

**ITEM H.106  
ACTION ITEM**

<i>FOR PRESBYTERIAN MISSION AGENCY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S OFFICE USE ONLY</i>					
	A. Finance		E. Corporate Property, Legal, Finance		J. Board Nominating and Governance Subcommittee
	B. Justice		F. PC(USA), A Corporation		P. Plenary
	C. Leadership		G. Audit		
	D. Worshiping Communities	X	H. Executive Committee		

**Subject: Response to April 2015 Board action regarding a churchwide conversation on the mission, priorities, and structures of the PMA**

**Recommendation:**

**The Executive Committee recommends that the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board:**

- 1. Embrace the churchwide listening effort sponsored by the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly regarding denominational identity as a priority during the lead-up to the 222nd General Assembly (2016).**
- 2. Focus its present attention on developing a two-year interim strategy to guide the Mission Agency to 2018.**
- 3. Recommend that the 222nd General Assembly (2016) forward the results of the research from the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly, the reports of the Presbyterian Mission Agency Review Committee and the Office of the General Assembly Review Committee, and other studies as appropriate, as input for the next agency review cycle, which during 2016-2018 is already designed to focus on “the review of the whole of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its six agencies, focusing broadly on the effectiveness of the six agencies and other governing bodies in working collaboratively to implement the General Assembly’s mission directives.”**

**Background:**

During the April 2015 Presbyterian Mission Agency Board meeting the following motion was proposed:

To Direct the Executive Committee to conduct a re-examination of the mission, priorities, and structure of the Presbyterian Mission Agency, including the following:

- a. Consultation across the church;
- b. Consultation with COGA to explore a merger of the two agencies;
- c. Coordination of this effort with the staff-led Mission Work Plan project for 2017-2020 and the PMA and OGA agency review committees.

After conversation, the following action was taken:

Refer motion to Strategy Advisory Group and Executive Committee, in consultation with the Strategy Working Group, to come back to the September 2015 Board Meeting with a recommendation on a process to consider a church wide conversation on the mission, priorities and structures of the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

In response to this referral, the Strategy Advisory Group took the lead for the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board in developing a research and listening plan that would inform the development of a two-year Mission Work Plan (the details of this plan will be presented as part of an update on the work of the Strategic Advisory Group). The Committee on the Office of the General Assembly (COGA) also formed a committee to consider their response and any action they should take. While the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board's work was focused (per the referral), COGA approached from a broader perspective looking at denominational purpose (considering who we are as the basis for determining how best to organize).

We believe both of actions are complementary, necessary and can form the basis for dialogue at the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly (2016). PC(USA) is in a period of transition that requires prayer, dialogue and discernment. We all share in this responsibility.

We are uncertain regarding the specific organizational actions that can be taken at the upcoming General Assembly. Bullet 3 addresses a way forward that uses the information collected, the dialogue of the General Assembly and established practices (the all-agency review) to consider and advise on an organizational structure that aligns with decisions around denominational purpose.

### **Recommended Action by the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly**

**Action:** The Committee on the Office of the General Assembly approves the following actions for the purposes of giving the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly a meaningful and productive opportunity for discernment and oversight regarding the purpose and mission of its national agencies:

1. Request that the Stated Clerk, in establishing the docket for the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly, provide for adequate time during which the General Assembly can engage in discernment regarding the purpose and mission of the national agencies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). In doing so, COGA seeks a structure for conversation that allows meaningful discernment (e.g, the World Café model) and the opportunity during the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly for action to be taken on the direction such discernment discloses;
2. Approve the attached communication regarding a church-wide consultation in advance of the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly distributed both through traditional channels (e.g., the state clerks of mid-councils) and through channels that may be more effective in reaching the whole church (e.g., social media and the communications tools available to the Office of the General Assembly);
3. Request that the Stated Clerk allocate sufficient resources to develop and communicate a reliable instrument to gather the input of individuals, congregations, seminaries, mid-councils, and various affiliated groups, and to collate that information in a manner useful to commissioners in advance of the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly; and
4. Authorize the moderator of COGA to appoint two task groups, to work in coordination with one another to (a) consult with the Stated Clerk regarding the development of a reliable instrument for the collection of data in advance of the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly and develop suggestions to councils and others participating in the church-wide consultation for a meaningful discernment process; and (b) consult with the Stated Clerk in the design of the General Assembly

docket and process to assure the opportunity for discernment and action regarding the purpose and mission of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

**Rationale:**

COGA's proposal for a church-wide consultation grows out of the theological heritage of the PC(USA), the blessings of our polity's guidance, and the wisdom emerging all around the church around new ways to listen and build community.

**The Book of Order's Directive to the General Assembly:**

1. General Assembly constitutes the bond of union, community, and mission among all its congregations and councils, to the end that the whole church becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness. As it leads and guides the witness of the whole church, it shall keep before it the marks of the Church, the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed communities have identified themselves through history, and the six Great Ends of the Church.
2. In light of this charge, the General Assembly has responsibility and power to:
  - a. provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard. This responsibility includes a comprehensive mission strategy, establishing and maintaining ecumenical relationships, and commissioning, sending, and support of mission personnel.
  - b. provide that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received.
  - c. nurture the covenant community of disciples. This responsibility includes, among other things listed in the Book of Order, the following: providing services performed most effectively at a national level; communicating with the church on matters of common concern; education; resourcing presbyteries in the areas of mission, prophetic witness, leadership development, worship, evangelism, and responsible administration; serving in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline; and, authoritatively interpreting the most recent edition of the Book of Order.

**A Matter of Calling**

We are called as church to maintain a robust connection between our mission and our theology of church. Our call is to understand and enact the GA as representative of the church's core and as an expression of the mission of the whole church given through Jesus Christ. The GA is not, therefore, the "highest level" of the church but an expression of the church's core, of its heart.

**Toward A Church-wide Consultation**

For the church to discern its identity and purpose in these changing times, we need a General Assembly that finds new ways to cultivate and be responsive to its proper nature as representative of the whole church's core identity and mission. COGA's proposal for this church-wide consultation attends to this pressing need. This consultation process would not replace the work commissioners are traditionally asked to accomplish; such a consultation will enrich that work. The Office of General Assembly has long asserted that our main focus is to *bring people together to discern the mind of Christ*. The PC(USA) can see Jesus best when we gather together at the shared table we call the General Assembly in a mode that truly honors the complexity and richness of who the PC(USA) truly is.

**Preparation for Consultation**

In order for the Assembly to have input from individuals, congregations, seminaries, mid-councils, and various affiliated groups, COGA will oversee preparation of a set of common questions and a process for collecting the responses to those questions. These questions are intended to assist individuals, congregations, seminaries, mid-councils, and various affiliated groups offering their input to the commissioners of the General Assembly as they seek to discern the purpose and mission of the PC(USA) in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Adequate time during the General Assembly in Portland will be set aside for discernment of denominational identity and mission. The General Assembly's process and conversation will include attention to the wisdom gathered in from this church-wide consultation. The docket of the General Assembly will permit it to decide how to both continue this work and to invite further conversation as the discernment process unfolds.

COGA's prayer is that this church-wide consult can help fill the 2016 Portland Assembly with a renewed sense of our shared purpose. We also pray that the whole church can have a renewed sense of how the Spirit is moving among us in these uncertain times. At such a time as this we are invited to be true to the courageous spirit of our Reformed heritage by engaging the most difficult questions together with our faith in Jesus Christ leading the way.

**PRESBYTERIAN MISSION AGENCY**  
**Executive Committee**  
**September 23-25, 2015**

[Cover letter]

Friends in Christ:

All of us know that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has undergone tremendous change in a short period of time. Each of the councils of the church is in the process of discerning how to faithfully carry out ministry in this changing context. In the midst of the vast changes across our denomination, and this collective discernment, it is important that part of that discernment focus on whether we have clarity as to the purpose and mission of the Presbyterian Church (USA) in our time.

Ultimately, the responsibility for such discernment belongs in our polity to the General Assembly. As the committee charged with being good stewards of the integrity of the General Assembly, the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly invites the entire denomination, at every level, into an intentional conversation as we prepare ourselves for the Portland General Assembly in June 2016. The discernment process described in the attached is intended to allow the 222nd General Assembly to engage this important conversation substantively informed by the insights and wisdom of your congregation, council or agency.

We trust that God will be at work in this process and in the work of the 222nd General Assembly, just as God is at work in the life of congregations and councils of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) each day.

[Margaret + Gradye signatures]

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***“A Call for Discerning A Meaningful Way Forward”***

**What is this “Call”?**

It is an initiative by the Committee on the General Assembly to foster a system-wide consultation among Presbyterians regarding the nature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century church and its mission.

**When will this take place?**

Materials will be available in Fall of 2015 in print and by electronic means to enable individuals and groups within the PC USA to offer their perspectives on what the PCUSA is called to do and be in contemporary America culture.

**What is the purpose of this consultation?**

Input submitted in print or electronically will be analyzed and summarized for commissioners at the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly (Portland) to consider as they weigh matters of purpose, function, mission and ministry.

**Who can participate and how?**

Presbyterian individuals, congregations, seminaries, mid-councils, and various affiliated groups are invited to share their perspectives through the materials designed to gather this information. These instruments will be available on several platforms and in three languages.

**What lead to this consultation?**

A number of factors led the COGA to take this initiative including careful attention to:

- ❖ Changes taking place in American denominational life over the last 20 years.
- ❖ Substantial reduction in PCUSA membership
- ❖ Changing patterns of religious affiliation within the American religions landscape
- ❖ Growing diversity in patterns and practices in church organization, mission, ministry and service
- ❖ Diminishing financial resources
- ❖ Observable stress in securing financial and human resources to maintain church councils

In the light of these and other factors COGA reviewed the Book of Order provisions regarding the role of the General Assembly and concluded that as our largest and most broadly representative body it would serve well as a venue for discerning the mind of Christ today. Moreover, any changes in structural form following a discernment of contemporary mission function must emanate from the General Assemble within our polity.