

Clerks' Tip of the Month What Happened at the General Assembly?

Although the 223rd General Assembly of the PCUSA did not have the drama (and divisiveness) of some past assemblies, a lot got done. And our commissioners and delegates served us well. If you want to learn about all the action, check out this page on the General Assembly website: <https://ga-pcusa.org/general-assembly-news/>.

But what happened to the things National Capital Presbytery sent to the GA? Most of what we sent or concurred in were adopted.

NCP sent a request for an Authoritative Interpretation concerning whether a session has authority to set policy regarding weddings on church property. A Permanent Judicial Commission decision in one presbytery held that a session could not set such a policy but had to consider each case separately but only after a decision by the pastor whether to conduct the wedding. The General Assembly, as we had urged, determined that sessions do have authority to set policy regarding weddings on church property.

NCP had concurred with an overture directing the Board of Pensions and the Presbyterian Foundation to divest from fossil fuel and actively invest in securities that focus on renewable energy. The GA did not adopt that overture, but instead adopted the report of the Mission Responsibility Through Investment Committee and directed MRTI, among other things, to continue its engagement with fossil fuel companies to work toward such things as reduced greenhouse gas emissions and improved energy efficiency, with possible selective divestment recommendations to the 224th General Assembly for companies that are not moving toward compliance.

NCP concurred with an overture on responding to the current Syrian crisis by urging government and United Nations officials to bring about a ceasefire, work for reconciliation of the Syrian society, help alleviate the suffering of Syrians, and deepen our partnership with Syrian Christians. This overture passed in the omnibus.

NCP concurred with an overture to recognize the prophetic witness of the Reverend Henry Highland Garnet, pastor of 15th Street Presbyterian Church in Washington, DC and Shiloh Presbyterian Church in New York City, by, among other things, publishing his speech in 1865 to Congress at the request of President Lincoln ("A Memorial Discourse"), and splitting the proceeds between those two churches. In committee the overture was amended to add two other churches connected with Rev. Garnet and to request the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation to include "A Memorial Discourse" in any materials developed in the future for the



study of The Confession of Belhar. The General Assembly overwhelmingly approved this overture.

The 224th General Assembly will be in Baltimore, Maryland beginning June 20, 2020! That will be a great opportunity for National Capital Presbytery folks to observe and participate in this impressive event. And, I suspect, we will have an opportunity to help our kin in Baltimore Presbytery as they host.

If you have a tip you think others could use or a topic you would like information on, please let me know at scoe@thepresbytery.org.

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