



Presbyterian Voices for Justice  
Commissioner Orientation  
Saturday, July 3, 2010

## Key Issues of Concern to Peace- and Justice-Lovers in the PCUSA

(prepared by PVJ Issues Analyst Sylvia Thorson-Smith, with appreciation for Doug King's more thorough overview in Network News and articles by Gene TeSelle, John Harris, and Jerri Rodewald)

### Committee 03, General Assembly Procedures:

Items 03-07 and -17 would both create serious procedural obstacles to LGBT inclusion. They are thinly veiled efforts to prevent Assemblies from moving forward on justice issues.

Item 03-19 seems to call for a GA "morals squad" and seeks to regulate affinity groups that shouldn't be required to subscribe to constitutional standards that they deem unjust.

Item 03-21 is a resolution to use a statistical procedure that would provide PCUSA specific data on women of color; PVJ supports this.

Items 03-03 and -20 would restrict the role of advisory delegates in the work of the Assembly.

Item 03-20 would specifically limit the voice of Young Adult Advisory Delegates in plenary sessions. We believe these limitations should be resisted.

### Committee 04, Middle Governing Body Issues:

Items 04-03 and -04 call for new non-geographical presbyteries and synods. PVJ rejects this effort to create a divided denominational structure operating under different standards.

Items 04-05 and -06 recommend studies of middle governing bodies. PVJ is concerned about the naming of a commission with the power to alter structures - a matter that should be dealt with by the General Assembly. We would suggest that at the very least, should these go forward, serious attention be paid to the process for naming members of such a committee.

### Committee 06, Church Orders and Ministry:

Item 06-01 provides a helpful clarification about Certified Christian Educators (they're entitled to be active in their presbyteries).

Items 06-04, -05, -11, and -18 all seek to reinstate a more complete ban on LGBT ordination.

Items 06-06 through -10, and 06-12 through -17 all seek to remove the ban on LGBT ordination.

Items 06-02 and -03 seek to restrict discussion of ordination standards.

PVJ strongly favors continued discussion of these issues and supports whatever action is needed to end the ban on LGBT ordination.

Committee 07, Form of Government Revision:

Items 07-01 and -02 present recommendations of the Form of Government Task Force. PVJ notes several issues that need attention in this report:

\*questionable return to language of "councils"

\*omission of COR, as well as a guarantee of permanent status of ACWC and ACREC.

\*potential problems with the slogan "the church is mission" if it's seen as a way to avoid controversial justice issues and dilute procedures for decision-making, due process, and protection of minority rights.

Committee 08, Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations:

Item 08-01 seeks to deepen our relationships with other churches.

Item 08-02 represents backward movement in interfaith relations.

Items 08-03, -04, and -09 address study papers on relations between Christians, Jews, and Muslims. Based on serious questions others have raised, PVJ agrees that further consulting and revision are needed.

Item 08-10 is the recommendation of the Committee on Ecumenical Relations that the PC(USA) become a full participant in the new Christian Churches Together. There are concerns about the full inclusion of racial justice and gender equality on the agenda of this new ecumenical body. The review committee recommended further study and conversation, and not moving yet to full membership.

Committee 09, Mission Coordination:

Item 09-01 seeks to celebrate and strengthen the church's Peacemaking Program, a goal which PVJ strongly supports. However, it focuses on actions of other nations and is silent about serious US threats to peace. Also, the proposal to create an advisory committee seems to impose external controls on the Peacemaking Program. PVJ advocates trust in the Peacemaking Program and its strong prophetic witness.

Item 09-03 seeks to impede social witness policy-making; PVJ rejects this.

Items 09-06, -07, -09, and -18 all point to areas in the PCUSA that have been recently neglected or dissolved. PVJ supports the call for renewed commitment and clear provisions for funding.

Item 09-17 recommends simply re-designating funds for the Status of Women Task Force; PVJ supports this.

Item 09-19 includes a recommendation that the three corresponding members to the GAMC from the advisory and advocacy committees (ACREC, ACWC, and ACSWP) be included in all closed sessions. PVJ supports this as a function of these committees to do their work on behalf of the General Assembly.

Committee 10, Social Justice Issues A:

Items 10-02, -04, -05, -06, -09, and -10 all deserve serious attention and support in order to celebrate social justice pronouncements, increase our cultural proficiency, enhance the church's vision of diversity, address violence against women and children on the US-Mexican border, and guide Presbyterians to turn needed attention to economic justice issues.

Item 10-07 calls for presbyteries to explore local resources and conduct training in cultural proficiency on the intersection of race with gender; PVJ supports.

Item 10-08 would direct the Stated Clerk to send a letter to the president and Congress calling on the United States government to ratify, without reservations, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; PVJ supports.

Committee 11, Social Justice Issues B:

Items 11-01 and -02 seek renewed commitment to restoring creation and endorsement of the shared religious principle of compassion.

Items 11-04, -05, -06, and -07 represent important work by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) on issues of human rights, public education, gun violence, and the nature of human life. PVJ supports serious study, discussion, and action based on these papers.

Committee 12, Civil Union and Marriage Issues:

Items 12-02, -03, -04, -07, and -10 would expand the meaning of marriage to include same-gender unions; 12-06, -08, and -09 would make the more limited change of permitting pastors to conduct legal same-gender marriages without facing ecclesiastical charges.

Items 12-01, -05 and -11 oppose any change in the definition of marriage.

PVJ regards the issues of same-gender marriage as a matter of justice and compassion, and supports changes in Presbyterian governance that would expand the meaning of marriage to include two persons of the same gender.

Committee 13, Peacemaking and International Issues:

Items 13-01, -02, -03, and -09 call for nonviolent approaches to hostilities in Afghanistan and point out that no GA has yet addressed this 8-year war. PVJ strongly supports a clear GA directive to speak boldly on this issue.

Item 13-04 calls for peace partnerships in Sudan, and Item 13-06 proposes a 6-year discernment on embracing nonviolent responses to war and terror – both of which PVJ supports.

Item 13-05 raises an important concern for human rights in religious matters, but uses problematic language and insufficient contextual analysis to raise the issue of protecting Christians in the Muslim world. PVJ encourages serious discussion and careful revision if this issue is to be addressed.

Item 13-07 provides hope for more connectional peacemaking between seminaries, colleges, and congregations.

Item 13-08 calls for a dramatically different, peaceful accord in Colombia, and PVJ supports this urgent request from our partner church there.

Committee 14, Middle East Peacemaking Issues:

Item 14-08 is a report by the Middle East Study Committee, and it lies at the heart of the work to be done by Committee 14.

Items 14-01 through -05, -09, and -10 call for corporate divestment, engagement with corporations involved in the Middle East (Mission Responsibility Through Investment report), recognition that Israel is practicing crimes of apartheid, study and advocacy around a statement about Palestinian suffering, investigation of violations of international law, continued attention to the war in Iraq, compliance with laws and human rights protection in the use of military aid.

Item 14-06 recommends that the PCUSA take no action that appears to support either side of the Israel-Palestine conflict. PVJ does not support a call for inaction.

PVJ supports recommendations of the Middle East Study Committee report and those overtures that sensitively support or carry forward those initiatives. PVJ also supports denunciation and divestment as strategies in the face of corporate non-compliance with PCUSA policies.

Committee 15, Church Growth, Christian Education, and PILF:

Item 15-08 calls for a task force to study Racial Ethnic and New Immigrant Church Growth; PVJ supports.

Item 15-09 seeks to address Hispanic/Latino/a Participation at All Levels of the Church; PVJ supports.

Committee 16, Theological Issues and Institutions:

Item 16-01 seeks to reverse action by the 2008 GA and cease discussing inclusion of The Belhar Confession in the Book of Confessions. It rejects Belhar because it has been used by some Christians to champion liberation theology and press issues other than racial equality, such as full equality for LGBT persons – both goals that PVJ strongly supports. PVJ affirms inclusion of Belhar in the Book of Confessions, as proposed by Item 16-12, and concurs with a request by the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (ACWC) that the language for God in Belhar be revised and made fully inclusive.

We also support the unanimous report of the Heidelberg Catechism Committee, Item 16-11.

Item 16-03 proposes to amend the Directory of Worship section on Baptism by stating that God "adopts our infants as his children, before they are born." PVJ opposes this overture for reasons

given by the Advisory Committee on the Constitution and the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (see ACC and ACWC comments for Committee 16 on PC-BI Z).

Committee 18, Board of Pensions, Foundations, and Presbyterian Publishing:

Item 18-01 and -06 seek to extend benefits to same-gender spouses and domestic partners. PVJ fully supports this simple step toward equitable treatment of the members of our Benefits Plan, their partners and dependents.

Committee 19, Health Issues:

Items 19-03 and -04 couch opposition to abortion in language that seeks to protect pregnant women from violence and intimidation. Both view women as victims who are unjustly pressured to have abortions. PVJ supports strong repudiation of any form of coercion against women as well as strong support for PCUSA policy affirming that women are competent moral agents who can be trusted to make their own reproductive decisions.

Items 19-02, -05, and -06 address the HIV/AIDS pandemic by encouraging Presbyterians to promote testing for the virus, calling for full prevention and treatment services in US correctional facilities, and becoming an HIV and AIDS competent church by implementing recommendations in the ACSWP report before this committee. PVJ supports all of these items and encourages commissioners and others to participate in the voluntary HIV testing program at this Assembly.

And there's more on our website.

For our GA page, with links to pages for each committee, and more complete comments on their items of business, please go to [http://presbyvoicesforjustice.org/2010/219th\\_GA.htm](http://presbyvoicesforjustice.org/2010/219th_GA.htm)

These pages will be updated regularly during the Assembly.

We welcome your comments and opinions as the Assembly progresses.

Just send an email to [dougking2@aol.com](mailto:dougking2@aol.com)