

[OVT-005] On Amending G-2.0301 to Allow Congregations to Elect Members as Ruling Elders for Service to the Larger Church

Source: Presbytery
Committee: Unassigned

IOB Link: <https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/3000515>
Event: 224th General Assembly (2020)
Sponsor: Synod of the Northeast
Type: General Assembly Full Consideration

[OVT-005]

1. Recommendation
1. Rationale
2. Concurrence
1. Newton Presbytery

Recommendation

The Synod of the Northeast overtures the 224th General Assembly (2020) to direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative vote:

Shall G-2.0301 be amended as follows: [Text to be inserted is shown in *italic*.]

*“As there were in Old Testament times elders for the government of the people, so the New Testament church provided persons with particular gifts to share in discernment of God’s Spirit and governance of God’s people. Accordingly, congregations should elect persons of wisdom and maturity of faith, having demonstrated skills in leadership and being compassionate in spirit. Ruling elders are so named not because they ‘lord it over’ the congregation (Matt. 20:25), but because they are chosen by the congregation to discern and measure its fidelity to the Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture its faith and life. Ruling elders, together with ministers of the Word and Sacrament, exercise leadership, government, spiritual discernment, and discipline and have responsibilities for the life of a congregation as well as the whole church, including ecumenical relationships. When elected by the congregation, they shall *ordinarily* serve faithfully as members of the session. *Congregations may also elect members as ruling elders to exercise spiritual leadership in a broader sense, in other specific capacities including service in higher councils, without the requirement that they first serve a term on the session.* When elected as commissioners to higher councils, ruling elders participate and vote with the same authority as ministers of the Word and Sacrament, and they are eligible for any office.”*

G-2.0301을 수정하여 회중이 더 큰 교회를 섬기는 대의원으로 선출하자는 안건 --Northeast 대회에서

노스이스트 대회는 224차 총회(2020)에 헌의하여 정서기가 다음과 같이 제안된 수정안을 찬성 또는 반대 투표를 위해 노회에 보내도록 지시합니다.

G-2.0301을 다음과 같이 수정해야 합니다: [삽입할 텍스트는 기울임 꼴로 표시됨]

“구약시대에 백성을 다스리는 장로들이 있었던 것처럼, 신약시대 교회에도 하나님의 영을 분별하고 하나님의 백성을 다스리는 사역에 참여하도록 특정한 은사를 받은 사람들이 있었다. 따라서 개체교회들은 지혜 있고 성숙한 믿음이 있는 자들, 탁월한 지도력을 갖춘 자들, 연민의 마음을 가지고 있는 자들을 선출해야 할 것이다. 사역장로는 그들이 회중 위에 “군림”하기(마 20:25) 때문이 아니라, 교회가 하나님 말씀에 신실한지를 분별하고 측정하며 교회의 신앙과 삶을 강화하고 양육하기 위하여 회중에 의해서 선택 받기 때문에 그렇게 불린다. 말씀과 성례전의 목사들과 더불어 사역장로들은 지도력을 발휘하고 다스림과 영적 분별을 하며 규율을 실행하고, 그들은 또한 에큐메니컬 관계를 포함하여 전체교회와 더불어 개체교회의 삶을 책임진다. 개체교회에서 선출될 때, 그들은 당회 회원으로서 충실하게 섬겨야 한다. *회중들도 당회 임기를 거치지 않아도 차상위 공의회에서 봉사하는 일을 포함하여 다른 특정한 능력으로 더 넓은 의미로 영적 지도력을 행사할 사역장로로 교인들을 선출할 수 있다.* 차상위 공의회에 총대로 선출될 때, 사역장로들은 말씀과 성례전의 목사들과 동일한 권위를 가지고 참여하고 투표하며, 어떤 직책에도 피선될 자격이 있다.”

Rationale

This overture grew out of the Synod of the Northeast’s New Way Forward reorganization. Convinced that full participation—comprising both voice and vote—is essential for true inclusion of more people of color existing within the synod as well as younger Presbyterians in synod governance. Recognizing the core values of the New Way Forward to increase participation of diverse people of color as well as to create space for younger leaders, the synod began to make this happen in many ways. It became clear that the length of time necessary for ruling elders to “come up through the ranks” of session and presbytery service delays younger Presbyterians’ participation in synod work, such that they are no longer young. The synod began to include limited numbers of non-elders in synod governance. In the remedial case of *Mackellar v. Synod of the Northeast*, the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission ruled this voting participation by non-elders to be unconstitutional, noting that the only way this could happen would be through constitutional amendment.

Synod leaders began to imagine ways more diverse people of color and younger people could come to the table with both voice and vote, so the synod’s membership could more truly represent the church as it actually is. This overture is the outcome. While retaining the locus of election in the congregation, and of examination, ordination, oversight, and training in the session, this amendment allows a nontraditional path to ordination not only for young people and representatives of color, but also for other categories of members who, for reasons unrelated to their abilities, are not able to begin their ordained service with a term on the session.

Here are some examples of how individual members, as well as the church at large, could benefit from such new flexibility:

- *Spouses and children of pastors* often cannot accept a seat on the session because of local conflict-of-interest policies, but may have much to offer to higher councils or their working groups.
- *Employees of congregations*—such as Christian educators, musicians, or administrative personnel—may likewise be prevented by session policy from accepting a seat on the session, but could serve in higher councils or their working groups.
- *Young people* whose attendance at a college or university makes it difficult for them to attend frequent meetings of their church's session may yet be able to participate in less frequent higher-council meetings closer to their college or university.
- *Leaders of new worshiping communities or immigrant fellowships* that do not have sessions could exercise spiritual leadership by being received as a member of a neighboring congregation, then elected and ordained in that congregation to serve the nontraditional community. This would assist higher councils in advancing the foundational principle that “the unity of believers in Christ is reflected in the rich diversity of the Church's membership” (F-1.0403).
- *Mission workers* could be ordained as ruling elders prior to deployment, even if their deployment plans make immediate service on their church's session impossible.
- *Members with superior skills to serve as clerk of session*, whose sessions have no vacancies, could be elected and ordained as elders so their session would then be able to elect them as clerk.

Along the way, the synod discovered that this proposal is not new. In commending to the church, *A Proposal for Considering the Theology and Practice of Ordination in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*, the 204th General Assembly (1992) encouraged study of a number of reforms related to ordained service. In the years since the issuance of that report, many of these proposed changes have been drafted and approved. Notably, with the adoption of the new Form of Government in 2011, it became possible for congregations to elect deacons to be individually commissioned and ordained (G-2.0202), without their having to begin service with a term on a board of deacons.

Celebrating the valuable service of ruling elders who are no longer on the session, the *Theology and Practice of Ordination* report points out that “all elders in a congregation, even those not in active service on the session, bear continuing personal responsibility for strengthening and nurturing the faith and witness of members through prayer, conversation, participation and leadership in congregational life. Some elders find themselves called by God specifically to nurture the life and faith of the church at other levels as well” (p. 84).

The 1992 report continues with this recommendation for change:

Persons manifesting the requisite gifts and character for the office might appropriately be elected and ordained to this office at the request of a particular governing body or agency of the church, as an alternative to election to service on the session of a local congregation. Ministers of the Gospel serving in specialized contexts have been so elected and ordained for years. In order to preserve the representative character of office (not merely that of elder but other offices as well) and to reflect the right and responsibility of some community of God's people to test the gifts and character of those who represent it, persons should not ordinarily be called to exercise the office unless the congregation in which they hold membership is willing to elect them to it.

The emergence of this or some other similar manifestation of the elder's office would permit the wider church to make use of the gifts and graces of persons who, for reasons unrelated to their

gifts (certain church professionals, spouses of ministers, and so on) ordinarily are not elected to service on the sessions of the congregations in which they hold membership. ...

Within the current manifestations of the elder's office, those engaged in long-term, full-time ministries of service within the church are prevented from responding to God's call for them to exercise the core functions of the office. This is because the office of elder — unlike that of Minister of the Gospel — depends (at least initially) on a pattern of limited rotary-term service on a board. **There is no reason, in principle at least, why the flexibility possible within the minister's office should not be possible within other offices as well, including that of the elder.** (pp. 87–88).

The Form of Government presently allows for the election and ordination of deacons independently of service on a board of deacons. It also allows ministers of the Word and Sacrament to be elected and ordained to service in specialized ministry, without having to start their ministry as installed pastors of congregations. The synod believes it is time for the church to honor the common foundation of all ordained ministry in *diakonia*, or God service, as well as the parity of presbyterial ministries, by allowing ruling elders to be elected and ordained without their having to immediately serve a term on the session.

This proposal would not in any way bypass the ordinary means by which a congregation elects gifted members for ordained service. Therefore, it is entirely consistent with the sixth Historic Principle that “the election of persons to the exercise of this authority, in any particular society, is in that society” (F-3.0106). Those identified for service would still need to be nominated by the congregation's nominating committee, elected by the congregation, examined and trained by the session, and ordained in a service of worship.

Like all other ruling elders, those who are elected and ordained in this fashion would be ordained for life and would exercise their ministries under the ecclesiastical oversight of the session. In training and examining members who are elected in this way, sessions should bear in mind that persons ordained for service to the larger church may in future years be elected and installed as session members.

As in the case of any other ruling elder serving in higher-council work, sessions should expect these individuals to report periodically to them on their service to the larger church.

The effect of this proposed amendment is permissive rather than restrictive. It does not impose this alternative route to ordained service on any congregation, but rather provides flexibility for uncommon situations so Christian disciples may fully exercise their gifts in service to our Lord.

Concurrence

Newton Presbytery

[OVT-006] On Establishing a General Assembly Administrative Commission on Mid Councils

Source: Presbytery
Committee: Unassigned

IOB Link: <https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/3000516>
Event: 224th General Assembly (2020)
Sponsor: Synod of the Northeast
Type: General Assembly Full Consideration

[OVT-006]

1. Recommendation
1. Rationale
2. Concurrence
1. Kiskiminetas Presbytery
2. Newton Presbytery

Recommendation

The Synod of the Northeast overtures the 224th General Assembly (2020) to establish a General Assembly Commission on Mid Councils for the purpose of deliberation and approval of mid council business that has significant time pressures such that it cannot wait for action or would suffer severely from having to wait for action until the 225th General Assembly (2022).

By direction of the 224th General Assembly (2020), upon a majority affirmative vote of the affected presbytery or presbyteries or a majority affirmative vote of the presbyteries in the affected synod or synods, the commission is authorized to act as the General Assembly upon requests of synods and presbyteries, with the authority of the General Assembly by “approving the acts of synods to organize, divide, unite, or combine presbyteries or portions of presbyteries” according to G-3.0502e. The actions of the commission shall require a two-thirds majority for approval.

중간공의회에 대한 총회 행정 전권위원회 설립 안건 – Northeast 대회에서

노스이스트 대회는 224차 총회(2020)가 중간공의회에 대한 총회 전권위원회를 설립하여 225차 총회(2022)까지 행동을 기다릴 수 없거나 심하게 고통받을 수 있는 중대한 시간 압력을 가진 중간공의회 사업의 심의 및 승인을 목적으로 조치를 취할 것을 헌의합니다.

224차 총회(2020)의 지시에 따라, 영향을 받는 노회들의 다수결 찬성 투표 또는 영향을 받는 대회에서 노회들의 다수결로 찬성 투표를 할 때, 전권위원회는 다음의 요청에 따라 총회 역할을 수행할 권한이 있습니다. G-3.0502e에 따라 “노회들이나 노회들 일부를 조직하거나 분할하거나 연합하거나 합병하는 대회의 결정을 승인하는 일”들을 총회의 권한으로 집행합니다. 전권위원회의 결정은 승인을 위해 3분의 2이상의 찬성을 요구합니다.

Rationale

Since May 2017, members of the seven presbyteries in New Jersey have been meeting to envision new missional communities that remain responsive to the changing contextual realities of the church and presbyteries and to the leading of the Spirit. For decades congregations, and thus presbyteries in New Jersey, have been declining in membership until, like a tiny congregation in a huge old building, time, energy, and resources are spent maintaining outdated and inefficient structures and systems, to the detriment of presbyteries' mission as the body of Christ in the world.

Through listening sessions in each of the New Jersey presbyteries, there was constant confirmation that now is the time to radically change the structure and function of these presbyteries to embrace an understanding of mid councils as spiritual communities rather than legal and administrative organizations. This is not to diminish the work of the current presbytery structure. The old wineskins have been wonderful containers for the old wine, but the new movement of the Spirit in this *kairos* moment calls for a new sort of structure.

The visioning group discerned that God's provision for ministry is taking a new form: fewer separate entities and greater collaboration, bringing about a new, statewide missional community. The visioning group was commissioned to explore several considerations as they imagined ways of redrawing the boundaries of seven presbyteries. In the end they produced a map of four presbyteries. The boundaries are soft, and presbyteries will have time to determine the final boundaries based on what will maximize health and effectiveness. The group envisions that shortly after the four new presbyteries are initially established, they will cooperate in a New Jersey missional community to accomplish goals no single presbytery can achieve on its own.

Currently, four of the seven presbyteries have voted unanimously to accept the invitation to participate in the New Jersey New Missional Communities. The three remaining presbyteries will be voting over this fall and winter. Once the votes are taken, a design and transition group will be assembled that will consider among other items legal and financial implications of redrawing presbytery boundaries, its impact on restricted funds, particular organizations that currently are within a presbytery, etc. This group will ultimately be authorized as an administrative commission of the synod to work through the issues that need attention before the proposed boundary changes can be brought to General Assembly.*

Clearly, this work will not be completed by the 224th General Assembly (2020). However, given the desire of presbytery members to move into new missional communities as quickly as possible, once the work has been completed it will be to the detriment of the current presbyteries and the dreams and visions of their members to have to wait until the 225th General Assembly (2022) in order to make the changes people eagerly await.

The Synod of the Northeast is aware that other presbyteries and synods around the country are in the midst of transformation and can also benefit from a General Assembly Commission on Mid Councils that allows those who are pressing forward to begin the work they are called to do in the 21st century.*

*Most of the rationale is taken from *Invitation to Participate in New Jersey New Missional Communities*, written by the New Jersey Mission Structures Working Group. It was approved by the Synod Mission and Ministries Commission on September 28, 2019, per the Reverend Nancy Talbot, Synod Stated Clerk.

Concurrence

Kiskiminetas Presbytery

Newton Presbytery

[OVT-011] Regarding a Korea Peace Treaty

Source: Presbytery
Committee: Unassigned

IOB Link: <https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/3000521>
Event: 224th General Assembly (2020)
Sponsor: Cayuga-Syracuse Presbytery
Type: General Assembly Full Consideration

[OVT-011]

1. Recommendation
1. Rationale
2. Concurrence
1. Lake Erie Presbytery
2. Lake Michigan Presbytery

Recommendation

The Presbytery of Cayuga-Syracuse overtures the 224th General Assembly (2020) to do the following:

1. Affirm its commitment to work with the people of Korea and with the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK), the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK), other church partners, ecumenical organizations, and nongovernmental organizations in the United States and around the world committed to seeking peace, justice, and reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula.
2. Affirm the need for a peace treaty for the Korean Peninsula that will replace the current armistice agreement dating from 1953.
3. Direct the Stated Clerk and the Presbyterian Mission Agency to work with our church partners in Korea, the United States, and around the world to advocate for a safe environment for a Korean-led process that will lead to a peace treaty for the Korean Peninsula that establishes peace with justice where no party to this long-continued conflict feels they have to sacrifice civil liberties in the name of security and where refugees and asylum-seekers are treated with love and compassion.
4. Direct the Stated Clerk and the Presbyterian Mission Agency to advocate for nuclear disarmament on the Korean Peninsula by both the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States.
5. Call Presbyterians to learn about the history of the conflict on the Korean Peninsula and the factors that get in the way of making peace on the peninsula today, including the role of the United States.
6. Direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency to identify print, video, audio, online, and other resources, and to encourage Presbyterians to use them to learn about the history of the conflict on the Korean Peninsula, the factors that get in the way of making peace on the peninsula, including the role of the United States, and opportunities for Presbyterians and other Christians in the United States to support efforts of the Korean people to make peace.

한국 평화 조약에 관하여 –Cayuga-Syracuse 노회에서

카유가-시라큐스 노회는 224차 총회(2020)에 다음과 같이 현의합니다.

1. 한반도에서 평화, 정의, 화해를 추구하는 데 전념하는 한국인 및 예장통합(PCK), 한국기장 (PROK), 기타 교회 파트너, 에큐메니칼 조직 및 미국과 세계의 비정부 기구와 함께 일하겠다는 약속을 확인합니다.
2. 1953년부터 체결된 휴전 협정을 대체할 한반도 평화 조약의 필요성을 확인합니다.
3. 정서기 및 총회 선교국이 한국, 미국 및 세계의 교회 파트너들과 협력하여 한국인이 주도하는 과정의 한반도 평화 조약으로 이어지도록 한다. 이는 오랫동안 지속된 분쟁의 당사자들이 안보의 이름으로 시민의 자유를 희생해야 한다고 느끼지 않고 난민과 망명자들을 위한 사랑과 동정심으로 정의와 평화를 이룩함에 있습니다
4. 정서기와 총회 선교국이 조선 민주주의 인민 공화국과 미국의 한반도 핵무장 해제를 옹호하도록 지시합니다.
5. 장로교인들에게 한반도 분쟁의 역사와 미국의 역할을 포함하여 오늘날 한반도 평화를 이룰 수 있는 요인들에 대해 알아봅니다.
6. 장로교 총회 선교국에 지시하여 인쇄, 비디오, 오디오, 온라인 및 기타 자료를 식별하고 장로교인들이 한반도 분쟁의 역사, 평화를 만드는 방식에 영향을 미치는 요인에 대해 배울 수 있도록 장려하고, 미국의 역할을 포함하여 미국의 장로교인들과 다른 기독교인들이 한반도 평화를 위한 노력을 지원할 수 있는 기회를 제공합니다.

Rationale

Seeking peace and pursuing it is our calling as followers of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. (Ps. 34:14, Rom. 14:19, Heb. 12:14, 1 Pet. 3:11). The Korean Peninsula is one of the many places in the world that are in critical need of peace.

Presbyterians in the United States have shared in ministry with the people of the Korean Peninsula since 1884. Currently we join in mission with Korea's Christian community, particularly our partners the Presbyterian Church of Korea and the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea, in higher education and youth ministries, theological education, health ministries, and women's and children's ministries. We also work with our partners, including the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., the World Council of Churches, and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, in ministries of peace education and reconciliation.

Japan occupied and ruled Korea for nearly thirty-six years, beginning in 1910. At the end of World War II, Allied forces liberated Korea on August 15, 1945. The Korean people rejoiced at regaining freedom. However, their joy was shattered when the U.S.A. and the USSR divided the country into two along the 38th parallel under the pretext of disarming the Japanese forces, without regard for the wishes of

the Korean people. Soviet forces occupied the northern portion until 1948, and an American military government controlled the southern portion until 1948, with American forces withdrawn in 1949. This situation of division contributed to war on the Korean peninsula lasting between June 25, 1950 and July 27, 1953.

The Korean War has never officially ended. The Korean Armistice Agreement, signed on July 27, 1953, stopped the active military fighting on the peninsula. It established a Military Demarcation Line (MDL) near the 38th parallel and a Demilitarized Zone on either side of the MDL. The Armistice Agreement promised negotiations to establish a peace treaty formally ending the war, but Cold War antagonisms prevented agreement, and negotiations were broken off after a few years. The Korean War still officially exists, nearly seventy years after the armistice.

The unended Korean War continues to impact those living on the Korean Peninsula and in diaspora. Millions of Korean families were separated as a result of the war and the armistice agreement that established the MDL. A limited number of Koreans have been able to visit family members across the MDL. Many Koreans have never seen family members who live on the other side of the line; many have died without ever seeing family members. Koreans in both countries live with suspicion, hostility, and recurring incidents of violence as a result of the unresolved state of conflict and extensive militarization of the peninsula.

United States military forces remain in the Republic of Korea and the Korean peninsula remains one of the most militarized places in the world. Military forces from the United States and the Republic of Korea (ROK) engage in annual exercises that rehearse invasion of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Feeling threatened, the DPRK maintains a strong military, upgrades its weaponry, and makes threatening displays in response. The nuclear capabilities of both the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea have escalated the tensions on the peninsula.

Despite the difficulties and complexity of the issues between them, the people of the Korean Peninsula, including the Christian communities, have worked for peace. Recent efforts by people and leaders of the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea have been made to nurture trust and open the possibility of concrete diplomatic negotiation toward establishing a permanent peace with justice. The U.S. opened a new diplomatic relationship with the DPRK in 2018, changing antagonistic and mutually threatening confrontation into a sudden and a friendly diplomatic relationship that had never happened before. The summit meetings between the leaders of the two countries in Singapore in 2018 and in Hanoi in 2019, along with a personal meeting between the two leaders later in 2019, offered hope that diplomatic negotiations could soon resolve the differences between the U.S. and the DPRK and finally conclude the Korean War with a Treaty of Peace.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has historically advocated for peace and reconciliation in the Korean peninsula. The 222nd General Assembly (2016) acted to "Request the U.S. government and the United Nations to secure a safe environment for the two Koreas to engage in dialogue and to develop a Korea-led process on healing, reconciliation, and peaceful reunification (*Minutes*, 2016, Part I, p. 951)." The 219th General Assembly (2010), approved a resolution strongly supporting "the replacement of the present armistice agreement with a just and lasting peace treaty between North and South Korea, brokered by the United Nations, and endorsed by the United States and other powers with interests in the region" (*Minutes*, 2010, Part I, p. 976). Representatives of the Presbyterian Church of Korea and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) met in Louisville, Kentucky, on April 17–19, 2013, and issued a joint statement reaffirming their commitment to partnership in efforts to build peace in the Korean peninsula: "We affirm our commitment to walk in humility, with open minds, prepared to change our ways fulfilling the ministry of reconciliation as we follow the Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. (Matthew 5:9)." A peace delegation of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) leaders visited the Republic of Korea in response to the action of the 222nd General Assembly (2016) previously cited and an action of that same

assembly that addressed the killing of Korean civilians by United States troops on July 26–29, 1950, near the village of No Gun Ri (*Minutes*, 2016, Part I, pp. 853–54).

In response to the “Statement on Peace and Reunification of Korea” adopted by the World Council of Churches at its 10th General Assembly (2013) in Busan, Republic of Korea, the National Council of Churches in Korea launched a global campaign for the signing of a peace treaty. The campaign delivered 13,000 signatures of United States citizens to President Obama on the 63rd anniversary of the armistice agreement. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the National Council of the Christian Churches in the USA, and other U.S. faith communities promoted this campaign.

A peace treaty is needed that does justice to all parties to this historic conflict, which continues to generate hatred, violence, poverty, hunger, and human suffering. Officially ending the war would help ensure the security of the Korean peninsula and the stability of the region.

Presbyterians have long prayed for peace on the Korean Peninsula. Advocating for a peace treaty, guided by our partners in Korea, PC(USA) members will help bring the answer to those prayers for peace there and around the world.

Concurrence

Lake Erie Presbytery

Lake Michigan Presbytery

[OVT-013] On Fossil Fuel Divestment

Source: Presbytery
Committee: Unassigned

IOB Link: <https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/3000523>
Event: 224th General Assembly (2020)
Sponsor: Monmouth Presbytery
Type: General Assembly Full Consideration

[OVT-013]

1. Recommendation
1. Rationale
2. Concurrence
1. Boston Presbytery
2. Hudson River Presbytery

Recommendation

The Presbytery of Monmouth overtures the 224th General Assembly (2020) to:

1. Recognize that fossil fuels have been used by humans to create a better world for many people and that the time of their usefulness is now over.
2. Recognize that divestment from fossil fuels is a viable approach to the climate emergency, which thousands of other institutions have used to hold the fossil fuel industry accountable for their inadequate responses to this emergency.
3. Commend Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) for their ongoing work with shareholder engagement to hold these industries accountable to the just and equitable values that Presbyterians seek to uphold.
4. Call on the PC(USA), The Presbyterian Foundation, the Board of Pensions, and the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program, Inc., to divest from the fossil fuel industry, using the Carbon Underground 200 and the S&P Global Industry Classification Standard's list of publicly traded companies engaged in coal, oil, and gas exploration, extraction, and production as the criteria to identify which companies are considered to be fossil fuel companies.
5. Proscribe (stop) any new investments in fossil fuel industry securities.
6. Instruct the Presbyterian Mission Agency, through MRTI, to correspond through form letter to all fossil fuel companies and presbyteries in which they are headquartered of the action and the theological and moral rationale for this decision.
7. Encourage the Board of Pensions and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Foundation to actively seek out and invest in securities of companies whose predominant focus is in renewable and/or energy efficiency.
8. Direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency, through MRTI, to monitor the Board of Pensions and Presbyterian Foundation on actions to divest/invest and to report to the 225th General Assembly (2022) on their progress in implementing Recommendations 4-7.

몬머스 노회는 224차 총회 (2020)에 다음과 같이 현의합니다.

1. 인간은 화석 연료를 사용하여 많은 사람들에게 더 나은 세상을 만들었으나, 이제는 유용한 시기가 끝났다는 것을 인식합니다.
2. 화석 연료의 매각은 기후 비상 사태에 대한 실행 가능한 접근법이며, 수천 개의 다른 기관들이 화석 연료 산업이 이 비상 사태에 대한 부적절한 대응에 책임이 있다는 점을 인식합니다.
3. 장로교인들이 지지하고자 하는 정당하고 공평한 가치에 대해 이러한 산업에 책임을 부여하기 위해 주주 참여와 함께 진행중인 작업에 대해 MRTI (Instant Responsibility through Investment)를 주관합니다.
4. 미국장로교 총회 재단국, 총회 연금국, 총회 투자 및 용자국에 연락하여 Carbon Underground 200 및 S & P Global Industry Classification Standard의 목록을 사용하여 화석 연료 산업에서 제외합니다. 화석 연료 회사로 간주되는 회사를 식별하기 위한 기준으로 석탄, 석유 및 가스 탐사, 추출 및 생산에 종사하는 상장 회사들을 구별합니다.
5. 화석 연료 산업 증권에 대한 새로운 투자를 제공 (중지)합니다.
6. MRTI를 통해 총회 선교국에 이 결정에 대한 행동과 신학적, 도덕적 근거의 본부로 있는 모든 화석 연료 회사와 노회들에게 양식 서신을 보내도록 지시합니다.
7. 총회 연금국과 미국장로교회 재단국이 재생 가능 에너지 및 / 또는 에너지 효율에 주력하는 회사의 유가 증권을 적극적으로 찾고 투자하도록 합니다.
8. MRTI를 통해 총회 선교국에 지시하여 투자 / 투자 활동에 관하여 총회 연금국과 총회 재단국을 관찰하고 권하여 4-7의 이행 과정을 225차 총회(2022)에 보고하도록 합니다.

Rationale

Presbyterians, and all people of faith, are always called to serve the earth. This is God's call for all humanity from the very beginning (Genesis 2:15). While fossil fuels have allowed us to create a better world for many, we now know its impact on creation and future generations is threatening the life we know and cherish. As we confess that failure, we must listen to and engage with the people in frontline communities who are already experiencing climate change, to better understand the human toll climate change has taken and will continue to take on God's children.

Here are just a couple of their voices:

"Every time there's an investment in fossil fuels, we in Africa have never been the winners of that investment. So yes this fight is about climate change but it's about decolonization and survival too" (Coumba Toure of Trust Africa).

“There’s 5.9 hours of sunlight on average every day in Puerto Rico [which is a lot]. But there’s no [infrastructure for] solar or wind. Fossil fuel companies want to make money from oil here—and that’s colonialism” (Dr. Ediberto Lopez of el Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico).

Everything else we do as people of faith to rationalize the need for immediate and categorical divestment takes root in this context and the way our church already acts in the rest of the world. To that end, we offer the below rationale for divestment from fossil fuels from frontline communities, according to the science, and in line with previous Presbyterian policy.

We cannot continue to invest in the past while at the same time investing in the future.

Moral Rationale

“Then the LORD said to Cain, ‘Where is your brother Abel?’ ‘I don’t know,’ he replied. ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’” (Gen. 4:9).

“... ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me’” (Mt. 25:40).

“The moral rationale that undergirds the divestment movement is driven by this logic: climate change is harming our planet and many who inhabit it; fossil fuels are a large driver of the climate problem; and alternatives to fossil fuels exist that can provide the core energy requirements of modern societies. Therefore, profiting from products that drive this damage is morally wrong, and divesting from these products is a moral obligation.”¹

This quotation is from a 2019 statement in favor of divestment by GreenFaith, an international and interfaith environmental nonprofit that has been the lead on faith-based divestment movements. This is the moral foundation of the movement to divest from fossil fuels that has been present in the PC(USA) since 2013. This morality is guided by the biblical call that we humans are created by God to serve the earth and other people as a way to love God. We are called to love God with our whole hearts. Where our treasure is there our heart will be also (Mt. 6:21).

We have watched as MRTI has faithfully sat at the table of fossil fuel companies, speaking boldly to companies that have lied to the world about climate change and fossil fuels. Still, their faithful witness has garnered slow promises that do not yet address the suffering and injustice implicit in climate change.

And so, it is our unequivocal commissioning to leave the table and divest from the fossil fuel industry, allowing us to reinvest in renewable energy and climate solutions. In doing so, we live out our chief end “to glorify God and enjoy God forever.”²

Scientific Rationale

Human use of fossil fuels has spurred economic and social growth, literally fueling the industrial revolution. However, burning fossil fuels has already raised the average temperature of the earth by 1°C (1.8°F). The latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change³ (IPCC) shows the extent of the damage we will cause to creation if we allow the earth’s temperature to rise by 1.5–2°C, the targets agreed to by all nations of the world under the Paris Agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change⁴. Even at 1.5°C of warming, we can expect to see the extinction of more than 300,000 species of animals, have an ice-free Arctic in most summers, expose 14 percent of people to extreme heat waves (especially in the Global South), expose 250 million people to severe drought, and raise sea levels by at least 1.3 feet.

The increase in global temperature is already causing more frequent heat waves, higher sea levels, more severe droughts, and more frequent heavy rainfall events, resulting in billions of dollars in damage through flooding, wildfires, intense hurricanes, and droughts. These climate disasters have

also impacted organisms and ecosystems while reducing crop yields and quality, increasing undernourishment, and damaging human health. Climate change migration is presently a fact of life for people of the Carteret Islands of Papua New Guinea; Shismaref, Alaska; and Isle de Jean Charles, Louisiana—all of whom are preparing to relocate due to the above-mentioned climate change impacts. Sea level rise is projected to reach at least 0.8 feet by the end of 2100 and as much as 6 feet if we do not take significant measures to reduce climate warming.⁵

Knowing we must keep climate to 1.5°–2°C of warming sets limits to how much fossil fuel can be burned. We have about ten years after the 224th General Assembly (2020) to stay within these warming limits. However, the fossil fuel industry's own estimates⁶ show that burning the proved reserves of fossil fuels will release almost three times the carbon budget at 2°C⁷ and an astounding five times the 1.5°C budget—CO₂ that will remain in the atmosphere for hundreds of years. Despite these dire realities, oil and gas production is increasing, and PC(USA)'s money has helped allow oil and gas companies to spend more than \$114 Billion in 2017⁸ to acquire new deposits of oil and gas that we can't afford to burn.

The fossil fuel industry often places new refineries and petrochemical plants in poor communities of color who lack the resources to stand in the way. This form of environmental racism drives some of the highest rates of cancer and disease in the country. A predominantly African American South Philadelphia community, for example, surrounds the Philadelphia Energy Solutions (PES) refinery. That plant was already Philadelphia's biggest single air polluter before it recently exploded, sending toxic fumes into the surrounding community of people who cannot afford to move away from them. A 2017 report⁹ said the PES complex was responsible for 72 percent of the toxic air emissions in Philadelphia, a major factor in the city's childhood asthma rate, which is more than double the national average, as well as causing a range of other health effects including headaches and cancer.¹⁰ Marathon Oil [one of PC(USA)'s GA⁹ investments¹¹], which recently spent \$1.9 billion to expand their refinery in a Detroit suburb, purchased property from nearby white neighbors in the path of the refinery's pollution clouds, leaving communities of color to suffer.¹²

While we sit at the table trying to convince these companies to change their ways, they continue to perpetuate sins against humans and all creation. We currently profit from these scientific realities and sins against our neighbor. In the face of this climate emergency, we must stand firm in a bold witness with people who have been hurt by the fossil fuel industry—we must divest.

Criteria Rationale

The criteria this overture calls upon the denomination to use to define which companies are fossil fuel companies, and thereby, which will go on the divestment and proscription list, are of vital importance. The first criterion, the Carbon Underground 20013, compiled and maintained by Fossil Free IndexesSM, identifies the top 100 coal and the top 100 oil and gas publicly traded reserve holders globally, ranked by the potential carbon emissions content of their reported reserves. This is the approach that has been most commonly used by institutions seeking to divest. By identifying the publicly traded companies with the largest reserves, divesting from these companies has the most immediate impact.

The second criterion is the S&P Global Industry Classification Standard (GICS®)¹⁴ listing of publicly traded companies engaged in coal, oil and gas exploration, extraction, and production. The GICS was designed in response to the global financial community's need for accurate, complete, and standard industry definitions. The GICS structure consists of 11 Sectors, 24 Industry groups, 69 Industries and 158 sub-industries. Used for financial indices such as the S&P Oil & Gas Exploration & Production Select Industry Index, the GICS Industry categories Oil, Gas & Consumable Fuels (101020) and Energy Equipment & Services (101010) capture the entire industry. Using this criterion prevents proscribing investment in companies selling petroleum products while still profiting from companies

engaged in exploration, extraction, and production, such as oil rig producers and independent fracking companies.

The third criterion calls for divestment. The Board of Pensions has consistently argued that they cannot divest without undermining their fiduciary responsibility to pension holders. However, more than 1,000 institutions—who must also uphold fiduciary responsibility—have already divested, representing more than \$11 trillion worldwide.¹⁵ Clearly it is possible (and one might argue necessary) to divest from fossil fuels and still be responsible for the investments of pensioners.

In 2017, the IPCC reported we have about ten years after the 224th General Assembly (2020) to make major changes, including a 45 percent reduction in CO₂ emissions by 2030 and reaching net-zero emissions by 2050 to stay within 1.5°C of warming.¹⁶ PC(USA)'s Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) committee currently uses a set of criteria that fail to respond prophetically to the urgency of climate change. MRTI's methodical approach is unnecessarily time consuming when there is little time left to act. MRTI has carefully constructed an evaluation rubric consisting of 20 environmental metrics, 12 social metrics, and 12 governance metrics (with several subcategories in some of these). Such an environmental, social, and governance (ESG) evaluation is the cornerstone of modern socially responsible investing. The 222nd General Assembly (2016) charged MRTI with identifying these metrics in 2016. The 223rd General Assembly (2018) approved the metrics and identified an initial list of nine companies to consider, of which only six are oil and gas companies.¹⁷ MRTI may deliver a list of proposed divestments to the 224th General Assembly (2020)—six years since the 221st General Assembly (2014) first considered divestment. There is no certainty that MRTI will consider any additional companies post 2020 because such a move would require a mandate from General Assembly. In fact, current MRTI efforts will not even provide a clear idea which of these companies are moving towards a low-carbon future and which are not until 2023, making further significant action unlikely before the 226th General Assembly (2024) meeting.¹⁸ Additionally, the MRTI approach includes no proscription of investment in other fossil fuel companies, so PC(USA) funds divested from one oil company could be reinvested into another. Finally, The MRTI process is too slow to make the changes we need now to protect creation.

PC(USA) Policy Rationale

“He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

The PC(USA) has a long history of divestment and, in particular, of categorical divestment. The church has divested from five industrial categories—military-related products, tobacco companies, alcohol corporations, gambling businesses, and for-profit prisons. The church has also divested from particular corporations that have contributed to human rights abuses in specific times and places.

In 1984 when the PC(USA) adopted its policy on divestment¹⁹ it provided for “divestment of holdings in a particular firm or class of firms is both part of the normal management of funds and potentially an occasion for Christian witness to God's call for justice and the renewal of society”. However, in its implementation of this policy, the PC(USA)'s Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) has developed a policy for divestment from an entire industrial category (class of firms). The paths to categorical divestment and the forms it has taken have thus diverged in each case. Such flexibility has allowed the church to appropriately respond to different industries and the various social and environmental problems each creates.

The 194th General Assembly (1982) of the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, for example, instructed the church to divest from corporations involved in military activities. Between 1982 and 1998, the General Assembly refined this industrial category to include (1) the five biggest military contractors to the U.S. government, (2) companies that receive at least 50 percent of their sales from military contracts and are among the 100 highest-earning military contractors, (3) the top five earning

companies engaged in foreign military sales, and (4) corporations that produce weapons that can lead to mass civilian casualties. MRTI began recommending these measures after ten years of shareholder engagement.

The General Assembly instructed the church to divest from all tobacco companies in 1990. The overture to divest called upon MRTI to “develop annually a list of corporations ‘whose primary business is tobacco and are known as such.’” In 1996, the General Assembly directed MRTI to use the Investor Responsibility Research Center, the American Lung Association, and Corporate Campaign, Inc. to define what qualifies as a tobacco company. From these guidelines, twenty-one corporations were identified. MRTI did not conduct any shareholder engagement prior to the General Assembly’s decision to divest.

Neither the General Assembly nor MRTI has ever called for divestment from alcohol or gambling corporations. However, the Board of Pensions and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Foundation have their own policies, which govern divesting/proscribing investments in all domestic and international alcohol and gambling corporations.

The General Assembly voted in 2003 to call for the abolition of all for-profit prisons, jails, and detention centers. In 2012, the General Assembly instructed MRTI to “report on the feasibility of affecting the corporate practices of Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), the GEO Group, and any other publicly traded corporation that directly manages or operates for-profit prisons and/or detention centers.” MRTI determined, “while efforts could be made through shareholder advocacy (where stock is owned in a publicly traded company), such efforts might improve some prison conditions, but would not address the fundamental contradictions identified by the 215th General Assembly (2003).” The General Assembly therefore voted to divest from all publicly traded for-profit prison companies.

The denomination has chosen to divest from each of these entire industrial categories in the first place because the very nature of these industries has been seen as harmful to the spiritual and biological life of God’s creation.

This overture to categorically divest from the fossil fuel industry would take a prophetic stance to protect God’s creation and ensure a sustainable energy future for the church and God’s world.

Endnotes

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Concurrence

Boston Presbytery

Hudson River Presbytery

[OVT-018] On Amending G-2.0804 Regarding PC(USA) Paid Family Leave

Source: Presbytery

Committee: Unassigned

IOB Link: <https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/3000528>

Event: 224th General Assembly (2020)

Sponsor: Hudson River Presbytery

Type: General Assembly Full Consideration

[OVT-018]

1. Recommendation

1. Rationale

Recommendation

The Presbytery of Hudson River overtures the 224th General Assembly (2020) to direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Shall G-2.0804 be amended to read as follows: [Text to be inserted is shown as italics.]

“The terms of call shall always meet or exceed any minimum requirement of the presbytery in effect when the call is made. The session shall review annually the minister’s terms of call and shall propose for congregational action (G-1.0501) such changes as the session deems appropriate, provided that they meet the presbytery’s minimum requirements. The call shall include *paid family leave of at least twelve weeks, including, but not limited to, leave for birth of a child, adoption, care of a sick family member, etc., and* participation in the benefits plan of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), including both pension and medical coverage, or any successor plan approved by the General Assembly.”

허드슨 강 노회는 224차 총회(2020)에 헌의하여 정서 기에게 다음과 같이 제안된 수정안을 찬성 또는 반대 투표로 노회에 보내도록 지시합니다.

G-2.0804는 다음과 같이 수정될 것입니다: [삽입 될 텍스트는 이탤릭체로 표시됩니다.]

“청빙 조건은 항상 청빙 시점에 시행되고 있는 노회의 최소 요구 사항을 충족하거나 능가해야 한다 . 당회는 목사의 청빙 조건을 매년 검토해야 하고 당회가 당회가 적절하다고 간주하면, 그 변경안이 노회의 최소 요구사항을 충족한다는 조건하에, 그 제안을 공동의회 결의 (G-1.0501)에 부쳐야 한다. 청빙은 *자녀 출산, 입양, 아픈 가족 간호 등을 포함하되 이에 국한되지 않는 12주 이상의 유급 가족 휴가, 그리고 연금과 의료 혜택이나 총회가 승인한 추가 플랜이 포함된 미국장로교 혜택제도의 가입을 포함해야 한다.*”

Rationale

The 221st General Assembly (2014) encouraged presbyteries and churches to create parental leave policies with the minimum of six weeks and 100 percent pay without using other forms of paid leave.¹

The 222nd General Assembly (2016) also voted to encourage the six agencies of the General Assembly (Board of Pensions, Foundation, Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program, Inc., Presbyterian Mission Agency, and Presbyterian Publishing Corporation) to improve their paid parental leave policies in accordance with the advice of the 221st General Assembly (2014).²

As a denomination, we have affirmed the importance of supporting families. However, in practice, congregations are put in the precarious position of choosing between taking care of a family or taking care of the financial well-being of the congregation. Many churches cannot afford paid family leave for their pastor(s) in addition to the cost of pulpit supply, yet many pastors cannot afford to be unpaid when they welcome a new member into the family. These choices are difficult ones that often lead to solutions which leave either the pastor or the congregation neglected, but usually the pastor, and lack witness to the love God, Parent of us all, has for the world.

Without a paid family leave policy, the PC(USA) forces parents to make a choice between proper health-care for themselves and their children, and adequate income to provide for their families. It forces family members with sick parents or children to choose work over care, which is antithetical to our call to be compassionate to the ill and infirm.

Without a paid parental leave policy, we uphold false narratives that describe men as “bread-winners” and require them to leave the child-raising to their spouses. Without a paid parental leave policy, we continue to uphold antiquated and unequal traditions that not only reinforce gender stereotypes, bringing harm to families and children, but fail to account for the many different kinds of families our denomination lifts up and celebrates.

Family leave is essential to the well-being of the pastor, the family, and the church. It enforces healthy boundaries, contributes to the financial security of caregivers, and ensures the continued care of both family and congregation in the long term.

In A Brief Statement of Faith, we confess as a church, that the Holy Spirit

... calls *women and men* to all ministries of the Church.

In a broken and fearful world
the Spirit gives us courage
to pray without ceasing,
to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,
to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,
to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,
and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.
In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
and to live holy and joyful lives,
even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,
praying, "Come, Lord Jesus! (*Book of Confessions*, 11.4, Lines 64–76, emphasis added)

With a paid parental leave policy, we have the opportunity to live into this calling of courage in our ministries as pastors and congregations and in our daily lives as we grow our families and support one another in love. With a paid parental leave policy, we unmask the idolatry of unequal practices and are free to live holy and joyful lives—lives wherein all parents can bond with their children without fear of destitution, and the whole community can grow in love.

This overture seeks to bring equity to the genders involved in caregiving, bringing life into the world, and caring for life as it grows, ages, and dies. While parental leave and family leave constitute different needs, they are equally necessary in the life of a healthy pastor, and therefore we urge the General Assembly to consider the language of family leave and make this a reality for everyone in our employ.

Supporting Statistics

The lack of any kind of paid parental leave creates problems for both parents because, while women are medically cleared to return to work after about at least six weeks (if birth went perfectly), the majority of daycares refuse children before six weeks of age. This puts parents in a lose-lose situation as they must risk their health, their child's care, and their families' overall well-being if proper paid leave is unavailable. Elsewhere in creation, we observe that God's creatures naturally keep their offspring close early in life.³ This policy simply acknowledges the health and financial needs of a new or growing family.

Numerous studies have shown the benefits of paid parental leave for both parents and their children. An increase of 10 weeks paid maternal leave has been associated with a 10 percent decrease in neonatal and infant mortality rate,⁴ and parental leave has been shown to be a cost-effective method for improving child health more generally.⁵ However, the benefits to child health and the decrease in infant mortality are only seen with an increase in paid parental leave.⁶ Moreover, studies that have analyzed the long-term benefits of paid parental leave have found benefits to women's mental health in older age and a decrease in high school dropout rates among their children.⁷

At least half of the contemporary seminary graduates are women, and a large portion of graduates (male and female) are in their child-bearing years.⁸ Some of these female colleagues must negotiate lower pay to receive adequate paid maternity leave in their calls, if they can get the maternity leave. Some of our female colleagues are being told they must prove they are worth the maternity leave. Many men have no leave guaranteed at all. This is a matter of gender justice in our denomination. Because women are the ones giving birth, most studies have focused on the relationship between a mother and her child. However, increases in paid parental leave continue to be met by increases in use of that leave among all parents, allowing parents of all genders to spend more time on their child's care, which has demonstrated health benefits for the child. Indeed, it has been shown that when fathers—or non-birthing parents—are offered comparable paid parental leave, the length of leave they take increases and their involvement in a child's care after the leave period increases.⁹ It is wholly regrettable that non-birthing parents (historically, men) have been denied such crucial bonding and care time with their families for so long. The need for a just paid parental leave policy at this time is urgent as more and more pastors reach retirement age and more and more younger pastors—those in their prime parenting years—seek and negotiate calls.

Across the United States, a mere 14 percent of people have access to paid family leave.¹⁰ As stated above, this justice issue looms large for many workers, and the PC(USA) is not currently acting as a faithful leader. In working toward a solution, it is the profound hope of many young pastors that the denomination will see the opportunity to lead the world to a more faithful, loving approach to family leave.

Endnotes

1. <https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/5121>, also see *Minutes*, 2014, Part I, p. 740, electronic version.
2. <https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/3000035>, also see *Minutes*, 2016, Part I, p. 292, electronic version.
3. To put this in perspective, it is illegal in twenty-two states to separate a puppy from its mother before eight weeks. We should be treating humans with at least as much respect as we do dogs. Source: <https://www.animallaw.info/topic/table-state-laws-concerning-minimum-age-sale-puppies>.
4. Jody Heyman, Amy Raub, and Alison Earle, "Creating and Using New Data Sources to Analyze the Relationship Between Social Policy and Global Health: The Case of Maternal Leave," *Public Health Reports* 126 (Suppl 3) (2011): 127–134.
5. Christopher J. Ruhm, "Parental Leave and Child Health," *Journal of Health Economics* 19, no. 6 (November 2000): 931–960.
6. Sakiko Tanaka, "Parental Leave and Child Health Across OECD Counties," *The Economic Journal* 115, no. 501 (February 2005): F7–F28.
7. Mauricio Avendano, Lisa F. Berkman, Agar, Brugiavini, and Giacomo Pasini, "The long-run effect of maternity leave benefits on mental health: Evidence from European countries," *Social Science & Medicine* 132 (May 2015): 45–53; Pedro Carneiro, Katrine Løken, and Kjell Salvanes, "A Flying Start? Maternity Leave Benefits and Long Run Outcomes of Children," IZA Discussion Paper No. 5793.

8. <http://pres-outlook.org/2017/09/pastoral-pipeline-will-enough-ministers-serve-presbyterian-church/>.
9. Arnalds, A., Eydal, G., and Gíslason, I. "Equal rights to paid parental leave and caring fathers—the case of Iceland," *Icelandic Review of Politics and Administration* 9, no. 2 (2013): 323–344.
10. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/03/23/access-to-paid-family-leave-varies-widely-across-employers-industries/>.

[OVT-042] Regarding Worship Resources for Ministering to Veterans

Source: Presbytery
Committee: Unassigned

IOB Link: <https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/3000572>
Event: 224th General Assembly (2020)
Sponsor: Blackhawk Presbytery
Type: General Assembly Full Consideration

[OVT-042]

1. Recommendation
1. Rationale

Recommendation

The Presbytery of Blackhawk overtures the 224th General Assembly (2020) to direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency, through its Office of Worship and Theology, to consult with military chaplains, mental health professionals, and other Christian traditions to develop worship resources and other appropriate rituals that pastors and military chaplains could use to assist military personnel when they are sent for training, when they are deployed, when they return home from deployment, and when they separate from military service. The new worship resources should be available to chaplains, pastors, and churches at the 225th General Assembly (2022).

Rationale

Every year since 2008, at least 6,000 veterans who have served on active duty have died by suicide. In 2017 the rate was 16.8 veterans per day¹ (if we include non-activated Guard and Reserve members, the rate was 19.3 per day.²). But taking into account the declining veteran population—largely older and male, the sex and age adjusted rate (to match the U.S. demographics of the 2000 C.E. Standard Population) of death by suicide in 2017 was 27.7 per day per 100,000, up from 18.5 per 100,000 in 2005!³ Of special note, the rates for women veterans taking their own lives has increased to 2.2 times the national average for women⁴ and the overall suicide rate of all veterans was 1.5 times the general population in 2017⁵ And it's not just recent veterans—though that rate is considerably higher than for older veterans, but veterans of all ages are dying by suicide at an alarming rate ([Alarming VA Report Totals Decade of Veteran Suicides](#) by Richard Sisk, 9/23/19, military.com).

Our most recent veterans between 18–34 years of age had the highest suicide rate of 44.5 per 100,000⁶. It is important to note that of the 17 deaths per day average of active duty military veterans, six had some kind of Veterans Health Administration (VHA) engagement while 11 veterans didn't have any record of VHA engagement⁷. This means that 2/3 of veteran suicides could be intervened by pastors and churches. Far too many military members are facing “moral injury” and post-traumatic stress issues without getting the help they need and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) currently has no resources available to help military members when they leave for service, when they return home, or when they separate from military service.

Ancient Israel had cleansing rituals to welcome warriors back into the community after returning from war (Numbers 31: 19–24). They recognized that war could make a person feel dirty, and that special rituals could help returning fighters deal with that sense of uncleanness so they could rejoin the community. Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini, in their book *Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War*, write that in addition to deep grief over the loss of comrades and sometimes horrendous memories of what they have seen, veterans can often suffer from “moral injury.” It is a violation of one’s conscience that can occur in the heat of war. The Christian church as a channel of God’s grace and healing power is in a unique position to address “moral injury.” In fact, as Brock and Lettini note, the church in the first millennium recognized this and “required that anyone who ‘shed human blood’ to undergo a rehabilitation process that included reverting to the status of someone who had not been baptized and was undergoing training in the Christian faith.” While this seems a little extreme today, it would be helpful if the church had liturgies that addressed the needs of returning military members to help them discover, or perhaps rediscover, the love and forgiveness God offers us in Christ and through the Christian community.

What sort of new worship resources would be helpful? *Resources for sending*: resources for congregations sending their young people into military service; resources for congregations and military chaplains for sending military members when they are being deployed: resources that remind military members and their families that God is with them. *And resources for welcoming home*: resources for local congregations and military chaplains to welcome military members back and to help them reintegrate into the community; and resources that pastors and Christian therapists could use with small groups or in one-to-one counseling.

Endnotes

1. [National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report 2019](#), Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, pages 3, 9.
2. Ibid, pages 3, 19.
3. Ibid, page 10.
4. Ibid, page 16.
5. Ibid, pages 3, 10.
6. Ibid, page 14.
7. Ibid, page 26.