

**Presbytery of Great Rivers
Bills and Overtures Committee Report
02/26/2022**

The Bills and Overtures committee met on February 9th to review an overture presented to the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Great Rivers, for concurrence by the assembly. Per G-3.0302d states that overtures to the general assembly require the concurrence of at least one other presbytery in order to be proposed to the General Assembly.

Motion from the Bills and Overtures Committee:

The Bills and Overtures Committee moves that the Presbytery of Great Rivers concur with the “Overture: On Establishing a Task Force to Explore the Theology and Practice of Ordination to Ordered Ministry for Ruling Elders.”

Here is the complete overture:

**Overture: On Establishing a Task Force to Explore the
Theology and Practice of Ordination to Ordered Ministry for
Ruling Elders**

Originated from San Fernando Presbytery to be considered by the 225th General
Assembly

Recommendation:

The Presbytery of San Fernando overtures the 225th General Assembly (2022) to establish a task force to explore the theology and practice of ordination to ordered ministry for ruling elders in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and recommend any needed changes to the 226th General Assembly (2024). This task force will reflect the breadth of the PC(USA) and include representatives from those who identify as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color), immigrant congregations, New Worshiping Communities, and middle governing body leadership. The task force will work with denominational staff, including the 1001 New Worshiping Communities leadership.

Rationale:

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) [PC(USA)] has experienced ongoing numerical decline and demographic aging. At the same time, there are leaders of dynamic immigrant fellowships and New Worshiping Communities (NWCs), including diverse NWCs that are prevented by our structure from taking an active role in the life and governance of the PC(USA).

At the end of 2020, there were 26,000 people nationwide participating in 529 NWCs. In our chartered churches, 1 member for every 10 comes from a background without church - or faith-based experiences, while 1 or 2 participants out of every 3 in the NWCs

come from the same background. In 2020, 15 percent of NWCs conducted adult baptisms compared to 5 percent in established congregations.

However, our emerging leaders and participants are prevented by our present structure from taking an active role in the life and governance of the PC(USA).

Currently a leader serving a NWC may not be designated as a commissioned ruling elder (CRE) by the Committee on Ministry (or equivalent) unless they are first ordained as an elder in the PC(USA) and serve on the session of a local church. This is because the NWC is not chartered and does not have a session to which the leader can be ordained. The NWC leader is excluded by our interpretation of polity from possibly qualifying to be a CRE with voice and vote at presbytery unless they step back into the traditional model and serve a traditional church. This “catch” excludes gifted, entrepreneurial leaders from taking a role in our governance to the detriment of the PC(USA).

The path for leaders of NWCs involves our immigrant leaders too, and we need clarity around their leadership as well.

Rev. Dr. James Herbert Nelson, II, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, writes: “Our global mission work is shifting as countless numbers of immigrants are coming to the United States seeking freedom and opportunities. It is only a matter of time before our government leaders will be forced to pass a bill seeking a new pathway to citizenship in the United States of America. Just as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) sent missionaries William H. Sheppard and Samuel N. Lapsley to the Congo, we must be willing to embrace and welcome persons who seek freedom in the United States as an act of love. Therefore we must prepare this mission field to receive immigrants seeking refuge and peace.”

These are identified issues. As the task force listens to and responds to the concerns of presbyteries across the country, other concerns can be identified and addressed in the report and action solutions presented to the 226th General Assembly (2024).

Other insights from church leaders and teachers:

“Ministry is changing. We cannot use a 20th century model of leadership as we live and lean into new and creative ministries of the 21st century. As so much of our growth and energy is coming from our New Worshiping Communities, we have to find new ways of discussing what ordained leadership looks like in the 21st century. We must not succumb to a dynamic where we are serving our polity instead of our polity serving us. This involves looking at new creative ways to empower and affirm our bi-vocational leaders, our immigrant community leaders, and our New Worshiping Community leaders. They need to have access to serve and vote as leaders in the Presbytery, where they can be supported as we can all learn and grow from their insights and wisdom.”

-Rev. Dr. Diane Givens Moffett, executive director, Presbyterian Mission Agency, PC(USA)

“As the PC(USA) reaches more broadly into the neighborhoods around us to call new disciples and form new communities of worship and witness, we need – and God is providing – new kinds of leaders who bring gifts and skills ‘for such a time as this.’ We are called to respond to and receive these gifts of God with new openness and flexibility in our equipping and credentialing of these leaders.”

-Rev. Nikki Collins, coordinator, 1001 Worshiping Communities, PCUSA

“At the time of the American Revolution, Presbyterians and Congregationalists were the two largest Protestant denominations in the new nation. The religious landscape changes dramatically in the 19th century. While Presbyterians adhered to the standard of an educated clergy, Methodists and Baptists won the West with their much greater flexibility about who could be messengers of the gospel. By the time new pastors were trained, we were always many years and hundreds of miles behind the frontier. In the 21st century, with attendance at Christian worship in decline, the question must be asked once more: Will Presbyterians be flexible enough to change with a changing situation. Who will we send?”

-Dr. Ronald C. White, presidential biographer, who has taught American church history at Princeton, San Francisco, and Fuller Theological Seminaries

Motion from the Bills and Overtures Committee:

Upon concurrence by the Presbytery of Great Rivers, the Bills and Overtures Committee also recommends that the following note be included in our notice of concurrence to the General Assembly:

NOTE: We would suggest that this task force also seek to identify other situations where individuals are prevented by our present structure from taking an active role in the life and governance of the PC(USA). For example: In the Presbytery of Great Rivers we have encountered this with those serving in rural settings.