

# **Ad Hoc committee on Strategic Planning**

## **of the Presbytery of Southwest Florida (PCA)**

This ad hoc committee was created at the 60th Stated Meeting of the Presbytery of Southwest Florida on September 10, 2005. The committee was asked to summarize and lead a discussion of the General Assembly's **Strategic Planning Committee** (SPC) report. The following is what was presented to our 61st Stated Meeting on November 8, 2005. The GA's SPC report was set to the Presbyteries for consideration by the 34th General Assembly of the PCA in 2006.

Our ad hoc committee met on October 19, 2005 at Grace Presbyterian Church, Pinellas Park, Florida to review the Strategic Planning Committee's proposal, and to formulate a summary for the Presbytery.

### **Present:**

**Bob Burrridge** (chairman) Grace, Pinellas Park

**Dustyn Eudaly** Holy Trinity, Tampa

**Richard E. Franks** Cornerstone, Lutz

Absent with excuse:

**Donald A. Broadwater** Cypressridge, Winterhaven

After discussing the proposals we exchanged e-mails after reflection on our findings.

This report is a summary of what was presented to the Presbytery at its November 8th stated meeting by the chairman Bob Burrridge. It was his intention to fairly summarize the thoughts and concerns expressed by members of the committee.

### **1. Outline of the contents of the Strategic Planning report:**

1. Overview
2. Five Perspectives
3. Development of the plan
4. Survey Task Force
5. External Validation Task Force
6. Statistical Analysis
7. Engaging Ruling Elders (recommendations p. 2253 lines 12-25)
8. Task Force on Preparing the Next Generation (recommendations p. 2258 lines 30-38)
9. General Assembly Task Force (recommendations pp. 2261 - 2281)
10. Joint Task Force on Continuing Collaboration and Funding (recommendations pp. 2285-2289)
11. Recommendations for the 2005 GA

### **2. The observations of the ad hoc committee in general:**

**The committee agreed that the large objectives set by the SPC are good and important.**

It's important to be improving the work we do as a church.

It's good to encourage REs to attend and take part in all levels of the church courts.

We need to be efficient and diplomatic when debate takes place in the courts.

Cooperation and coordination between the various committees is vitally important.

Denominational giving should be addressed realistically and promoted responsibly.

**It was our concern however that the solutions proposed come short in some important areas:**

They do not seem to directly address or solve the problems for which they are intended.

They do not seem to be consistent with the results of the survey included in the report.

The procedure for adoption avoids accepted parliamentary processes.

Such a complex proposal should not by-pass presbytery action and accountability.

There are serious limits imposed upon the delegates and business of the General Assembly.

Control over the assembly and its business is granted to the permanent committees.

Constitutionally they answer to the court electing them,

rather than limiting the business of the court electing them.

The SJC would deliberate on theological issues relating to exceptions

rather than being limited to clearly defined judicial duties relating to church discipline.

### **3. The following communications are from individual ad hoc committee members:**

- a. chairman Bob Burrridge
- b. Dustyn Eudaly
- c. Richard E. Franks

## a. Comments submitted by Chairman, Bob Burrridge

This is a **very complex and detailed** set of proposals producing **immense changes** in the PCA. I'm concerned about several aspects of the report:

### 1. the unamendable nature of the report itself.

While recognizing that many parts are interdependent, complexity shouldn't rule out improvement. Such a major restructuring should not be done in a manner that **avoids the constitutional amendment process of actual votes by presbyteries and approval by two successive GAs.**

### 2. By modifying historic parliamentary law the safeguards are removed from deliberations.

The very **nature of church courts** as based on Acts 15 involves extensive debate on important issues where the input of every delegate was welcomed and respected.

The proposal imposes serious limits upon the delegates and the business of the General Assembly.

Control over the assembly and its business is granted to the permanent committees.

Constitutionally these committees answer to the court electing them.

The changes would make the electing court answer to those elected

and would give the ones elected the power to limit the business of the court electing them.

This is a reversal of all parliamentary law and produces a "top-down" structure regardless of what it is called by those who with good intentions propose it as "grass-roots".

To demand a supermajority to allow new business places the GA in a position of having to vote on a matter before it has been explained, presented fully or debated.

Such a vote could not be cast responsibly by any delegate.

### 3. It's important to encourage REs to attend and take part in GA

Rather than encouraging RE attendance, the proposed restructuring may have the opposite effect.

It may be seen as **trivializing the delegates** who are not serving on the massive Bills & Overtures Committee which becomes, as one of our committee members called it, a "**quazi-delegated assembly**".

The **survey** in the report **doesn't support** that the REs avoid GA because of the business.

The **survey showed satisfaction** with the efficiency of the business sessions.

My **personal experience** is that the **floor is most populated with delegates during important debates** and most poorly populated during promotional reports and presentations.

When I served **as an RE** before I became a TE I **gladly took time off** to do the **business of the church**. But I would not have taken my vacation time just to vote matters up or down with no input, or to simply attend seminars (as helpful as they may be as one part of the whole GA work).

### 4. The SJC is given duties beyond its original constitutional role.

The SJC would deliberate on theological issues relating to exceptions to our standards, rather than being limited to clearly defined judicial duties relating to church discipline.

## b. Comments submitted by Dustyn Eudaly Holy Trinity, Tampa

I spoke with Jack Williamson, who is the SPC representative for our presbytery. I had a good conversation with him. My general impressions of the proposals remain, though he was kind to answer some questions and clarify a couple of things for me.

10/24/05 Below is a thumbnail sketch of my thoughts to this point.

I agree with the GA SPC's concern for

- (1) RE involvement at GA (and in the overall life of the church),
- (2) efficiency in the way that GA functions,
- (3) an edifying atmosphere at GA,

- (4) cooperation and mutuality between our permanent committees and agencies and
- (5) the need for churches to give sacrificially to the work of our denomination.

My specific thoughts regarding each item are as follows:

#### **(1) RE Involvement at GA.**

I believe that we ought to train our REs about the high calling that they have at session, presbytery and GA levels. Where such an understanding is missing at any one of these levels, it will inevitably affect the other levels as well. I think that **the best way to address RE attendance is accomplished through this means of patient instruction, not through a restructuring of GA.** (I assume that RE participation at GA is reflective of RE participation at the presbytery level as well. It seems that the remedy for each ought to mirror the other.)

#### **(2) Efficiency in the Way that GA Functions.**

Efficiency is an important concept, and yet a difficult matter to monitor when it comes to the life of a spiritual entity like the church. Efficiency demands that only matters of significance appear before the floor of General Assembly and that discussion be productive, polite and orderly. I think that it is difficult to require more than this from GA operations. I believe that the proposed **inability on the part of commissioners to offer amendments** to items before the floor of GA in some ways assumes that the **bulk of the work has been done in the proposed expanded Bills and Overtures Committee.** (I am also unclear as to the reasoning behind the **difficulty in achieving a minority report** at the Bills and Overtures level.) This seems like a **very big shift from current operational structure.** If a major shift were to occur, I would **prefer** that we move to a **fully delegated assembly** where there is fair representation and rotation **than** to have a **quasi-delegated assembly mindset** where the role of the full body of commissioners seems a bit vague. I would like to clarify as a presbytery **how we would seek to rotate our TEs and REs as Bills and Overtures representatives** under the new proposal.

#### **(3) Edifying Atmosphere at GA.**

I think that the proposed new structure for GA, while in a genuine attempt to provide an edifying atmosphere to commissioners, **may result in a sense of ambiguity** on the part of those **commissioners not on the expanded Bills and Overtures committee as to their role and function** in the life of GA. I do **not** see GA so much as a time for **instructional classes and activities** as I do a time for the **commissioners present to engage in extended discussion** about the matters before the life of the church. (I am in no way opposed to such instructional classes and activities, but do **not see them as belonging to the central core** of GA.) I believe that such **discussion of the matters** before the life of the church, even in its technicalities, **can be a most edifying instrument** for the commissioners present and for the church as a whole.

#### **(4) Cooperation and Mutuality between Our Permanent Committees and Agencies.**

I agree wholeheartedly about the need for each permanent committee and agency to understand its individual role in light of the overall mission of the church (as summarized in the Great Commission-Matthew 28:18-20). Such a posture on the part of the committees and agencies will lead to effectiveness by the individual committees and agencies and an honor and appreciation for the work of the other committees and agencies as well. I agree about the importance of constant discussion between these committees and agencies and an awareness on the part of each committee and agency about the dangers of a competition mindset. (Incidentally, this is a reminder that we all, as individual churches, must be constantly keeping at the forefront of our minds as well.) I simply desire that whatever remedy is offered for the current lack of communication between committees and agencies **not grant to any party(ies) a power that goes beyond executing the tasks assigned by GA.** The **current Committees of Commissioners** assigned to each permanent committee and agency, it seems, are **in a good position to evaluate** the individual committee's/agency's work in light of the other committees and agencies and the overall mission of the PCA. So long as the Committees of Commissioners assigned with such tasks are charitable toward the committees and

agencies that they are evaluating, I see great value in hearing from them at GA as the standard report for each committee and agency.

**(5) The Need for Churches to Give Sacrificially to the Work of Our Denomination.**

I agree about the need for individual churches to give sacrificially to the overall work of the denomination. It is **difficult** to determine **how best** to go about **realizing this goal**. (Our recent discussion at the presbytery level about the need for individual churches to give to the work of the presbytery seems closely related to this matter.)

**c. Comments submitted by Richard E. Franks Cornerstone, Lutz**

Positive Aspects of SPC Report

- \* Emphasis on Ruling Elder participation
- \* Need for collaboration between Permanent Committees of GA
- \* Need for Permanent Committees of GA to re-evaluate their effectiveness in ministering to the Presbyteries & local churches.

Areas of Concern regarding the SPC Report

- \* That changes are coming through **RAO instead of BCO** and **bypassing the approval of Presbyteries**.
- \* The fact that the motion of the SPC is to **either adopt** the recommendation (without amendments) **or vote it down**
- \* That the recommended changes to GA seem to be **redefining Presbyterianism**. **To much power in the hands of a few** with less accountability than at present.
- \* The **loss of opportunity to discuss issues on the floor** of GA.
- \* That the recommended structure seems to **take authority out of the hands of the church courts & put in the hands of representatives** of the courts without a sense of accountability.
- \* That the recommended changes of the SPC seems to **address issues** that people (according to polls) are **not concerned about** (i.e. structure of GA) and **ignores issues** that people were **concerned about** (i.e. cost of GA)