

06 ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON ECUMENICAL AND INTERFAITH RELATIONS

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Item 06-01

The General Assembly Council, upon recommendation of the Worldwide Ministries Division, with the concurrence of the Congregational Ministries Division and the National Ministries Division, recommends that the 216th General Assembly (2004) approve the following:

- 1. Expansion of work responding to the 1999 referral to better equip the church for witness in pluralistic society, to be designed and carried out by a cross-divisional staff team coordinated by the Interfaith Relations Office. This team will also involve at least the Office of Theology and Worship and the Committee on Theological Education in the Congregational Ministries Division, the Office on International Evangelism in the Worldwide Ministries Division, and the Office of Evangelism and Church Development in the National Ministries Division.**
- 2. Development of one or more study resources for congregational use, to equip Presbyterians in better articulation of their faith in interreligious contexts.**
- 3. A change of the date for a final report on this project to the 217th General Assembly (2006).**

Rationale

These recommendations are in response to the following referral: *1999 Referral: 25.246. "Policy Statement on Building Community Among Strangers," Religious Intolerance and Conflict, Recommendation f. Encouraging the General Assembly Council, Through the Worldwide Ministries Division, in cooperation with the Committee on Theological Education, to Convene a Consultation on Ways Seminaries and Others Might Provide Continuing Education on How to Train Church Members to Articulate Their Faith—From the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (Minutes, 1999, Part I, p. 404).*

The 211th General Assembly (1999) acted to refer to the Worldwide Ministries Division that, "in cooperation with the Committee on Theological Education, [it] convene a consultation on ways seminaries and others might provide continuing education for pastors to enable their training church members to articulate their faith adequately in the context of interreligious dialogue" (*Minutes, 1999, Part I, p. 404, paragraph 25.246*).

The General Assembly referral focuses on the witness made by Presbyterians in interreligious relationships of every kind, but particularly in the arenas of everyday life. Many Presbyterians confess that they do not know how to talk about their faith with persons outside the church community. Consequently, their choices are limited—to avoid relationships with persons of other faiths; to meet persons of other religions without talking about faith matters; or to engage with neighbors who are followers of other religions, repeating "churchy" language that conveys little meaning to others. Presbyterians may even be adopting relativistic theological positions about religion simply because they are not articulate.

While witness is not solely a matter of words and speech, we believe what we say is important. We make our witness in the context of listening to the other as well as sharing our own experience. The General Assembly action puts an emphasis upon discovering appropriate ways to equip pastors for helping church members meet their needs in order that they may be witnesses in pluralistic society.

The Worldwide Ministries Division (WMD) indicated to the 214th General Assembly (2002) that it expected to make a final report on this project to the 215th General Assembly (2003). To that end, WMD's Interfaith Office began to work with the Committee on Theological Education (COTE) on a proposed consultation, which aimed to focus on ways the continuing education systems related to the PC(USA)—especially, but not necessarily exclusively, the theological institutions—might empower pastors to nurture church members in the articulation of their faith as they live among people of other religions.

The consultation planned would have given attention to issues of witness in pluralistic society and of congregational nurture in the context of determining means for pastoral continuing education. The understanding of wit-

ness to be addressed by the consultation was broad in scope, and based upon a dialogical approach that implies that Christian witnesses both express their own faith and listen to the witness of the other in an attitude of respect and openness.

This project was not pursued in 2002 nor in 2003, due primarily to a staff vacancy in the Interfaith Relations Office, which has now been resolved. Funds were reallocated for other work.

Reasons for Expanding the Referred Mandate

In 2004, Presbyterians continue to find themselves in increasing interaction with persons of other religious traditions. The political and social significance and complexity of our interactions is ever more clear. If anything, there is now more need to help Presbyterians feel comfortable and equipped to be articulate witnesses to their faith in interreligious situations of everyday life.

Conversations with pastors, members, and staff within the PC(USA) have raised a number of additional questions and concerns related to the completion of this project:

- We do not yet have enough information about what specific kinds of help pastors and congregants want and need with regard to witness in pluralistic society. Some research is needed to clarify what sort of resource or process will be of most help. Focus-group discussions and other conversations need to be conducted to clarify what is most needed by pastors, congregants, and seminary leaders in this area.
- Addressing theological questions and unfamiliarity with central affirmations of Christian faith clearly need to be part of any attempt to enable more adequate articulation of faith. One issue that has been raised for possible exploration by the Office of Theology and Worship is the question of what Presbyterians mean by “salvation.” New resources may be needed to help Presbyterians nourish their roots in Reformed Christian tradition that will support them as witnesses.
- To equip the church well in this area, it might also be helpful to clarify the variety of possible approaches to witness and evangelization, and to enable Presbyterians to study and discuss these. This work will require the cooperation of the Offices of Interfaith Relations, International Evangelism, and Evangelism and Church Development, on approaches to witness and evangelism.

It is in light of these concerns that the Worldwide Ministries Division makes this recommendation for cross-division work to complete the referred mandate on “Witness in Pluralistic Societies.”

Item 06-02

On Forming a Task Force to Draft a Denominational Policy Consistent with the Religious Pluralism Reality in the U.S.A.—From the Presbytery of Eastern Oklahoma.

The Presbytery of Eastern Oklahoma overtures the 216th General Assembly (2004) to instruct the Stated Clerk to convene the presidents of seminaries associated with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to designate scholars in the field of religious pluralism to form a task force to draft a denominational policy consistent with the religious pluralism reality in the United States of American and in the world that does the following:

- **Informs our religious educational systems.**
- **Enlightens our liturgical practices.**
- **Enlarges our ecumenical efforts.**

All this with the purpose in mind that our leadership and membership have a better appreciation of what *neighbor love* really means when our neighbors and work colleagues so often are people of another religion, which reality instructs us that our faith and its practice are not threatened by the acknowledgment and respect of religions other than Christianity nor by denominational instrumentalities other than Presbyterianism. And as a part of this process it is requested that General Assembly urge the Stated Clerk to do the following:

- **Engage the staff of the Worldwide Ministries Division and the office of the Coordinator of Interfaith Relations to aid and assist the Stated Clerk in this effort.**
- **Seek the necessary funding from the Office of the General Assembly.**

Organize this task force so that they can be prepared to come to the 217th General Assembly (2006) with a recommended policy statement that is sufficiently credible and judicious that it will not only serve the mission and ministry of this church, but serve as a model for other Christian denominations to emulate in their own fashion.

Rationale

Contending religious forces are certainly not the only source of hatred and war in this world and at this time, but it is a self-evident truth that: there will be no peace between nations until there is peace between religions.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has a reputation known worldwide as a faith community that not only seeks peace as a program goal, but diligently works under the mandate of reconciliation to make peace between the alienated.

Presbyterians have long acknowledged and deplored our own failure to find reconciliation within our own communion that too often immobilizes good decision-making capabilities.

To our detriment, we have failed to employ our most learned thinkers often associated with seminaries and institutions of higher education to help our denomination find workable solutions to chronic but crucial religious and ideological problems that have confounded past General Assemblies.

We freely confess that our culture and our discords tempt us to be impatient when healthy outcomes actually require very long-term planning and very hard work.

GAC COMMENT ON ITEM 06-02

Comment on Item 06-02—From the General Assembly Council.

The General Assembly Council, in consultation with its Worldwide Ministries Division, offers to the 216th General Assembly (2004) the following comment:

This overture asks for the drafting of a denominational policy consistent with the religious pluralism reality in the U.S.A. and in the world that informs our religious education systems, enlightens our liturgical practices, and enlarges our ecumenical efforts with the purpose in mind that our leadership and membership have a better appreciation of what *neighbor love* really means when our neighbors are people of another religion.

Over the years, the General Assembly has approved a number of policy and study documents that address the Presbyterian's calling in relation to men and women of other religious traditions. For example, the 211th General Assembly (1999) approved "Presbyterian Principles for Interfaith Dialogue," and "Building Community Among Strangers."

These and other documents address the concern of this overture, and lay the foundations of the policy for which it calls. Yet such policies and studies are not well known by many Presbyterians.

The present financial realities also make it necessary to confess that funding for the kind of task force requested in the overture is not readily available.

Therefore, the General Assembly Council urges the 216th General Assembly (2004) to do the following:

1. Disapprove the specific process called for in Item 06-02.

2. Approve the spirit of the overture by

a. instructing the Office of Interfaith Relations, together with other appropriate offices of the General Assembly Council, to prepare a guide for congregations that makes known and available the resources already available in regard to religious plurality and Christian discipleship; and

b. instructing the Office of the General Assembly and the Office on Interfaith Relations of the World-wide Ministries Division to bring to the 217th General Assembly (2006) a recommendation on what further study or action might be needed to better equip the church to live in a religiously plural world.

Item 06-03

The General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations recommends that the 216th General Assembly (2004) invite the following churches to send ecumenical advisory delegates to the 217th General Assembly (2006):

Overseas Churches: Korean Christian Federation (North Korea), Presbyterian Church of Korea (South Korea), Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (South Korea), Presbyterian Church of the Cameroon, Christian Evangelical Church of Minahasa (GIMM), Tomohon (Indonesia), United Church of Jamaica and Grand Cayman Island, Lesotho Evangelical Church, Apostolic Orthodox Church of Albania, Synod of the Nile of the Evangelical Church of Egypt, Presbyterian Church of Colombia.

North American: African Methodist Episcopal Church, Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, Orthodox Church in America, United Church of Canada, United Church of Christ.

Rationale

The General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations nominates to each General Assembly churches to be invited to send ecumenical advisory delegates to the subsequent assembly (Standing Rule A.2.f. and E.8.). Ten overseas churches and five churches from within the United States are recommended. Of the overseas churches, we recommend at least one church from each area staffed by the Worldwide Ministries Division (WMD). Of the churches within the United States, we recommend at least one church from the Formula of Agreement, at least two churches from Churches Uniting in Christ, and at least one church in our current conciliar relationships.

Item 06-04

The General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations recommends that the 216th General Assembly (2004) urge the congregations and middle governing bodies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to engage in study and response to the World Council of Churches Decade to Overcome Violence until 2010. This program calls upon the Church to do the following:

- 1. Work together for peace, justice, and reconciliation at all levels—local, regional, and global.**
- 2. Embrace creative approaches to peace building that are consonant with the spirit of the gospel.**
- 3. Interact and collaborate with local communities, secular movements, and people of other living faiths towards cultivating a culture of peace.**
- 4. Walk with people who are systematically oppressed by violence, and to act in solidarity with all struggling for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.**
- 5. Repent together for our complicity in violence, and to engage in theological reflection to overcome the spirit, logic, and practice of violence.**

Rationale

In 2004, the United States is the focus of the World Council of Churches Decade to Overcome Violence—Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace (DOV). The U.S. focus for the DOV provides a great opportunity for raising awareness about this movement and will encourage Presbyterians to incorporate education and advocacy about the DOV in their programming and planning.

Item 06-05

The General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations recommends that the 216th General Assembly (2004) instruct the General Assembly Council to continue its support for ecumenical formation.

Rationale

As part of its ecumenical commitment, the PC(USA) promotes the ecumenical formation through some of the program areas of the General Assembly Council. The majority of this work is done, either through the Worldwide Ministries Division (WMD) Ecumenical and Mission Partnership office or through the Congregational Ministries Division (CMD) Youth and Young Adult Ministries. Among the findings of the National Council of Churches Review Committee are the following:

- Educational programs should be provided for those who will be representatives of the PC(USA) in ecumenical councils and agencies. The younger generation should have opportunity to be more involved in work of the NCCC and CWS and to become aware of, and committed to, the ecumenical vision.
- Funding is required to support opportunities for ecumenical involvement and formation, especially special programs for leaders, congregations, and youth of the PC(USA).
- Even though this concern was raised in the context of the NCCC Review Report, it was also recognized by the Review Committee that it is a concern that applies to PC(USA) ecumenical formation in general.

Item 06-06

The General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations recommends that the 216th General Assembly (2004) do the following:

1. Approve the report, “Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Understanding 16th and 17th Century Condemnations of Other Churches in *The Book of Confessions*” (which can be found following recommendations), and approve the following policy statement:

Specific statements in 16th and 17th century confessions and catechisms in *The Book of Confessions* contain condemnations or derogatory characterizations of the Catholic Church: Chapters XVIII and XXII of the Scots Confession; Questions and Answer 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism; and Chapters II, III, XVII, and XX, of the Second Helvetic Confession. (Chapters XXII, XXV, and XXIX of the Westminster Confession of Faith have been amended to remove anachronous and offensive language. Chapter XXVIII of the French Confession does not have constitutional standing.) While these statements emerged from substantial doctrinal disputes, they reflect 16th and 17th century polemics. Their condemnations and characterizations of the Catholic Church are not the position of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and are not applicable to current relationships between the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Catholic Church.

2. Amend the Preface to *The Book of Confessions* by inserting the policy statement [above] between paragraph 5 and the concluding quotation from the *Book of Order*.

3. Instruct the Office of the General Assembly to include footnotes to relevant sections, referring to the policy statement in the Preface in all future editions of *The Book of Confessions*.

4. Request the Office of the General Assembly and the Office of Theology and Worship to initiate conversations with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, seeking a WARC statement on the issue. Results of these conversations will be reported to the General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations.

5. Request the Office of the General Assembly and the Office of Theology and Worship to initiate conversations with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, seeking a joint Catholic-Presbyterian statement on 16th and 17th century condemnations and characterizations. Results of these conversations will be reported to the General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations.

Report

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Understanding of 16th and 17th Century Condemnations of Other Churches in *The Book of Confessions*

Prepared by the Office of Theology and Worship

Chapter II of the Form of Government—“The Church and Its Confessions”—sets forth the church’s understanding of the role and function of the confessions in the life of the church.

a. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) states its faith and bears witness to God’s grace in Jesus Christ in the creeds and confessions in *The Book of Confessions*. In these confessional statements the church declares to its members and to the world

who and what it is,

what it believes,

what it resolves to do.

b. These statements identify the church as a community of people known by its convictions as well as by its actions. They guide the church in its study and interpretation of the Scriptures; they summarize the essence of Christian tradition; they direct the church in maintaining sound doctrines; they equip the church for its work of proclamation. (*Book of Order*, G-2.0100)

The church's confessions are not mere historic artifacts. The confessions guide, direct, and equip the whole church. Persons ordained as ministers, elders, and deacons vow to receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions, and to be instructed, led, and guided by them. Because the church is serious about its confessional basis, confessional statements that condemn other churches or express derogatory characterizations of other churches are troubling and confusing. How are 21st century Presbyterians to understand 16th and 17th century polemic?

The Confessional Nature of the Church, adopted by the 198th General Assembly (1986) notes that "Most confessions have been intended as polemical defense of true Christian faith . . . against perversion from within as well as attacks from outside the church. They are the church's means of preserving the authenticity and purity of its faith" (Minutes, 1986, Part I, p. 518, paragraph 29.131). In every age, the church has sought to express distinguishing marks of faithful Christian community. This has always entailed saying "Yes" to some things and "No" to others. Genuine confession of faith is always both affirmation of truth and denial of untruth. Sometimes the "No" is explicit, as with the Theological Declaration of Barmen and the Confession of 1967; at other times it is implicit, as with the Nicene Creed and A Brief Statement of Faith.

The church's denials are more than polite reservations; they are essential articulations of the boundaries of Christian faith and life. However, the church's expression of those boundaries should not be overstated, insulting to other churches, or ecumenically provocative. The intensity of Christian controversy in the 16th and 17th centuries, coupled with characteristically hyperbolic modes of expression, produced some confessional language that strike contemporary Christians as exaggerated, offensive, and confrontational.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its predecessor churches have dealt with this issue before. The 1647 edition of The Westminster Confession of Faith has been amended at several points in order to remove offensive references to Catholicism. The amendments did not conceal doctrinal disputes, eliminate points of theological disagreement, or mute Reformed affirmations, however.

Amending the confessions to suppress unpleasant realities may not be the best way to honor the integrity of the confessions and the integrity of contemporary witness. The Preface to *The Book of Confessions* is instructive:

The creeds, confessions and catechisms of *The Book of Confessions* are both historical and contemporary. Each emerged in a particular time and place in response to a particular situation. Thus, each confessional document should be respected in its historical particularity; none should be altered to conform to current theological, ethical, or linguistic norms. The confessions are not confined to the past, however; they do not simply express what the church was, what it used to believe, and what it once resolved to do. The confessions address the church's current faith and life, declaring contemporary convictions and actions. . . .

The tension between the confessions' historical and contemporary nature is a fruitful tension within the church. The confessions are not honored if they are robbed of historical particularity by imagining that they are timeless expressions of truth. They are best able to instruct, lead, and guide the church when they are given freedom to speak in their own voices. The confessions are not respected if they are robbed of contemporary authority by imagining that they are historical artifacts. They are best able to instruct, lead, and guide the church when they are given freedom to speak now to the church and the world.

How, then, can the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) honor both the historical and contemporary integrity of the confessions at points where the confessions characterize other Christian churches and other religious faiths in ways that are offensive and that do not express present understandings of ecclesial relationships? A survey of problematic sections of the church's confessions indicates both the seriousness and limited scope of the issue.

1. *The Scots Confession (1560)*

The Scots Confession was written at a turning point in Scottish history. The year 1560 marked the culmination of a long struggle to end Catholic rule and establish Scotland as a Protestant nation. Not surprisingly, the confession's language reflects the passions of the time.

Chapter XVIII

The Notes by Which the True Kirk Shall Be Determined from the False . . .

Since Satan has labored from the beginning to adorn his pestilent synagogue with the title of the Kirk of God, and has incited cruel murderers to persecute, trouble, and molest the true Kirk and its members, as Cain did to Abel, Ishmael to Isaac, Esau to Jacob, and the whole priesthood of the Jews to Christ Jesus himself and his apostles after him. So it is essential that the true Kirk be distin-

guished from the filthy synagogues by clear and perfect notes lest we, being deceived, receive and embrace, to our own condemnation, the one for the other. . . . [*The Book of Confessions*, 3.18]

Chapter XXII

The Right Administration of the Sacraments

. . . This is why we abandon the teaching of the Roman Church and withdraw from its sacraments; firstly, because their ministers are not true ministers of Christ Jesus . . . and, secondly, because they have so adulterated both the sacraments with their own additions that no part of Christ’s original act remains in its original simplicity. . . . Similarly, if the teacher teaches false doctrine which is hateful to God, even though the sacraments are his own ordinance, they are not rightly used, since wicked men have used them for another end than what God commanded. We affirm that this has been done to the sacraments in the Roman Church, for there the whole action of the Lord Jesus is adulterated in form, purpose, and meaning. . . . [*The Book of Confessions*, 3.22]

2. *The Heidelberg Catechism (1563)*

The Heidelberg Catechism—warmly personal and irenic—has been adopted by Reformed churches throughout the world. Question 80 was not part of the original text, but was added at the insistence of Frederick the Elector.

Q. 80. What difference is there between the Lord’s Supper and the papal Mass?

A. The Lord’s Supper testifies to us that we have complete forgiveness of all our sins through the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ which he himself has accomplished on the cross once for all But the Mass teaches that the living and the dead do not have forgiveness of sins through the sufferings of Christ unless Christ is again offered for them daily by the priest (and that Christ is bodily under the form of bread and wine and is therefore to be worshiped in them). Therefore the Mass is fundamentally a complete denial of the once for all sacrifice and passion of Jesus Christ (and as such an idolatry to be condemned). [*The Book of Confessions*, 4.080]

3. *The Second Helvetic Confession (1566)*

The Second Helvetic Confession was written by Heinrich Bullinger as a personal testament for the church in Zurich, but it was soon adopted by Reformed churches in Switzerland and throughout Europe. While generally moderate in tone and catholic in spirit, it condemns numerous ancient heresies. Jaroslav Pelikan notes that “the confessions of the Reformation, reacting to the repeated charge of their Roman Catholic opponents that they are the recrudescence of ancient heresies, make it a point to condemn such ancient heresies by name” The confession also expresses disagreement with positions of the Catholic Church, of course, but sometimes doctrinal disputation lapses into broad, derogatory characterizations of the Catholic church as church.

Chapter II

Of Interpreting the Holy Scriptures; and of Fathers, Councils, and Traditions

. . . Nor consequently do we acknowledge as the true or genuine interpretation of the Scriptures what is called the conception of the Roman Church, that is, what the defenders of the Roman Church plainly maintain should be thrust upon all for acceptance. [*The Book of Confessions*, 5.010]

Chapter III

Of God, His Unity and Trinity

. . . Therefore we condemn the Jews and Mohammedans, and all those who blaspheme that sacred and adorable Trinity. . . . [*The Book of Confessions*, 5.019]

Chapter XVII

Of the Catholic and Holy Church of God, and of the One Only Head of the Church

. . . The Roman head does indeed preserve his tyranny and the corruption that has been brought into the Church, and meanwhile he hinders, resists, and with all the strength he can muster cuts off the proper reformation of the Church. [*The Book of Confessions*, 5.132]

Chapter XX

Of Holy Baptism

. . . We condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that newborn infants of the faithful are to be baptized. . . . We condemn also the Anabaptists in the rest of their peculiar doctrines which they hold contrary to the Word of God. We therefore are not Anabaptists and have nothing in common with them. [*The Book of Confessions*, 5.192]

4. *The Westminster Confession Of Faith (1647)*

The Westminster Assembly conducted its work in a time of national crisis. It attempted to find a way through intractable religious and political problems. Although the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has amended the West-

minster Confession to eliminate objectionable statements, most Reformed churches retain the original wording. Both the 1647 text and the PCUSA amended text are shown.

Chapter XXII
Of Lawful Oaths and Vows

. . . [Popish] monastical vows of perpetual single life, professed poverty, and regular obedience, are so far from being degrees of higher perfection, that they are superstitious and sinful snares, in which no Christian may entangle himself. (PCUSA: removes “Popish”) [*The Book of Confessions*, 6.126]

Chapter XXV
Of the Church

The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error: and some have so degenerated as to become no Churches of Christ, but Synagogues of Satan. (PCUSA: The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error: and some have so degenerated as to become apparently no churches of Christ.) [*The Book of Confessions*, 6.144]

There is no other Head of the Church, but the Lord Jesus Christ: Nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense be head therof: but is, that Antichrist, that Man of sin and Son of Perdition, that exalteth himself, in the Church, against Christ, and all that is called God. (PCUSA: The Lord Jesus Christ is the only head of the Church, and the claim of any man to be the vicar of Christ and the head of the church is unscriptural, without warrant in fact [PCUS version adds “even anti-Christian”], and is a usurpation dishonoring to the Lord Jesus Christ.) [*The Book of Confessions*, 6.145]

Chapter XXIX
Of the Lord’s Supper

In this sacrifice Christ is not offered up to his Father, nor any real sacrifice made at all for the remission of sins of the quick or dead, but only a commemoration of that one offering up of Himself, by Himself, upon the cross, once for all: and a spiritual oblation of all possible praise unto God, for the same: So that, the Popish sacrifice of the mass (as they call it) is most abominably injurious to Christ’s one, only sacrifice, the sole propitiation for all the sins of the Elect. (PCUSA: . . . but a commemoration of that one offering up of himself, by himself, upon the cross, once for all, and a spiritual oblation of all possible praise unto God for the same: so that the so-called sacrifice of the mass is most contradictory to Christ’s one sacrifice, the only propitiation for all the sins of the elect.) [*The Book of Confessions*, 6.162]

5. *The French Confession (1559)*

The French Confession, “fashioned in common accord by the churches dispersed in France,” expresses John Calvin’s mature theological views. Although the French Confession is not included in *The Book of Confessions*, both the 209th General Assembly (1997) and the 215th General Assembly (2003) have commended it to the church for study, with the possibility that it may be recommended for inclusion at a future date.

XXVIII

In this conviction we declare that where the word of God is not received and its authority is not acknowledged, and where there is no use of the sacraments, we can conclude that there is no church, properly speaking. Thus we condemn the assemblies of the papacy where the pure truth of God is banished, where the sacraments are corrupted, bastardized, falsified, or annihilated altogether, and where idolatries and superstitions hold sway. We hold that all who engage in these acts by taking communion there separate and cut themselves off from the body of Jesus Christ. Yet because some small trace of the church continues in the papacy, and because the substance of baptism remains there (for the efficacy of baptism does not depend on the one who administers the sacrament), we confess that those who have been baptized have no need of a second baptism. However, because of corruptions, people cannot present children in those assemblies without polluting themselves.

* * * * *

Some contemporary churches recognize that 16th and 17th century condemnations and characterizations do not reflect current ecclesial understanding, and may hinder the deepening of relationships among the churches. The issue has been dealt with in a variety of ways.

- The *Formula of Agreement*, establishing full communion among the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Reformed Church in America (RCA), and United Churches of Christ (UCC) stipulates that the four churches “withdraw any historic condemnation by one side or the other as inappropriate for the life and faith of our churches today.”

- The *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, agreed to by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, states that “. . . the doctrinal condemnations of the sixteenth century, insofar as they relate to the doctrine of justification, appear in a new light: The teaching of the Lutheran churches presented in this *Declaration* does not fall under the condemnations of the Council of Trent. The condemnations in the Lutheran Confessions do not apply to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church presented in this *Declaration*. Nothing is thereby taken away from the seriousness of the condemnations related to the doctrine of justification. Some were not simply pointless. They remain for us ‘salutary warnings’ to which we must attend in our teaching and practice.”

- The Church of Scotland declared in 1986 that “This Church no longer affirms the following contents of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* [specific wording cited in chs. 22.7; 24.3; 25.6; 29.2] . . . This Church therefore disassociates itself from the above statements and does not require its office bearers to believe them.”
- The Christian Reformed Church, in response to a 1998 overture asking that Q&A 80 be removed from the Heidelberg Catechism, has been in dialogue with the Catholic Church since 1998 “to clarify the official doctrine of that church concerning the mass.” The 2002 Synod received a report concerning the dialogue, and requested its Interchurch Relations Committee “to advise a future synod about any further action that may be needed regarding Q. and A. 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism.”

These cases are instructive. Each is helpful, but they are not adequate precedents for the issue before the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Four of the 16th and 17th century documents in *The Book of Confessions* contain condemnations and derogatory characterizations of the Catholic Church. Removal of the offending statements would not change history. Moreover, removal of offending statements might deprive the church of salutary warnings about the danger of excessive zeal and disproportionate representations of opponents. Yet the offending statements cannot stand alone. They require commentary that adequately articulates the current understanding and policy of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is not called to agree with every statement in *The Book of Confessions*, but rather to be directed, guided, and equipped by the confessions. The church is not called to comment directly on every statement in *The Book of Confessions* with which it may differ. The statements in question are directed against *others*, however, and so the church is called to articulate its current understanding.

Condemnations and derogatory characterizations of the Catholic Church grew from momentous doctrinal disputes, especially in the areas of ecclesiology and the sacraments. Real differences in doctrine remain. The proposed policy statement does not presume to resolve doctrinal differences. These differences are being explored, and agreement sought, in the ongoing series of national and international Reformed-Catholic dialogues. The issue before the church now is far narrower in scope, dealing only with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s current understanding of 16th and 17th century condemnations and characterizations of the Catholic Church and their applicability to the contemporary Catholic Church.

Rationale

The issue of 16th and 17th century condemnations has been before the General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations (GACER) since the two conversations between a delegation from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Vatican’s Council for Promoting Christian Unity. At its February 2003 meeting, GACER voted to

instruct the office of Theology and Worship to draft a proposed statement expressing PC(USA)’s understanding of specific sections in *The Book of Confessions* that express pejorative views of the beliefs and practices of other Christian churches and traditions; and that, if approved, will be used as the basis of consultations with WARC Department of Theology, the Ecumenical Office of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, or both.

ACC ADVICE ON ITEM 06-06

Advice on Item 06-06—From the Advisory Committee on the Constitution

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advises the 216th General Assembly (2004) with the following alternatives to the recommendations for amending the Preface to *The Book of Confessions* and adding footnotes related to historic condemnations of the Roman Catholic Church.

There can be little doubt that a vast majority of the church finds the historic condemnations of the Roman Catholic Church to be offensive, as the proponents allege. However, the proponents rightly state that the confessions are not “mere historical artifacts” but have a living currency in the life of the church. To alter the text of such historic statements does indeed violate the integrity of the experience of our forbearers. To retain language that does not express our current understandings and even provides potential for offense to sisters and brothers in the faith, on the other hand, may violate the integrity of our present witness. This tension, inherent in maintaining a confessional tradition, may be one with which we must live. The proponents believe that leaving ancient texts unaltered and noting current belief and practice in extra-constitutional notation is the best solution for the time being.

The General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations correctly understands that certain material adjacent to a constitutional document (such as prefaces, footnotes, and titles) are not themselves of constitutional authority and are not binding on the church as reflections of our belief and practice. Therefore, in the strictest sense, it is not within the mandate of the Advisory Committee on the Constitution to respond to the proposal.

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution observes that amending the Preface may not achieve the intent of the proponents. To seek significant alteration in what the church believes about its witness and relationships with other believers without giving those assertions full constitutional authority may aggravate rather than ease the difficulty. If it is the hope of the proponents that when officers vow to “receive,” “adopt,” “be instructed,” “led,” and “guided by the Confessions” the reversal of these ancient condemnations are included, then the full intent of the request may only be fulfilled by leading the church through the complete process of Confessional amendment (G-18-02011).

There are alternatives:

The Book of Confessions, *The Form of Government*, and *the Directory for Worship* each have a “Preface” composed of material that is not considered to be of constitutional authority, but instructive in nature. *The Rules of Discipline* has no Preface but includes, as its Chapter I, a “Preamble” that spells out fundamental material related to discipline, material that is often cited in decisions with constitutional authority. Should the assembly desire to submit this proposal to the process of full confessional amendment, it may be wise to cast that amendment as the attachment of a Preamble with unquestioned authority for the church.

The provision of G-13.0103p “to warn or bear witness against error in doctrine or immorality in practice in our outside the church” could be used to make a declaratory statement to the church that it is error to hold the confessional condemnations of others in any way apart from their historic context. Any of these actions or a combination may achieve the intent of the recommendation.

Item 06-07

Report on the Review of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

The General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations recommends that the 216th General Assembly (2004) do the following:

1. Affirm its intent that the PC(USA) shall seek to sustain the basic level of its support to the work of the National Council of Churches of Christ (NCCC) and Church World Service (CWS), both in finances and human resources, while urging other member communions to seek every possible way of increasing their support.
2. Commend the Board of Directors of Church World Service for developing and evaluating its Strategic Plan and for substantially involving member communions in this planning process and in the follow-up Listening Dialogue Sessions.
3. Commend the steps the National Council of Churches and Church World Service have taken to work in partnership with each other and with member communions on issues and programs related to communions; and request PC(USA) participants in NCCC and CWS governance to give attention to further steps that support the development of goals and priorities and accountability to these goals in the procurement and use of funds from all sources.
4. Request that, internationally, Church World Service and the National Council of Churches work closely together and in partnership with churches and councils of churches in various regions of the world; and requests that PC(USA) representatives in NCCC and CWS work to ensure the development of structures that allow such cooperative relations.
5. Request the General Assembly Council to support the programs and activities of the National Council of Churches and Church World Service through cognate funding and programmatic participation, in recognition of the place our own theology and priorities give to ecumenical life.
6. Request the General Assembly Council to provide more information to congregations about the value and work of the National Council of Churches and Church World Service through appropriate news and communication services and through programmatic offices and initiatives, with special emphasis upon ways that local churches may participate.
7. Express its support for the possibility of a broader ecumenical table while maintaining its involvement in the National Council of Churches and Church World Service.
8. Express appreciation for the open and responsive way that the senior staff of the National Council of Churches and Church World Service cooperated with the PC(USA) review of its work, giving of their time for meetings and providing full information in a timely and collegial fashion.
9. Affirm, with gratitude to God, the achievements and renewal of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and Church World Service and express its appreciation to the member churches for their participation in this instrument of the ecumenical movement, as we seek to find the unity declared by our Lord Jesus Christ.
10. Request the Stated Clerk to communicate the above report and recommendations to the National Council of Churches, Church World Service, and their member communions.

Rationale

A. The Assigned Task and Introduction

The 212th General Assembly (2000) requested the General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations (GACER) “to design a process for review of councils and other ecumenical alliances to which the Presbyterian

Church (U.S.A.) belongs” (*Minutes*, 2000, Part I, p. 108). The 214th General Assembly (2002) and the 215th General Assembly (2003) received reports on the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Council of Churches respectively. This review of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. (NCCC) is presented to the 216th General Assembly (2004). The team that conducted and edited this review included: Edward Chan, Oscar McCloud, Donald Shriver, Peggy Shriver, Kenneth Thomas, Kristine Thompson, Wayne Wilson, and Belle Miller-McMaster.

The purpose of this report is twofold. It is the review committee’s intention not only to fulfill the requirements established by the General Assembly but also to provide a resource that will educate our church on the goals of the NCCC and the nature of the church’s commitment to the NCCC. It is important to remind our church that the NCCC is not just a religious organization but also a council of which we as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are members.

B. A Historical Summary of Presbyterian Church Commitment to the National Council of Churches in Christ in the U.S.A.

Founded in 1950 as a successor to the Federal Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. (NCCC) was born in hope and faith in the aftermath of World War II. It brought together many Christian denominations and more than a dozen interdenominational agencies to form a new ecumenical structure. Presbyterians have been at the heart of this endeavor to “covenant with one another to maintain ever more fully the unity of the Church” (NCCC Preamble). These thirty-six communions, which presently include mainline Protestant, Episcopal, Orthodox, historic African American, and peace churches, “responding to the gospel revealed in the Scriptures, confess together Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, as Savior and Lord.”

The *Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)* is consistent with the Preamble of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. as it affirms that “the Church universal consists of all persons in every nation, together with their children, who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and commit themselves to live in a fellowship under his rule” (*Book of Order*, G-4.0101) The *Book of Order* also states “the unity of the Church is a gift of its Lord and finds expression in its faithfulness to the mission to which Christ calls it. The Church is a fellowship of believers which seeks the enlargement of the circle of faith to include all people and is never content to enjoy the benefits of Christian community for itself alone” (G-4.0201). Such language links the evangelical witness of the church to the struggle of all members of the body of Christ to exhibit their “visible oneness” as promised in Jesus’ own great prayer of consecration in John 17:17–23. The *Book of Order* is consistent on this point:

Visible oneness, by which diversity of persons, gifts, and understandings is brought together, is an important sign of the unity of God’s people. It is also a means by which that unity is achieved. Further, while divisions into different denominations do not destroy this unity, they do obscure it for both the Church and the world. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), affirming its historical continuity with the whole Church of Jesus Christ, is committed to the reduction of that obscurity and is willing to seek and to maintain communion and community with all other branches of the one, Catholic Church. (G-4.0203, Cf. G-15.0000)

Presbyterians, in short, do not look upon ecumenical involvement and participation as optional faithful Christian behavior. As United Methodist John McCullough, executive director of Church World Service, observes of Presbyterians, “Ecumenism is in the soul of this church!”

There are many ways that Presbyterians carry out some aspects of this commitment in groups and organizations that gather individual Christians or agencies in a common endeavor. Often these agencies make their witness by concentrating on service to particular vital human needs worldwide, for example, disaster relief, housing for the poor, and protection of religious liberty. The National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., however, brings churches into regular fellowship, theological dialogue, and joint social and programmatic action. This is a uniquely precious and spiritually grounded church-to-church official relationship. It welcomes all churches that meet the basic requirement of confessing Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, as Savior and Lord into a mutual search for and response to the will of God in today’s world. The three major streams of activity characterize the central ministry of the NCCC in faith, justice, and education: (1) Faith and Order, (2) Life and Witness, and (3) Christian Education. Through Church World Service, the churches that are members of the NCCC together reach out in compassion to the needy of the world and advocate policies that have their concerns in mind. Pro-

grams of Church World Service (CWS) fall into five basic categories: Immigration and Refugee Aid, Emergency Response and Disaster Relief, Education and Advocacy, Mission Relationships and Witness, and Economic and Social Development.

Through fifty-three years of struggle to be faithful churches in times of plenty and times of crisis, the NCCC has responded to challenges of war and nuclear threat, provided the best current scholarship through preparation of the Revised and New Revised Standard Versions of the Bible (RSV and NRSV), engaged in efforts to ameliorate poverty and racism, advocated for human rights, linked public policy advocacy to the needs and concerns of church councils around the world, prepared the ongoing Uniform Lesson Series for church schools, held conferences and done research on issues as diverse as evangelism, radio/TV communications, gender and family issues. When asked why he accepted the challenging office of NCCC General Secretary, Robert Edgar answered, in addition to his confession of faith, "Because the council has been a voice for justice, because it has been courageous, and because it is necessary."

A courageous voice is likely also to be a controversial one. The NCCC has weathered some serious controversies around unpopular positions, including some, like urging the recognition of the Peoples Republic China, that were simply ahead of their time. Over the past year, for example, the NCCC rigorously questioned a preemptive strike in Iraq and urged United Nations involvement in peaceful initiatives for change. Church partners around the world turn to the U.S. council to respond to international issues that are vital to these partners' life as churches. Advocating on their behalf may be in tension with policies that serve only our national interests, as both the NCCC and CWS have had to confront. Presbyterian participation in the world of the NCCC has been so strong and consistent that, as one elected official of our church has remarked, a critique of National Council social witness policy is also a critique of PC (USA) social witness policy!

Presbyterians come by their consistent ecumenical commitments as adherents of a long Reformed tradition embodied in John Calvin's teachings and his famous remark that he could "cross several seas" if it would serve to heal the divisions of the Christian church. It is not surprising then that both before and after the Presbyterian reunion in 1983, our northern and southern streams have been leaders in the ecumenical movement both having been part of the NCCC from its beginnings. Presbyterians have contributed presidents to the National Council, such as Eugene Carson Blake, Patricia McClurg, Syngman Rhee, and William P. Thompson; a general secretary, Clair Randall; numerous staff such as Jorge Lara-Braud, James Gunn, Karen Hessel, Eileen Lindner, Jovelino Ramos, Margaret Shafer, Peggy Shriver, Jay T. Rock, and Franklin J. Woo as well as key leaders like James Andrews, Vernon Broyles, Clifton Kirkpatrick, Belle Miller McMaster, Dan Rift, George Telford, and Frederick Wilson on oversight boards and committees. Indeed, participation by Presbyterians in this ecumenical reality is so profound that one can hardly imagine the NCCC functioning with the same effectiveness and structural integrity without it.

The NCCC leadership has recently been influential in helping fashion a new, more broadly ecumenical body, Christian Churches Together (CCT), which would bring together Roman Catholics, mainline Protestants, Orthodox, Evangelicals, and Pentecostal. Its leaders hope to deepen mutual understanding of the different theological stances and politics of their respective bodies, but it does not anticipate united public action and advocacy in the foreseeable future. This "broadened table" is welcome and a hopeful sign; it does not replace the distinctive seasoned spiritual voice, international church ties, advocacy and social action of the National Council of Churches in the U.S.A. Many denominations that are not members of the NCCC participate and contribute financially in many ministry areas and programs of the NCCC, such as Faith and Order Commission. Although there has been much collaboration between some NCCC commissions and programs and the Roman Catholic Church, Pentecostals, and some largely evangelical churches, no step that would lead to full membership in the council has been successful. It is with considerable appreciation, therefore, that Billy Graham's openness to ecumenical dialogue, beginning in 1991, was received. He came to the council to express solidarity with fellow Christians who call Jesus Lord and Savior and who work for justice and peace with concern for the needs of the poor. He thanked the secretary for evangelism of the National Council of Churches in the U.S.A. "for the integrity of my own ministry," and spoke of his "conversion to ecumenism." Echoing the Roman Catholic decree on Ecumenism, Graham said,

There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without an interior conversion. The faithful should remember that they promote union among Christians better, and indeed they live it better, when they try to lead lives according to the Gospel. The closer their union with God, with the Word and the Spirit, the more closely and easily they will be able to grow in mutual love. This change of heart and holi-

ness of life, along with public and private prayer for Christian unity and for all Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement.

Such testimony leads unity-minded Christians to hope, dream, and work toward the wholeness of Christ's body, even while encountering various kinds of resistance and taking some false steps along the way. Like the denominations that comprise the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., the NCCC has undergone financial hardships and winnowing of staff in recent years. Presbyterians can be especially grateful, therefore, for those who have honored the Holy Spirit as the "bond of unity," for the vision sketched by the *Book of Order*, for the ecumenical tradition taught by John Calvin, for the Christian leaders from many richly varied traditions who eagerly learn from one another, and for those who willingly take up the challenge of shared faithfulness in today's complex world environment.

C. *Nature and Structure of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.*

Throughout the years since its founding in 1950, the NCCC has waxed and waned along with the national structures of its member communions. Staffing and program depend largely upon the staffing strength, resources, and interests of the denominations that participate in the council. The NCCC staff that once numbered in the hundreds, at the present time has been reduced to approximately forty.

1. *A Search for Amicable Autonomy*

Church World Service (CWS), whose resources include federal funds for some of its programs as well as contributions from churches and individuals, has always been significantly larger in staff and budget than its conciliar host. Over the past few years, a greater autonomy has been negotiated for CWS with the financial and administrative separation of CWS from the rest of the NCCC's ecumenical programming activity. Prior to the separation, while CWS had its own corporate identity with its own executive director and board, the NCCC had ultimate control over CWS, including its finances and its director. Separation of CWS from NCCC was seen as necessary to enable clearer bookkeeping and tighter control over the moneys designated for the advocacy, relief, and development work of CWS, as distinct from NCCC programming funds. As of the end of 2000, control over CWS finances rests with a CWS board composed of representatives of member churches, to whom the CWS executive director is responsible. The CWS board remains elected by, and thus accountable to, the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, but CWS is otherwise separate from the NCCC's other ecumenical programming activity. An exchange of board members between entities provides continuity and coordination, and the chair of the CWS board is a vice president of the NCCC.

Both the NCCC and CWS collaborate with councils of churches worldwide. Clarity about which body, the NCCC or CWS, is primary in certain relations with ecumenical partners globally needs further work. A Memorandum of Understanding on International Affairs is being developed jointly to refine that part of an important continuing collaboration between CWS and the NCCC. A very recent example of ongoing collaboration is the seven-member delegation from the NCCC and CWS to North Korea, which brought significant food aid (132,000 pounds of wheat flour) and met in worship and encouraging fellowship with the small but steadfast Christian congregations and their Christian Federation in Pyongyang, North Korea. In search of peace and just relationship they also visited the National Council of Churches in Korea, government leaders in North and South Korea, and U.S. State Department officials.

2. *Programs and Priorities*

The NCCC amended its constitution and bylaws in 2002 to make official its new relationship with CWS and to reconstitute five commissions in the following five program areas:

- Communication
- Faith and Order
- Interfaith Relations
- Education

- Leadership Ministries
- Justice and Advocacy.

Presbyterians have long provided seconded staff to the NCCC in interfaith relations that enabled the NCCC to work in this area. Now that the NCCC has directly hired a staff and has revitalized the Commission for Interfaith Relations, these actions are extremely important in today's multi-religious world. Each commission may establish program ministries under its oversight. Some of these program areas are long-standing (Uniform Lesson Series, NRSV, etc.) while other respond to the times or adjust to changing technologies (computer databases, e.g. the Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches). Annually the General Assembly, composed of denominational (communion) delegations, meets as the primary legislative body. In addition to worshiping and fellowshiping together, it sets policy, adopts public statements and recommendations, elects officers and the general secretary, receives reports, and conducts a program review. It also witnesses to and assists the ecumenical sharing and community life of its member communions.

In addition to, but also infusing, the program areas, the NCCC sets key priority concerns. In the quadrennium concluded at the end of 2003, it has focused upon expanding the Christian ecumenical table, mobilizing to overcome poverty, and peace and justice issues. Through the "expanded table" initiative, the Christian Churches Together has taken on a life of its own. Mobilization on poverty concerns has been gathering slowly but now has new staff leadership. The NCCC, through its energetic leadership, was at the forefront of those raising issues of warning about the Iraq war, both before and since its inception. A remarkable conciliar effort spurred worship-led rallies in Washington and also took various delegations to visit personally with the Vatican and with top government leaders in England (Prime Minister Tony Blair), Germany (Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder), Russia (President Vladimir Putin), and France (President Chirac administration).

Although the NCCC, like its member churches, has endured severe cutbacks in staff and financial resources, it is in stable condition and has stabilized its finances so that a precariously balanced budget now includes a reserve of about \$10 million. Through internal and external evaluative work, in which Presbyterians played a leading role, the council is striving to express its vision in a resurgence of responsible communion and staff leadership. It means to be, as the constitution says, the place where a community of Christian communions "makes visible their unity given in Christ, and lives responsibly in witness and service."

Our Presbyterian church, enabled by the National Council of Churches of Christ and Church World Service, speaks to power in various parts of our endangered planet with added authority, serves needy and suffering peoples in partnership with others through providing material comfort, spiritual nurture, and political advocacy, help sustains Christian brothers and sisters near and far, and witnesses to our unity in Christ. Our ecumenical vision statement says it well: Presbyterians "in gratitude for God's grace and mercy commit ourselves to faithful use of God's gifts in search for the fuller expression of the visible unity to which we are called."

D. *Financial Situation and Organizational Changes*

In 1999, the NCCC found itself in a severe financial crisis. Years of consecutive budget deficits led to the exhaustion of its reserve funds. The NCCC appealed to member churches for an emergency recapitalization fund. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) contributed \$500,000 towards this effort, conditioned on the NCCC retiring its debts and balancing its subsequent budgets. The recovery process of the NCCC occupied the energy of staff and board members for the next several years. A new general secretary took office in 2000, and a new associate general secretary for Administration and Finance was charged with reining in expenses. Staffing was severely cut. Moneys were also raised from foundation grants and individual contributions in addition to the contributions that had come from the member churches. A significant structural change that occurred during this time was the financial and administrative separation of CWS from the rest of the NCCC's ecumenical programming activity.

E. *National Council of Churches of Christ*

The outlook for the future is much brighter. Since the 2002–2003 budget year, the NCCC has balanced its budget without tapping into its long-term reserves. The NCCC's long-term reserves have been rebuilt and now

stand at about \$10 million, although most of that came from a single anonymous gift to the NCCC. New policies prevent the tapping of reserves without action of the board of directors. The NCCC deserves much credit for this turnaround, as does the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for its large role in the process, through the energy and time of its staff as well as elected board members. The NCCC is now on a much more secure financial footing compared to years past, but continued vigilance is required. The NCCC's financial statements are independently audited, and have been found to be in order.

The NCCC budget for 2003–2004 is approximately \$5.8 million. As a member of the body, the Presbyterian Church (USA) supports the life of the council through its giving. The primary form is the Ecumenical Commitment Fund (ECF), which is composed of unrestricted moneys contributed by the member communions to support the maintenance of the council as a whole. In 2002–2003, the PC (USA) contribution was \$421,000. Of the thirty-six member communions, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is the second largest contributor to the NCCC, after the United Methodist Church. Together these two denominations provide more than two-thirds of the Ecumenical Commitment Fund (ECF). Other member communions make contributions ranging from more than a hundred thousand dollars, down to nothing at all.

The member communions of the NCCC vary in size and wealth. Many of the member communions of the NCCC are very small in terms of membership, and more importantly, are not structured with a national body, which has programming emphases, staff, or budget. In addition, denominations in this country have historically varied in the representation of differing socioeconomic classes among their members. Simple dollar-per-member comparisons among the member communions are thus not appropriate. Still, disproportionate giving levels raise serious questions about whether the larger denominations exert undue influence in the council, while smaller denominations find themselves marginalized. It is the goal of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the NCCC that no one denomination's funding exceed 25 percent of the ECF.

In addition to the Ecumenical Commitment Fund, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) gives designated grants to support specific programming activities of the NCCC. Known as cognate funds, these funds are used for projects in which our programming entities are working closely with the NCCC. In 2002–2003, the PC (USA) supported some fifteen different NCCC program areas with cognate funding totaling \$125,000. The bulk of these moneys have gone to "Micah 6," an NCCC initiative for getting local congregations involved in economic justice and hunger ministries in their communities. Other areas where cognate funds have gone include education programs such as the development of the Uniform Lessons Series curriculum, and support for Faith and Order and Interfaith Relations programming. Cognate funding as a whole has suffered in recent years with budget cuts both within our denomination and within the NCCC. When a program area is cut in either body, an avenue of cooperation and cooperative funding is also lost. Interestingly, some denominations that do not contribute to ECF, do give to cognate funding.

Denominational giving, both ECF and cognate, account for only about 30 percent of the NCCC revenues. In recent years, an increasing amount of income has come from foundation grants and individual and other contributions. The development of alternative sources of funding has helped stabilize the finances of the NCCC and is a testament to the NCCC's fundraising efforts. However, as foundation support increases as a percentage of revenue it is vitally important for goals and priorities to be set by the NCCC board and for accountability to these directions to be the focus of the development and use of all funds.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) cannot be characterized simply as a donor to the National Council of Churches of Christ. It is a member of the council. Our core contribution to the NCCC demonstrates the seriousness with which we take our membership and is an expression of our quest for Christian unity. As one of the wealthiest denominations in the council, and indeed, the country, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) can be proud of its leadership in supporting the NCCC.

F. *Church World Service*

The Church World Service budget for 2003–2004 is approximately \$65 million of which more than 80 percent goes towards program expenses. The budget for the 2002–2003 was slightly reduced in order to match revenue; CWS ended that year and earlier years without deficit. The budget for 2003–2004 is projected to be bal-

anced. A current focus of CWS is to increase its cash reserves. The CWS's financial statements have been independently audited and found to be in order.

In 1999, CWS concluded a period of study and planning by its board and staff with the adoption by the board of a Strategic Plan, which revised the structure of CWS and set goals and objectives for all the programs for the coming quadrennium. Then the board entered into Listening Dialogue Sessions with the member churches of CWS to share information about the Strategic Plan and the new structure and future program plans. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) representatives on the CWS board, PC(USA) staff, and officers and staff of CWS met for a day to discuss common concerns and to hear from each other. In 2003, the CWS board reviewed and evaluated the progress in implementing the Strategic Plan, identified areas needing further work, and set goals for the next quadrennium. The program committees will next develop objectives to recommend to the board.

Church World Service is supported by a variety of sources. Funding from member communions is the third largest source of CWS revenue, combining to account for fewer than 15 percent of the CWS budget. In 2002, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) contributed more than \$2.2 million to CWS. This funding comes primarily from One Great Hour of Sharing, Disaster Relief, and Hunger funds, and is for the most part designated towards various programs and projects. The PC (USA) is the largest denominational contributor to CWS, with the United Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ as second and third respectively. (It should be noted that some of the other member communions, while contributing substantially to CWS, also channel some of their relief efforts through structures such as the United Methodist Committee on Relief, or Lutheran World Relief. Presbyterians, by contrast, have always been committed to respond to disasters and support relief and development as much as possible in an ecumenical way.) In addition to moneys given at the national level by the member communions, individual congregations of the various denominations, make contributions to CWS. In 2002, individual congregations of the PC(USA) directly contributed a total of \$1.3 million to CWS.

The second largest source of CWS revenue is perhaps the one most familiar to Presbyterians, the CROP Walks. This source represents about 20 percent of the budget. Income from CROP Walks was down approximately \$1 million in 2002–2003, with terrorism fears cited as a reason; so that at least a few walks cancelled out of concerns about being a visible target.

By far the largest portion of CWS funding comes from federal and state government grants for such programs as refugee relief and economic development. This amount has been increasing over the past few years and now accounts for about a third of the budget. The CWS also receives contributions from individuals and foundations.

While money received from sources beyond the member communions and their congregations enables CWS to do far more than it would be able to do otherwise, it is vitally important for the goals and priorities set by the CWS board to govern the procurement and use of all funds so that the priorities rather than sources of funding set the direction of the ministry. .

Just as it does with the NCCC's faith, justice, and education programs, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) supports CWS not simply as a donor, but as a member. There are a multitude of relief and development agencies that do good and important work around the world. Church World Service is distinctive among these agencies however, in not being merely a ministry of Christians, but rather a ministry of the churches in partnership with one another. Presbyterians have supported this ministry generously, not just at the national level but also from the congregational and individual level and should be commended.

G. *Findings Within and Beyond the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*

The Presbyterian Panel in 1996 showed that the majority of all its categories of respondents—Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) members, elders, and pastors—supported the participation of the PC(USA) in the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) sources continue to affirm the importance of our church's membership and participation in the NCCC as an expression of the PC(USA)'s theological commitment to the visible expression of the oneness of the body of Christ and its intention to work in ecumenical partnership.

Both representatives of the PC(USA) and of other member churches of the NCCC recognize the valuable roles of the NCCC as an instrument for churches to relate to one another in discussions of theology and issues of mutual concern, as an umbrella organization to express their concerns to society at large about issues of peace and justice, and as a way to work together worldwide in witness and service. The NCCC/CWS enables the churches to have greater visibility than the denominations speaking and acting individually.

In particular, the functions of the NCCC highlighted as significant were:

- Bible translation (the Revised Standard Version and New Revised Standard Version),
- Publications (e.g., “The Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches”),
- Christian education ministries (e.g., the Uniform Lesson Series),
- The worldwide ministry of CWS in relief, refugee, and development work,
- Faith and Order studies (e.g., the current “Authority of the Church in the World” and “Christian Mission in Multi-religious Society” studies),
- Public policy advocacy (e.g., on peace, poverty, and justice issues),
- Study materials (e.g., “Mind the Children” and environmental studies),
- Research (e.g., the current bio-technology study, environment),
- Interfaith relations (e.g., the Interfaith Policy Statement and the “Living Faithfully Together” seminars held cooperatively with regional and state councils of churches),
- Support of local and regional ecumenism.

Many expressed the opinion that, if the NCCC did not exist, another similar organization would need to be established to provide these services. Representatives of other member churches of the NCCC expressed their appreciation for the leadership and financial support provided to the NCCC by the PC(USA).

H. *Issues*

The main issues considered by the NCCC Review Committee can be presented comprehensively in a question and answer format.

1. Does the PC(USA) disproportionately fund the NCCC?

- Our level of involvement in the NCCC is based on our self-understanding as a member of Christ’s church universal and our commitment to work together with other communions.
- We should be proud of the PC(USA)’s contributions to the NCCC and maintain our funding commitment.
- We recognize the excellent work being done by the current NCCC general secretary and leadership to achieve a balanced budget and growing NCCC reserves and by the CWS executive director and leadership to continue with balanced budgets and to increase CWS reserves.
- All member communions need to contribute to the NCCC, as they are able. The leadership of the PC(USA) can help by taking a direct role in urging other member communions to increase their giving.

2. Are the priorities of the PC(USA) and other member communions reflected through the NCCC?

- The NCCC administration often asks the churches to support its agenda rather than assisting the churches in cooperative agenda setting through joint decision-making by their representatives.
 - Sometimes the agenda of the PC(USA) will not be the priority of the NCCC, but we can expect that—as part of the learning that comes through the experience of ecumenical involvement—we will be called upon to share with and learn from other member communions.
 - There are examples of joint planning done by the member communions in setting the agenda of the NCCC, and the member communions participated in developing the Strategic Plan of CWS.
 - The new NCCC board, which includes PC(USA) representatives, should take strong leadership that would allow it to set the agenda and direct the priority setting of the NCCC. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) representatives can help encourage full and active participation and regular attendance of all elected and designated persons from every member communion.
 - More denominational involvement in the various commissions of the NCCC is needed. The organization of the NCCC is in transition, and this is a time for the member communions to take an active role in its development.
3. Does non-church funding received by the NCCC and CWS unduly impact the agenda of the organization?
- There are some examples of influence on the agenda of the NCCC by its partnerships with foundations and other organizations that have their own agendas.
 - The NCCC has begun to address this issue and recognizes the potential for conflict with the interests of the member communions.
 - The CWS board has voted not to have non-member participation on the board in order that the representatives of the member communions set its agenda.
 - The CWS has struggled with the issue of accepting government money for its programs and has refused to take such money when it would compromise the stand of the NCCC in relation to religious and justice issues.
 - The PC(USA) representatives can encourage development of clear policies that ensure accountability to the member churches for the use of funds from non-church sources.
4. Is CWS part of the NCCC?
- Both the NCCC and CWS have their own boards, elected by and accountable to the General Assembly of the NCCC, with some members serving on both boards. The structures of both CWS and NCCC should be representative of the member churches in order to enable their programs to reflect the priorities of the member churches.
 - The relationship between the NCCC and CWS is improving and there are examples of their working together, although they basically continue to work independent of one another.
 - The elimination of international area desks by CWS has changed the way the NCCC deals with international issues and the way it relates to regional councils of churches in other parts of the world. CWS and NCCC are working on ways to mitigate the detrimental effects of that elimination.
 - A memorandum of understanding between CWS and the NCCC is being developed in relation to international relations. A new NCCC staff person will work in the area of international affairs, including the relationship between the NCCC and CWS.
5. How are the NCCC and CWS different from other interdenominational or nondenominational organizations?
- The NCCC and CWS are ecclesial in nature, with policies and programs determined by representatives of their member communions rather than by individuals who are members of different churches but not chosen by those churches.

6. What is the renewed focus of the NCCC and CWS at this time?

- There is a general renewed focus on NCCC programs to promote peace and alleviate poverty. Additionally, each of the different NCCC commissions will determine priorities in its own program area. Faith and Order, the search for Christian unity, education, and interfaith relations continue to be an integral part of the work of the council.

- The CWS board approved a strategic plan in 1999 and, later, reviewed its progress and revised it in 2003. The plan's focus is on work with churches and other partners in various regions of the world to promote peace and justice and to eradicate poverty and hunger.

- The NCCC is undertaking a new emphasis on interfaith relations. After many years of interfaith staff being seconded by churches—most particularly, the PC(USA)—the newly created position of associate general secretary for Interfaith Relations is now being funded by the NCCC itself.

7. How can we in the PC(USA) better communicate the importance of the NCCC and CWS and other ecumenical work to people in the pews?

- The particular churches' knowledge of the importance and activities of the NCCC and CWS is limited, and this affects the support given to them.

- The PC(USA) news services and offices are doing some communication and ecumenical education.

- There need to be more opportunities for leaders at various levels of the PC(USA) to be involved in ecumenical programs.

- Educational programs should be provided for those who will be representatives of the PC(USA) in ecumenical councils and agencies.

- The younger generation should have opportunity to be more involved in work of the NCCC and CWS and to become aware of—and committed to—the ecumenical vision.

- Funding is required to support opportunities for ecumenical involvement and formation—especially special programs for leaders, congregations, and youth of the PC(USA).

8. Will the Christian Churches Together initiative replace the NCCC?

- The NCCC has been a catalyst in an initiative called Christian Churches Together (CCT). One of the main goals of CCT is to bring together the churches in the NCCC with evangelical and Pentecostal churches and the Roman Catholic Church. Those involved in this process recognize that this will have a more limited role than the NCCC and that it will therefore not be a replacement for it.

- The PC(USA) offers hope and prayer for the future of the CCT, but our future involvement in CCT should not diminish our commitment to traditional ecumenical organizations.

9. How do the NCCC and CWS benefit the PC(USA)?

- The NCCC and CWS provide an ecumenical approach to interfaith relations, peace initiatives, racial justice, and mission worldwide through refugee relief and economic and social development, as well as the opportunity to interact with people from other communions who bring a diversity of experiences and viewpoints.

- Participation in the NCCC provides Presbyterians with the opportunity to live out their ecumenical calling, and deepens their understanding of the nature and mission of the Church.

- The PC(USA) programs can benefit from the learnings gained from other churches through our connection with them enabled by the NCCC and CWS.

Item 06-08

The Committee on the Office of the General Assembly recommends that the 216th General Assembly (2004) amend Standing Rule E.8.b as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown as italic.]

“The Committee on Ecumenical Relations shall be composed of ~~sixteen~~ *twenty* members. ~~Eight~~ *Twelve* shall be members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) nominated for at-large positions by the General Assembly Nominating Committee (*GANC*) and elected by the General Assembly in as nearly equal classes as possible. Four shall be members of four churches invited by the Stated Clerk to appoint one member each from their communion to serve as voting members of the committee. One of the four churches shall be one of our ecumenical church partners. The other three shall be our Full Communion partners. One member shall be appointed by the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly. One member shall be appointed by the General Assembly Council. The other members of the committee shall be the Stated Clerk or the Associate Stated Clerk for Ecumenical Relations and the Executive Director of the General Assembly Council or the Associate Director of Ecumenical Partnerships of the Worldwide Ministries Division, both serving ex-officio with vote.

“In addition, the directors of the three divisions of the General Assembly Council shall be corresponding members without vote.”

Rationale

The increasing complexity and large number of ecumenical relationships have led the General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations (GACER) to believe that an increased membership of diverse expertise/representation and knowledge of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is needed for GACER to effectively meet its mandate. This change would increase the ratio between Presbyterian to ecumenical representatives from 75 percent to 80 percent, and the ratio between at-large and appointed members from 50 percent to 60 percent. This change would also afford the possibility of increasing the diversity of expertise of members on the GACER.

Item 06-09

On Re-Examining the Relationship Between Christians and Jews and the Implications for Our Evangelism and New Church Development—From the Presbytery of Hudson River.

The Presbytery of Hudson River overtures the 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to do the following:

- 1. Direct the Office of Theology and Worship, the Office of Interfaith Relations, and the Office of Evangelism to “reexamine the relationship between Christians and Jews and the implications of this relationship for our evangelism and new church development in continuing response to the 211th General Assembly (1999) mandate to guide the church in ‘bearing witness to Jesus Christ in a pluralistic age.’”**
- 2. Suspend funding of any additional proposals for “Messianic Judaism” new church developments until such time as the General Assembly may hear the results of this study and approve a policy governing and funding such requests.**

Rationale

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is committed to “make joyous witness to persons of other faiths in the spirit of respect, openness, and honesty and has implemented a policy encouraging the formation of new churches around distinct ethnic and cultural identities. In respect to our Jewish brothers and sisters, their ethnic and cultural distinctiveness are historically and theologically inseparable from their religious identity. “Messianic Judaism,” by self-definition, therefore, syncretizes two theological identities, thereby imperiling the integrity of both Judaism and Christianity.

Paul and the early church were clear that the covenant established by God with Sarah and Abraham was not superceded by the coming of Christ, “...for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29); yet misunderstanding of this central New Testament truth has led to injustices by Christians toward Jews.

In recent times, Presbyterians have joined with Roman Catholics and other Christians in acknowledging the church’s role in fostering anti-Semitism, and in accepting responsibility and making amends for the wrongs that have been committed. In 1987, the study document by our General Assembly, “A Theological Understanding of the Relationship Between Christians and Jews,” calls us to engage one another in ways that promote peace, understanding, and justice while simultaneously honoring the distinctive blessings entrusted to each community. Therefore, we view the launching of Avodat Yisrael by the Presbytery of Philadelphia, with endorsement and financial support by the Synod of the Trinity, as calling into question the basic understanding of the relationship between Presbyterians and Jews.

Concurrences to Item 06-09 from the Presbyteries of Carlisle and New York City.

Concurrence to Item 06-09 from the Presbytery of Chicago (with Additional Rationale).

Rationale

It is the intention of this overture to stimulate focused theological reflection on the nature of the relationship between Christians and Jews, specifically as related to the evangelism efforts of the PC(USA).

It is not the intention of this overture to undermine or cancel commitments already made to provide funding for new church developments currently under way, but it is the intention to prevent the funding of new proposals for Messianic Jewish new church developments, until the PC(USA) has clarified the implications that denominational sponsorship of such congregations has on interreligious relations with our Jewish sisters and brothers.

In seeking to lay a foundation for a new and better relationship between Christians and Jews, a 1987 study document adopted by the 199th General Assembly (1987) affirmed, among others, the following four theological points:

1. A reaffirmation that the God who addresses both Christians and Jews is the same—the living and true God.
2. A new understanding by the church that its own identity is intimately related to the continuing identity of the Jewish people.
3. A willingness to ponder with Jews the mystery of God’s election of both Jews and Christians to be a light to the nations.
4. An acknowledgement by Christians that Jews are in covenant relationship with God and the consideration of the implications of this reality for evangelism and witness.

These theological points were offered “as a basis for an ever deepening understanding of the mystery of God’s saving work in the world.”

In light of these theological affirmations, new church developments sponsored by the PC(USA) that function as synagogues, following the liturgical cycles of Jewish religious life rather than Christian, and which elevate Torah over Gospel, raise theological questions about what it means for a new church development to be called Presbyterian and Reformed.

Similarly, relations between the PC(USA) and Jewish interreligious dialogue partners become strained when the Jewish community encounters Presbyterian new church developments that seem to subsume Jewish identity into a Christian theological commitment.

In the course of addressing the relationship between Christians and Jews, the authors of the 1987 study document noted that “We have come to understand in a new way how our witness to the gospel can be perceived by Jews as an attempt to erode and ultimately destroy their own communities.”

Messianic Jewish congregations sit in relationship to both Christian and Jewish communities. Their identity and their existence raise new questions and call upon the PC(USA) to clarify its commitment to maintaining a “spirit of respect, openness, and honesty,” in evangelical efforts.

Given a long and complicated history of Jewish Christian relations, the 1987 study document reminds us that, “We must be sensitive as we speak of the truth we know, lest we add to the suffering of others or increase hostility and misunderstanding by what we say.”

GAC COMMENT ON ITEM 06-09

Comment on Item 06-09—From the General Assembly Council.

Historic and theological connections between Christianity and Judaism, as well as the relationship of Christians and Jews, call for careful attention to our theological understanding of this relationship, and to appropriate forms of Christian witness to Jews.

In “*A Theological Understanding of the Relationship Between Christians and Jews*,” adopted for study and reflection by the 199th General Assembly (1987), our church acknowledged that “the same Scripture which proclaims [Christ’s atoning work for both Jew and Gentile]... also states that Jews are already in a covenant relationship with God who makes and keeps covenants.... Dialogue is the appropriate form of faithful conversation between Christians and Jews.” In this light, questions and concerns have been raised regarding the appropriateness and integrity of Congregation Avodat Yisrael, a “Messianic” new church development in the Presbytery of Philadelphia, in particular, and, in general, regarding the mission commitments and theological understandings of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in relation to the Jewish community.

A Theological Understanding of the Relationship Between Christians and Jews has been a valuable resource for the church, and for church-synagogue relationships since its introduction in 1987. Further examination of biblical, theological, and missional aspects of the Christian-Jewish relationship can deepen the church’s understanding and refine the church’s mission in an increasingly pluralistic society.

Our Presbyterian polity is clear, however, in relation to the authority and obligation of presbyteries to establish congregations within their bounds and to oversee those congregations, to approve calls to ministers of the Word and Sacrament as members of the presbytery, and to exercise pastoral care and discipline in the oversight of their ministries. The process for funding new church development work is likewise carefully delineated. It provides for regular review by the Presbytery for continued financial support of such projects by all other bodies involved.

Therefore, the General Assembly Council urges the 216th General Assembly (2004) to approve the first recommendation of Item 06-09, and to disapprove the second recommendation of Item 06-09.

ACREC ADVICE AND COUNSEL ON ITEM 06-09

Advice and counsel on Item 06-09—From the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC).

Item 06-09 requests the 216th General Assembly (2004) to examine the relationship between Christians and Jews and the implications for our evangelism and new church development, from the Presbytery of Hudson River.

The Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns advises that Item 06-09 Recommendation 1 be approved and that Recommendation 2 be disapproved.

Rationale

The Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns makes the following comment supporting its advice:

Item 06-09 is timely in nature. The U.S. religious culture is changing, and a fresh analysis of the PC(USA)’s response to this change is surely needed.

Jewish people combine their ethnicity and religion in their understanding of who they are as people of God, and Presbyterians honor their definition of themselves. The result is a historic wholesome relationship between Presbyterians and the Jewish community in the U.S.A. Item 06-09 will aid in maintaining both our understanding of how we reach out to Jewish people, and it gives promise in helping the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) practice Christian integrity in its witness.

Item 06-09 requests the appropriate response to “new religious phenomena” in the society, asking that all new church developments with and among “Messianic Jewish” followers be halted until the study is completed. The PC(USA) holds that all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are welcomed to its congregations. Previously, Jewish people have not been targeted as a religious group to be evangelized, especially because of who they say they are.

Item 06-10

The General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations recommends that the 216th General Assembly (2004) elect the following persons to be delegates and alternates to the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (2006). The GACER also requests authorization to make adjustments to the delegation if necessary to achieve appropriate representational balances as defined in the Book of Order, G-4.0403.

Principals: The Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, the chair of the Worldwide Ministries Division (in 2006 or beyond), Vanessa Luciano.

Alternates: The Associate Stated Clerk for Ecumenical Relations, the director of Worldwide Ministries Division (in 2006 or beyond), Marissa Galvan.

Rationale

The World Council of Churches will hold its 9th assembly February 14–23, 2006, in Porto Alegre, Brazil. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has been allotted seats for three delegates. The Office of Ecumenical Programming and Facilitation solicited nominations from around the church for the General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations (GACER) consideration. By virtue of the Standing Rules G.2.p., the Stated Clerk is a member all ecumenical delegations. The GACER sought to include in this delegation representation from the international mission work of the church as well as a youth/young adult. Because of the shift to biennial assemblies, this recommendation is offered without information or knowledge about the chair of the Worldwide Ministries Division in 2006 or beyond. Therefore, GACER requests authorization to adjust the delegation if necessary to ensure appropriate balances as defined in the *Constitution*.

Item 06-11

The General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations recommends that the 216th General Assembly (2004) confirm the election of Michael Racelis as a delegate and William A. Radford as an alternate to the 24th General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

Rationale

The 214th General Assembly (2002) elected delegates and alternates to the 24th General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. However, both the youth/young adult delegate and the alternate are unable to attend the General Council meeting. Because of both the World Alliance of Reformed Churches requirement for a youth delegate and our own constitutional expectations of a representative delegation, a replacement for the previously elected youth delegate and alternate is needed.

Item 06-12

Commissioners' Resolution. On Calling on the Stated Clerk to Justify His Endorsement of the World Council of Churches and Reviewing PC(USA) Relationship with the World Council of Churches.

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) do the following:

1. Call the Stated Clerk, the Reverend Clifton Kirkpatrick, to define the intention of the World Council of Churches' (WCC) request to "prosecute," to discuss the relevant Scriptures, confessions, General Assembly Council (GAC) directives, and General Assembly statements in justifying his endorsement, and to defend his authority as Stated Clerk to make such endorsements that are contrary to the stated position of the General Assembly in regards to Item 12-08 of the 215th General Assembly (2003) of the PC(USA) (*Minutes*, 2003, Part I, pp. 656ff). [Note: This recommendation was sent to 12 Assembly Committee on Peacemaking as Item 12-10.]

2. Review the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) relationship with the World Council of Churches at each General Assembly through the committee charged with that work to ensure the WCC's actions and positions more closely represent those of the majority of PC(USA).

Rationale

The 215th General Assembly (2003) of the PC(USA) approved the statement entitled "Iraq and Beyond" as a resource for study and reflection; and acknowledged that there are ongoing disagreements regarding the war and urges tolerance for differing opinions.

"Iraq and Beyond" clearly states that the position of the PC(USA) is "to encourage a process of reflection, discussion, and understanding ..." (*Minutes*, 2003, Part I, p. 656). [Editor's Note: This quote originally came from a statement of the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, which followed the recommendation section and was rationale for writing "Iraq and Beyond." That statement reads as follows: "The U.S.-led war against Iraq, the motives, dynamics, and process leading up to it, and the consequences that will flow from it have presented our church and its members with serious issues around which much reflection, theological debate, and prayerful discussion is yet to be done. To encourage a process of reflection, discussion, and understanding, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy made the above recommendations."]

"Iraq and Beyond" explains that, "The church must urge every jurisdiction within the land, from the federal government to the local governing body, to make every effort to protect the right of disagreement, to sustain the civility of policy debate, and to tolerate demonstrations in support of all viewpoints" (Ibid, p. 658).

"Iraq and Beyond" goes further to say, "The anguish of those who feel that this war is unjustifiable and the conviction of those who support the war must be acknowledged as legitimate moral responses that should not be condemned" (Ibid).

"Iraq and Beyond" emphasizes the need for continued debate on differences of moral judgment regarding U.S. military doctrine "with poise and graceful thoughtfulness."

"Iraq and Beyond" warns of tabling debate "for the sake of maintaining an assumed sense of peace," which is contrary to "American political, social, and religious life."

In contrast, the World Council of Churches issued a "Statement on Iraq," which clearly states that the war was an "immoral" and "illegal resort to war." Additionally, the WCC's "Statement on Iraq" calls for the United Nations to "promptly investigate" and "prosecute" the democratically elected officials of the coalition forces in Iraq. Finally note, the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, the Reverend Clifton Kirkpatrick, endorsed the WCC's "Statement on Iraq" during the 8/26/03–9/6/03 meeting of the WCC without the consent of the General Assembly or in consultation with its council.

David Andrew IV—Presbytery of Glacier
Ted Worley—Presbytery of Cherokee

[Note: Text is an addendum. Please add to Item 06-12 as page 2.]

COGA COMMENT ON ITEM 06-12

Comment on Item 06-12—From the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly (COGA)

The Committee on the Office of the General Assembly (COGA) notes that the authority of the Stated Clerk as a member of an ecumenical body, such as the World Council of Churches, comes from Standing Rule G.2.p. relating to the duties of the Stated Clerk.

p. The Stated Clerk is a permanent ecumenical representative of the General Assembly and shall be a member of each delegation representing the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in ecumenical or interchurch bodies or councils...

The responsibilities of full participation of the Stated Clerk in World Council of Churches (WCC) deliberations and actions do not require further consultation with the GAC. These responsibilities have been given to the Stated Clerk by virtue of the office and are in compliance with the Standing Rules.

Item 06-13

Commissioners' Resolution. On Cooperative Ecumenical Strategy.

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) encourage the leadership of synods and presbyteries, in cooperation with long-time ecumenical partners, to

- 1. develop or renew regional plans to ensure ministry in areas of declining population and/or resources;**
- 2. coordinate meeting locations, fellowship, and educational experiences when feasible;**
- 3. meet with leaders of partner denominations, to share reports, public communications and visits;**
- 4. cooperate in efforts of evangelism, witness, and service in new ways.**

Rationale

Our Full Communion partner denominations (The Reformed Church, the United Church of Christ, the Evangelical Lutheran Church) and our partners in the Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC) face many of the same demographic and cultural changes we face.

In urban and rural areas where most needed, interdenominational strategy and cooperation have frequently weakened, despite mutual recognition of each other's ministries.

Gordon V. Webster—Presbytery of Genesee Valley

Lou McAlister East—Presbytery of Salem

Item 06-Info

A. *General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations Agency Summary*

1. *Purpose*

The purpose of the General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations is to give a high profile to the vision of the ecumenical involvement and work as central to the gospel and key to the life of the church; plan and coordinate, in consultation with the agencies and governing bodies of the church, the involvement of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in ecumenical relations and work; connect the ecumenical efforts of all governing body levels of the church; provide a common point for all ecumenical efforts connecting us with those outside our church; keep a unity of vision that includes the ecclesiastical, programmatic, ecumenical, and denominational parts of our ministries and commitments; articulate the Reformed and Presbyterian identity in the midst of our ecumenical commitments; and promote awareness of the role of the unity of all humankind in the search for the unity of the church; and promote the unity of the church as an exhibition of the kingdom of God to the world.

The committee is composed of sixteen members, inclusive of the Stated Clerk and the Executive Director of the General Assembly Council, ecumenical representatives inclusive of Full Communion, dialogue partners, and members elected at large from the General Assembly.

2. *Ministry and Accomplishments*

The General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations held its two regular meetings: the spring meeting on January 30 to February 1, 2003; and the fall meeting on October 2–4, 2003. The following provides some highlights of these meetings:

Spring Meeting—The committee engaged in theological reflection through a panel presentation on the subject of “Visioning-Ecumenical Formation.” The panel members were Nancy Jo Kemper, Margaret Haney, and Phil Wickeri. The committee also heard a presentation from Bertrice Woods, director of Churches Uniting in Christ, on the subject of “Ecclesiology and Ecumenism.” Among other actions, the committee received the report from the Review Committee of the World Council of Churches. The report was forwarded to the 215th General Assembly (2003).

Fall Meeting—The theological reflection was offered by a panel discussion on the topic of “CUIC Mutual Recognition and Reconciliation of Ministries.” The committee received an introduction to the ministries of National Council of Churches and Church World Service. The general secretary of the NCCC and the director of CWS did the introduction. The committee received and discussed two proposals, one from the CUIC Ministry Task Force, and the other to join Christian Churches Together in the USA. They approved a recommendation to begin the Second Round of the Interfaith Listening Project. The committee received a report of the efforts of the Ecumenical Relations Office in strengthening ecumenical ministries at the presbytery level. The National Council of Churches delegation for the new quadrennium was approved.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), in gratitude for God’s grace and mercy, commits itself to a faithful use of God’s gifts in the search for fuller expression of the visible unity to which we are called. The General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations, following the mandate of the 212th General Assembly (2000) is reviewing our relationship with the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. The CER formed a review committee in accordance with the assembly guidelines. The committee members were: Kristine Thompson, chair, Ed Chan, Wayne Wilson, Don Shriver, Kenneth Thomas, and Oscar McCloud. The committee received a partial report from the review committee at its fall meeting. The final report will be presented in the spring 2003 General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations meeting. The finished report will be then presented to the 216th General Assembly (2004) in Richmond, Virginia.

In harmony with our understanding that “we engage in bilateral and multilateral dialogues with other churches and traditions in order to remove barriers of misunderstanding and establish common affirmations,” the General

Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations continues in dialogue with the Moravian Church, and ongoing conversation with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America, and the Korean Presbyterian Church in America. The dialogue with the Episcopal Church, initiated in January 2002, entered in its second year. This dialogue has proven to be of great relevancy, as they engage in finding ways to reconcile the ordained ministries of both denominations. A success in this effort could be well-received by a similar work done in the Churches Uniting in Christ.

During the month of September, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) participated in two bilateral dialogues: the Lutheran/Reformed Dialogue and the Reformed/Roman Catholic Dialogue. The Reformed/Roman Catholic Dialogue began a new series of conversations. The main topic for this series will be the Sacraments. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is represented in dialogue by Richard Mouw and Marta Moore-Keish.

Through this past year, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has maintained and strengthened our conciliar relationships. As we make every effort to preserve the unity of the church we strengthened our relationship with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the World Council of Churches, and the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. The committee has closely followed the fiscal responsibility of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and has witnessed the change in course of the council finances. The WCC finished its process of finding a new general secretary to succeed Konrad Raiser when he retired at the end of 2003. The Reverend Samuel Kobia, a Methodist minister from Kenya, became the first general secretary from the African continent. We also continued our relationship with our full communion partners (the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, United Church of Christ, and the Reformed Church of America).

Our participation this year in Churches Uniting in Christ was reciprocal to our commitment to the organization. The CUIC began to develop specific strategies and programs that will strengthen the witness of its nine member churches in our country. The following includes a summary of the work of the three task forces during 2003:

a. *Local and Regional Ecumenism Task Force*

The Local and Regional Ecumenism Task Force has identified several initiatives to engage the member churches of CUIC, at the local, state, and regional levels, more fully into life and witness of Churches Uniting in Christ. Pilot programs are being developed in Denver, Los Angeles, and Memphis, involving local religious leaders and councils of churches. The task force is also working to build relationships with seminaries and theological communities related to CUIC member communions. Conversations with some seminary leadership have identified the role that polity courses highlighting CUIC and its churches would have in enhancing the ecumenical formation of emerging church leadership.

b. *Ministry Task Force*

The Ministry Task Force has met five times attending to its task of preparing a foundation for the mutual recognition and mutual reconciliation of ordained ministries among the CUIC member communions. Following conversations aimed at helping task force members understand the ecclesiologies and patterns of ministry that characterize the churches, a writing group has begun to prepare a draft text of a proposal for consideration and action by the member communions in mid-2005.

c. *Racial Justice Task Force*

The Racial Justice Task Force is organizing a consultation for March 29, 2004, in Chicago, that will bring together church leaders, academics, seminary students, and grassroots workers who are committed to the eradication of racism. The theme of the consultation is "Eradicating Racism: Liberating Tomorrow's Children." Most of the day will be spent in eight working groups in order to prepare models that the churches might use in pursuing our commitment as CUIC churches to work for racial justice.

The General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations continues to be faithful to its responsibilities of planning and coordinating the involvement of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in ecumenical relations and work; and also to its call to search for diverse patterns of the visible unity of Christ's Church.

B. *Corresponding Bodies Reports*

1. *National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.—Report of the 2000–2003 Quadrennium*

The National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. (NCCC) has just begun its 2004–2007 quadrennium on a note of stability and optimism, a welcome contrast to conditions four years ago. At the close of the previous quadrennium, in November 2003, the General Assembly met in Jackson, Miss., and reviewed the incredible four-year journey that NCCC member communions have taken together. The following message is adapted from the report in Jackson of the NCCC's general secretary, Dr. Robert Edgar:

As we moved from General Assembly to General Assembly in recent years, some wondered if each meeting might be our last. But we have survived, and thrived, under the worst-case scenario our founders back in 1950 could ever have imagined.

When we gathered in Cleveland in 1999, we met to celebrate a heritage of fifty years of ecumenical achievement, to remember the best of our journey. But in the shadows, and too soon in the spotlight, there was crisis as well. The NCCC was running on fumes, both financially and in that less tangible sense of mission. The prospects looked ominous.

On that fiftieth anniversary, we tapped the distinguished Andrew Young to be our president, recalling his achievements in public service, civil rights, international diplomacy, and in ministry, as a minister of the United Church of Christ and especially as a former staff member in the youth department of the NCCC. And I was elected as the new general secretary.

On my first day in office, I was faced with the Elian Gonzalez case—a study in advocacy crisis management, involving hundreds of players on a complex chessboard of values, legalities, public opinion, political stakes, and faith commitments. We survived, and Elian survived, and I got a baptism of fire in international, ecumenical action that was preparation for the tumultuous internal struggle that awaited us.

The full dimensions of the fiscal crisis began to emerge soon after I arrived at NCCC offices in New York. We were \$6 million over budget and had—over the previous decade—spent \$21 million of our \$24 million reserve fund to avoid laying off personnel or closing down programs. Now the decisions were urgent and unavoidable. We were in danger of disappearing in a collapse that would be heard across Christendom.

Underlying all of this financial concern was a broader question about direction and future, the vision and mission of the NCCC. The optimists among us saw that our challenge was to trim the sails of the ecumenical ship, but I would remind you that trimming the sails is not just cutting the cloth to make it smaller. It also means setting them just right, to catch the wind of God's spirit, that our journey might be sure. One dimension of that challenge was the evidence that the world of Christian faith had grown far beyond our table, with more than half the Christians in America related to organizations *outside* the NCCC's circle. How to design a setting for fellowship to which all might want to come?

We set ourselves the goal of building a wider ecumenical table. We already had experienced some of the wider table within the council itself, because there are many non-NCCC participants serving on NCCC commissions. Still, the field of American Christianity is much, much broader, so in 2000, as the General Assembly met in Atlanta, we proposed what has become the hope of a table for all Christians in America, Christian Churches Together in the USA (CCT)—for which Wesley Granberg-Michaelson of the Reformed Church in America has provided leadership.

It is becoming evident as CCT emerges that it will *not* replace the National Council of Churches. The CCT's strength, which is the incredible variety of churches and church-related groups that are members, also means that it may not achieve the consensus required to carry out substantive program ministries or to be a public voice on a wide range of peace and justice issues. Nor is it staffed and structured to do so.

The next stop in our journey was in Oakland, California, where we installed Elenie Huszagh, a prominent lay member of the Greek Orthodox Church, as our president. The installation took place in a Greek Orthodox cathedral in a splendid setting high in the hills overlooking Oakland—symbolic of the high standard and the long-range view that Elenie would hold us to in her term as our leader.

We worked hard at building accountability into our fiscal management as the base on which we would build future program. The NCCC's interim chief financial officer, Spencer Bates, began by reducing his own staff. Working with NCCC Treasurer Phil Young of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and members of the Finance and Administration Committee, he began a careful program of cost cutting and innovative management that dealt with just about everything from space utilization to investment strategy.

Another way we stretched our resources to fulfill our mission was through partnerships with highly focused, specialized organizations who shared our goals in strategic areas of our multiyear Poverty Mobilization, a major focus of the council's work. By linking our programs to these effective sources of energy and experience, we were updating an honored council tradition established years ago with Children's Defense Fund, by welcoming others into that relationship.

And our oldest partners, the local and state councils of churches and interfaith organizations, The World Council of Churches, and the family of national councils around the globe are becoming increasingly important allies in our mission of justice, reconciliation, and peace, moving forward.

In 2002, the General Assembly met in Tampa, Florida, amid the first signs of a financial turnaround. There was an exciting run of success in our fund-raising efforts, with growth in foundation grants and individual gifts. Lilly Endowment, whose leaders had said in the year 2000 that they would make no further gifts to the NCCC, by 2002, had committed a half-million dollars to give us the capacity for enlisting donor support. Lilly had been watching, as we were able to announce the welcome news that we had achieved the first balanced operating budget in more than a decade.

As the NCCC community gathered in Jackson, Mississippi, at the end of their four-year journey, they did so with renewed energy and stable resources—and a productive new working relationship with Church World Service (CWS). The CWS is the global humanitarian organization of the NCCC's thirty-six Protestant and Orthodox member communions and is headed by the Reverend John L. McCullough of The United Methodist Church. The NCCC/CWS relationship already is proving itself in our work on Africa, Korea, and the Middle East. These giant steps forward free us to focus on building our capacity and vision for the years ahead.

Even while attending to internal matters, the NCCC and its member communions gave full attention to pressing national and global concerns—remembering that the Christ who unites us was given because God so loved the world. From the autumn months of 2002 through the spring of 2003, our initiatives to advance the cause of peace put us in conflict with the nation's leaders as we questioned the rush to war in Iraq, and the preemptive strike policies and unilateralism that have marked America's current foreign policy. We took to the airwaves, the streets, and the corridors of Congress to speak truth to power.

The peace initiative crossed national boundaries as we met with the leaders of Britain, France, Germany, and Russia, and visited with the Pope at the Vatican in pursuit of ecumenical solidarity. And we joined with Church World Service in helping organize All Our Children, a campaign for the well-being of Iraq's children.

In a modern-day echo of the parable of the talents, we took our limited resources and invested them in the high priority of peacemaking. The faithfulness of the council and its churches gave courage to increasing numbers of people to witness for peace. And the council—shown to be trustworthy in these things—was entrusted with

more: a \$7 million gift from an anonymous donor, much of which has been used to increase our long-term reserves.

At every crossroads over the past four years, we have searched for the right direction and the organizing strategy to bring it to life. Survival mode was an uncomfortable classroom in which to learn some important lessons.

One of the ways we sought to get our bearings was a Substantive Reflection Task Group, organized by our president, Elenie Huszagh, and chaired by Robert Welsh of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). What this group helped us envision was a future that is beginning to take shape in actions begun in recent months and—to echo the theme of the Jackson assembly—is still being shaped “In the Hands of the Potter,” who will work through us as we seek to honor our call to be good stewards.

Now, we are moving forward from Jackson, under the leadership of our new president Bishop Thomas L. Hoyt Jr., of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, into a new quadrennium that will have its own potholes, and detours, and challenges of every kind. A New Testament scholar, preacher, writer, teacher, administrator, and pastor, Bishop Hoyt brings an approach that stresses Christian unity and social justice as twin concerns inherent in the Gospel.

Also helping to move into the future is the fact that an effective organizing principle has emerged in the form of our five program commissions, spanning the full spectrum of our work together.

Some are already well-established, like Faith and Order. Others, like Justice and Advocacy, are just beginning, though their assignment gathers up in a new way our historic and prophetic commitments in the justice arena, including a renewed emphasis on environmental programs. Some have a newly urgent nature, like Interfaith Relations. Others are long-standing ecumenical concerns, like Education and Leadership Ministries, which gathers under its umbrella more than a dozen program committees that serve the churches in everything from the Uniform Series, to racial ethnic ministries, ministry with people with disabilities, young adult ministry, and much more. And the Communication Commission lifts up all four of these commissions and gives them a wider voice and a public presence, even as it manages its own communication-related advocacy and education agenda.

Together, these five commissions represent a vehicle to carry us into the future, encompassing our programs and emphases in an ecumenical design that involves all of our communions in the detailed agenda of the council.

Undergirding the work of the commissions, our research and planning office, under the expert direction of Eileen Lindner, a PC(USA) minister, continues to draw foundation support for its studies of trends and issues of concern to the ecumenical family. Eileen and Marcel Welty, also a PC(USA) minister, enjoy wide acclaim for the annual *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*, not only for its statistical value and its comprehensive listing of religious leadership, but for its provocative and far-reaching analysis of topics and trends in religion.

One of the major initiatives of the council over the past several years has been our concern for poverty and economic justice. That work received an infusion of new energy several months ago, when Dr. Paul Sherry, former president of the United Church of Christ, committed to spending a year of his retirement to mobilize our churches for effective action on economic issues. Karen Hessel, another NCCC staff member from the PC(USA), helps to staff the Mobilization, as well as the Justice for Women Working Group.

This is a breakthrough for us as we seek to consolidate all we have learned from our history—and move forward from Jackson into a new, more effective era ahead. Some of the best advice for the journey that we have heard comes from Dr. Sam Kobia, the new general secretary of the World Council of Churches, who shares with us this African proverb: “If you want to walk fast, walk alone. But if you want to walk far, walk together.”

a. *NCCC Officers 2000–2003 Quadrennium*

President: Ambassador Andrew Young (2000–2001), United Church of Christ; Elenie K. Huszagh (2002–2003) Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

General Secretary: The Reverend Dr. Robert W. Edgar, The United Methodist Church.

Immediate Past President (1998–1999): The Right Reverend Craig B. Anderson, The Episcopal Church.

Secretary: The Reverend Roberto Delgado, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Treasurer: Philip Young, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Vice Presidents: The Reverend Canon Patrick Mauney, The Episcopal Church; Dr. Audrey Miller, United Church of Christ; Bishop Jon S. Enslin, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; the Reverend Dr. Bertrice Wood, United Church of Christ; Barbara Ricks Thomson, The United Methodist Church.

b. *NCCC Officers 2004-2005*

President: The Reverend Dr. Thomas L. Hoyt Jr., Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.

General Secretary: The Reverend Dr. Robert W. Edgar, The United Methodist Church.

President Elect: The Reverend Michael E. Livingston, International Council of Community Churches.

Vice President: Clare Chapman, The United Methodist Church.

Vice President, and Chair Church World Service Board of Directors: Betty Voskuil, Reformed Church in America.

Vice President at Large: The Reverend Dr. Randall R. Lee, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Vice President at Large: The Reverend Dr. Thelma Chambers-Young, Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.

Secretary: Bishop Vicken Aykazian, Armenian Orthodox Church of America.

Immediate Past President: Elenie K. Huszagh, Esq., Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

c. *NCCC Elected Staff*

(1) *The General Secretariat*

Robert Edgar, general secretary; Paul Sherry, special assistant to the general secretary for the Poverty Mobilization; John Briscoe, development director; Jon Sherry, special assistant to the general secretary for Planned Giving Endowment; Eileen Lindner, deputy general secretary for Research and Planning/editor, *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*; Marcel Welty, associate editor, *Yearbook*, and technical coordinator.

(2) *Communication Commission*

Wesley “Pat” Pattillo, associate general secretary for Communication; Carol J. Fouke, director, News Services; Shirley Struchen, coordinator of Television Programming; Leslie C. Tune, Washington communication officer; Sarah J. Vilankulu, director, Interpretation Resources.

(3) *Education and Leadership Ministries Commission*

Patrice Rosner, associate general secretary for Education and Leadership; Garland Pierce, associate director.

(4) *Faith and Order Commission*

Ann K. Riggs.

(5) *Interfaith Relations Commission*

Shanta Premawardhana.

(6) *Justice and Advocacy Commission*

Brenda Girton-Mitchell, associate general secretary for Public Witness and director of the Washington Office; Tony Kireopoulos, associate general secretary for International Affairs and Peace; Karen Hessel, Justice for Women; Cassandra Carmichael, director, Environmental Programs.

(7) *Administration and Finance*

Leora Landmesser, associate general secretary for Administration and Finance; Karen Wang, controller.

2. *Report on the 2003 General Assembly of the National Council of Churches in the U.S.A.*

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) delegation consisted of Belle Miller-McMaster, Roberto Delgado, Gordon Webster, Janet E. Leng, Clifton Kirkpatrick, Aimee Moiso, Robina Winbush, Carlos Malavé, Kathy Lueckert, Cindy Pierse, Phil Young, and Margaret J. Thomas.

The 2003 General Assembly of the National Council of Churches in the U.S.A. (NCCC) celebrated its general assembly in Jackson, Mississippi, on November 4–6. The assembly opened with the music of the Piney Woods School Choir, a school for African American children. The choir brought the congregation to a moment of joyful praise by their contagious music. As the congregations praised and listened to God's word, a potter worked on his clay, forming a beautiful piece from the formless clay. At the opening service the preacher, the Reverend Thelma Chambers-Young, emphatically declared "God is sovereign, God can re-mold us," and "we are in the Masters hand."

After the conclusion of the worship service, several people shared words of welcoming, among them: Eleine K. Huszagh, president; the Reverend Bob Edgar, general secretary; the Reverend John McCullough, director of Church World Service (CWS); and the Reverend Paul Jones from the Mississippi Religious Leadership Conference.

The general secretary presented his report to the assembly, highlighting the accomplishments of the last four years and emphasizing the financial recovery of the organization. The young adults who participated on the Young Adults pre-assembly event presented a report. This year was the first time that the NCCC celebrated an event for young adults. They made three general observations:

- There was a lack of knowledge among young people about the NCCC in general, and also about the "Come to the Feast" event.
- There was also a lack of knowledge about the Ecumenical Young Adult Ministry Team.
- All agreed that a young adult assembly pre-event was needed.

The day concluded with a moving presentation on the resurrection of the Orthodox Church in Albania. Presbytera Renee Ritsi described the process by which the country of Albania, which became the first declared atheistic nation, was rediscovering its Christian heritage.

The Presbyterian delegation met on the opening night for a dinner and briefing at the Covenant Presbyterian Church in Jackson. The delegation had the opportunity to hear the Reverend Paul Means describe some of the exciting ministries of Covenant Presbyterian Church.

a. *Reports Presented*

During the second day of the assembly, several reports were presented:

(1) *Board of Directors Report*

One of the major activities during the year was the review of the general secretary's work. A great deal of time was also spent in re-visioning and evaluating the council in general.

(2) Interfaith Relations Commission Report

It was announced that Jay Rock, who served the NCCC for approximately seventeen years as the staff for the interfaith office, had finished his service. The job description for the position was re-evaluated and a search for the new person was started. The search committee recommended the hiring of the Reverend Shanta Premawardhana, a Baptist minister. Rev. Premawardhana was introduced to the assembly and shared some of his goals for the interfaith office.

(3) Church World Service Board Report

The board adopted a strategic plan in Cleveland. The plan called for financial and administrative autonomy. One of the highlights from this period was the hiring of the new executive director. During the last year and a half the CWS has met with fifteen of the member communions. These conversations intend to strengthen the relationships with the churches.

(4) Communications Commission Report

The communications commission is supporting all the work of the council. The staff has been in the front lines of the news and media in their efforts to speak about the war in Iraq. Eculink has become a publication noticed all over America. The Ecu-news Web site had more than 200,000 visitors last year. Eculink has more than 75,000 readers. The commission is an expression of the wider ecumenical table, which includes churches like Seventh-day Adventist, Canadian churches, and many others. In partnership with Roman Catholics, Southern Baptists, and Jewish religious organizations, the commission has shared in media projects in partnership with major TV networks. The NCCC communications commission was the driving force behind the corporate ownership of broadcast media judicial case. The communication commission is experiencing a real renaissance. The current leadership looks forward to the future.

(5) Education and Leadership (E & L) Ministries Commission Report

Minister's support, curriculum for Sunday school, camps; these are only a sample of the varied ministries of the E & L Commission. The commission has evolved over the years, but the commitment to education has not changed. The Committee on Uniform Series has been in existence for 133 years. Some fifteen ministries are at the core of the commission's ministries. All these ministries are accomplish with a modest budget of \$528,000. All this work is grounded in prayer and theological reflection.

(6) Human Genetics Report

As an introduction to the report, Richard Hayes presented a challenging lecture on the possible frightening or positive effects of human genetics and cloning. He provided basic information about Human Genetic Modification and cloning. The big questions were: Where do we draw the line? and Who draws the line?

Claire Chapman presented the report in behalf of the chair. The report recommended process, not issues. People with particular expertise are being recruited for the committee continuance. The church must be prepared to respond to public policy questions on these issues. This will involve educational efforts from the NCCC and its member churches. The committee proposed two options for providing the financial resources needed to move ahead with the proposed plan.

(7) Justice and Advocacy Commission Report

Michael Kinnamon, the chair of the new commission, gave a detailed explanation of the history, necessity, and plans of the justice ministries and the new commission.

(8) Church World Service Financial Report

The years 2002–2003 have been a challenge to the CWS. The financial situation of the country has had a negative impact on the fundraising of the agency. The agency has been able to maintain their commitment to the

projects around the world. The administrative costs have been down. The unrestricted reserves have been increased. The administration of the fundraising this year was 18.4 percent. The CWS has been faithful in using the funds given for specific projects strictly for those projects. Two million dollars will be added this year to unrestricted reserves. This has been difficult to do, but CWS feel that it is important to do.

(9) *NCCC Financial Report*

The audit of the NCCC was presented. The treasurer also presented a balanced budget for the year 2004. As of June 30, 2003, the council investment portfolio consisted of \$9,250,124. The total assets of the council consisted of \$12,651,535.

(10) *Faith and Order Commission Report*

The commission has concluded their present work, and is ready to begin a new set of studies. The Meaning of Full Communion and the Authority of the Church in the World are two of the documents that will publish in the coming two years. Some of the themes for the new period are, justification/sanctification, Theosis, and Justice/Ethics. The dialogue with the foundation for the next Faith and Order continues, as they work to find the funds. The commission has benefited from the support of various theological institutions.

(11) *Church World Service (CWS) Report*

Education and Advocacy Program: The main issues addressed by this area of ministry are globalization, HIV/AIDS, and Decade to Overcome Violence.

Immigration and Refugee Program: The government reduced the number of refugees allowed to come to the US from 70,000 to 28,000. The CWS is in charge of processing all refugees coming from Africa to the U.S.A. One of the big challenges is the displaced and uprooted peoples in their own countries. Half of the people displaced in the world are in Africa.

Emergency Response Program: 3.5 million dollars have been distributed in the last three months alone. The Interfaith Trauma Response Training was established as a response to the tragedy of 9/11. The All Our Children Response is a program in Iraq that has been increased because of the war. Many other programs are been implemented in various parts of the world, places like, Afghanistan, Brazil, etc. Another program is the building of houses for disaster-affected people; thousands of houses have been built.

Social & Economical Development Program: It focuses in community developing programs; this work is done in cooperation with many partners around the world. The CWS is also present in the Balkans. They have been working in Vietnam for fifty years. The Africa Initiative will be launched in 2004; this work will be in partnership with the All-Africa Conference of Churches. At the heart of this initiative is the Water for Life program. This program will address the water crisis affecting many African countries. In a nation like Angola, in 1999, 62 percent of the population had no access to water.

Other reports given included: Office of International Affairs and Peace, Constitution and Bylaws Committee.

b. *Resolutions Approved by the Assembly*

The NCCC assembly endorsed consumer boycotts of Taco Bell and Mt. Olive Pickle products, both effective immediately, to put pressure for improvement of wages and working conditions of their suppliers' farm workers. Given the NCCC's insistence that boycotts are a measure of last resort, the affirmative votes on the two boycotts are especially significant. It has been more than fifteen years since the NCCC endorsed a boycott (May 1988, related to Royal Dutch/Shell's connections at that time to apartheid South Africa).

Urging support for the boycott of Taco Bell, Gerardo Reyes Chavez, a Florida farm worker and member of the Steering Committee of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, described farm workers' low wages and lack of any benefits such as health insurance or overtime pay.

“And in the most extreme circumstances we find modern day slavery,” said Chavez, speaking in Spanish through an interpreter. “By modern day slavery I mean people forced to work at gunpoint.”

The General Assembly also approved resolutions on the following:

- “*The Churches and Public School*” urging member communions and their congregations to redouble their efforts in support of public education.
- “*Preserving U.S. Pharmaceutical Sales to Canada*” urging the president, the Food and Drug Administration, and Congress to enact legislation enabling U.S. consumers to purchase prescription drugs at costs comparable to those charged by U.S. companies to other countries and opposing legislative attempts to make it illegal for U.S. consumers to purchase prescription drugs from Canada.
- “*The Conflict in the Middle East*” urging in particular the dismantling of the “Separation Wall” being constructed between Israel and the West Bank.

And the assembly, reissuing its 2002 “*Resolution Recognizing the Patriarch of Jerusalem*,” renewed its call to the State of Israel to recognize the 2001 canonical election of His Beatitude Irenaios as Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, enabling the patriarchate to function as a legal entity in Israel.

c. *Officers*

Since this was the end of the quadrennium, new officers were installed. The installation service took place at the Anderson United Methodist Church. Around four hundred people worshiped with joy until past 10:00 p.m. on that evening.

Dr. Thomas L. Hoyt Jr., was installed as the National Council of Churches’ new president for 2004–2005. Dr. Hoyt, 62, of Shreveport, Louisiana, is bishop of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church’s Fourth Episcopal District, comprising Mississippi and Louisiana. He is the first member of the historic African American C.M.E. to serve as NCCC president since the council was founded in 1950.

Other NCC officers installed were:

- General Secretary: The Reverend Dr. Robert W. Edgar, a United Methodist, reelected to a second, four-year term as NCCC general secretary, with headquarters in New York City.
- President Elect: The Reverend Michael E. Livingston, of Trenton, New Jersey, executive director, International Council of Community Churches, as NCCC president elect for 2004–2005. He will serve as the council’s president in 2006–2007.
- Vice President: Clare J. Chapman, executive director of Finance and Administration, General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, United Methodist Church, New York City, and chair of the NCCC’s Administration and Finance Committee.
- Vice President: Betty Voskuil, coordinator for Diaconal Ministries, Hunger Education and Reformed Church World Service, Reformed Church in America, Grand Rapids, Michigan, chair of the Church World Service Board of Directors.
- Vice President At Large: The Reverend Dr. Randall R. Lee, assistant to the bishop and director, Department for Ecumenical Affairs, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Chicago, Illinois.

- Vice President at Large: The Reverend Dr. Thelma Chambers-Young, director of Christian Education, Holy Temple Baptist Church, Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. (PNBC), Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; immediate past president of the PNBC Women's Department.
- Secretary: Bishop Vicken Aykazian, diocesan legate and ecumenical officer, Diocese of the Armenian Orthodox Church of America, Washington, D.C.
- Immediate Past President: Elenie K. Huszagh, Esq., a Greek Orthodox laywoman from Nehalem, Oregon, concluding her 2002–2003 term as the NCCC's president, continues in 2004–2005 in the office of NCCC immediate past president.

d. *Conclusion of Assembly*

On the last day of the assembly, the general secretary-elect of the WCC, Dr. Samuel Kobia, brought greetings from the World Council of Churches.

He gave thanks for the historical participation of the U.S.A. churches in the Faith and Order Commission. He stressed the importance of the full involvement of all the member churches of WCC in the process of re-configuration of the worldwide Ecumenical Movement. Dr. Kobia spoke extensively about the rationale and the importance of the focus of the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) program in the U.S.A. during the year 2004. After Dr. Kobia's address, the assembly heard an introduction to the Decade to Overcome Violence by Hansul-risch Gerber. The DOV promotes solidarity, understanding, celebration (peace and justice), peace, and overcoming violence.

The General Assembly will convene again on November 9–11, 2004, in Saint Louis, Missouri.

3. *World Council of Churches, Activities in 2003: A Report to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*

The year 2003 marked several significant transitions in the life of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The first day of the year brought a new organizational structure, and the final day saw the retirement of WCC General Secretary Konrad Raiser after nearly eleven years in that position. The WCC Central Committee, meeting at Geneva in late August and early September, elected Samuel Kobia as the new general secretary to take office in 2004, selected a place and theme for the Ninth Assembly of the WCC in 2006, and hailed indicators that the financial situation of the council has improved significantly since the crisis of 2002.

a. *Selected Highlights 2003*

In 2003, the life and program of the WCC were diverse and dynamic, despite financial difficulties experienced in the preceding year. Fourteen core programs and two international ecumenical initiatives were implemented during 2003, covering dozens of activities worldwide. A selection of highlights is given below. More detailed activities reports were presented to the central committee in August 2003, and a comprehensive WCC annual report for 2003 is scheduled to be published in April 2004. The fully audited WCC financial report for 2003 will also become available in the spring of 2004. Details of many of the initiatives of the WCC may be found on the council's website: <http://www.wcc-coe.org>

b. *Election of a New General Secretary*

In August 2003, the Central Committee elected a new WCC general secretary, the Reverend Dr. Samuel Kobia, a Methodist originally from Kenya. Sam Kobia is the first African general secretary of the WCC, and he took office in January 2004. In his acceptance speech following his election, Kobia reaffirmed his commitment to the ecumenical vision: "I believe very strongly that working together and walking together will help us stay together ... This is a spiritual journey we need to sustain, to fulfill the prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ that all may be one, that the world may believe." *For further information:* http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/press_corner/index-e.html

c. *WCC Ninth Assembly Theme and Venue Announced*

“God, in your grace, transform the world” will be the theme of the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, planned for February 2006 in Porto Alegre, Brazil. The decision was taken by the WCC Central Committee in August 2003. As a result of conservative budgeting, the ninth assembly will have 700 delegates, almost 300 fewer than in previous years. It will last for ten days, two days less than previously. Alongside the assembly of WCC member churches, a broader Ecumenical Forum will gather representatives of churches, organizations, and groups from around the world.

For further information: <http://www2.wcc-coe.org/pressreleasesen.nsf/index/pr-cc2003-15e.html>

d. *Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV)*

Launched in 2001, the WCC’s ten-year focus aims to mobilize churches in opposition to violence and in support of peace. Following the recommendation of the WCC Central Committee, the 2003 annual DOV theme was “Sudan—Healing and Reconciliation.” The DOV worked closely with the Sudan Ecumenical Forum in developing the theme, and in nurturing the peace process and the churches’ contribution to overcoming violence in this war-torn country. The theme country for 2004 is to be the United States of America.

For further information: <http://www2.wcc-coe.org/dov.nsf>

e. *Strengthening the Ecumenical Movement: New Configuration*

The WCC leadership continued efforts to strengthen the coherence and unity of the worldwide ecumenical movement. A discussion on “The Reconfiguration of the Ecumenical Movement” was initiated by the WCC leadership with the aim of assessing and reinvigorating institutional ecumenism in the 21st century, notably in an initial international consultation at Antelias, Lebanon, in November 2003.

For further information: http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/press_corner/index-e.html

f. *Orthodox Participation in the WCC*

The Steering Committee of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC met in Neapolis, Greece, in June 2003. The committee continued working on a consensus method of decision-making and membership. It was informed about ongoing work on ecclesiology by the Faith and Order Commission as well as the extent to which this work responds to concerns expressed by the special commission. It reviewed and clarified the sections on worship in the special commission report.

For further information: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/who/special-01-e.html>

g. *Faith and Order*

The Faith and Order Commission, incorporating both WCC member churches and nonmembers including the Roman Catholic Church, is the most representative theological forum in the world. Its members and Geneva staff have been preparing for a plenary meeting of the commission in July and August 2004 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The theme of the plenary is “Receive one another—just as Christ has received you, for the glory of God” (Rom. 15:7). Draft texts for the meeting deal with the following “boundary issues” in contemporary dialogue toward Christian unity: ecclesiology; baptism; biblical hermeneutics; theological anthropology; ethnic identity, national identity, and the quest for unity; theological reflection on peace; and worship. The commission also works with the Vatican’s secretariat for the promotion of Christian unity in preparing resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

For further information: <http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/faith/index-e.html>

h. *WCC Dialogue with Pentecostals*

The Joint Consultative Group between the WCC and Pentecostals held its fourth meeting in 2003 on the campus of Lee University in Cleveland, Tennessee. The group is composed of equal numbers of WCC member churches and Pentecostals from churches that are not members, from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America. Following two years of building trust, the group has focused on the theme of “unity” and explored this theme through Bible studies offered by the members. The group will have meetings in 2004 and 2005 before reporting to the Ninth Assembly of the WCC in February 2006.

For further information: <http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/ecumenical/index-e.html#pea>

i. *World Mission and Evangelism*

From 2003 through 2005, the main focus of the WCC’s program on Mission and Evangelism is to prepare for its 2005 world mission conference in Athens, Greece. The conference theme is: “Come, Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile: Called in Christ to be healing and reconciling communities.” In addition to preparatory activities, the program sponsors ongoing work in the areas of evangelism, mission study, mission in solidarity with the poor (particularly through the Urban Rural Mission initiative), and health and healing.

For further information: <http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/mission/index-e.html>

j. *Diakonia and Solidarity*

The WCC team for Diakonia and Solidarity contributes to the task of building ecumenical fellowship through common service. This program seeks a just sharing of the world’s resources, working in partnership with churches and church-related movements to assist communities in healing broken relationships and meeting their own needs. Creative partnerships with the marginalized and excluded are built in cooperation with member churches, regional groups, Christian confessional communions, and such specialized ecumenical organizations as Action by Churches Together (ACT International), the Ecumenical Church Loan Fund (ECLOF), and the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA).

For further information: <http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/regional/index-e.html>

k. *Ecumenical Women’s Solidarity Fund*

The Ecumenical Women’s Solidarity Fund (EWSF) of the WCC celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2003 with a special event and exhibition at the Central Committee meeting in Geneva. The EWSF is a project fund administered by women, for women, in the countries of the former Yugoslavia. It addresses the needs of those who have suffered from conflict in this region, lending assistance regardless of ethnicity, religion, or origin. Since 1993, the EWSF has initiated and supported hundreds of local projects in aid of restoring peace, hope, and reconciliation. Its goal is to promote human dignity and community renewal.

For further information: <http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/europe/ewsf-e.html>

l. *The WCC and the Conflict in Iraq*

During 2003, the WCC gave particular attention to enabling and communicating an international church response to the war in Iraq. An international meeting of church leaders co-convened by the WCC, held in Berlin in February 2003, appealed for an alternative to military invasion. Church leaders from several regions stated, “For us it is a spiritual obligation, grounded in God’s love for all humanity, to speak out against war in Iraq. Through this message we send a strong sign of solidarity and support to churches in Iraq, the Middle East and in the USA.” The Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Bossey, Switzerland, February 18–23, 2003, deplored the moves towards war on Iraq and expressed deep concern for the humanitarian situation. Churches were asked to join in a day of prayer for peace in Iraq at the beginning of Lent. In Iraq, the WCC

worked through its emergency office ACT International to deliver relief supplies and to alleviate hardship in local communities.

For further information: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/iraq.html>

m. *Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)*

Elsewhere in the region, the WCC entered the second year of its Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel. The EAPPI monitors and reports violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, support acts of nonviolent resistance alongside local Christian and Muslim Palestinians and Israeli peace activists, offers protection through nonviolent presence, and stands in solidarity with the churches and all those struggling against the occupation. The WCC, with local churches and the Middle East Council of Churches, plans to establish a Jerusalem Ecumenical Center.

For further information: <http://www.eappi.org>

n. *Inter-religious Dialogue: Christian-Muslim Relations*

The WCC carried out a series of activities in the area of inter-religious relations and dialogue in 2003. Most visible of these was the visit of the Iranian president and spiritual leader, Sayyid Mohammad Khatami, to the Ecumenical Center in Geneva on December 11, 2003. The Iranian president appealed for inter-religious dialogue to be seen as an alternative to religious fundamentalism, and as a source of peace and stability. Earlier in the year, the central committee moderator, Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia, called for “dialogue, relations and collaboration with other religions” to have high priority in the WCC’s ecumenical witness.

For further information: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/khatami-anchor.html>

o. *Economic Globalization: Affirming Alternatives*

The first encounter between the WCC and representatives of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund was held in February 2003 and focused on “Evolution of institutional mandates and related views/concepts of development.” The meeting allowed discussion of the historical progression of institutional mandates as well as the institutions’ different views and operational paradigms of development that are manifested in trade, financial, and other socioeconomic policies.

For further information: <http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/jpc/globalization.html>

p. *WCC and the Churches in China*

The WCC’s Asia Desk organized the visit of a delegation of government religious affairs bureau officials and church leaders from the People’s Republic of China to Norway, Germany, and Switzerland. The visit took place from March 19 to April 4, 2003, as part of a study to understand how churches engage in social development work and how church-state relations are seen and function in these European countries. The delegation visited the WCC in Geneva on March 26. In April, the Asia desk organized a seminar on the “Current Situation of the Church in China” at the Ecumenical Center and also facilitated the visit to the WCC of a seven-member delegation composed of the new leadership of the China Christian Council.

For further information: <http://www2.wcc-coe.org/pressreleasesen.nsf/index/Info-03-07.html>

q. *The Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Switzerland*

The 55th annual session of the Ecumenical Institute, 2003–2004, takes as its theme “The role of religion for establishing peace in contexts of increasing violence.” In cooperation with the University of Geneva, the institute offers a master’s degree in ecumenical studies. Plans are in place for the inauguration of a PhD program in late 2004.

For further information: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/bossey>

r. *Theological Understanding of Disability: "A Church of All and for All"*

The place of disabled people in the life of church and community was explored in an insightful document entitled "A Church of All and for All," prepared by the Ecumenical Disabilities Advocates Network (EDAN) and the WCC's Faith and Order Commission. Urging the inclusion of people with disabilities just as they are, the report says, "Without the full incorporation of persons who can contribute from the experience of disability, the Church falls short of the glory of God, and cannot claim to be in the image of God." The central committee affirmed the WCC's commitment to the work of EDAN.

For further information: <http://www2.wcc-coe.org/ccdocuments2003.nsf/index/plen-1.1-en.html>