

ITEM C.300
ADVICE AND COUNSEL MEMORANDUM

*The Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC) advises the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board (PMAB) to **approve** the recommendation to reconsider its vote and reverse its action to discontinue base grants from the Christmas Joy Offering to the Charles H. Cook Foundation. ([C.102](#))*

Rationale:

After extensive consultation with those working directly with the Charles H. Cook Foundation and other Native American PC(USA) constituents, ACREC is compelled to advise the Board to revise its earlier decision and continue funding the Charles H. Cook Foundation from the Christmas Joy Offering.

Even a cursory examination of the mission of Cook as stated on its website shows that while they no longer have a brick-and-mortar school building, they remain committed to providing education to Native American communities:

The CNAM campus closed in 2007, but the organization remains committed to its mission and is undertaking steps to form a foundation. The foundation will be a structured means to continue assisting Native American tribal communities through equipping and educating leaders to more effectively serve their respective communities.

Continuing that mission, we are still offering Workshops and other events, plus the [Commissioned Ruling Elders Program](#) (CRE), geared to the Native American Community and available to anyone interested while building the foundation to provide monies for innovative educational programs.

(<http://cooknam.org/about-us/history-mission/>)

Under guideline I.D.2. of the [Institutional Standards for Participating in the Christmas Joy Offering](#), non-degree granting institutions, “must have an alternative educational model that is consistent with their mission to educate racial ethnic students and has been approved by the Presbyterian Mission Agency in lieu of accreditation.” Cook Foundation clearly meets this standard, but remains unclear as to why the Presbyterian Mission Agency will not approve their model. In fact, those with whom ACREC has been in conversation remain unclear as to whether the PMA has, in fact, disapproved their educational model. Barring this disapproval, there remains no reason Cook should not continue to receive Christmas Joy Offering Funds.

Beyond these facts, ACREC must express a deep concern over the lack of communication and consultation that occurred around this decision. Those from Cook who were invited to the April 2015 Board meeting came with the understanding that, based on the recommendation at the September 2014 Board meeting, they would be given the opportunity to report, and a decision

about funding would be made at the April 2015 meeting. (See [Item C.102](#) from the September 2015 meeting) Instead, on their way to the April 2015 meeting, representatives from Cook were informed that the Leadership Committee was recommending a discontinuation of funding to Cook, effective August, 2015, before Cook representatives even had a chance to report on their progress.

What appears to have been ignored throughout this process is the PC(USA)'s [Native American Churchwide Policy Statement](#), approved by the 191st General Assembly (1979). We implore each and every Board member to become familiar with the entire statement, though here we cite just a few extremely relevant portions:

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) through its agencies and governing boards will make it possible for Native Americans to participate and contribute fully in the total life of the church in order that the whole church may be enriched and benefit from partnership and involvement in the larger body of Christ. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will develop ways to include Native Americans in its decision-making process, especially in those areas that affect the lives and destinies of Native Americans...

...In addition to existing patterns of theological education, alternative programs such as theological education by extension should be supported, enabling candidates to remain within their culture and community while undergoing preparation for the ministry...

This policy requires the church to consult and connect with Native American Presbyterians in a meaningful way that provides fair representation for Native Americans at decision-making tables – particularly those where decisions will be made that directly impact Native American Presbyterians. We do not believe that to this point this policy has been honored in the Board's decision-making process. Even more detrimental, nor were our Native American sisters and brothers in Christ.

This recommendation offers the opportunity to correct past mistakes.