

Commission to Unify the Office of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency
Minutes
Online
May 20, 2023

Gathering

The Commission to Unify the Office of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency (“Unification Commission”) met online on May 20, 2023, using Zoom, an online audio and web conferencing platform. The public was able to watch in real-time (and view a recording) via Vimeo, a video sharing platform, on the website of the Office of the General Assembly.

At 3:00 p.m. ET, Felipe Martínez, co-moderator, called the meeting to order.

Roll

The roll was formed (including an audio / video check):

Commissioners (as appointed by the Co-Moderators of the 225th General Assembly (2022); criteria and demographics included for the record):

Felipe N. Martínez, Co-Moderator, Teaching Elder, Presbytery of Ohio Valley;
Commissioner, 225th General Assembly (2022)

Cristi Scott Ligon, Co-Moderator, Ruling Elder, Presbytery of Middle Tennessee;
Commissioner, 225th General Assembly (2022)

Carson Brown, Ruling Elder, Presbytery of Peace River; Young Adult Advisory
Delegate, 225th General Assembly (2022)

Dee Cooper, Teaching Elder, Presbytery of Denver; Presbyterian Mission Agency Board

David Davis, Commissioner, Teaching Elder, Presbytery of the Coastlands;

Committee on the Office of the General Assembly

Frances Lin, Ruling Elder, Presbytery of San Diego; At-Large

Scott Lumsden, Teaching Elder, Presbytery of Seattle; Per Capita and Financial
Sustainability Special Committee

José Rosa-Rivera, Ruling Elder, Presbiterio de San Juan; Per Capita and Financial
Sustainability Special Committee

Kris Thompson, Ruling Elder, Presbytery of National Capital; At-Large

Ex-Officio:

Ruth Faith Santana-Grace, Co Moderator, 225th General Assembly (2022)

Staff and Support:

Jennifer Clowery, interpreter, JC Wordsmith Translation & Interpretation

Barry Creech, Deputy Executive Director for Administration, Presbyterian Mission Agency

Kathy Lueckert, President, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), A Corporation

David Reasoner, interpreter, Reasoner Language Solutions LLC

Alejandra Sherman, Executive Assistant to the President, Presbyterian Church
(U.S.A.), A Corporation

Excused:

Debra Avery, Teaching Elder, Presbytery of Great Rivers; Moving Forward
Implementation Special Committee

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Emily Martin, Ruling Elder, Presbytery of North Central California; Young Adult
Advisory Delegate, 225th General Assembly (2022)
Bill Teng, Teaching Elder, Presbytery of Peace River; Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),
A Corporation Board

Opening Prayer	Upon recognition, José Rosa-Rivera led the meeting in an opening prayer, which included a petition for love, justice, and unity, and gratitude for the ministry of the Stated Clerk, the Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson II (who had declared the intention to resign with effect from June 30, 2023), and prayers for the Office of the General Assembly, and this Church.
Land Acknowledgment	Felipe Martínez gave thanks for this opportunity to gather, and recognized Scott Lumsden to lead the land acknowledgment, which noted the Presbytery of Seattle contains lands previously inhabited by the Suquamish and Duwamish peoples. It was noted that though the Duwamish were signatories of the Treaty of Point Elliot on January 22, 1855, the Duwamish people are still not recognized as a Native American Tribe. Scott Lumsden concluded a donation would be made to the Duwamish people to recognize the Unification Committee's meeting.
Staff Announcement	Upon recognition, Kathy Lueckert, President, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), A Corporation, shared there were translators present to translate into Spanish, along with the ability for all participants to change the language version that each participant could hear. José Rosa-Rivera successfully tested the translation services, with a note of thanksgiving in Spanish.
Agenda	Without objection, <u>the agenda was adopted</u> . The agenda was distributed to the Unification Commission and publicly posted prior to the meeting.
Minutes	Upon motion and second, and without objection, <u>the Minutes of the April 16, 2023 meeting were approved</u> .
Covenant	Felipe Martínez and Cristi Scott Ligon, in their roles as co-moderators, read the covenant as a reminder of how the Unification Commission has agreed to pursue their work.
Co-Moderator Report	Felipe Martínez and Cristi Scott Ligon presented their co-moderators report, which included the attending the joint meeting of the Committee of the Office of the General Assembly ("COGA") and the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board ("PMAB") in person in Louisville, Ky. on April 19, 2023. It was noted that other members of this Unification Commission were present for this consultation. This consultation occurred before the public announcement by the Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson II to conclude the current call with effect of June 30, 2023. It was shared that after opening worship, there was a pause for relationship-building that COGA and PMAB conducted independently and concurrently. The Unification Commission consultation was part of the executive session of the COGA – PMAB joint meeting.
Staff Information Session on Timelines and Timing	Felipe Martínez reminded the Unification Commission of important processes leading to the 226th GA (2024), to be held in Salt Lake City, Utah, in June 25 through July 4, 2024. There are two-year budgets; the next to be approved is the 2025-2026 Budget, which

needs to be shaped by Spring 2024. This 2025-2026 Budget is the first “unified” budget of the Office of the General Assembly (“OGA”) and the Presbyterian Mission Agency (“PMA”); and, the Unification Commission should provide guidance on this “unified” budget. A goal of the June 2023 in-person meeting of the Unification Commission is to begin to shape the narrative for budget priorities to inform the budgeting process. This narrative would be submitted to staff by November 2023.

Felipe Martinez called on Kathy Lueckert and Barry Creech to provide additional information. It was noted Kerry Rice was traveling for General Assembly business during this meeting, and was not able to participate.

Kathy Lueckert briefly reviewed the timeline distributed with the advance materials (Attachment 1), which outlined opportunities to interact with OGA and PMA. An important date remains Feb. 26, 2024, the “120-day deadline” General Assembly deadline for submitting reports from committees and agencies – this “120-day deadline” applies to the work of the Unification Commission. The formal budget deadline is the “45-day deadline” (May 11, 2024). Barry Creech provided additional emphasis on the “120-day deadline” to provide a narrative; and the “45-day deadline” to provide the budget. Staff projections for budget figures will begin in the Summer 2023.

Felipe Martínez thanked staff for their guidance.

Acting Stated
Clerk Search
Update

Without objection, Felipe Martínez presented an update from Kerry Rice, Deputy Stated Clerk, Office of the General Assembly, who was excused from today’s meeting.

The Standing Rules of the General Assembly empower the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly to name an Acting Stated Clerk. This term will conclude with the election of a Stated Clerk at the 226th GA (2024). As reported in the press, COGA has named a task force to review applications, which are due by May 30, 2023. The task force will provide a recommendation for consideration by COGA, with hopes the Acting Stated Clerk will begin at or close to July 1, 2023. The Stated Clerk Search Committee, elected at the 225th GA (2022), will continue their work, independently. There will be time to celebrate the ministry and contributions of the Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson II at the 226th GA (2024).

Work Group
Updates

Cristi Scott Ligon began leading the meeting and noted each work group would now provide an update.

Finance: Work
Group Update

Upon recognition, Scott Lumsden, facilitator, provided an update for the Finance work group (also comprised of Dave Davis and Kris Thompson). This work group has met weekly to get an understanding on the financial operations of the national church, including details and broad trends. There are standing financial reports on twelve ministry areas, in addition to two administrative areas. There are connections to both PMA and OGA; therefore reports from PMA and OGA have been requested to see how revenue and expenses (and surpluses and deficits) are presented. The Finance Work Group will observe the budgeting process.

It was explained that the task, to focus on OGA and PMA, requires an understanding of the bigger picture. For example, the Presbyterian Historical Society (“PHS”) falls under the purview of OGA; therefore, a portion of Per Capita revenues are allocated to PHS.

Regarding restricted and unrestricted funds; a meeting has been planned with the Presbyterian Foundation. Regarding the operation and allocation of fundraising; meetings are being planned. Regarding realized and unrealized gains; the spending formula has a larger influence and is being explored.

The June meeting of the Unification Commission is anticipated to contain a presentation on what the Finance Work Group is learning.

Scott Lumsden welcomed suggestions from the Commission how the Finance Work Group might better present a report for the June meeting (noting that ten years of financial statements are uploaded into EQUIP). It was suggested that funding sources are specifically identified for each agency and mission area, including fundraising. It was noted, as an example, the Presbyterian Historical Society receives funding from the Office of the General Assembly, the Presbyterian Foundation, and the Board of Pensions [recorder’s note: the Board provided in-kind information technology support, since both organizations are located in Philadelphia, Pa.]. Another note was how Presbyterian Disaster Assistance was reported as part of the Presbyterian Mission Agency. Another suggestion was detailing restricted funds, and how income is both assigned and anticipated. It was noted how governance is tied together with the finances; and, at some point a legal review might be helpful. Kathy Lueckert shared that Legal Services is a part of A Corporation, and can make contributions. It was also noted a need to discern “why” the future merged entity is serving congregations.

Consultation:
Work Group
Update

Upon recognition, Dee Cooper, facilitator, provided an update for the Consultation work group (also comprised of Cristi Scott Ligon and Emily Martin). Dee Cooper briefly mentioned the joint COGA / PMAB consultation (previously addressed), and shared there were two meetings with Mission Co-Workers from around the world. Upcoming consultations already scheduled include the Stated Clerk Nominating Committee and Mission Responsibility Through Investment (“MRTI”). A consultation with New Worshipping Community leaders is also being explored.

Thanks were provided to Kathy Lueckert for supporting the Work Group.

The learning curve regarding use of remote technology was being climbed. The format provided good feedback and information.

Dee Cooper inquired how the Unification Commission would like to receive the information gathered at the consultations – whether it be the raw data, or a summary. (This information would be posted to the secure area of EQUIP, given the topic of personnel.) It was noted that some voices were at more than one meeting – there is not a correlation between one voice and one comment. After discussion, the Unification Commission requested the raw data be shared, along with a brief summary – with an expectation that commissioners would read more than the summary and also review the data.

Dee Cooper also inquired about the timing of when the Unification Commission receives feedback from Consultations, while there are also parallel conversations happening on items like budgets. It was affirmed there needed to be a mindfulness of the parallel work.

It was shared how though there was anxiety prior to the creation of PC(USA) – A Corporation, that “A Corp” has been made a helpful impact. This is a model of successful change in this Church.

The discussion included the interconnected work of MRTI, and the nature of the parallel and interconnected work of the Unification Commission Work Groups. A hope was expressed that this interconnected nature could be formally identified in a project management plan.

Finally, Dee Cooper noted international obligations preventing participation in the June meeting. Felipe Martínez will be on sabbatical and not in attendance. All other participants anticipate being present at the June meeting.

Common Mission:
Work Group
Update

Upon recognition, Felipe Martínez, spoke as a member of the work group, providing an update for the Common Mission work group (also comprised of Bill Teng, facilitator, excused from this meeting, and Frances Lin, with staff support from Kerry Rice). This work group has not reconvened since the previous update. There is a meeting scheduled before the June meeting of the Unification Commission, and a more detailed update is anticipated to be provided.

Governance: Work
Group Update

Cristi Scott Ligon noted the Governance Work Group was seeking guidance from the Unification Commission on clarification of a task, specifically the key functions and non-negotiable essential tasks of the unified body formed by the Unification Commission. A review of the “shall” guidance from the *Book of Order* at the June meeting would be helpful. It was suggested the Unification Commission could propose changes to the *Book of Order* to the General Assembly for consideration by the presbyteries; and, the current constitutional structure is relatively permissive, perhaps not needing changes. The *Organization for Mission* is much more focused and detailed, and falls within the purview of the Unification Commission to amend and update.

Carson Brown provided an update for the Governance work group (also comprised of Debra Avery, facilitator, and José Rosa-Rivera). The work group has begun reviewing the documents provided by staff, including how similarly sized denominations are structured. There is another meeting scheduled before the June meeting.

Communications
Strategy

Following the agenda, Cristi Scott Ligon asked the Unification Commission how they might communicate with the various constituencies, including the broader church, and employees of PMA and OGA. A suggestion is an abbreviated version of the minutes distributed to employees and mid-councils. Carson Brown accepted the offer from Cristi Scott Ligon and Felipe Martínez, co-moderators, to produce such a communication after each meeting. It was shared this communication would be a very simple summary with any important discussions and actions, and the timing of the next meeting. By common consent, the Unification Commission adopted this communications strategy.

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Executive Session Cristi Scott Ligon noted the next agenda item was reserved for an executive session, and asked if a commissioner wanted to make a motion to enter executive session (and to explain the rationale). A motion and second was made to enter executive session for the purpose of discussing observations from employees made at the various listening sessions. After discussion and without objection, the Unification Commission entered executive session, with ex-officio members and staff and support invited to remain.

[Recorder's Note: the video stream was ended; and a new video stream was started upon rising from executive session.]

The Unification Commission rose from executive session and declared no actions were taken.

Closing
Comments Felipe Martínez reminded the Unification Commission of the scheduled sabbatical leave, and Cristi Scott Ligon would be the sole moderator of the meetings through the summer. Felipe Martínez shared an overview of the sabbatical plans.

The next scheduled meeting of the Unification Commission will be in-person in Louisville, Ky. on June 22-24, 2023. Commissioners were reminded to respond to the inquiries regarding travel logistics.

Adjournment Upon motion and second, and without objection, the Unification Commission adjourned with a closing prayer by Felipe Martínez, which included thanks for the good work of the church, and the ministry of the Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson II.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Raymond Bonwell
Recorder

THE PATH AHEAD FOR THE UNIFICATION COMMISSION

	Unification Commission	COGA/PMAB	General Assembly
May 2023	20 – online	18 – COGA online	
June 2023	22 – 25 in Louisville	15 – COGA online	
July 2023	22 – online	20 – COGA online	
August 2023	20 – online	July 31 – Aug 3 – PMAB retreat 17 – COGA online	
September 2023	17 – online	12 –14 COGA in Louisville	
October 2023	11 – Consultation with mid councils 11 – 14 in St. Louis	4 – 6 PMAB online 19 – COGA online	
November 2023	12 – online	16 – COGA online	
December 2023	16 – online	21 – COGA online	
January 2024		18 – COGA online	
February 2024		15 – 16 COGA meeting ?? – PMAB meeting	26 – 120-day deadline for GA business
March 2024		21 – COGA online	
April 2024		18 – COGA online	26 – 60-day deadline for overtures with financial implications
May 2024		7 – 9 COGA in Salt Lake City 8 – 10 PMAB meeting (Unified budget recommended to GA)	11 – 45-day deadline for budgets and comments
June 2024		COGA – during GA226	Committees of 226th General Assembly
July 2024			226th General Assembly – Salt Lake City

THE PATH AHEAD FOR THE UNIFICATION COMMISSION

	Unification Commission	COGA/PMAB	General Assembly
February 2026			Deadline for business to 227th General Assembly
July 2026			227th General Assembly