

**PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)
GENERAL ASSEMBLY WAY FORWARD COMMISSION**

**AFIRMATION OF APPROACH
MARCH 2017**

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We are twelve servants of the church established by the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the PC(USA) to discern the way forward for the PC(USA) in the 21st century, in collaboration with the All Agency Review Committee and the 2020 Vision Team.

The Way Forward Commission strives to model the change it seeks, in collaboration and communication with both elected representatives and staff throughout the denomination. The commission intends to act swiftly, creatively, and boldly in the desire to take advantage of this unique God-given opportunity to help the church once again return its full focus to the work of the church in the world. The time is now.

We are not starting from scratch in this task. Most recently, resources, such as the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly (COGA) survey, the Moderators' and NEXT Church Conversations, the periodic agency reviews, and the agency strategic plans, have all pointed to societal realities that confront the church.

We also reflect the belief that this work of identity and structure, although important, must not distract or divert us from our call for Christian witness and service.

The commission unanimously adopts this affirmation in the hope of engaging the church in conversation about a common set of underlying assumptions and values. It is intended to provide insight into the approach and values of the commission as we engage with the church in our continuing discernment to study and identify a vision for the structure and function of the General Assembly agencies of the PC(USA).

CALL TO ACTION AND INVITATION TO COLLABORATION

We strongly affirm the good work happening in our church, and the dedication and hard work of all those in ministry at the national level. We firmly believe that the values reflected in this affirmation might well apply to all national agencies and staff and recommend consideration for their adoption and application. We recognize that we stand at a Kairos moment both in our church and in the world and are called to be both bold and creative in this next season of Christian witness and service.

This is a time for radical improvement, collaborative creativity, and dramatic innovation. We are all invited to ask ourselves and one another:

- What are our strengths as a denomination?
- What does the present moment call us to do and to be?
- How can we better help congregations and local ministries thrive and grow?
- What are we not doing or able to do differently?

We have engaged the agencies and groups within the church and encouraged them to collaborate with us about how to best utilize the time-limited opportunity that the General Assembly's empowerment of the Way Forward Commission uniquely provides.

For consideration:

- What can the commission help you accomplish that you cannot implement on your own?
- How can the spirit of urgency reflected in the General Assembly's action creating the commission be harnessed to assist you to overcome inertia that hampers helpful change?
- As the commission discerns its recommendations for structural change in the national denomination, what might be some approaches that help to ensure our acting as one body in Christ even as we start off from the perspectives and bias inherent to our individual roles?

OUR CURRENT CONTEXT

- Now more than ever, the church must continue to play an important prophetic role for justice and service to the marginalized.
- The growing diversity of our denomination presents a vital new landscape for ministry and witness.
- At least for the present, overall PC(USA) membership—like all mainline denominations—is declining.
- Funding sources increasingly prefer designated giving to particular ministries.
- Unrestricted funding for the national church will continue to decrease, with resulting complications for administrative costs.
- National staff will continue to decrease under status quo.
- Planning for financial sustainability for ministries will need to be a higher priority.

VALUES THAT GUIDE OUR WORK

- Our Reformed theology and heritage offers us gifts—among other things, we are connectional, ever-reforming, and committed to engagement with the world.
- What we do and how we do it must reflect on the realities of our context, culture, and societal needs.
- We are committed to a denominational structure that nurtures and empowers all voices to Christian witness and action.
- We recognize that our fundamental core is rooted in our identity as a church; it is our ecclesial identity that informs what we do, how we do it, and how we speak of our work.
- We undertake our work with a posture of humility and invite the same of all working with our national agencies. Understanding our roles, listening with an open mind, and maintaining trust are central to our call.
- We support integrated inclusiveness and support for nontraditional voices—the growing center of our church.
- We believe in the value of hospitality as a means of extending welcome to all.
- We welcome an openness to change and a willingness to try new things.
- We invite all to live into our connectional church polity, avoiding compartmentalization and modeling (in our actions and in our recommendations) the collaborative working approach we want to see within and among our national agencies. We are one body in Christ, and our loyalty is to Christ and the PC(USA) rather than to a particular agency.
- We commit to frequent and real-time communication delivered in multiple languages.

- We promise to be available and to respond promptly (within a day or two) to questions and concerns. We may not always agree or have the resources to satisfactorily address individual concerns, but we will listen and answer.
- We recognize local ministry level is most qualified and informed about ministry, and must be empowered and included from the outset in all decision-making while affirming the significant role of witness in the national and regional structures of the church.
- Ministry and mission must drive decision-making. The role of support services is to help get it done, not to serve as a stumbling block.
- We seek evaluations based on how much we help, not on how much we do.
- We approach all suggestions with the belief that there is always a kernel of truth that can lead to improvement.
- We are committed to a structure that provides flexibility and non-rigidity.
- We seek to outsource functions where the church does not uniquely have expertise.

God calls the PC(USA) to a faithful and exciting future. In the bold, confident hope of God's grace, we journey together toward that future. We solicit your prayers for this movement of the Spirit.