



The Pelican

The Presbytery of Florida is called to serve God
using our gifts and skills to **Excite, Encourage, Equip and Empower**
our Congregations and Clergy in Mission and Ministry.



Summer Quarter 2014

“Let the leader be as one who serves...” (Jesus)

Luke 22:26

Pastoral letter addresses recent GA civil union and marriage decisions

June 19, 2014

To congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Earlier today, the 221st General Assembly (2014) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approved a recommendation from its Assembly Committee on Civil Union and Marriage Issues allowing for pastoral discretion to perform “any such marriage they believe the Holy Spirit calls them to perform,” where legal by state law.

They also approved a recommendation to change language in the *Book of Order* to indicate that “marriage involves a unique commitment between two people, traditionally a man and a woman.”

Both decisions came with much thought, discussion, and prayer, and clearly the entire body that is the PC (USA) will be interpreting these actions for some time.

Please know that the same triune God in whom we place our hope, faith, and trust in *is* still in control, and that the assembly’s action today is the result of deep discernment to hear God’s voice and discern God’s will.

We concur with the feelings expressed by Teaching Elder Commissioner Jeffrey Bridgeman, moderator of the Assembly Committee on Civil Union and Marriage Issues, during his presentation to the assembly.

“The apostle Paul tells us that ours is, in fact, ‘the ministry of reconciliation’ as ‘ambassadors of Christ,’ and he died for us so that we might be reconciled, that we might become reconcilers,” Bridgeman said.

In this season of both happiness and sadness over the assembly’s decisions, we call on you to remember the overflowing grace and love God gifts us with, and to take seriously our charge to bestow the same grace and love on one another.

In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord,

Ruling Elder Heath K. Rada
Moderator, 221st General Assembly (2014)

The Reverend Gradye Parsons
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly

Ruling Elder Linda Bryant Valentine
Executive Director, Presbyterian Mission Agency

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Our presbyter writes about GA letter

June 20, 2014

To the Presbytery of Florida, Greetings in Christ Jesus!

Earlier this week, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) meeting in Detroit took an action permitting teaching elders in states where same-gender marriages are legal to officiate at such unions if they feel led to do so.

An amendment to the Book of Order, changing language that is flawed, will be going to the presbyteries for vote during the coming year. That amendment will be before our presbytery and all presbyteries for study and vote.

Many newspapers and other news sources have reported the actions of General Assembly in ways that do not reflect what has actually transpired. Part of this is due to a lack of understanding of Presbyterian polity. Part of this is simply due to the tendency to sensationalize such topics in the press.

Preceding this letter is the official account of actions taken at General Assembly, in the form of a pastoral letter from our national leadership.

This is, to my way of thinking, the best source for information and the best source for reflection on this very sensitive and controversial matter.

During months to come, the Presbytery of Florida will be studying the proposed changes coming from the General Assembly, on this and all other actions requiring the advice and consent of the Presbyteries.

Full participation by our ruling and teaching elders will keep us informed and aware and allow us to vote our consciences and convictions wisely and well when the time comes to take action.

Please pray for the work of the General Assembly and for the peace, purity, and unity of the church.

Yours in Christ's service,
Ted Land
Coordinating Presbyter

A tale of two churches

By Rev. Dr. Ted Land,
Presbytery of Florida
Coordinating Presbyter

I want to tell you about two very different churches. One is the First Presbyterian Church, of Blountstown, FL The other is the Mount Pleasant, SC, church.

The Blountstown church is one of the smallest churches in the Presbytery of Florida,

with ten members. But it is debt free, self-sustaining, and averages 12 in worship

every Sunday. I doubt there are many churches that can claim an average attendance of 20 percent more than their membership roll!

The other church, Mount Pleasant, is the largest Presbyterian Church in the state of South Carolina. Their pastor has baptized more than 800 babies in the last 10 years, so you know that it is a young and growing church. What in the world could these two churches have in common? I would argue that, without the Blountstown church,



Dr. Ted Land

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Letter and protests challenge Wendy's "frosty" response to Fair Food



Above, protesters call attention to the fast-food chain's long-standing refusal to join the Fair Food program.

The Presbyterian Church (U. S. A.) has joined religious leaders nationwide in calling on Wendy's to participate in the Fair Food Program. "Wendy's should join Walmart and the others in the mighty flood of justice sweeping through the fields of Florida and beyond," said Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons.

"Wendy's has tried to give consumers the impression that it supports the changes achieved through the FFP, while, in fact, continuing to do business as usual," stated a letter signed by CIW supporters, including Parsons and Presbyterian Mission Agency Executive Director Linda Valentine, and presented to Wendy's CEO at a May 28 shareholders' meeting. "By refusing to commit to buy its Florida tomatoes only from growers complying with the Fair Food Program, Wendy's perpetuates the old, 'no questions asked' market for those growers unwilling to recognize the FFP's human rights standards."



Stewardship of Creation Notes

Report from the 221st General Assembly on the Fossil Fuel Divestment Overture

By Pam McVety, Presbytery of Florida Stewardship of Creation Enabler

Catholics are doing it and so are Episcopalians, Quakers and numerous other faiths, but Presbyterians are not doing it — divesting our fossil fuel holdings. Twelve Presbyteries marched forward arm-and-arm with enthusiasm, passion and energy to the 221st General Assembly (GA) asking our denomination to divest its fossil fuel holdings.

Our presbytery and 11 others passed identical fossil fuel divestment overtures last year, asking our Board of Pensions and Presbyterian Foundation to divest our fossil fuel holdings over the next five years and to not purchase any new ones. The fossil fuel divestment overture, because of a parliamentary maneuver at GA, was not even discussed in committee.

A group of ministers, youth and ruling elders from around the country formed a group — Fossil Free PCUSA (the team), developed a logo, a website (www.fossilfreepcusa.org) and worked by teleconference and email for 14 months to bring the divestment overture to the General Assembly. At GA, the team had a booth with plenty of educational materials, stickers, bookmarks, bracelets, scarves and enthusiastic supporters to share our story of why divestment is important.



Pam McVety is second from right among the Fossil Free Team of overture advocates shown above.

Our message was straight out of the overture we passed. “The realities of climate change require prophetic and strategic action by people of faith seeking to be faithful to the everlasting covenant God has made with us, with every living

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A Tale of Two Churches *Continued from page 2*

the Mount Pleasant Church would not be what it is today.

How can that be? Well, in a very real way, the pastor who has led the Mount Pleasant Church to be one of the fastest-growing churches in the PC(USA) is a child of the Blountstown Church.

It starts out like this: Back in 1956 and 1957, a young man was completing his education first at Florida State University and then at Columbia Theological Seminary. He was married, starting a family, and without a job, a church, a place to preach, he might not have achieved the goal of graduation. Lewis Bullard served the Blountstown Church as its student supply, or student intern, and then went on to complete his education, be ordained, and have a long career as a Presbyterian minister. In retirement, from 2005-2011, he came back to Blountstown, and served the church

as its supply pastor. He and his wife still worship there.

How does this connect with Mount Pleasant? The pastor of the Mount Pleasant Church, the one who has baptized all those babies, is Gary L.R. Bullard. Yes, he is the son of the Bullards of Blountstown. One might well count him as a son of the Blountstown church.

By serving as a “learning laboratory” for a young pastor, the Blountstown church established Lewis Bullard as the kind of pastor/father who would raise up a son to become the kind of pastor that Gary Bullard is today.

We Presbyterians are a connectional church. We are family. Where ever I go around the United States, when I worship in our of our PC(USA) churches, there



**First Presbyterian Church of Blountstown
Organized Oct. 2, 1922**

are connections. And the whole is always greater than the sum of its parts.

The Scots Confession tells us that the church is where the word of God is proclaimed and the sacraments are rightly administered. First Presbyterian Church of Blountstown is one of those places.



Report from the 221st GA Continued from page 3

creature and with all future generations. If fossil fuel companies simply fulfill their business model, the earth will become irreversibly inhospitable to life as we know it. The overture urges the PC(USA) to divest from fossil fuel companies as part of a worldwide movement.”

Prior to going to GA, the team consulted with the Board of Pensions (BOP) and Presbyterian Foundation (PF) and while at GA worked with the Mission Responsibility through Investment Committee (MRTI) and the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP).

Here is the very good news: Not a person we met or consulted with had any doubt about the reality of climate change. Everyone was concerned.

Here is the not-so-good news: The problem our team faced was that the denomination’s staff – BOP, PF, MRTI and ACSWP – all wanted the issue to follow the traditional route of review and shareholder engagement, with the committee on MRTI and divestment to only be used as a last resort. Our team agreed that the committee on MRTI should review the issue but at the end of five years the denomination should be divested from fossil fuel investments.

While at GA a compromise was reached with MRTI and ACSWP that MRTI would develop an implementation plan for divestment and at the end of five years divestment would be completed. The BOP and PF did not agree to this approach.

The reason a time limit was important was because following the traditional MRTI process could take a decade as it did with the Middle East divestment issue. With climate change we may have as little as six years to get our carbon emissions down in order to avoid a temperature rise that would make the planet a vastly different place than civilization developed on. Now is the time to take a stand while we still can make a difference.

What happened next gets a little

complicated. The overture was presented to the GA Committee on Immigration and Environmental Issues by ten Overture Advocates. (Each Presbytery that passed the overture could send an overture advocate. I was the overture advocate for our presbytery.) Even before deliberations began, a member of the Immigration and Environmental Issues Committee presented a substitute motion that represented the compromise between the fossil free PUCSA team, the MRTI and the ACSWP.

Before the motion could be discussed, another committee member presented a different motion that referred the overture to the Committee on MRTI. There was no mention of divestment or a deadline in the motion. Since this was a referral motion, it trumped the substitute motion. The committee discussed only the referral motion and voted 30 to 29 to bring it to the floor of the GA.

Eleven members of the Immigration and Environmental Issues Committee prepared a Minority Report, which was the substitute motion that represented the compromise and it was brought to the floor of the General Assembly along with the committee recommendation to refer the overture to the Committee on MRTI. On the floor of the GA, the BOP and MRTI spoke in favor of referring the overture to the Committee on MRTI.

The eleven commissioners, including Youth Advisory Delegates who filed the Minority Report spoke passionately in favor of it – divesting in five years. The final GA vote was overwhelmingly in favor of referring the overture to the Committee on MRTI with no mention of divestment or a timeframe.

I learned a lot at GA about our church. Overture advocate work is all consuming from early in the morning until late at night. Meals are hit and miss and eight hours of sleep is not to be had. Great distances are walked and new friends are made every day. Presbyterian polity is orderly and

specific. Fair or not, there is a hierarchy of privilege and access to the process and overture advocates are near the bottom. There are rules for everything. Presbyterian staff have speaking privileges overture advocates wish they had. Learning is on the fly. Parliamentary procedures are complicated and he who knows them best has the advantage. Attending GA is very expensive.

Would I do it again? I don’t know. I went to GA with faith, with hope and with a strong sense of urgency. To a person all the overture advocates, the Youth Advisory Delegates and all who spoke in favor of divestment were devastated to not even have had the overture discussed in committee.

What’s next? We have to do more – a lot more than talk and study an issue and repeatedly ask an industry who won’t listen to us to change their core business practice. The crisis we face with climate change is now more than an “inconvenient truth”. It is a devastating reality for millions of people every day and responding to it is urgent.

It is important for the church to take a prophetic stand because this is *the* moral issue of our time. History will treat us badly if we don’t figure out how to lower our carbon emissions and do it quickly. I hope as a church we can tell our children that we did everything possible to combat climate change.

I remain hopeful and pray that the good folks on the Committee on MRTI will respond to the urgency of climate change and move to divest without further engagement of the fossil fuel industry.

Finally, a special thanks to the members of our presbytery for their courageous leadership in voting to support the fossil fuel divestment overture and entrusting me to advocate for it. To see my remarks before the Immigration and Environmental Issues Committee, go to

www.fossilfreepcusa.org.

