

## General Assembly Council (GAC) – Spring 2009

### Mary Lynn Walters

The spring meeting of the General Assembly Council (GAC) was held in Louisville from March 25-27. One of the main items on the agenda was adjusting the 2009 budget by \$4 million which, unfortunately, meant the elimination of 44 staff positions. This transformation began a year ago and has been done with a great deal of intentionality. Although 56 positions (some of which were vacant) have been eliminated, 12 new ones have been added. There has been a realignment of responsibilities that has evolved from strategic reshaping of ministry areas that even might have occurred without the current economic situation. The National Health Ministries Office has been closed and ministries for college students and youth have been consolidated. The Multicultural Ministry Office is now Multicultural Congregational Support and has moved into the Racial Ethnic and Women's Ministries division. There is now a new environmental ministries office which is a result of a directive from the 2008 General Assembly. Many of these changes have taken place in an effort to have the national staff do the things that it does uniquely and best. In the 2009 budget adjustment, there was a shortfall of nearly \$10 million but around \$5.93 million was taken from reserves or unspent revenues. One other direct repercussion of the lower income is that nearly all of the GAC staff will take a week of furlough May 17-23 (a savings of \$450,000) and are forgoing any raises for 2010 (saving \$900,000). GAC Executive Director, Linda Valentine, has taken no increase for 2009. Additional budget considerations for 2010 will be addressed at the September GAC meeting. If you want to see a more complete summary of the budget revisions, they are available at <http://www.pcusa.org/gac/budgetrevisions.htm>

Perhaps the most exciting news for Grand Canyon Presbytery (GCP) was finding out that the money that we receive from the National Mission Partnership Funds will actually be more than we had been expecting since more undesignated funds had been received than had been anticipated. We will be receiving an additional \$32,201. For those who don't understand Mission Partnership Funds (MPF), here is a brief history and background. It will help our churches understand how *critical* it is to support both the Synod of the Southwest (SSW) and the General Assembly (GA) with undesignated mission gifts. Historically, Mission Partnership Funds have been given to synods for four purposes: staff support, new church development/transformation, campus ministries and racial ethnic ministries. These monies were initially intended to offset the responsibilities of ministry shifted from the GA to middle governing bodies, particularly those which originally had been part of the Board of National Missions of the PCUSA. The money in MPF comes from **unrestricted** giving to mission at the General Assembly. For several years, 10.447% of that total has been allocated to aid-receiving synods. Of the 16 synods across the PCUSA, nine (9) receive MPF. SSW receives 23.6% (the largest amount) of those funds. Additionally, **SSW is the only synod in the PCUSA which receives those funds and has passed 100% of them on to the presbyteries**, often supplementing them with additional funds from its reserves. For several years, each presbytery has received \$100,000 for staff support, \$30,124 for racial ethnic staffing and ministry and then an additional allocation that is determined by a formula that takes into account a ratio of the membership and undesignated giving to SSW (mission giving % + members %/2). For 2009, GCP receives 48.84% of the \$138,758 being distributed by formula. The numbers

used to determine the formula % are based on numbers from 2 years prior to the year being figured. Unfortunately, we know that these funds will be disappearing after 2013 and we anticipate that they will decrease by about 10% each year until then.

The Committee on the General Assembly (COGA) and the Council met jointly at the beginning of this session. All those in attendance from each group went to 100 Witherspoon and were given a presentation from each of the 6 entities that comprise the General Assembly: Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program, Presbyterian Publishing Company, Board of Pensions, Presbyterian Foundation, Office of the General Assembly and General Assembly Council. Since half of the GAC was attending only their second meeting, this general information particularly was helpful for them.

Another significant piece of business took place in the Discipleship Committee in which I serve as vice-chair. It was my regrettable, but unavoidable, responsibility to move that Sheldon Jackson College (SJ), located in Sitka, Alaska, be removed from the Christmas Joy Offering since it no longer is conducting classes and, therefore, does not qualify as a Racial Ethnic School. It is the hope of the committee, that SJ again will become a qualifying institution and be restored to its former status as one of the recipients. Cook Native American Ministries, located in Tempe, also made a required presentation to the committee since their status has changed significantly with the closure of their campus in preparation for the sale of their property. Unfortunately, that sale has become a victim of the current economic real estate situation in the Valley and that sale has been cancelled. Since Cook is still conducting classes in different locations, they have not been excluded but will continue to be required to keep GAC apprised of their ongoing progress and long-range plans. Their status will be reconsidered again in February 2010.

We were addressed by the Reverend Bruce Reyes-Chow, Moderator of the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, who shared with us happenings from across the church. Grand Canyon is fortunate to have Bruce with us today. He will be back in April 2010 for an official visit as part of a National Hispanic Conference. Bruce and the Reverend Byron Ware, vice-moderator, as the second officers to serve a two-year term, share the responsibilities and privileges of visiting presbyteries and synods across the church. Bruce brings a real technological savvy to the office...you can find him on Facebook, twittering, and using many advantages of electronic communication all the time but he still brings a very personal touch to his ministry, proving that there are many ways to communicate the message and outreach of the church.

If you wish to see an overall picture of the General Assembly Council, go online to [www.pcusa.org](http://www.pcusa.org) and check out the 2008 Annual Report. There are many pictures and lots of information that will help you to see what one of the national arms of our church is doing on your behalf. I welcome any questions at [NANAML@cox.net](mailto:NANAML@cox.net), at home (602-955-7281) or on my cell (602-291-8754). It has been a privilege to serve on the GAC for the past six years; I will continue until the conclusion of 2010 GA in Minneapolis.