

# **PRESBYTERY of NEW HARMONY**

## **Report from the Commissioners to the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) June 21-28, 2008 San Jose, California**

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*General Overview of the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly*  
*June 21, 2008 – June 28, 2008*  
*San Jose, California (In the Heart of the Silicon Valley)*  
*Elder Robert Johnson*

The Assembly's theme was: "Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with our God" (Micah 6:8). There were 973 elder/clergy commissioners and advisory delegates at the 218<sup>th</sup> GA. The advisory delegates consisted of youth, theology students, missionaries and ecumenical delegates.

Three ministers and one elder vied for the position of 218<sup>th</sup> GA moderator. They were: Rev. Carl Mazza, pastor/director of Meeting Ground, a ministry with the homeless and other marginalized persons in Cecil County, MD; Rev. Bruce Reyes-Chow, pastor of Mission Bay Presbyterian Church, San Francisco, CA; Elder Roger Shoemaker, a member of Southern Heights Presbyterian Church, Lincoln, NE; and Rev. William "Bill" Teng, pastor of Heritage Presbyterian Church, Alexandria, VA.

Rev. Reyes-Chow, 39, is an energetic new church development pastor, who is a Northern California native and a grandson of Filipino and Chinese immigrants, in San Francisco, CA. Reyes-Chow was elected moderator on the second ballot with 55% of the vote. Rev Teng was second with 36% of vote; Rev. Mazza was third with 7% of vote; and Elder Shoemaker was last with 1% of the votes. Rev. Reyes-Chow received his M.Div from San Francisco Theological Seminary.

The Rev. Dr. Byron Wade, 45, a native of Los Angeles, CA, and pastor of Davie Street Presbyterian Church, Raleigh, NC, was chosen by Moderator Reyes-Chow to serve as vice-moderator of the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. Dr. Wade received his M.Div from Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary.

The Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick was honorably retired as the Stated Clerk of the GA at the 218<sup>th</sup> GA. On Thursday afternoon, June 26, 2008, the General Assembly officially named him Stated Clerk Emeritus of the General Assembly. Rev. Kirkpatrick, upon his retirement, will take a position with the World Council of Churches.

On Friday, June 27, 2008, the Rev. Gradye Parsons, Associate Stated Clerk and director of operations for the GA, won a first ballot victory to succeed the Rev. Kirkpatrick as Stated Clerk of the PC(USA) General Assembly.

Rev. Joan Gray, Moderator of the 217<sup>th</sup> GA, spoke at the Sunday Morning Communion Worship Service on June 22, 2008. Rev. Gray was the first of several ministers who gave stirring messages during the week. Each minister's theme centered on Micah 6:8, "Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with our God".

**Respectfully submitted,  
Robert Johnson, Elder Commissioner**

***Report from General Assembly (GA) Procedures Committee  
Elder Robert Johnson***

The General Assembly Procedures Committee considers matters related to: meetings of the assembly; per capita budget; standing rule amendments; operation of the office of the GA; statistics; publishing of reports; GA nominating committee process; special committees; commission and advisory delegates credentials/leave of absence.

One of the recommendations sent to floor of the GA from GA Procedures for its approval was an overture from the Presbytery of San Francisco [03-20] On Creating a Presbyterian Office for the Prevention and Healing of Minister of Word and Sacrament Mis-conduct and Abuse.

The GA approved an alternate resolution:

That the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2008) approve the following resolution:

Alternate Joint Resolution Between  
the Office of the General Assembly;  
the General Assembly Council;  
the Overture Advocates of the Presbyteries of San Francisco, Geneva, and San Jose;  
and the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns

While the Office of the General Assembly (OGA) and the General Assembly Council (GAC) provide a combination of staff and resources to assist in prevention of sexual misconduct and to support middle governing bodies and local churches when a minister of the Word and Sacrament controlled or employed by them is accused of sexual misconduct, this approach may have been perceived to be reactive rather than responsive, and could be more proactive. The approach should be expanded and strengthened to ensure appropriate resources are easily accessible to middle governing bodies and local particular churches. At the same time, survivors must receive information to enable them to access pastoral care and access advocacy assistance regardless of whether the perpetrator is a minister of the Word and Sacrament, member, elder, deacon, commissioned lay pastor, volunteer or nonordained staff doing ministry, including Christian educators and youth leaders of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

To strengthen and improve resourcing for middle governing bodies and local particular churches, the OGA/GAC will:

1. Better coordinate and develop resources by forming a joint OGA/GAC staff advisory team that will meet regularly to review existing resources and recommend development of additional resources; review the hotline response to ensure it includes appropriate pastoral and advocacy elements; review and recommend Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) "best practices" to be included in a revised Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Sexual Misconduct Policy and Guidelines to be recommended as guidelines to middle governing bodies and local churches, which will be sent as a report to the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2010); and to review the training resources for needed updates and enhancements.

2. Train three to four people to answer the hotline in the absence of the Sexual Misconduct Ombudsperson.
3. Survey, through the Office of Middle Governing Body Relations, to determine what resources presbyteries need for the prevention of and response to incidents of sexual misconduct and, if needed, to develop and distribute at reasonable cost to middle governing bodies and local particular churches, a training on the topic of preventing and responding to sexual misconduct by ministers of the Word and Sacrament, member, elder, deacon, commissioned lay pastor, volunteer, or non-ordained staff doing ministry, including Christian educators and youth leaders. This training could be available on DVD and available for order on the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Website at reasonable cost. The advisory staff team could investigate online training and train-the-trainer educational programs to be provided through third party vendors at a reasonable fee per participant.
4. Place resources currently available on the PC(USA) website in one easily accessible area of the website, and develop and distribute a brochure to promote the available resources on the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) website to middle governing bodies and local churches and available opportunities for training.
5. Increase middle governing body and local particular church awareness of the availability of these resources through MGB Connect, OGA and GAC websites, by sending online communications.

**Respectfully submitted,  
Robert Johnson, Elder Commissioner**

***Report from Form of Government (FOG) Committee***  
***The Rev. Kyle Henderson***

The report from the Task Force (created in 2006 by the 217<sup>th</sup> General Assembly) to revise our Form of Government (FOG) was received by the General Assembly FOG Committee, but the Task Force's recommendations were not endorsed. The Task Force's goal was to propose a new FOG that would encourage our churches and presbyteries to be more missional (reaching out to others with the gospel more effectively).

The General Assembly's FOG Committee heard much "testimony" and "evidence" from many parties concerning the proposed FOG. A preponderance of dissatisfaction was expressed both on the new FOG and the process. Some objection was specifically made on the proposed fourth section to our Book of Order, entitled *Foundations of Presbyterian Polity*. The fear was that this section might have become an interpretive lens for the three other sections.

The 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly approved the Committee's recommendation to ask for a new process to be designed by the nine members of the original Task Force supplemented with additional members from the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly's FOG Committee.

As soon as the new process is designed, churches and presbyteries will be asked to study and to reflect on ways that our denomination can govern ourselves differently in order to be more flexible and trusting as we carry out Christ's mission. Churches and presbyteries will have until October 15, 2009, to return comments and suggestions back to the Office of the General Assembly (OGA). After receiving that round of feedback, the new Task Force will propose another revised FOG and distribute its recommendations to presbyteries no later than January 15, 2010, for consideration by the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, which will take place July 3-10, 2010, in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

**Respectfully submitted,**  
**Kyle Henderson, Minister Commissioner**

***Report from Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee  
Report from Peacemaking and International Issues Committee  
The Rev. Dr. Jeri Parris Perkins***

One of the most significant actions the Assembly took was to approve with amendments a resolution from the Presbytery of Newton “On Calling for Tolerance and Peaceful Relations Between the Christian and Muslim Communities”. The resolution was based on the understanding that while Judaism, Christianity, and Islam hold differing understandings of how God has been revealed to humankind they each share the common ground of loving God and neighbor and caring for the poor. As a result, Presbyterians are called to be in dialogue with Muslims and Jewish communities. We are encouraged to seek out materials prepared by the Offices of Interfaith Relations and Theology and Worship, and the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program. The Assembly also commissioned a study on Islam and Christian-Muslim relations that would have the same scope and authority as the 1987 study on Christian-Jewish relations. We are also encouraged to identify and report any violations of the civil rights of Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the United States and other areas of the world.

Another key action was the approval of *A Common Word Between Us and You*, which is an invitation to dialogue and cooperation from 138 Muslim clerics as a primary source of conversation among the Abrahamic faith traditions as the pathway to new efforts toward global peace and justice. One of the most painful discussions and actions concerned the Actions and Conduct of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church as it has set up transitional presbyteries to receive PC (U.S.A.) congregations and pastors who may be seeking to leave the denomination. In some presbyteries there have been painful and costly court battles over property and active pursuit of congregations by the EPC. The matter was referred to the General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical relations.

The Assembly adopted an ecumenical policy statement - the denomination’s first in more than 25 years - and reaffirmed our historic commitment to work with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the National Council of Churches, and the World Council of Churches. We celebrated a report on the Mutual Recognition of Baptism with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Covenant Agreement with the Moravian Church, a dialogue agreement with the Episcopal Church, and a Covenant Relationship with the Korean Presbyterian Church in America. Covenant agreement implies “full communion” with these two denominations.

The Peacemaking Committee endorsed the “Amman Call” regarding Arab-Israeli Peace efforts, encouraged us to take pilgrimages to Israel-Palestine to learn of the struggle for peace, and to continue to monitor our Corporate Engagements in Israel, Gaza, East Jerusalem and the West Bank through MRTI (Mission Responsibility Through Investment). It should be noted that since the 2004 General Assembly action regarding the study of divestment no divestment has actually occurred. The Assembly endorsed reports on Peacemaking in Colombia, building peace in Iraq and support for the Presbyterian Church in Zimbabwe.

**Respectfully submitted,  
Jeri Parris Perkins, Minister Commissioner**

*Report from Theological Issues and Institutions Committee*  
*Report from Church Orders and Ministry Committee*  
*Elder Rebecca Hinds*

Theological Issues and Institutions Committee

The 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly approved the Theological Issues and Institutions recommendation to correct translation problems in five responses of the Heidelberg Catechism in The Book of Confessions and to add the original Scripture texts of the German Heidelberg Catechism. These changes were proposed based on drawing on the German and Latin original texts of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Church Orders and Ministry Committee

The General Assembly approved several overtures that were recommended by the Church Orders and Ministry Committee.

1. Commend presbyteries and session that have incorporated serious theological reflection and prayerful discernment into their examination procedures and to direct the Stated Clerk to collect and/or develop models of such procedures, and make them available to the whole church.
2. Allowing positions such as a mission worker, a chaplaincy, a part-time pastorate, or a tent-making position to be an ordainable position.
3. Allowing a commissioned lay pastor, a candidate or inquirer under care, or an elder serving a congregation as a temporary supply pastor still be permitted to serve a congregation as a temporary supply pastor.
4. Affirmed the authoritative interpretation of G-6.0108 to apply equally to all ordination standards of the PC(USA), and require examining bodies to give prayerful and careful consideration, on an individual, case-by-case basis, to any departure from an ordination standard in matters of belief or practice that a candidate may declare during examination. However, the examining body is not required to accept a departure from standards, and cannot excuse a candidate's inability to perform the constitutional functions unique to his or her office (such as administration of the sacraments).
5. Approved sending to presbyteries for their action an amendment to G-6.0106b (Ordination of Ministers and Officers) to delete the current text and insert: Those who are called to ordained service in the church, by their assent to the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003), pledge themselves to live lives obedient to Jesus Christ the Head of the church, striving to follow where he leads through the witness of the Scriptures, and to understand the Scriptures through the instruction of the Confessions. In so doing, they declare their fidelity to the standards of the Church. Each governing body charged with examination for ordination and/or installation (G-14.0240 and G-14.0450) establishes the candidate's sincere efforts to adhere to these standards.
6. Amending G-14.0240 (Preparation and Examination for Office) to insert: demonstration of readiness to assent to the constitutional questions for ordination and installation.

**Respectfully submitted,**  
**Rebecca Hinds, Elder Commissioner**

***Report from Youth Committee***  
***YAD Hakeem Jefferson***

As a Youth Advisory Delegate I served on one of two new General Assembly committees—the General Assembly Committee on Youth. Not only was this one of only two new committees at the General Assembly, it was one of only two General Assembly committees not using Robert’s Rules of Parliamentary Procedure to conduct the majority of its business. Instead of using Robert’s Rules—rules very familiar to us as Presbyterians—our committee used a process known as communal discernment. Communal discernment is defined by the Reverend Victoria G. Curtiss, author of *Guidelines for Communal Discernment*, as a process that “engages a group of people to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit [and] involves prayer, a humble surrendering of control, reflection on Scripture, and listening carefully to one another as together we seek to hear God’s voice.” Reverend Curtiss also goes on to note that the process of communal discernment “is based on several theological principles: Christ is head of the Church; God sends us the Holy Spirit to guide us into all the truth, to teach us everything, and to remind us of all that Jesus Christ said; Christians are exhorted to ‘be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord of one mind...; Christians are people of the covenant, who best understand the truth of God in and through community; and the discernment of God’s direction takes time.”

Many on the committee were a tad concerned that the committee work was unimportant as unlike other General Assembly Committees, the Committee on Youth had no overtures or business before it other than a Commissioner’s Resolution and was charged to come up or choose not to come up with business to bring before the General Assembly’s full body. After a great deal of discernment, prayer, and conversation, our committee brainstormed many ideas regarding youth in the Presbyterian Church USA and after voting to move back into a formal business setting, debated and discussed many recommendations that committee members had devised. Using Robert’s Rules, we made many amendments to motions and ultimately voted to bring 5 recommendations before the General Assembly’s full body, one of which was written by yours truly (the recommendation to form the youth taskforce referenced below). Our committee’s intent was to address key issues that we thought were facing the youth of our church including the need for the church to be a place that meets both spiritual and physical needs, the need for mentors in the church during a time when the church’s message is in a constant struggle with the world’s message, the struggle that youth in the church have with articulating their faith, and the need for more study of the one demographic group in our church that will undoubtedly determine the fate of our denomination’s future.

All of our committee’s recommendations passed the General Assembly, and I am proud of the work that our committee did in bringing the following recommendations before the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly as I believe they will have a positive impact on our denomination for years to come:

- The General Assembly (2008) direct the Office of Ministry with Youth to provide the resource center or resource contact person of each presbytery with a copy of the DVD *Soul Searching* to enhance the outreach to teens; and prepare a study guide to accompany the DVD.

The rationale for this recommendation from the committee was that “a major component of the information gathering completed by the Assembly Committee on Youth was the viewing of the documentary *Soul Searching: A Movie About Teenagers and God*, a creative representation of the

findings of the National Study of Youth and Religion (<http://www.youthandreligion.org>). The committee found this DVD and the study it represents to be eye-opening resources of great value. As many of our congregations struggle to connect meaningfully with youth and young adults, it was the judgment of the vast majority of the committee that congregations and presbyteries would gain helpful insights from viewing this film.”

- The 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2008) asks commissioners to take back to their churches and presbyteries the recommendation to develop a mentoring program for young people in their congregations and presbyteries, and to prayerfully and seriously consider being a mentor to at least one young person and enhance walking humbly with God; direct the Office of Ministries with Youth to affirm the importance of the use of mentors in the spiritual formation of youth, with attention to “tweens” (ages 9-12), teenagers (ages 13-18), and also to young adults (ages 18+); create and/or identify, and to disseminate tools and appropriate educational materials for training mentors and emphasizing active listening; develop worship and programmatic resources to celebrate the rites of passage for “tweens,” “teens,” and young adults, and to commission their mentors; and include on the PC (USA) website a page to report on the experiences of mentors.

The rationale for this recommendation from the committee was that “the Assembly Committee on Youth identified several key needs of youth after considering all the information gathered. Among these was the need for acceptance and belonging, for adults to listen with respect, for leadership development, and for a safe place to question and learn the language of faith. The committee felt that many of these needs are best addressed through the development of quality relationships between adults and young people. It was the desire of the committee that such relationships be encouraged through the creation of mentoring programs within congregations and for the development of resources to support such programs. This was of such great importance to members of the committee that they desired immediate implementation by those gathered at this assembly.”

- The 208<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2008) directs the Moderator of the General Assembly to appoint a task force to seek input from youth, young adults, and adults to continue the dialogue begun at this assembly; find and present model programs; and focus on the needs and development of youth ministries, and report back to the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2010) specific recommendations for designing and conducting various youth ministries under a “new vision” for youth. The task force would be composed of ten youth and young adults, ages 15–21, and five adult mentors. The task force would meet four times prior to the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2010).

The rationale for this recommendation from the committee was that “it is undeniable that investing valuable General Assembly time and energy to consider youth, a crucial generation in our faith communities, was an essential exercise and is one that merits more time, attention, and resources that could be offered in the short time available at the General Assembly. Though the committee sought to discern God’s vision for youth and the PC(USA), this is a task that will require more time and more intensive youth involvement for its adequate completion. The Assembly Committee on Youth has begun an important dialogue that should be continued in a task force with a two-to-one youth-to-adult ratio. We became convinced that youth are best equipped to articulate the needs and possibilities for effective youth ministry and for a more comprehensive inclusion of youth in the life

and mission of the church, but also that intergenerational collaboration contributes to fruitful discernment. It is the understanding of the committee that there are existing funds allocated within the budget of Office of Ministries with Youth that could be appropriately redirected to this effort.”

- Another recommendation simply referred business to the taskforce for their consideration including the inclusion of both youth (ages 12-18) and young adults (post-secondary) in the definition of “youth ministry” and the inclusion of youth as full partners in the church.
- The 218th General Assembly (2008) urge the Office of the General Assembly to consider the following recommendation to the 219th General Assembly (2010): Since the age range of YADs is currently 17–23, the designation of youth advisory delegate is not a fitting description of these delegates. Therefore, we urge the official name of these persons be changed to young adult advisory delegates (YAADs).
- The committee also urged the disapproval of the Commissioners’ Resolution that would allow youth ages 12-17 to volunteer at the General Assembly because of concerns regarding liability and insurance.

Please note that all of the above recommendations along with the written rationale are available for your review on [www.pc-biz.org](http://www.pc-biz.org) as is all business conducted at the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.

It was indeed a joy for me to serve on the General Assembly Committee on Youth as we, the youth of the church, are more than the future of the Presbyterian Church (USA), we are called by God to be active participants in our church **now** and the church is called by God to meet the needs of its young people today.

**Respectfully submitted,  
Hakeem Jefferson, Youth Advisory Delegate**