

**REPORT OF
FALL 2004 GENERAL ASSEMBLY COUNCIL MEETING**

by Mary Lynn Walters

The General Assembly Council met in Louisville, KY from September 22 – 25, 2004.

This was the first meeting held under the new biennial structure and presented an opportunity for community building that previously had not been possible before because it had always been necessary to begin budget work. In 2003, additional focus was on the Mission Work Plan that was being created in order to bring structure and purpose to the work of the Council in its preparation of a two-year budget and to establish increased accountability to the Church and improved communication and connection with its members.

The initial session featured greetings and reports from the GAC Chair - Nancy Kahaian, GA Moderator – Rick Ufford-Chase, GA Stated Clerk – Cliff Kirkpatrick, and GAC Executive Director – John Detterick. Following these updates, there was a presentation on the Interfaith Listening Teams. This is the second year of this program, which sends teams from abroad, one Christian and one Muslim, to numerous sites around the country to help “plant and sustain relationships of understanding and mutual discovery with our Muslim neighbors, and to learn more about Islam and our world.” At dinner that evening, the eleven teams were seated at different tables so that GAC members had an opportunity to have conversation with them and learn about them and the program.

On Thursday morning, a presentation was made by Deborah Bruce, co-author with Cynthia Woolever, on their book, *“Beyond the Ordinary, 10 Strengths of U.S. Congregations”*; then, small group discussions took place on questions relating to the Evangelism Goal of the Mission Work Plan. Groups had been established with the intention of mingling old and new members of GAC to further our relation-building as well to discover information about evangelism in our congregations and middle governing bodies and to seek to find ways for the GAC to be “open and responsive to the movement of empowering” those three levels of our Church.

Four actions were taken by GAC:

1. Support Military Personnel and their families by:
 - Petitioning the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program and/or the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) for a quick response in developing a pastoral letter on how the church can care for veterans,
 - Referring to the Presbyterian Council on Chaplains and Military Personnel (PCCMP) the responsibility to come up with appropriate suggestions of how to care for returning veterans and their families,
 - Gathering best practices from presbyteries to share with the church,
 - Encouraging compassionate ministry by churches to military personnel and their families.

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2. GAC send (in collaboration with the Stated Clerk and the Moderator of the General Assembly) a pastoral communication about selected phased divestment to congregations.

Commended for your attention:

- A. Church and Society issues discussing this matter.
 - B. The procedure spelled out in the response of the Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) Committee to the 216th General Assembly's action instructing MRTI to "*initiate a process of phased selective divestment in multinational corporations doing business in Israel, in accordance with General Assembly policy on social investing...*" (NMD: F.13.1)
 - C. www.pcusa.org/israelandjewishrelations
3. Authorize the Worldwide Ministries Division and the Peacemaking Program of Congregational Ministries Division to implement a program of accompaniment in Colombia in support of the people, leaders and ministries of the Presbyterian Church of Colombia as part of the '99 General Assembly directive "to implement appropriate programs of nonviolent, direct action in situations of conflict."
 4. Approve the 2006 Program Emphases – Special Days and Seasons and added Souper Bowl of Caring for Sunday, February 5, 2006.

If you have any questions with regard to any of this material, I would be happy to talk with you about it. Once again, I would like to express my appreciation to the presbytery, through you, for the opportunity to serve in this capacity. I feel very strongly about the need to increase the connectionalism at all levels of our Church and will do my best to represent you at the GAC and to share with you what we, as the GAC, are doing. I want to emphasize that "we" are the GAC not "they" are the GAC.