

Presbyterian Church in America Assembly Meets in Atlanta

The second largest of more than 30 Presbyterian denominations in the United States met June 6-11 in Atlanta, GA. With 500 career missionaries, 1,655 summer missionaries, and 92 short-term missionaries, the Presbyterian Church in America has the largest Presbyterian mission enterprise in the world.

Dr. William S. Barker, II, academic dean at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, PA, served as moderator. The former editor of the *Presbyterian Journal*, Barker obtained a unanimous endorsement when Rev. David Coffin, his only opponent, withdrew.

The first lively event of the gathering was a report from the Committee of Commissioners on Interchurch Relations calling for the removal of the Permanent Committee on Interchurch Relations (IRC). The commissioners were unhappy with the committee's efforts to play down concern over trends in the Christian Reformed Church and expressed dissatisfaction with the IRC report on the state of affairs in the CRC. The initial report of the Permanent Committee on Interchurch Relations drew hostile reaction from all sides in the Christian Reformed Church and many areas in the PCA.

After spirited debate, the court selected a third statement: "We call upon you to reverse the steps you have taken to open the offices of minister and elder to women, believing that the clear teaching of Scripture reserves these offices to certain qualified men. We plead with you not to be led by the spirit of the age but to lead the age to bow before the truth of God's Word. We pledge ourselves to pray for you that the Holy Spirit will lead you to a continued and renewed faithfulness to Christ and His gospel."

Rev. Ric Perrin, the controversial spokesman for the Permanent Committee, was directed to represent the PCA at the Christian Reformed Synod. Appointment of Perrin, who had been the primary focus of discontent in the committee of commissioners, expressed the general attitude of the court toward the CRC as much as the court's mild call to reverse policy.

The second major concern in Atlanta was the future of the Investors Fund for Building and Development (IFBD). The exposure of a cluster of confusingly related corporations and the unavailability of a legal audit had focused the attention of the independent church press on financial issues prior to the Assembly. However, provisions to make the audit available to neutral observers and the decision to distance the denomination from the IFBD calmed the situation.

The court also expressed its full confidence in Stated Clerk, Paul Gilchrist, who had come under fire from the independent media, including the *Observer*, in the weeks immediately prior to the assembly.

The IFBD trustees expressed concern for the denomination's financial exposure in the event the IFBD should fail to fulfill its contractual obligations and the Assembly agreed under the circumstances to divest itself of the IFBD. While all ties to the PCA were severed, IFBD trustees declared their intention to continue assisting PCA churches to acquire funding for church buildings. The move defused the most potentially explosive matters before the court.

A memorial from a conservative PCA interest group, Concerned Presbyterians, was ruled out of order. The procedure which broke over 150 years of Presbyterian tradition was viewed as a slap at the CP claim the

denomination was turning from its roots. All the points in the memorial appeared for consideration under overtures from various presbyteries and eventually received the court's full attention at other times. Generally, the Concerned Presbyterian measures called for reaffirmation of earlier PCA positions on doctrine and practice, but they failed to gain substantial support when they eventually surfaced.

Home missions coordinator Terry Gyger, head of Mission to North America (MNA), resigned to take a position as a church planter in Boston and foreign coordinator John Kyle retired. No one has been suggested for Gyger's job, but denominational seminary president Dr. Paul Kooistra will assume the leadership of the financially troubled foreign mission.

The redistribution of \$2.8 million in designated funds for other purposes could have been a major sticking point in PCA affairs but the court seemed satisfied with efforts being made by the Mission to the World to solve the problem through new procedures.

The *PCA Messenger* will cease publication in December. Having slipped in circulation from 68,000 to less than 10,000, the denominational house organ apparently was unable to capture the imagination of its constituency. An assembly committee, charged with studying communication needs within the denomination, concluded that the PCA should have a denominational magazine going into every home and that this magazine should be supported by all PCA committees and agencies. However, the commissioners were unconvinced.

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