Boise, ID, a retired pilot for American Airlines, preached a delightful, and sobering sermon on “Heaven” from the words of Jesus in Luke 23:43, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” The retiring Moderator wonderfully called the commissioners, for a few moments, to look away from the hurly-burly of our present circumstances, to gain a transcendent vision of our hope to be with Jesus in His heavenly glory. It was grand! A video of the entire service is available here:

<https://livestream.com/accounts/8521918/events/9731338/videos/222877938>

New Moderator

- Dr. L. Roy Taylor, our retiring Stated Clerk of 22 years, was elected as Moderator. Dr. Taylor led the Assembly with a deliberation and fair-mindedness, ruling with humility and good humor, that served the Assembly well in the course of its full and challenging docket. You can read more about Moderator Taylor here:

<https://byfaithonline.com/roy-taylor-elected-moderator-of-48th-general-assembly/>

Report of the Stated Clerk

- The Moderator introduced this report as the most important part of the docket! Dr. Bryan Chapell, Stated Clerk *Pro Tempore*, spoke on the challenges and opportunities for the gospel, now, and in the near future. His report was a masterful presentation, clear-eyed with respect to our present troubles, yet visionary with respect to grounds for hope in the days ahead. It was insightful, sobering, and encouraging. Below find a link to a recording of the opening business session of the General Assembly. At 25:00 you will find the Clerk’s report. All who care for the PCA should listen in, as you have the opportunity.

<https://livestream.com/accounts/8521918/events/9731338/videos/222888792>

- Statistics reported (2020 Statistics Compared with 2019):
 - * The number of churches increased by 13 to 1,580.
 - * The number of mission churches stayed the same.
 - * The number of Teaching Elders increased by 60 to 5,117.

- * Sunday School attendance dropped by 26,700 to 65,648.
- * Total professions of faith dropped by 1,761 to 8,314.
- * Total membership (communicants, non-communicants, and ministers) decreased by 383 to 383,338.
- * Total giving decreased by \$2,905,566 to \$934,585,585.
- The Clerk *Pro Tem* reported on BCO amendments sent down by the 47th General Assembly to Presbyteries for voting. Both items, having received the required vote of two-thirds of the Presbyteries, were placed before the Assembly for voting and were adopted without objection.
 - an amendment to BCO 42-4 and 43-3 regarding method and deadlines for filing Appeals and Complaints.
 - an amendment to BCO 32-8, 32-13, 35-10 to allow for video testimony by witnesses.

Committee on Constitutional Business

- CCB reported on the advice given to Committees of Commissioners and that it had examined the minutes of the SJC and they were found to be in order without exceptions.

Interchurch Relations

- The Assembly was introduced to Fraternal Delegates who offered greetings via video presentations displayed at the beginning and ending of the various Assembly business sessions.

WEDNESDAY

Assembly-wide Seminar

- An Assembly-wide seminar entitled “The Future Glory of the Church: The PCA We Envision for Christ’s Purposes”. Dr. Chapell led a discussion on the topic of the title among 6 PCA leaders. A recording of the seminar can be found at 21:35 at the link below:

<https://livestream.com/accounts/8521918/events/9731338/videos/222898925>

A list of all Assembly seminars can be found here:

<https://pcaga.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Seminars.pdf>

Review of Presbytery Records

- Potomac Presbytery’s minutes were approved without exception.
- Most of the recommendations proposed by CRPR were approved. However, there was vigorous debate concerning a recommendation with respect to the minutes of Calvary Presbytery and the alleged right of a presbytery to forbid the teaching of an approved exception to the doctrinal standards. RPR had recommended that the responses of the Presbytery be found unsatisfactory and sought that the matter be referred to the SJC (RAO 16-10. c.). This recommendation was defeated in favor of a Minority Report that recommended that the response be found satisfactory and required no further action. In light of the action with respect to Calvary, a few recommendations with respect to other Presbyteries that were similar in character were revised.

Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality

- The Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality gave its final report which included no recommendations for adoption by the Assembly. For more on the Assembly’s actions related to this matter see “Selected Acts & Deliverances, Appendix 1”.

Ad Interim Committee on Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault

- The Committee, established by the 47th GA, was continued to the 49th GA and funding for the additional year was set at \$25,000 to be included in the Administrative Committee’s budget (note: a commissioner on the floor stated that there was an anonymous doner who promised to fund the full amount!). For more on the Assembly’s action see “Selected Acts & Deliverances, Appendix 2”.

Worship

- TE Russ Whitfield, Senior Pastor of Grace Mosaic, Washington, DC, preached on the theme “Truth in Advertising” from Jonah 4:1-11.

THURSDAY

Nominations Committee

- Almost all Committee nominations prevailed.

Mission to the World

- The Committee of Commissioners recommended an answer in the affirmative to Overture 14, a proposal seeking that the Assembly direct CMTW to amend the MTW Policy Manual to include the following statement: “All MTW leaders in line authority over church planting or church development ministry shall be ordained elders.” Further the proposal declared that this statement be considered a “material change” to the MTW Policy Manual, and that any change or removal of this statement must be approved by CMTW and submitted to the General Assembly through the usual process of reports of the Permanent Committees and Agencies in accordance with *RAO* 4-21.j and *RAO* 14-11.d, f, g, h.” After a formal debate, that was both vigorous and cordial, between a representative of CMTW and a representative of the Committee of Commissioners, the latter’s proposal was adopted.
- Approved November 7, 2021, as a day of prayer for the persecuted church worldwide and November 2021 as a month of prayer for global missions.¹

Standing Judicial Commission

- 17 matters before the court this year (’18, 1 case; ’19, 14 cases; ’21, 2 cases). 7 cases were reported. There were no minority reports.

Administrative Committee

- Approved all budgets, “partnership shares,” and “ministry asks”.
- Upon the Committee of Commissioner’s recommendation, the Assembly answered in the negative an overture to reduce GA registration fees for Ruling Elders. The AC offered a detailed explanation of why the proposal was unwise and why it would not serve the end it was seeking.
- When Dr. Taylor, who served as stated clerk since 1998, announced his retirement, I commented that it would be very difficult to replace such an able and devoted servant of the church. This difficult task has, nonetheless, been well accomplished. The search committee unanimously nominated, and the Assembly elected by acclamation, the next stated clerk of the PCA General Assembly: Dr. Bryan Chapell. Upon Dr. Chapell’s election Dr. Taylor commented that no Stated Clerk has been more qualified from the very day that he took office than Dr. Chapell. He has served as the senior pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church in Peoria, Illinois, since 2013. He served Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis for three decades, including as president and chancellor from 1994 to 2013. He is the author of a number of best-selling books. Dr. Chapell served as the moderator of the 42nd General Assembly and has been elected multiple times to serve as a member of the Standing Judicial Commission and the Committee on Constitutional Business. He has also served on the Overtures Committee, including once as its chairman. You can read about Dr. Chapell here:

<https://byfaithonline.com/bryan-chapell-nominated-for-stated-clerk/>

Worship

- TE Abraham Cho, Senior Pastor of Redeemer East Side, NY, NY, preached on the theme “The Spiritual power of Weakness” from 2 Corinthians 2:14-3:5ß.

¹ Resources for participation in both of these events will be found on the MTW website.

Overtures Committee

- The committee reported on 35 Overtures, enjoying able, effective, and cheerful leadership from W. Scott Barber, pastor of Redeemer Church of the Shoals, Florence, Alabama. For the second time electronic voting was used in the Overtures Committee. There were two minority reports on notice, but only one was filed (the other having been withdrawn in favor of a carefully crafted compromise). The one report filed did not prevail with the Assembly. Almost all Committee recommendations were approved. The Committee went very late into the night on Thursday, finishing its report well after midnight, but in time for Adjournment! For more on the Assembly's actions on the Overtures see "Selected Acts & Deliverances".

Committee on Thanks

- The Report continued a tradition of long-standing: without peer, the best report of the Assembly! The report closed, however, with a poignant sense of loss: this is the first Resolution of Thanks for which the PCA has not had the venerable Henry Lewis Smith of Southeast Alabama Presbytery to assist in its crafting.

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God.

Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

Hebrews 13:7.