

DENVER PRESBYTERY

OVERTURES FOR CONCURRENCE

226th
General Assembly





226th GENERAL ASSEMBLY Recommendations for Concurrence with Upcoming General Assembly Overtures

DENVER PRESBYTERY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OVERTURES FOR CONCURRENCE

The business of the 226th Assembly has been officially scheduled. Information about each of the Overtures to be addressed can be found at www.pc-biz.org. Every presbytery has an opportunity to voluntarily express its non-binding affirmation of individual overtures by Presbytery Assembly vote .

As in prior years, former and current General Assembly Commissioners from Denver Presbytery had the opportunity to review and discuss the 226th Assembly Overtures, and made concurrence recommendations for Denver Presbytery's consideration at the April 23, 2024 Presbytery Assembly. The Concurrence recommendations, based on alignment with Denver Presbytery's Mission, Vision and Values are available on the following pages.

You can review the text and rationale of the concurrence-recommended documents at www.pc-biz.org. To obtain a Log-In, please go to www.pc-biz.org, and click on "Log-in" in the upper right corner of the log-in page, and follow the instructions to register a new account.

If you have any questions, please contact our Stated Clerk, [Rev. gretchen N. Sausville](#) or Assembly Vice Moderator, [Rev. Ruth McCollum Huff](#), prior to Assembly.



226th General Assembly Overtures - Concurrence Recommendations Slate

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| | For concurrence consideration by Denver Presbytery at Assembly on 4/23/2024 |
| | To see all Overtures on the 226th GA docket, go to www.pc-biz.org . |
| | To register for PC-Biz , follow these steps: |
| | 1. Visit the PC-Biz website. |
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| | 4. Complete the registration process. |

[DOE-03] An Overture Calling for Action so that Children May Live Free from Gun Violence
Source: Presbytery
Committee: [DOE] Domestic Engagement
Profile #: [OVT-032]
Event: 226th General Assembly (2024)
Sponsor: Chicago Presbytery
Type: General Assembly Full Consideration

Recommendation

The Presbytery of Chicago, on February 27, 2024, overtures the 226th General Assembly to:

A. Call upon every congregation in the PC(U.S.A.) to take some specific action of love and responsibility for children as part of the movement to prevent gun violence.

Action Suggestions and Options for Congregations:

- 1. Actively support and pray** for the emotional, spiritual and mental health needs of children as they grow up in an era of school lockdowns, active shooter drills and near-daily news of gun violence.
- 2. Promote Secure Gun Storage** - Churches of the PC(U.S.A.) can share information about the Be SMART for Kids campaign, which provides strategies and resources to protect children from unintentional firearm injury and death. Congregations are gifted at sharing safety information in their communities, which can include life-saving information on the importance of secure gun storage in every home where there is a gun. Congregations can offer free or low cost gun locks to church members, neighbors and others, and encourage schools to send secure gun storage information home in backpacks for parents.
- 3. Encourage Parents and Caregivers to Take Gun Safety Action-** Embolden parents and caretakers to always ask if there is a gun in a home and how it is stored before sending children to play in other homes. Churches can provide parents and caretakers with guidance on how to talk to children and adolescents about what to do if they discover unsecured guns and what to do if they know of a gun that has been brought to school, church or another gathering.
- 4. End Gun Marketing to Children** - Congregations can monitor and advocate with their retail stores to stop the “normalization” of firearms that happens in the mind of a child when guns are advertised to appeal directly to children and displayed in stores where children may see them. This includes the need for retailers to refrain from including toy guns in Easter baskets, Christmas displays and other ways that train children to acclimate to the presence of guns, such as the promotion of the youth- sized JR-15.
- 5. Promote Gun Security Technology** - Learn about and advocate for wide-spread use of existing technology that allows a gun to be fired only by the owner, preventing unintentional shootings, deterring gun theft and preventing youth and child suicide. Promote the use of biometric locks for secure gun storage, limiting access to the gun owner.
- 6. Act for Change** - Demonstrate to children that adults will act to protect them from gun violence: Participate in efforts such as Be SMART for Kids, Guns to Gardens, Violence Interruption Programs; support youth-led gun violence prevention organizations, and gun violence survivors and their families; engage in advocacy with elected officials for gun-sense regulation such as comprehensive background checks, a ban on the future sale of semiautomatic assault weapons and raising the age for gun purchases to 21 or older. Where appropriate, involve children, teens and youth in these efforts.
- 7. Vote** - As citizens, parents and grandparents, prayerfully prioritize the lives of America’s children in determining how to cast our individual votes in local, state and national elections.

B. Additionally, the 226th General Assembly calls upon the PC(USA) Office of Public Witness and the Presbyterian Decade to End Gun Violence to include secure gun storage and the other safety measures listed here in their ongoing gun violence prevention actions, advocacy and resources.

Rationale

Hearing Christ's Call

In Luke 18, we see Jesus on the final journey to Jerusalem. Many adults had been besieging Jesus with questions and challenges. Suddenly Jesus is interrupted by parents who are bringing their children, the "little ones" who in first-century Herodian Palestine were overlooked and expendable. The caregivers seek a blessing, a promise of a safe place to belong, to grow free of harm. The disciples who have been following Jesus dismiss these vulnerable ones. Jesus is indignant, but replies with great kindness, "Let them come to me. They know what my Kin-dom looks like."

As disciples of Christ, we have the same call: to bless all God's children with a place to belong, to grow, to become strong and filled with wisdom and the grace of God (Luke 2:40). Continuously since the 1968 General Assembly, the Presbyterian family has called upon our officials to save lives through a reasonable regulation of firearms to keep them away from those who may be a danger to themselves or others. The PC(USA) has never called for the restriction of guns typically used in hunting or shooting sports. To these prior actions we add steps that local churches can take to protect children in particular.

Acknowledging our Present Reality

We cannot ignore or dismiss the present reality in the USA: more children are being traumatized, wounded, and killed by guns than by any other danger. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, since 2020 firearms have been the number one cause of death among children and teens in the United States, surpassing even car accidents.¹ From 2017 to 2021, child and teen gun fatalities increased by 40 percent to 4,739, the largest annual number ever recorded.² In addition to those who die, thousands more young people survive shootings each year with injuries that reverberate for months and years, and with ripple effects on parents, siblings, and communities.

A recent Harvard study³ shows that firearm deaths and injuries among youth exert a massive physical toll and mental health burden on survivors and their families. Financial costs are also high, with survivor health spending increasing by \$35,000 in the year following injury. Gun violence inflicts an enormous burden on children and on society, with a disproportionate danger for children of color.⁴ When compared to communicable and infectious diseases, gun violence often poses a larger burden on society in terms of potential years of life lost, as well as the long-term impact of trauma on individuals, families, and communities. These costs are immeasurable and reverberate through generations.

Recognizing Causes and Solutions

1. Unsecured Firearms: The easy access to guns exacerbates the rise in child victims, including gun sales that may not include background checks. There is also an access crisis at the point of gun storage. In America, 4.6 million children live in homes with guns that are both loaded and unlocked, and this number is growing.⁵ Secure gun storage saves lives. Solutions that congregations can participate in:

A. The Be SMART for Kids Campaign has been promoted nationwide and utilized by major hospitals, healthcare systems, the American Academy of Pediatrics, law enforcement agencies, and schools. Community partners include national organizations like Injury Free Coalition for Kids, Safe Kids

Worldwide, National PTA, as well as numerous other state and local partners. SMART is an acronym that stands for:

S: Secure all guns in your home and vehicles.

M: Model responsible behavior around guns.

A: Ask about the presence of unsecured guns in other homes.

R: Recognize the role of guns in suicide.

T: Tell your peers to be SMART.

Congregations can join in monthly BeSMART conference calls and use printable resources that include:

--Asking about Secure Gun Storage, with examples of effective conversation-starters.

--Keeping Your Home Safe with Secure Storage, which show how gun owners don't need to choose between storing guns securely and maintaining quick access to them if necessary.

--Secure Storage Toolkit, a guide to getting secure storage resolutions passed within school districts.

--Talking to Your Children about Guns, a guide that includes specific tips for young children, adolescents. Learn more at <https://besmartforkids.org/>

Additional Secure Storage Resources:

--Order Gun Safety Cards and the Gun Violence Prevention Congregational Toolkit (2024 Edition) from <https://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence/congregational-toolkit/> (See Section 3: Action)

--Free cable locks for small firearms can be obtained at most local Veterans Administration facilities.

B. Normalize the Ask and Talk about Gun Safety: Child lives can be saved if parents and caregivers will regularly ask friends or neighbors about gun storage in homes where children may visit. Find information on "normalizing the ask" at: <https://www.bradyunited.org/program/end-family-fire/asking-saves-kids> and at https://besmartforkids.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Asking-About-Secure-Gun-Storage_09.2023.pdf

While it is always an adult's responsibility to prevent unauthorized access to guns and not a curious child's responsibility to avoid guns, we must talk with children about gun safety. Incorporate the conversation about guns regularly, just as you would about other crucial safety issues. Make sure they understand that any situation where there is an unsupervised gun is a dangerous situation. Simple language could include "If you see a gun, don't touch it. Tell an adult right away." Tell children not to touch a gun, even if it looks like a toy. They should always assume a gun is loaded, and they should tell an adult immediately.

We know that talking to children about guns is only a precaution, not a guarantee of safety. One study found that young children who go through a week-long gun safety training are just as likely as children with no training to approach or play with a handgun when they find one.⁶

[ENV-01] Adoption of the Sustainable Peace Pledge
Source: Presbytery
Committee: [ENV] Environmental and Climate Justice
Profile #: [OVT-007]
Event: 226th General Assembly (2024)
Sponsor: Charleston-Atlantic Presbytery
Type: General Assembly Full Consideration

Recommendation

On Adopting The "Sustainable Peace Pledge"

The Presbytery of Charleston-Atlantic overtures the 226th General Assembly [2024] to adopt the following Sustainable Peace Pledge [1]:

"Sustainable peace entails the physical, material, psychological, cultural/religious, and ecological well-being of all peoples. We declare our organizational intention to pursue sustainable peace in our work and our lives"

and in adopting it to call upon:

- a. The Presbyterian Mission Agency to hold a consultation of relevant PC(USA) agencies and PC(USA)-related organizations to begin the process of developing a comprehensive, coordinated, global, and long-term strategy for contributing to the mitigation of the effects of climate change, which imperil "the physical, material, psychological, cultural/religious, and ecological well-being of all peoples."
- b. Representatives from other Christian denominations and other faith communities, but especially denominations of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, to be included in the consultation.
- c. Other councils of the PC(USA) to be encouraged to adopt this pledge and develop their own comprehensive, coordinated, global, and long-term strategies in concert with that of the Presbyterian Mission Agency.
- d. All members of the PC(USA) to be encouraged to personally adopt this pledge.
- e. The Presbyterian Mission Agency to report back to the 227th General Assembly [2026] on the progress toward establishing and implementing a comprehensive, coordinated, global, and long-term strategy for contributing to the mitigation of the causes and effects of climate change.

Rationale

Rationale

1. Earth is warming and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. [3]
2. This warming, accelerated by human activity, is forcing changes in Earth's climate. The primary anthropogenic factor forcing climate change is increasing amounts of carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide in the atmosphere, causing a "greenhouse" effect, heating Earth. [4]
3. If no more greenhouse gasses were added to the atmosphere, methane would dissipate in about a decade and nitrous oxide in a bit over a century. [5], [6]
4. About 80% of carbon dioxide would be dissolved in the ocean over two centuries but the remainder would take millennia. In the process the ocean becomes more acidic. [7]

5. However, greenhouse gasses continue to be added to the atmosphere.
6. It is estimated that the level of temperature rise over the next century will overshoot current mitigation targets.
7. The consequences of climate change will affect virtually every aspect of human life and every human being on Earth.
8. The global consequences of climate change (e.g., wide-spread drought, frequency of wild fires, severe weather events, sea level rise, wide-scale flooding, species extinction, etc.) will increase in severity for successive generations even if global efforts to mitigate them are instituted today. [8]
9. In addition to these consequences for the global ecosystem, there will be pronounced human costs. These will include: wide-spread hunger, mass population migration, increased heat-related health challenges and diseases, increased global political violence. [9], [10], [11]
10. Scripture warns that the iniquities of the parents will be delivered upon the children for many generations (Exodus 20:5). Scripture also declares reasons for hope (Jeremiah 32:1- 9, Romans 8:38-39, Revelation 21:5). The opening chapter of Genesis shows God calling upon the existing creation to share in the creation of the future (Genesis 1:11, 20, 24). Scripture witnesses that present actions have consequences on future generations; that by the loving grace of God, the present is not fully determined by the past; and that we are called upon by God to help bring forth the new creation.
11. While some of the consequences of climate change are inevitable, their degree can be mitigated by concerted application of God-called human capacities of intellect and imagination. Efforts to mitigate the most severe consequences of climate change for future generations will need to be comprehensive, coordinated, global, and long- term. Such efforts need to include, at least [12]:
 - a. Reducing, substantially, current levels of CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions [13],
 - b. Adopting non-CO₂ emitting forms of energy production,
 - c. Removing and sequestering CO₂ from the ocean and atmosphere. [14]
12. The PC(USA) currently has formal or affiliated efforts that could address or are addressing some of the issues related to mitigating climate change. These include but are not limited to the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy; the Office of Public Witness; the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program; Mission Responsibility Through Investment; Presbyterians for Earth Care; and the Presbyterian Association on Science, Technology and the Christian Faith.
13. However, the PC(USA) does not currently have a comprehensive, coordinated, global, long-term strategy for its efforts to contribute to mitigating the consequences of climate change. Still, the PC(USA) has identified itself as a Matthew 25 Church, and the Presbyterian Mission Agency has taken the organizational lead in fulfilling that Matthew 25 commitment. [15]
14. The Presbyterian Mission Agency has adopted three primary foci and three intersectional priorities as means of fulfilling the Matthew 25 commitment. One of the intersectional priorities is climate change. Without significant mitigation of the already anticipated consequences of climate change, the issues related to the other Matthew 25 foci and priorities (i.e., building congregational vitality; dismantling structural racism; eradicating systemic poverty; gender justice and heteropatriarchy; militarism) will be exacerbated.
15. The Presbyterian Mission Agency is the fitting agency of the PC(USA) to coordinate the development of a comprehensive, coordinated, global, long-term strategy for contributing to the development of a sustainable peace that will incorporate all of the foci of the PC(USA) Matthew 25 initiative.
16. The Sustainable Peace Pledge itself does not provide such a strategy but it is a commitment to seek Shalom in relation to all people and all of God's creatures. The Pledge commits the PC(USA), as a body, to develop and implement a strategy to work toward a comprehensive, coordinated, global, and long-term effort to mitigate the worst consequences of global climate change and provide a foundation for an ecologically sustainable peace that would fulfill Matthew 25 goals.
17. The Pledge commits other Councils of the PC(USA) and individual PC(USA) members, if they adopt it, to work toward a comprehensive, coordinated, global, long-term effort to attain an ecologically sustainable peace.
18. The Pledge also commits the PC(USA) to engage in an ecumenical and interfaith effort to contribute to a comprehensive, coordinated, global, long-term effort to attain an ecologically sustainable peace beginning with

engaging members of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

Citations:

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13. <https://www.energy.gov/eere/renewable-energy>
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Concurrence

Arkansas Presbytery

Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery

Twin Cities Area Presbytery

Boston Presbytery

[ENV-03] On Becoming Free from Plastic Pollution
Source: Presbytery
Committee: [ENV] Environmental and Climate Justice
Profile #: [OVT-014]
Event: 226th General Assembly (2024)
Sponsor: Susquehanna Valley Presbytery
Type: General Assembly Full Consideration

Recommendation

On Becoming Free from Plastic Pollution

The Presbytery of _ Susquehanna Valley overtures the 226th General Assembly (2024) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to commit ourselves as a church, a people of faith and a social organization embodying Christian values, to:

1. Encourage all our settings to commit to changing from a disposable culture to a reusable, sustainable one.
2. Encourage education within our congregations and in our communities to advocate for alternatives to single use plastics, whether through mitigation efforts and campaigns or by supporting local and state bans on single use plastics, and
3. Encourage all settings of the Church to determine the best pathway forward for strategies and actions to mitigate plastic pollution, using as examples the following resources:
 - a. The Story of Plastics, (95-minute documentary)[i]
 - b. Sierra Club Solutions to Plastic Pandemic[ii]
 - c. Ten Towns –Ten actions Toolkit of New Hampshire[iii]
 - d. National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF): Join the Fight for Reducing Plastic Pollution[iv]
 - e. Break Free Plastics: resources, articles, list of the worst corporate polluters and suggestions for actions[v]
 - f. The Five Actions Congregations Can Take from the United Church of Christ[vi]
 - g. Presbyterians for Earthcare webinar and resources on becoming free from plastics[vii]
4. Reduce the use of single-use plastics and packaging.
5. Commend all settings of the church to join in possible opportunities for participation in addressing plastic pollution including to:
 - a. Encourage all settings of the Church to commit to change from the throwaway and disposable culture and consumptive practices to reusable and compostable products.[viii]
 - b. Encourage replacement of single use plastics such as cutlery, plates, cups, straws, lids, and bottles with bioplastics, reusable, truly recyclable (like aluminum or paper) or compostable substitutes.
 - c. Preach on ecological sustainability principles articulated by Sallie McFague on responsible use of ecological resourcesix and the sustainable goal of mitigating single-use plastics.
 - d. Educate on the importance of mitigation of single-use plastics and plastic straws as well as plastic bottles at our churches, their events, and gatherings.
 - e. Educate on the toxicity of plastic pollutions and microplastics to the health of our environment, to our own health, and the health of non-human life.

- f. Educate on policies and practices of local recycling and composting services and advocating for better practices.
 - g. Organize low or zero waste events in collaboration with local organizations and infrastructures.
 - h. Support businesses that use sustainable practices such as reusable containers and reusable bags.
 - i. Participate in public cleanup of God's creation, including all bodies of water, parks, and beaches.[x]
 - j. Install fountains for water bottles in church campuses, wherever possible.
 - k. Actively support and lobby for local, state, national, and international legislation and policies that align with the intention of this resolution including bans of or fees on single use plastics.
 - l. Encourage the Mission Responsibility Through Investment Committee of the PC(USA) to engage with companies and corporations to reduce their production and use of plastics, particularly eliminating single-use plastics wherever possible.
6. Acknowledge that accommodations in expectations need to be made for certain impacted groups such as those who are disabled or unhoused.
7. Encourage people in all settings to speak truth to the public square against plastic pollution of our planet.

Rationale

Rationale

The 222nd General Assembly overwhelmingly agreed that “caring for God’s creation” should be part of our constitution and this received concurrence of 150 Presbyteries[xi]. Our Book of Order now states “God sends the Church to share in the stewardship of creation, preserving the goodness and glory of the earth God has made”[xii] and includes “caring for God’s Creation” in the commitment to participate in Christ’s mission. In keeping with this, all Presbyterians should seek to reduce the use of plastics, especially single-use plastics, in their homes, churches, workplaces, communities, states and nation.

In 2023, our sisters and brothers in the United Church of Christ (UCC) General Synod passed the overture “Free from Plastic Pollution: A Resolution of Witness”.[xiii] We overture the 226th General Assembly (2024) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to join them. The UCC’s Rationale can be found in their Resolution.

The PC(USA) General Assembly has affirmed that creation care is a fundamental part of who we are as Presbyterians. The biblical mandate for the overture “On Amending G-1.0304, The Ministry of Members, by Adding “Caring for God’s Creation”[xiv] by Dr. William P. Brown (William Marcellus McPheeters Professor of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary) applies to our need to become free from plastic pollution as well:

The fundamental biblical mandate for creation care comes from Genesis 2:15, where God places Adam in the garden to “till it and keep it” (NRSV). A better translation from the Hebrew is “to serve it and to preserve it.” In Genesis 1:26–28, God blesses humankind with dominion over the earth. Human “dominion” as intended in Genesis is best practiced in care for creation.

In Christ “all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17), and “every creature under heaven” is to receive God’s good news (v. 23). According to Revelation, God’s work in the world is “make all things new” (21:5), to bring about a new creation that does not destroy the old but transforms it, renews it. If the church is the sign of the new creation, then the church must lead the way in caring for creation.

Since the UCC General Synod passed their Resolution of Witness, further evidence of the danger of plastics to God’s Creation have been realized. Studies have found plastics in almost every food they tested, often at high levels.xv Water from disposable water bottles contains about 240,000 nanoparticles per liter.[xvi] Plastics in our

bodies can have serious impacts on our health and inhaled plastics have been correlated with lung inflammation, shortness of breath and a higher risk of lung cancer.^{xvii} These impacts disproportionately fall on vulnerable and disadvantaged communities. Mary Johnson (Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health) said, “Vulnerable populations are at even greater risk of the negative health impacts from the production, use and degradation of plastics”.^[xviii]

Approximately 99 percent of plastic comes from fossil fuels, generating 3.4% of global greenhouse gas emissions.^[xviii] Petrochemical companies have undertaken a massive increase in plastic production referred to as “Plan B for the fossil fuel industry”.^[xviii] Expanded the use of plastics serves to increase demand for fracked gas.^[xix] Leaked methane, the largest component of fracked gas, has 28 times as much impact on warming the climate as does carbon dioxide^[xx] and is responsible for about 30% of the rise in global temperatures since the Industrial Revolution,^[xxi] resulting in 2023 being the warmest year on record, by far.^{xxii} And while governments and international bodies are trying to limit plastic production, petrochemical industries are working to weaken legislation and international treaties.^[xxiii]

Currently, 430 million tons of plastic is produced yearly resulting in a production of 11 billion metric tons of plastic in the last century, surpassing the biomass of all animals on earth. Despite efforts to convince people recycling is effective, only 9% of the plastic ever produced has been recycled, and 19% has been incinerated.^[xxiv] Plastics are now one of the largest environmental disasters on our planet, polluting the Earth we are passing on to our children and subsequent generations.

God placed Adam in the garden to serve it and to preserve it. It is time for the Presbyterian Church (USA) to preserve creation by becoming free from plastic pollution.

Citations

i The Story of Stuff, <https://www.storyofstuff.org/movies/the-story-of-plastic-documentary-film/how-to-watch/>

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iv National Environmental Education Foundation, <https://www.neefusa.org/nature/water/join-fight-reduce-plastic-pollution>

v #BreakFreeFromPlastic, <https://www.breakfreefromplastic.org/>

vi Free from Plastic Pollution: Five Actions Congregations Can Take, United Church of Christ, 2023 <https://www.ucc.org/free-from-plastic-pollution-five-resolution-resources/>

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viii The Solving of the Plastics Issue, Yes Magazine, <https://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/solvingplastic> Also see eco-friendly alternatives, Eco-Friendly Alternatives for Disposable Plastic Water Bottles | Cedar Springs Blog (cedarspringswater.ca)

ix McFague, A New Climate for Theology

x Greenpeace, <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/campaign/toolkit-plasticfree-future/>

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xvii Microplastics Are Everywhere. What Are They Doing to Our Health? Discover Magazine, 2023, <https://www.discovermagazine.com/environment/microplastics-are-everywhere-what-are-they-doing-to-our-health>

xviii How the fossil fuel industry is pushing plastics on the world, CNBC, 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/01/29/how-the-fossil-fuel-industry-is-pushing-plastics-on-the-world-.html>

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xxi Global Methane Tracker 2023, International Energy Agency, <https://www.iea.org/reports/global-methane-tracker-2023>

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Concurrence

Arkansas Presbytery

Highlands Presbytery

Northwest Coast Presbytery

[FIN-01] On Engagement with General Electric and Palantir Technologies, Inc. for Possible Divestment Recommendations

Source: Presbytery
Committee: [FIN] Financial Resources
Profile #: [OVT-033]
Event: 226th General Assembly (2024)
Sponsor: Pittsburgh Presbytery
Type: General Assembly Full Consideration

Recommendation

The Presbytery of Pittsburgh overtures the 226th General Assembly (2024) to:

Direct the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) to begin focused engagement with General Electric (GE) and Palantir Technologies, Inc. in the 2025 and 2026 proxy seasons and to report back to the 227th General Assembly (2026) with possible divestment recommendations for the companies that are not moving toward compliance with established General Assembly policies.

Rationale

The Presbyterian Church (USA) has long recognized that church investment is “an instrument of mission.”ⁱ General Electric and Palantir Technologies are both involved in activities that bring them into direct conflict with our policy of mission-directed investment.

Military-Related Production, Human Rights, and Divestment

The PC(USA) has identified concerns that can qualify a company for divestment and/or proscription. The most relevant criteria for these two companies are military-related production and human rights violations.ⁱⁱ

Regarding military-related production, the divestment/proscription list offers guidelines that include “the sale of weapons to states involved in armed conflicts where there are heightened risks of those weapons being used in ways that constitute serious and systematic violations of international humanitarian law (IHL).”ⁱⁱⁱ

Regarding human rights violations, the list notes,

It is in conflict-affected and high-risk areas (CAHRA) ... that people are most vulnerable to violations of their human rights. CAHRA may include ... military occupations (e.g., Occupied Palestinian Territories)...^{iv}

General Electric (GE)^v

GE is a vast corporation involved in a wide variety of activities. Its revenues in 2022 totaled \$76.6 billion, with a “defense revenue” of \$4.4 billion.^{vi}

Military Production and Human Rights Violations in Israel/Palestine

GE's F110-GE-129 engines are found in all F-15 and F-16 fighter jets. Its electronic components are included in F-35 fighter jets.^{vii} F-15, F-16, and F-35 fighter jets have been used regularly in strikes on Gaza, including in 2008-09, 2014, 2021, and 2023-24. For each of those bombing assaults Israel has been accused of war crimes by the human rights organizations Amnesty International (AI), B'tselem, and Human Rights Watch (HRW).^{viii}

GE's T700 engines are employed in Israeli helicopters, including the Apaches that have been prominent in military operations against the West Bank and Gaza.^{ix}

The LM2500 produced by GE is the turbine part in the Sa'ar 5 warship with which the Israeli Navy enforces the naval blockade of Gaza.x In 2010 a Sa'ar ship assaulted the Gaza Freedom flotilla, leading to war crimes charges by the ICC's chief prosecutor.xi

Human Rights Violations in Yemen and China

GE works with the Royal Saudi Air Force, which has been implicated in war crimes in Yemen. The company provides Saudi with engines used in F-15 jets and Black Hawk and Apache helicopters. According to the human rights organization, PAX, the company "should be seen as 'contributing' to the [human rights] violations in Yemen.xii

GE is connected through its supply chain to the forced migration and labor of the Uyghur population in China. GE is a customer of Dongguan Yidong Electronic Co. Ltd., a supplier with factories in China that participate in the forced transfer, re-education, and exploitation of the Uyghurs.xiii

Palantir Technologies, Inc.

Palantir Technologies develops technology used in machine-assisted and human-driven data analysis. Palantir was created with start-up money provided by the CIA's venture capital branch.xiv

Military Production and Human Rights Violations in Israel/Palestine

Palantir's leading international clients include Israel's security forces, which use Palantir's predictive systems to identify individuals considered a "threat." Using this technology, Israel jails Palestinians because they fit the 'terrorist profile. One officer commented in 2016, "Unlike terrorists who belong to Hamas or the Islamic Jihad, if you get to their house a week before the attack the kid doesn't know that he is a terrorist yet."xv By its police profiling, Palantir Technologies contributes to the mass incarceration of Palestinians."xvi

Contribution to Human Rights Violations against Migrants and Asylum Seekers

Palantir's products contribute to human rights violations in the U.S. and on the U.S.-Mexico border in immigrant surveillance and targeting. In 2020 AI concluded, "there is a high risk that Palantir is contributing to serious human rights violations of migrants and asylum-seekers."xvii ICE has used its products to carry out workplace raids, deportations, and separate migrant families.xviii Palantir developed a tool used by ICE to separate immigrant families and build cases against migrants slated for deportation. Palantir's "FALCON" product has been used to help conduct workplace raids against undocumented migrants.xix

Contributions to U.S. Police Forces and Military

Palantir provides predictive policing technology to law enforcement agencies in the United States, a practice widely recognized as racist.xx The company has garnered more than \$600 million in Pentagon contracts since 2008. Since 2018, Palantir has worked on "Project Maven," an "initiative to deploy autonomous AI drones that can track vehicles and people, with the goal of sending those drones to combat zones to help the military prioritize targets and plan raids."xxi

Conclusions

Both General Electric and Palantir Technologies are involved in activities that conflict with the mission-directed investment policy of the PC(USA). We urge the General Assembly to direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board to instruct MRTI to begin a focused engagement process with General Electric (GE) and Palantir Technologies, Inc. with the aim of moving these companies away from actions that create human harm, are a barrier to peace, and violate human rights.

Citations

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- ii PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA) 2023 General Assembly Divestment/ Proscription List 2023, p.1.
- iii Ibid., pp. 5-6.
- iv Ibid., p. 7.
- v The following section and the section on Palantir Technologies utilize reports on the AFSC's Investigate website.
- vi "Top 100 Defense Companies," Defense News, 2023.
- vii "GE's F110 Engine," GE Aerospace,; Christine Gibson, "The F-35 Stealth Fighter..." Aug. 24, 2023,; "Boeing," Investigate website, AFSC,; "Lockheed Martin Corp.," Investigate website, AFSC.
- viii "ISRAEL/OPT: The Conflict in Gaza," AI, Jan. 19, 2009; "Israel/Gaza," HRW, Dec. 30, 2008; "Israel/Palestine ...," HRW, Jul. 15, 2014; "Gaza 'Black Friday' ...," AI, Jul. 29, 2015; "Israel/ OPT... ,"AI, May 17, 2021; "Killing blockaded civilians ...," B'tselem, May 15, 2021; "HRW accuses Israel, Palestinians ...," Al Jazeera, Jul. 27, 2021; "Commission of Inquiry collecting evidence ...," UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 10 October 2023; "Israel: Palestinian armed groups ...," AI, Oct. 12, 2023;"Damning evidence crimes ...," AI, Oct. 20, 2023,; Jacob Magid and Jeremy Sharon, "B'tselem accuses Israel ...," Times of Israel, 10 Oct., 2023; Ben Adler, "3 questions ...,"Yahoo! News, Oct. 11, 2023; Stefano D'Urso, "Configuration And Payload ...,"The Aviationist, Oct.12, 2023; ; Gabriel Centeno, "Meet the Israeli fighter jets ...," Aeroflap, Oct. 10, 2023; Christine Gibson, "The F-35 Stealth Fighter..." Aug. 4, 2023.
- ix "The T-700..." GE Aerospace; "GE XT700-GE-700 ...," National Air and Space Museum; "Boeing Co.," Investigate website, AFSC; "Lockheed Martin Corp." Investigate website, AFSC; Christine Gibson, "Trusted Around the World ...," GE, Jun. 22,2023, Lubna Masarwa and Oscar Rickett, "Israel uses Apache ...," Middle East Eye, June 19, 2023; "2021 is deadliest year ...," DCI, Dec. 10, 2021; Karen Yourish and Josh Keller, "The Toll in Gaza and Israel ...," NYT, Jul. 15, 2014; Anne Barnard, " Boys Drawn to Gaza Beach ...,"NYT, July 16, 2014; "HUMAN RIGHTS IN PALESTINE ...," Human Rights Council, UN, Sept. 25, 2009.; "US-made Apaches ...," Al Jazeera, Sept. 1, 2009, .
- x "LM2500 ...," GE.
- xi "Israel, Blockade of Gaza ...," ICRC; "Statement of ICC Prosecutor ...," ICC, Nov. 30, 2017. .
- xii "High-risk arms trade ..." Pax for Peace, Jul., 2022.
- xiii Vicky Xiuzhong Xu, "Uyghurs for sale ...," Australian Strategic Policy Institute Policy Brief, Report No. 26/2020.
- xiv "Palantir Technologies, Inc.," Stock Analysis; Sam Biddle, "How Peter Thiel's Palantir..." Intercept, Feb. 22, 2017,
- xv Orr Hirschauge and Hagar Shezaf, "How Israel Jails Palestinians ...," Haaretz, May 31, 2017, .
- xvi "Thousands of Palestinians ...," Al Jazeera, Jun. 30, 2021.
- xvii "Failing to Do Right ...," AI 2020 .
- xviii The War Against Immigrants ..., Mijente, August 2019 .
- xix "New Documentary Reveals ...," The Appeal, My, 21, 2020; "Data Company ...," WNYC, July 16, 2019,.
- xx Caroline Haskins, "300 Californian Cities ...," Vice, July 12, 2019, Maha Ahmed, "Aided By Palantir,..." Intercept, May 11, 2018; "Palantir Technologies Inc.," Investigate website, AFSC.
- xxi "Palantir Technologies Inc.," Investigate website, AFSC.

Concurrence

Mid-Kentucky Presbytery

Utah Presbytery

[INT-02] That the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Utilize the Gospel of Love as a guiding principle in its advocacy and humanitarian efforts

Source: Presbytery

Committee: [INT] International Engagement

Prefile #: [OVT-023]

Event: 226th General Assembly (2024)

Sponsor: Yukon Presbytery

Type: General Assembly Full Consideration

Recommendation

That the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Utilize the Gospel of Love as a guiding principle in its advocacy and humanitarian efforts

The Presbytery of Yukon overtures the 226th General Assembly (2024) to utilize the Gospel of Love as a guiding principle in its advocacy and humanitarian efforts, particularly in addressing the conflict between Israel and Hamas, with the aim to foster peace, reconciliation, and justice in the region.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) should apply the Gospel of Love (Matthew 22:37-40) to its approach in dealing with this conflict by implementing this three-fold approach to a peaceful solution:

1. Advocate for Peace and Justice

Advocate for policies that denounce violence from all sides, drawing from biblical imperatives of justice and peace (Micah 6:8; Matthew 5:9, Romans 12:21).

Justification: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9)

2. Implement Humanitarian Action

Increase support for humanitarian efforts to provide essential care to those affected by the conflict, reflecting Christ's compassion for the suffering (Matthew 25:35-40).

Justification: "For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in." (Matthew 25:35)

3. Promote Dialogue and Understanding

Create platforms for dialogue that include diverse voices, fostering reconciliation in alignment with the Gospel (Romans 12:18, 2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

Justification: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." (Romans 12:18)

Rationale

By implementing this three-fold approach, the Church can act as an agent of transformation, using its resources and influence to promote a peaceful resolution to the conflict, thereby witnessing to the power of the Gospel of Love.

The Gospel of Love, as taught by Jesus Christ, calls for active engagement in the lives of others, extending beyond mere sentiment to tangible actions that demonstrate care and concern for the well-being of all. This principle is deeply rooted in Christian Scripture and tradition, encapsulated in the Great Commandment to love God and our neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40). The current rule of engagement in the Israel-Hamas conflict has

often been characterized by retaliatory violence and a cyclical nature that perpetuates suffering. A new approach, grounded in unconditional love and non-violent action, is needed to break the cycle of violence and achieve lasting peace.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has a history of global mission work that includes peace-making initiatives. By advocating for policies that promote peace and justice and providing humanitarian aid, the Church can embody the compassion of Christ. The Church's involvement in the conflict, guided by the Gospel of Love, can serve as a testament to the power of love to overcome hostility and build bridges of hope.

The crisis persists due to a lack of widespread, concerted efforts to address the underlying issues with a compassionate, creative, and principled approach informed by the Gospel. If unaddressed, the conflict threatens to continue the cycle of violence, leading to further loss of life, violations of human rights, and impediments to peace.

[POL-01] On Amending the Book of Order to Include Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Among the Categories Against Which This Church Does Not Discriminate

Source: Presbytery
Committee: [POL] Polity
Profile #: [OVT-001]
Event: 226th General Assembly (2024)
Sponsor: Olympia Presbytery
Type: General Assembly Full Consideration

Recommendation

On Amending the Book of Order to Include Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Among the Categories Against Which This Church Does Not Discriminate

The Presbytery of Olympia overtures the 226th General Assembly (2024) to direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendments to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

(Text to be added is *[underlined, in brackets and italics]*.)

1. Shall F-1.0403 be amended as follows:

“The unity of believers in Christ is reflected in the rich diversity of the Church’s membership. In Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God unites persons through baptism, regardless of race, ethnicity, age, sex, *[gender identity, sexual orientation,]* disability, geography, or theological conviction. There is therefore no place in the life of the Church for discrimination against any person. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall guarantee full participation and representation in its worship, governance, and emerging life to all persons or groups within its membership. No member shall be denied participation or representation for any reason other than those stated in this Constitution.”

2. Shall G-2.0104b be amended as follows:

“b. Standards for ordained service reflect the church’s desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (F-1.02). The council responsible for ordination and/or installation (G-2.0402; G-2.0607; G-3.0306) shall examine each candidate’s calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of ordered ministry. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate’s ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.0404) *[and in the principles of participation, representation, and non-discrimination found in F-1.0403]*. Councils shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.”

Rationale

Rationale

Twice in 2022 Olympia Presbytery held ordination votes on the floor of presbytery involving ordinands with opinions that did not fully embrace the equal and affirmed status of LGBTQIA+ persons in the church. Those conversations were difficult because the *Book of Order* does not include gender identity or sexual orientation in its list of protected classes. These experiences reveal the need for denominational clarity concerning the church's ministry to LGBTQIA+ individuals as full participants in all aspects of life in the church.

While affirming the freedom of councils of the church to make ordination decisions as guided by the Holy Spirit, we acknowledge that the Church has been called upon historically to be ever more faithful to the most inclusive and affirming statements of Scripture and promptings of the Holy Spirit. The Church continues to find and confirm that the limits of each council of the church in their "local option" are conditioned by affirmations found in the *Book of Order*: sex, race, or any other prejudicial category, now to include gender identity and sexual orientation.

We feel that the Spirit is working in the churches concerning this matter. The 223rd General Assembly (2018) approved the following resolution:

- 1. Celebrating the expansive embrace of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the breadth of our mission to serve a world in need, the 223rd General Assembly (2018) affirms the gifts of LGBTQIA+ people for ministry and celebrates their service in the church and in the world.*
- 2. The assembly celebrates that over the years, LGBTQIA+ people have faithfully, lovingly, and courageously served in every kind of service to which Christian disciples are called— notwithstanding the church's efforts to exclude them from particular types of service.*
- 3. The assembly laments the ways that the policies and actions of the PC(USA) have caused gifted, faithful, LGBTQIA+ Christians to leave the Presbyterian church so that they could find a more welcoming place to serve, as they have been gifted and called by the Spirit.*
- 4. At the same time, the assembly gives thanks for the LGBTQIA+ pioneers of the faith who have persisted in relationship with the Presbyterian church, at great personal cost and sacrifice, together with the whole of the LGBTQIA+ community, moving the church toward a more generous, loving, and just understanding of God's grace.*
- 5. The assembly also gives thanks for those who continue to seek deeper understanding, and more authentic welcome, even amid discomfort or uncertainty about how best to show hospitality, in the spirit of continuing Reformation.*
- 6. Today, openly LGBTQIA+ people are leading churches, preaching the gospel, serving those in need, and otherwise using their gifts for ministry in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).*
- 7. With an eye toward the future, the assembly affirms God's presence and call in the lives of all God's people and commits to seeking justice, equality, and inclusion for all in church and society.*
- 8. The assembly calls on the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, the Presbyterian Mission Agency (through its Office of Public Witness), and all who represent the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to actively work for the protection of human and civil rights, both in the United States and around the world, especially the rights of marginalized and oppressed groups, including people facing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.*
- 9. The assembly calls upon mission co-workers and ecumenical representatives to advocate for justice and equality for all God's people in ways appropriate to their cultural and ecclesiastical context.*
- 10. The assembly encourages all congregations and councils of the PCUSA continually to seek to expand their welcome so that all might know the Good News of Jesus Christ and encourages all other communions to do the same.*

We follow this encouragement by urging that gender identity and sexual orientation be established as protected classes against which we must not discriminate. As the PC(USA) continues to celebrate the gifts of our LGBTQIA+ siblings, we must amend our *Book of Order* to prevent discrimination against those same siblings.

We further feel that justice will be served and the children of God will be supported by this amendment. Studies show that LGBTQIA+ youth who have religious parents that share negative views on being LGBTQIA+ have higher rates of suicide attempts.[1] We believe that the Church is being called to affirm and support this at-risk population as children, youth, and adults.

We pray that the PC(USA) will fully affirm our LGBTQIA+ siblings by adding language that protects these historically oppressed people.

[1] The Trevor Project: (<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/LGBTQ-Youth-and-Religion-Research-Brief-April-2020.pdf>)

Concurrence

San Jose Presbytery

New Castle Presbytery

Mission Presbytery

Even as the General Assembly called on the church to lament the ways in which PC(USA) policies have caused prior harm to LGBTQIA+ people, categories of sexual orientation and gender identity nonetheless remain omitted from the list of protected classes against which the church will not tolerate discrimination.

Even as the General Assembly called on the church Stated Clerk and other representatives of the PC(USA) to work for the general protection of the rights of LGBTQIA+ people, the Spirit has called the church into a moment in which such discrimination has taken on increasingly vivid form in our laws and in our society. Therefore it is incumbent upon the PC(USA) in this moment to bear cohesive, unified witness to the fully inclusive nature of God's creation. As the activity of any one council represents the activity of the whole church, it is incumbent upon the whole to make a determinative standard for full inclusion in the elemental language of its constitutional foundations.

While we affirm and value the freedom of local councils to examine candidates for ordination, we also recognize that such freedom exists within historical limits and that the so-called "local option" should not be construed to allow for discriminatory practice in one corner of the church which necessarily infringes on the inclusive witness of the whole church.

Furthermore, while we affirm and value the full inclusion of diverse theological convictions, we also recognize that sexual orientation and gender identity are matters of core identity, akin to other identity categories already present in F-1.0403 and that people of diverse theological convictions may nonetheless affirm their commitment to nondiscriminatory practice.

Finally, we pray with thanksgiving for the work of the Spirit in this time and place and for the possibility that by our hands, the Spirit might transform us into a church where all are truly welcome and valued.

Heartland Presbytery

Great Rivers Presbytery

[MC-06] On Clarifying the Boundaries within the Synod of the Rocky Mountains
Source: Presbytery
Committee: [MC] Mid Councils
Profile #: [OVT-034]
Event: 226th General Assembly (2024)
Sponsor: Synod of The Rocky Mountains
Type: General Assembly Full Consideration

Recommendation

The Synod of the Rocky Mountains overtures the 226th General Assembly (2024) to approve the geographic districts of its presbyteries as follows:

The geographic district of the Presbytery of Denver consists of the counties of Adams, Arapahoe, Clear Creek, Denver, Douglas, Eagle (that portion east of a line from the southwest corner of Lake County to the southwest corner of Grand County), El Paso (that portion north of a line running east from the common boundary of Elbert and El Paso counties), Elbert (that portion north of a line running east from the common boundary of Elbert and El Paso counties), Gilpin, Grand, Jefferson, Kit Carson, Lake, Park, Pitkin (that portion east of a line from the southwest corner of Lake County to the southwest corner of Grand County), and Summit, all in the state of Colorado.

The geographic district of the Presbytery of Glacier consists of the counties of Blaine, Cascade, Chouteau, Flathead, Glacier, Hill, Jefferson (that portion north of the Boulder River), Lake, Lewis and Clark, Lincoln, Liberty, Mineral, Missoula, Pondera, Powell (that portion north of 46 degrees 40 minutes latitude Montana prime meridian), Ravalli, Sanders, Teton, and Toole, all in the state of Montana.

The geographic district of the Presbytery of Plains and Peaks consists of the counties of Boulder, Broomfield, Jackson, Larimer, Logan, Morgan, Phillips, Sedgwick, Washington, Weld, and Yuma, all in the state of Colorado; and the counties of Banner, Box Butte, Cheyenne, Dawes, Deuel, Garden, Kimball, Morrill, Scotts Bluff, Sheridan, and Sioux, all in the state of Nebraska.

The geographic district of the Presbytery of Pueblo consists of the counties of Alamosa, Baca, Bent, Chaffee, Cheyenne, Conejas, Costilla, Crowley, Custer, El Paso, Elbert (that portion south of a line running east from the common boundary of El Paso and Elbert counties), Fremont, Hinsdale (that portion east of the Continental Divide), Huerfano, Kiowa, Las Animas, Lincoln (that portion south of a line running east from the common boundary of El Paso and Elbert counties), Mineral (that portion east of the Continental Divide), Otero, Prowers, Pueblo, Rio Grande, Saguache, San Juan (that portion east of the Continental Divide), and Teller, all in the state of Colorado.

The geographic district of the Presbytery of Utah consists of the state of Utah, excluding that portion lying within the Navajo Nation), and the county of Franklin, in the state of Idaho.

The geographic district of the Presbytery of Western Colorado consists of the counties of Archuleta, Delta, Dolores, Eagle (that portion west of a line from the southwest corner of Lake County to the southwest corner of Grand County), Garfield, Gunnison, Hinsdale (that portion west of the Continental Divide), La Plata, Mesa, Mineral (that portion west of the Continental Divide), Moffat, Montrose, Montezuma, Ouray, Pitkin (that portion west of a line from the southwest corner of Lake County to the southwest corner of Grand County), Rio Blanco, Routt, San Juan (that portion west of the Continental Divide), and San Miguel, all in the state of Colorado.

The geographic district of the Presbytery of Wyoming consists of the state of Wyoming.

The geographic district of the Presbytery of Yellowstone consists of the counties of Beaverhead, Big Horn, Broadwater, Carbon, Carter, Custer, Daniels, Dawson, Deer Lodge, Fallon, Fergus, Gallatin, Garfield, Golden Valley, Granite, Montezuma, Jefferson (that portion south of the Boulder River), Judith Basin, Madison, McCone, Meagher, Musselshell, Park, Petroleum, Phillips, Powder River, Powell, Prairie, Richland (excluding the town of Fairview) , Roosevelt, Rosebud, Sheridan, Silver Bow, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, Treasure, Valley, Wheatland, Wibaux, and Yellowstone, all in the state of Montana.

Rationale

In 2021 the Office of the General Assembly initiated a project to develop a database with the descriptions of each presbytery's geographic district, as well as a precise and accurate map. When the process revealed a variety of discrepancies and needs for clarification, OGA had conversations with mid council leaders in every synod to resolve identified issues. Agreements developed during those consultations resulted in these clear descriptions, now presented to the General Assembly for approval. Where a congregation that is a member of one presbytery is located in the geographic district of another presbytery, the exception is noted in the description of both presbyteries; this is a recognition of current reality, reflecting decisions made in the past, and is not intended as permission for a presbytery to organize congregations outside its own district.

This overture was approved by the Synod of the Rocky Mountains at a Called Meeting of the Assembly on January 29, 2024.

Candice Sweet, Stated Clerk

[ORD-06] On Appointing a Committee to Review the Preparation for Ministry Process

Source: Presbytery

Committee: [ORD] Ordination

Profile #: [OVT-011]

Event: 226th General Assembly (2024)

Sponsor: Highlands Presbytery

Type: General Assembly Full Consideration

Recommendation

On Appointing a Committee to Review the Preparation for Ministry Process

The Presbytery of the Highlands overtures the 226th General Assembly (2024) to appoint a committee to review the overall Preparation for Ministry process, and to make recommendations for relevant and appropriate changes to the 227th General Assembly (2026).

The Committee will be responsible for the following:

- An overall review of the Preparation for Ministry process including an assessment, evaluation, and recommendations for changes to the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCCEC):
 - revision of the handbook, including the process
 - development of ordination exams
 - selection/nomination of the team responsible for overseeing exam writers.
- Make recommendations for next steps to bring the process in line with today's church and its needs, or to develop a new process.
- The committee shall consult with presbytery leaders and committee on preparation for ministry (CPM) moderators concerning the process including a discussion on their understanding and suggestions concerning G-2.0607d: "examination materials, together with evaluations that declare those materials satisfactory in the areas covered by any standard ordination examination approved by the General Assembly. Such examinations shall be prepared and administered by a body created by the presbyteries."
- The committee shall consult with the Unification Commission on issues and concerns about the Preparation for Ministry process.
- The committee shall consider the following questions in their report to the 226th General Assembly:
 - Are ordination exams still necessary in the church today? Are the process and exams as they are now meeting the moment of the church and culture? Do they perpetuate white privilege culture and values?
 - Is the process helpful to form people who will be operating within this white privilege culture church or is the process missing the point at which the church is trying to move beyond?
 - What are ordination exams looking for and are they the best way to find it? What is being examined that isn't already discovered through the CPM process and the requirement of a seminary education?
 - If the exams are still necessary, how might they examine what needs to be understood in the multicultural, racial, and power-imbalanced twenty-first century? Are these exams still serving their greater intended purpose?

- How can readers come to the process without their cultural bias and perhaps “old school” view of the church, and provide an objective and impartial standard to test taker responses that may not reflect the reader’s cultural understanding? How does having evaluators who don’t know the test takers or anything about them improve the preparation for the ministry process?
 - How do we improve the integrity and relevance of preparing people for ministry to benefit the church and culture in the post-pandemic world?
- The General Assembly moderator(s) appoint a team of twelve which will include at least four mid council leaders and two CPM moderators. The moderators should also consider for the committee recently ordained clergy, ruling elders, men and women, and a diversity of ages, cultures, racial and gender identity. The team should be staffed and receive support from the Office for Ordered Ministry and Certification, The Office of Racial Equity and Women’s Intercultural Ministries, The Office of Theological Education.

Rationale

Rationale

In early 2023 the Exegesis examination, developed by the Presbyteries’ Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCCEC) focused on Judges 19, which includes the rape and dismemberment of a concubine. Many test takers, mid council leaders, CPM moderators and others have pushed back that this was an inappropriate passage to use for students to demonstrate their ability to exegete a passage. Many test takers and exam readers found this text hard to read, let alone useful for formulating a curriculum for college students; some acknowledged that it triggered trauma responses. The response of the PCCEC to the concerns expressed by mid council and CPM leaders was slow.

In the weeks and months following, The PCCEC slowly shared information on how they determined that this was an appropriate passage to use. What we learned from those exchanges and conversations is that the process for developing the examinations works on a three-year cycle. Within that cycle anyone on the PCCEC can flag exam passages, questions, or scriptures as inappropriate or in need of revision or editing. This particular passage did raise flags but remained in the process. We also learned that the PCCEC process does not include any input from other OGA/PMA staff, other diverse voices, or feedback from outside the committee (even those bodies created expressly for that purpose), thus forming a closed loop of conversation and information. The PCCEC’s funding model, unusual for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), was cited as a hindrance to a more open system.

The process for ongoing conversation about examining seminarians failed both the students and the presbyteries the PCCEC is meant to serve. A story about the rape, abuse, and dismemberment of a woman was not appropriate for exegesis by candidates for ministry. Even well-seasoned pastors would approach this conversation with caution, if at all.

The test takers were told they could not consult or speak to anyone about the test while they were taking it. Many students became upset with the material but felt that they couldn’t speak with anyone for fear it would cause them to fail the exam. The ordination exam is already stressful, and being faced with questions that cause trauma and not being able to discuss this with anyone is unconscionable. The exam instructions were

silent on how to seek help if this passage triggered a trauma response or traumatized the exam taker. A recent pilot project initiated by the PCCEC seeks to remedy concerns about seeking support and counseling during the exam, but this was no doubt instigated by the volume of comments that came from outside the closed loop.

When the mid councils and CPM leaders sought explanations about the exam the response from the OGA and the PCCEC was inadequate, very slow, frustrating, and confusing.

What was learned from this experience is that the PCCEC and the ordination exam process no longer functions as a confidential process but as a secretive process. The ability to appropriately and nimbly respond to concerns is inadequate and confusing. Concerns raised even within the committee went unheeded. The whole process, including the structure and funding of the PCCEC, hasn't been thoroughly examined in a very long time. The Book of Order reference (G-2.0607d) that the process is developed by the presbyteries no longer applies.

The conversation concerning ordination exams this last year also prompted other conversations and questions concerning exams and the process of ordination:

- Are the exams still necessary and if so, how can they examine what needs to be examined in a multiracial, multicultural, power-imbalanced twenty-first century?
- Are the exams and the process in the present form meeting the moment of the church and culture? Or are they perpetuating a white privilege culture and values beyond their reasonable life in the church?
- Is the process as a whole helpful to form people who will be operating within this white privilege culture church or are they missing the point at which the church is trying to move beyond?
- Is the present process and ordination examinations out of touch with the reality of church life, culture, and ministry?

These events and conversations have led to the overture asking for a full review of the process in light of the church today.

Concurrence

Baltimore Presbytery

Southern New Jersey Presbytery

Salem Presbytery

The Western Reserve Presbytery

[ORD-07] On Amending Book of Order G-2.1002 on Use of Commissioned Pastors

Source: Presbytery

Committee: [ORD] Ordination

Profile #: [OVT-016]

Event: 226th General Assembly (2024)

Sponsor: Palo Duro Presbytery

Type: General Assembly Full Consideration

Recommendation

The Presbytery of Palo Duro overtures the 226th General Assembly (2024) to direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

To amend Book of Order G-2.1002 to allow commissioned pastors to continue to perform certain functions after service in a particular ministry, by amending G-2.1001, Book of Order to read:

G-2.10 Commissioning Ruling Elders To Particular Pastoral Service

G-2.1002 Training, Examination and Commissioning [Strikethrough text are deletions; underline and bolded text are additions.]

A ruling elder who seeks to serve under the terms of G-2.1001 shall receive such preparation and instruction as determined by the presbytery to be appropriate to the particular commission. Such preparation shall include a certificate of completion of boundary training, which includes the topic of sexual misconduct, and child sexual abuse prevention training with recertification at least every thirty-six months. The presbytery shall determine which training courses are approved to meet the criteria of these two requirements. The ruling elder shall be examined by the presbytery as to personal faith, motives for seeking the commission, and the areas of instruction determined by presbytery. A ruling elder who has been commissioned and later ceases to serve in the specified ministry may continue to be listed as available to serve ~~but is not~~ **and is** authorized to perform the functions specified in G-2.1001 until commissioned again to a congregation or ministry by the presbytery **subject to annual review by the presbytery. The Commissioned Pastor will carry voice and vote as Commissioned Pastor while they continue their life in the presbytery.**

Rationale

The General Assembly amended G-2.1001 in 2022 to clarify that a ruling elder could serve as Commissioned Pastor (CP) to multiple worshipping communities or missions in the presbytery, subject to approval of the presbytery and the appropriate sessions. This is a recognition by the denomination of the growing importance of the CP. Commissioning a CP for service in multiple congregations or other ministries is a frequent practice in the PCUSA.

CPs provide faithful service to our denomination and with their gifts provide service to congregations that might otherwise go unserved. It makes sense to allow the use of the gifts in as broad a venue as possible. Through this change in the Book of Order, presbyteries, churches and CPs will benefit in many ways. Some instances of that are:

1. Some who are serving churches as lay leaders have expressed an interest in becoming a CP but have not pursued that path because they want to serve more than one church. By this change, the call to become a CP may attract a larger number of candidates.

2. CPs who are not currently commissioned to a church are ready on the quick to fill empty pulpits provide as pool of CPs ready on the quick to fill empty pulpits.
3. Because of the expanded role of a CP, congregations will more likely opt for a CP in small, chronic empty pulpits in rural areas when a teaching elder is not available. Hopefully, the congregations will see the advantage of a trained pastor who will be readily available.
4. This change is consistent with the Presbyterian call to those who are called to be proclaimers of the word.
5. This change lifts the title, the calling and the professionalism of this role from location to location.
6. CPs gain experience and wisdom that can be shared at presbytery and council meetings.

Concurrence

Synod of The Sun

Utah Presbytery

[POL-03] On Amending the Book of Order to Include Other Forms of Corporate Witness (Small Worshipping Communities, etc.)

Source: Presbytery
Committee: [POL] Polity
Profile #: [OVT-005]
Event: 226th General Assembly (2024)
Sponsor: Santa Fe Presbytery
Type: General Assembly Full Consideration

Recommendation

On Amending the Book of Order to Include Other Forms of Corporate Witness (Small Worshipping Communities, etc.)

The Presbytery of Santa Fe overtures the 226th General Assembly (2024) to approve and send to the presbyteries for ratification the following heading and new paragraph to the Form of Government, following G-1.0103:

G-1.0104 Other Forms of Corporate Witness (Small Worshipping Communities, etc.)

In circumstances where the formation of a traditional ecclesiastically and legally organized congregation is not desired or deemed appropriate, but a worshipping community nonetheless wishes to exist and function in relationship to The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), presbyteries and congregations may work together with such a group to provide supervision and support. Such recognized groups shall be under the mutually agreed upon oversight of a minister of the Word and Sacrament approved by the presbytery, shall include at least one ruling elder in their chosen leadership, and shall function under the financial, legal, and disciplinary sponsorship of an ecclesial council (either a session or a presbytery). The sponsoring council shall, in consultation with the worshipping community, authorize any celebrations of the sacraments within the group in accordance with the Directory for Worship. Membership records for group participants desiring to be formally enrolled as baptized, active, or affiliate members in the PC(USA) shall be maintained by the sponsoring council. Such groups shall not hold property, and may not undertake any financial, legal, or contractual obligations, apart from their sponsoring council. They shall adhere to the sponsoring council's required policies on sexual misconduct, harassment, child and youth protection, and antiracism. Presbyteries shall determine appropriate means of representation and participation of such groups in and through the sponsoring councils (session and/or presbytery).

Rationale

Rationale

1. The intention of the proposed amendment is to provide a minimal, flexible, and adaptable level of historic Reformed polity for small worshipping communities that wish to identify with the larger church in worship and formation, discipleship, and mission. The wording is intended to be adaptable to current constitutional provisions and/or to whatever recommendations may emerge from the Task Force to Explore the Theology and Practice of Ordination.
2. There is currently no constitutional provision in the *Book of Order* of basic organizational guidance for small worshipping communities wishing to relate to the PC(USA) that are not organized as a congregation. But, as is recognized in the establishment of the Task Force to Explore the Theology and Practice of Ordination, there is a broadly felt need for such.

3. From the PC(USA) web-page on New Worshipping Communities: “Living out the Gospel demands ministry which engages today’s cultures (John 1:14). New ways of joining Christians together for contextual ministry will use current and historic ways of ‘being church’ as springboards for creative innovation (Matt 9:17).”
4. From the PC(USA) web-page on New Worshipping Communities: “As distinct yet connected expressions of the body of Christ, NWCs have local leadership arising from their own community of faith (Exodus 18:21). Pastoral leadership, facilities, and programs are all appropriately structured in order to demonstrate good and faithful stewardship.”
5. This vision encompasses varying types of small worshipping communities, such as:
 - a. New Worshipping Communities which are not at a place to be organized as congregations.
 - b. Small churches no longer deemed viable or sustainable as organized congregations but which may be able to continue in ministry and service under sponsorship.
 - c. Intentional small worshipping communities (fellowships, house churches, etc.) that desire to identify and be connected with the larger church without the burden of formal organization or legal incorporation.
 - d. Groups with a particular need or emphasis (linguistic and cultural, minority, recovery, differently abled persons, residents of retirement communities, etc.) that wish to focus ministry on those needs as distinct worshipping communities, but also identify and be connected with the larger church.
6. The role of the sponsoring council (session or presbytery) would basically be that of an “umbrella organization” with oversight of financial, legal, and disciplinary matters as needed.

The principal body responsible for discerning the appropriateness of any such groups and their activities in relationship to the PC(USA) would be the presbytery, in consultation with any sponsoring congregation, acting under the authority of Scripture, guided by the *Book of Confessions*, and governed by the *Book of Order*.

Concurrence

Huntingdon Presbytery

Sierra Blanca Presbytery

Lake Erie Presbytery

Sheppards And Lapsley Presbytery

[POL-08] On Dissolution of Pastoral Relationships
Source: Presbytery
Committee: [POL] Polity
Profile #: [OVT-028]
Event: 226th General Assembly (2024)
Sponsor: Northeast New Jersey Presbytery
Type: General Assembly Full Consideration

Recommendation

On Dissolution of Pastoral Relationships

The Presbytery of Northeast New Jersey overtures the 226th General Assembly to adopt the following changes, for ratification by presbyteries, to the following provisions in the Book of Order.

(Changes shown in ***bold italics***.)

1. That G-2.0901 should read as follows:

An installed pastoral relationship may be dissolved only by the presbytery. Whether the minister of the Word and Sacrament, the congregation, or the presbytery initiates proceedings for dissolution of the relationship, there shall always be a meeting of the congregation to consider the matter and to consent, or decline to consent, to dissolution. ***No non-disclosure agreement shall be allowable.***

2. That G-2.0504b should read as follows:

Temporary pastoral relationships are approved by the presbytery and do not carry a formal call or installation. When a congregation does not have a pastor, or while the pastor is unable to perform her or his duties, the session, with the approval of presbytery, may obtain the services of a minister of the Word and Sacrament, candidate, or ruling elder in a temporary pastoral relationship. No formal call shall be issued and no formal installation shall take place.

Titles and terms of service for temporary relationships shall be determined by the presbytery. A person serving in a temporary pastoral relationship is invited for a specified period not to exceed twelve months in length, which is renewable with the approval of the presbytery. A minister of the Word and Sacrament employed in a temporary pastoral relationship is ordinarily not eligible to serve as the next installed pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor.

When the temporary pastoral relationship ends, no non-disclosure agreement shall be allowable.

Rationale

In the vows we take at ordination, we (ruling elders, teaching elders, and deacons) promise to serve one another, God, and God's church with love (W-4.0404). Non-disclosure agreements indicate the opposite has happened, and tend to engender speculation rather than truth-seeking. While there are specific instances when police or a court may forbid the sharing of information, those circumstances would not require any non-disclosure agreement for the parties specified so the ruling can be honored without any agreement. Similarly, a proper order of a permanent judicial commission (PJC) would also take precedence over any such agreement entered into by the parties, and this would in no way preclude a PJC from making its own determination.

As pertains to a church and a pastor, a non-disclosure agreement invites speculation that is typically a disservice to all parties. The dissolution of pastoral relationships is similar to divorce in that the absence of information often results in speculation of the circumstances that can be far worse than the actual circumstance

and can brand a pastor with erroneous behavior or brand a congregation as damaging to pastors. Further, if the dissolution involved a traumatic event from inappropriate behavior either on the part of a pastor or members of the congregation, the non-disclosure agreement would prevent the congregation from processing the collective trauma appropriately, so they would be unlikely to put it behind them. Dysfunction in the congregation as a result of unprocessed trauma typically carries over to negatively affect the next pastoral relationship.

Personal testimony:

"I was serving as an associate pastor at a church in a bedroom community of (City). Almost immediately upon my arrival in 2017, the Head of Staff [HOS] announced his departure, and I was on my own 3 months into the job. That part was fine. I served as Acting HOS until the interim started about 8 months later. I was not compensated for the extra work. When my time was finished as Acting HOS, I was given a flower and a \$500 bonus check, in lieu of the nearly \$7,000 they actually should have paid me. A short time later I became pregnant, and my child was born in early May. About two weeks after his birth I got a text from an elder saying they needed me to attend a session meeting to talk about dissolving my position. During my 12 weeks of parental leave I spent about 40 hours in session meetings trying to save my job. They said, "we need to take the personal out of this and make a smart business decision." It was then I knew I wouldn't be returning. With a COM [committee on ministry] representative, I began negotiating the terms of my severance. I requested six months of salary and benefits continuation, plus the money they owed me for serving as Acting HOS, plus the money they didn't pay for my move across the country (but did pay for the male interim). We finally landed on 7 months of severance, and we agreed. On the Sunday I was supposed to come back from leave, the congregation held their meeting to dissolve our relationship. At this meeting, a motion was made by a serving elder to reduce the terms of my severance to 4 months, and that passed. I declined to consent to the change.

The issue then had to go to the presbytery. Before that, the committee on ministry met to make a determination that they bore some responsibility for the situation and decided to fill in the remainder of my agreed upon severance with their own funds. I agreed to this and agreed to the dissolution. COM recommended the presbytery act on the dissolution.

One minister member of the presbytery, however, believed that COM had overstepped their authority by offering me money, and brought a motion to the floor of presbytery to rescind COM[']s] action. My value as a human and a pastor was debated at that meeting. It was said I didn't deserve it because I'd only been there two years and "much" of that time was spent on "maternal leave." This member and a colleague threatened a Synod PJC case if the presbytery didn't rescind. So they did.

Then a motion was made that COM funds be used to fill in the remaining 3 months of my severance that my congregation had refused to do, and to seek my consent in dissolving the relationship. This motion passed and I consented.

At a later COM meeting I was handed a stack of papers to sign, having been told it was "all the standard paperwork." In my grief and haste and postpartum fog, I signed them not knowing one was an NDA. I had said multiple times I absolutely would not sign an NDA under any circumstances, and all parties had agreed. Then I unknowingly signed one.

The Executive Presbyter eventually began to question my integrity because I had not adhered to the NDA, though in my view it was invalid and unenforceable because I was on the record having said I would not sign one. They got my signature anyway. I relayed all of this to her (she was brand new), and reiterated that I would not be beholden to an NDA no matter the circumstances. She just nodded and nothing has ever come of it, but it certainly could and I run that risk every time I tell someone about my experience.

This is the fear I live with, even as I advocate for the end of this harmful, unChristian, unPresbyterian practice."

