

221st General Assembly

NPC Beginning of Assembly Briefing

June 14, 2014

Note: Dr. Quinn Fox

is a Teaching Elder Commissioner

WATCH LIVE: pcusa.org



What's A General Assembly?

General Assembly of the PCUSA

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graph TD; A[General Assembly of the PCUSA] --> B["Synod (Mid-Atlantic)"]; B --> C["Presbytery (National Capital)"]; C --> D["Session of National Presbyterian Church"];
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Synod (Mid-Atlantic)

Presbytery (National Capital)

Session of National Presbyterian Church

A map of Alaska with a small rectangle in the Aleutian Islands indicating the study area. The text 'Study Area' is written inside the rectangle.



Presbyterian Church (USA)

Statistics 2012-2013

	2012	2013
Members	1,849,496	1,760,200
<i>% Women</i>	<i>58.2%</i>	<i>58.3%</i>
Churches	10,262	10,038
Churches: <i>leaving</i>	110	148
Churches: <i>closing</i>	86	74
Churches: <i>opening</i>	13	24
Ministers	20,849	20,562
Child Baptism	19,862	17,929

The Synod of the Mid-Atlantic's 14 Presbyteries



National Capital Presbytery

- 111 churches from DC, Maryland, and Northern Virginia (geographical).
- Meets every 2 months.
- Presbyteries are responsible for Reformed witness and worship in their geographical region.
 - Support for churches in hiring (and paying) Pastors; hold Sessions accountable for being and doing “church.”
- National Capital Presbytery is a socially active presbytery.
 - Many clergy not in congregations
 - This includes a wider spectrum of theological positions, which on balance tend toward the liberal end of the spectrum.
 - E.g., In January, our Presbytery voted to send two amendments to the General Assembly that would change the definition of marriage.

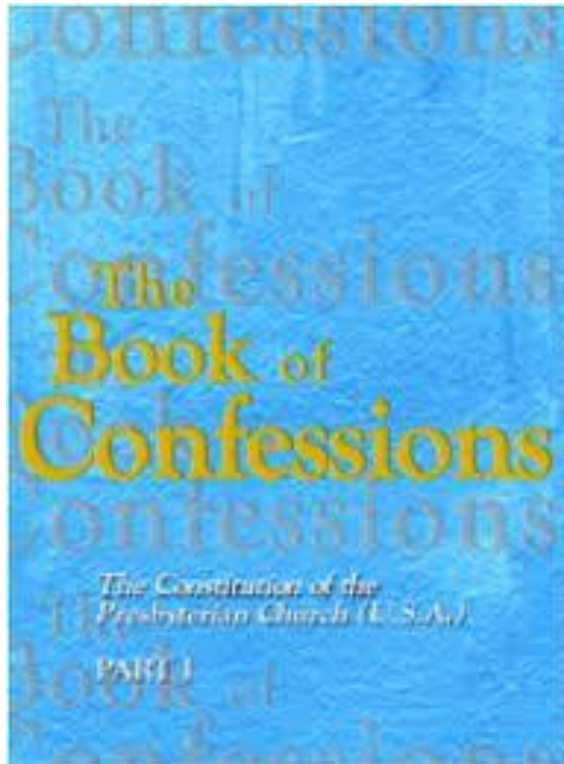
General Assembly

- Body that is ultimately accountable for the Reformed witness and worship of the Presbyterian Church (USA)
- **Meets every two years** –
 - This Year in Detroit, June 14-21, 2014.
 - All Presbyteries send commissioners, based on size.
 - National Capital Presbytery, being large, sends 12
- Makes Recommendations for Study by the Church
- Calls on Specific Groups or organizations to take action (e.g., the U.S. Government)
- Proposes changes in the interpretation and wording of **our constitution** = **NEW MODERATOR . . HEATH RADA**

PCUSA Constitution

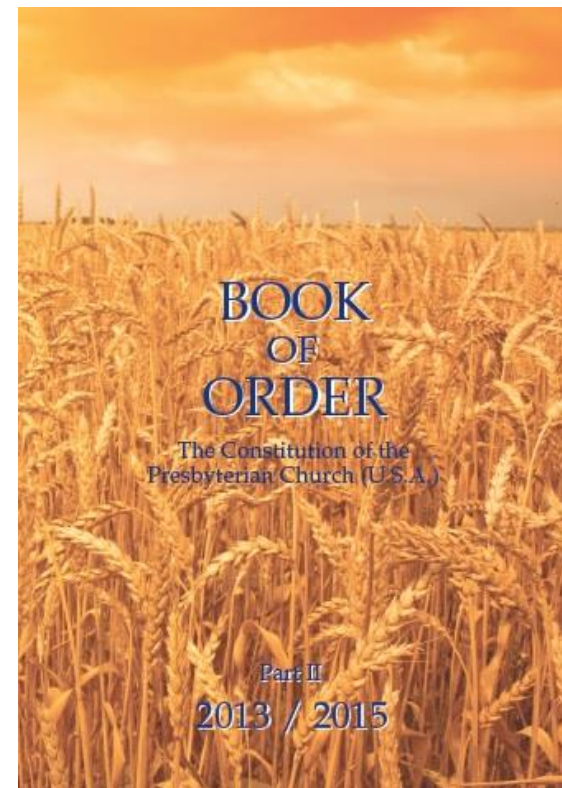
Part I: Book of Confessions

❖ **Faith** – 11 Confessions (theological summaries) and Creeds, from different periods of time.



Part 2: Book of Order

❖ **Polity** – How we do things



General Assembly

- **Book of Order** (polity) changes proposed at GA must be ratified by a majority ($>1/2$) of the Presbyteries before they take effect.
 - An **Authoritative Interpretation** (AI) does not require ratification by the presbyteries, because it is an “interpretation” of the Book of Order.
- **Book of Confessions** (faith) changes must be recommended by two General Assemblies, a special committee and by $2/3$ of the presbyteries.

Overtures (by the numbers)

- 68 overtures from presbyteries and synods have qualified for consideration by the 221st General Assembly (2014) of the PC (U.S.A.).
- Overtures must have concurrence this year, for the first time, from one additional presbytery or synod to qualify for Assembly consideration.
 - 8 overtures did not receive the required concurrence.

Items Before the GA this Summer

- www.pc-biz.org allows you to see all of the business before GA

Recommend for Study

1. Children – unwanted, sexually exploited
2. Cuba/US relations
3. Drug Policies
4. End of Life
5. Financial Crisis accountability, etc.
6. Fossil Fuel exports
7. Immigrant Civil Right Defense Initiative
8. End Hunger (study, work, pray)
9. Survivors of Homicide
10. Sustainable Development “Precautionary Principle”
(=*if in doubt, don’t*) : study and affirm

Items Before the GA this Summer

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- **Internal/Organizational**
 1. Property gifted to congregations
 2. Retired Ministers joining churches
 3. Youth Leadership at GA
 4. Korean Churches (assimilating, local connections)
 5. Small Churches (surviving)
 6. Synod Boundaries (changing)
 7. Presbytery Boundaries (choosing)
 8. Church Dues for General Assembly
 9. Pension/medical participation and viability
 10. Conscience và Medical Dues for Abortion
 11. Background checks (for ministers)
 12. Disciplinary Processes (for ministers)
 13. Acting against ministers who leave the denomination
 14. Acting against ministers who do not endure disciplinary process
 15. Divest Fossil Fuels
 16. **Marriage Definition, Permission to Conduct**

Items Before the GA this Summer

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Commemorate/Pay Attention

1. John Knox 500th birthday
2. Armenian Genocide
3. Persecution (Egypt)
4. Child Nutrition
5. Support Congolese Hospital

Theology

1. Define/Add “Essentials” of Reformed Faith
2. Define/Add Belhar Confession

Items Before the GA this Summer

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U.S./International Political Process

1. Gun Ownership
2. Cuba/U.S. Relations/Travel
3. Death Penalty Moratorium
4. Drones
5. Middle East

National Capital Presbytery's Overtures

- Ovt 065: 09-11 (Social Justice Issues)

Affirming the **Importance of Maternal and Child Nutrition** in early childhood

- Ovt 008: 12-03 (BOP, PILP, PPC and Foundation)

Publishing the Current List of **Churches Certified as Relief of Conscience Churches**

- Ovt 007: 09-01 (Social Justice Issues)

Taking Action to **Reduce Gun Violence**

Items Before the GA this Summer

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A LARGE NUMBER OF ISSUES

Committees (*Mon-Tues*)

- *examine/amend*
- *pass on (or not) to Plenary (Wed – Sat)*

David's Opinions . . .

Quinn's Categories . . .

Quinn . . . Era/Generational Issues

- Ovt 018: 15-01 (Immigration and Environmental Issues)

On **Divestment** From **Fossil Fuel Companies**

— *from Boston Presbytery.*

- Ovt 020: 03-03 (General Assembly Procedures)

On Amending G-3.0500 to **Give YAAD's Voice And Vote** and to Rename Them “Youth Adult Commissioners”

— *from the Synod of the Covenant.*

Quinn . . . Signs of Decline

- Ovt 003: 03-01 (General Assembly Procedures)
 - Issuing a Request to **Teaching Elders** to Participate in the Administrative Costs of the Church by **Paying Per Capita**
 - *from Albany Presbytery.*
- Ovt 019: 06-06 (Church Polity and Ordered Ministry)
 - Amending G-3.0301 Regarding the **Minimum Number** of Operating Sessions and Teaching Elders in **Presbytery**
 - *from Eastern Oregon Presbytery.*

Quinn . . . Conservative vs. Liberal Issues

- Ovt 001: 06-01 (Church Polity and Ordered Ministry) — Amend G-2.0104b. by **Replacing “Guided by” with “Obedient to”** in reference to Scripture and the Confession
— *from East Tennessee Presbytery.*
- Ovt 004: 12-02 (BOP, PILP, PPC and Foundation) — Direct the Board of Pensions in the **Distribution of Pension Benefits of Church Leaders and Administrators of Churches Leaving the PC(USA)**
— *from Tropical Florida Presbytery.*
- Ovt 032: 06-09 (Church Polity and Ordered Ministry) — Amend F-2.05, G-2.0105, and W-4.4003c to **Clarify What is Meant by Essentials of the Reformed Faith**
— *from Upper Ohio Valley Presbytery.*

Quinn . . . Failed to Qualify (no concurrence)

- Ovt 043: *not referred for lack of a concurrence*
 - On Ending Discriminatory Policies in the **Boy Scouts** of America
 - *from New York City Presbytery.*
- Ovt 064: *not referred for lack of a concurrence*
 - On Divestment from **Fossil Fuel** Companies
 - *from Palisades Presbytery.*

Confession of Belhar

- NB: Belhar is not listed in the overtures
 - It is a recommendation *from a Special Committee*, rather than an overture coming from a Presbytery.
 - It was an overture in 220th G.A. (2012, Pittsburgh)
 - A Special Committee studied and recommended it for this G.A.

PRIMARY ISSUE: Racial Reconciliation & Justice

PROVENANCE: South Africa, 1986

[WEB SEARCH “Belhar”]

Major Items Before the GA this Summer

- **Marriage:** Changing marriage and participation in “covenant” ceremonies will be discussed in 2 ways:
 - A **change to the wording of the PCUSA constitution** eliminating references to men and women, effectively changing the definition of marriage, and allowing same-sex marriages in the church. *If approved, it would have to be passed by a majority of the Presbyteries to take effect*
 - An **Authoritative Interpretation** of the constitution that declares that the constitution will be interpreted to allow same-sex marriage. This would take effect immediately and does not require any approval from the Presbyteries.
- **Middle-East:** Israel-Palestinian relations generally, and particularly divestment (boycotts and sanctions) in companies that do business with Israel.
- www.pc-biz.org allows you to see all of the business before GA

Marriage & Civil Unions

- Ovt 011: 10-01
 - **Amend W-4.9000** Concerning the Church's Role in Legal Marriage and Services of Christian Covenant — *from Lehigh Presbytery.*
- Ovt 021: 10-02
 - **Amend W-4.9000**, Marriage — *from Cascades Presbytery.*
- Ovt 024: 10-03
 - **Issue** an Authoritative Interpretation of **W-4.9000** to Affirm Pastoral Discretion in Performing Marriage Ceremonies — *from Heartland Presbytery.*
- Ovt 047: 10-07
 - **Create a Task Force** to Identify Common Ground and Reconcilable Differences with Respect to Same Gender Marriage — *from Eastern Korean Presbytery.*

Israel, Palestine & the Middle East 1

- Ovt 013: 04-01 (Middle East Issues)
 - Review General Assembly Policy Regarding the “Two-State Solution” in Israel Palestine — *San Francisco Presbytery.*
- Ovt 017: 04-03
 - Engage Presbyterian to Witness for Palestinian Human Rights and for Ending the Occupation of Palestine — *Grace Presbytery.*
- Ovt 022: 04-04
 - Support Middle East Peacemaking — *New Covenant Presbytery.*

Israel, Palestine & the Middle East 2

BDS = *Boycott, Divest, Sanctions . . .*

- Ovt 014: 04-02
 - Divest from Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard, and Motorola – *San Francisco Presbytery.*
- Ovt 030: 04-05
 - Call for a Boycott of all Hewlett-Packard Products – *New Brunswick Presbytery.*
- Ovt 059: 04-06
 - Affirm “Occupation-Free Investment” in Palestine – *Mackinac Presbytery.*
- Ovt 061: 04-07 (All above = “Middle East Issues”)
 - Adopt the Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) Recommendation on Divestment – *Synod of the Covenant.*

Israel, Palestine & the Middle East 3

- Ovt 051: 07-01 (Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations)
 - Distinguish between *Biblical Terms for Israel* and Those Applied to the *Modern Political State of Israel* in Christian Liturgy — *Chicago Presbytery.*

- Ovt 040: 11-02 (Peacemaking and International Issues)
 - Turn Attention to the Plight of the Church that is Suffering due to Sectarian Violence and ***Persecution in Egypt and Other Parts of the World*** — *from Pittsburgh Presbytery.*