

APPROVED: October 12, 2023

Commission to Unify the Office of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency
Minutes
Online
September 17, 2023

Gathering

The Commission to Unify the Office of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency (“the Unification Commission”) held their tenth meeting online 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. Materials, including the agenda and minutes, were available to the public via EQUIP, a learning management system administered by the Officer of the General Assembly.

Roll

The roll was formed:

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

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

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

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
Dave Davis, Teaching Elder, Presbytery of the Coastlands; Committee on the Office of
the General Assembly

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

Emily Martin, Ruling Elder, Presbytery of North Central California; Young Adult
Advisory Delegate, 225th General Assembly (2022)

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

Bill Teng, Teaching Elder, Presbytery of Peace River; Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),
A Corporation Board

Staff:

Barry Creech, Deputy Executive Director for Administration, Presbyterian Mission Agency
Kathy Lueckert, President, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), A Corporation
Alejandra Sherman, Executive Assistant to the President, Presbyterian Church
(U.S.A.), A Corporation

Guests:

Bronwen Boswell, Acting Stated Clerk, Office of the General Assembly
Ruth Gardner, Director, Human Resources, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),
A Corporation

Mike King, Director and General Counsel, Legal and Risk Management, Presbyterian
Church (U.S.A.), A Corporation

Excused:

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

Opening Prayer and Devotion	Felipe N. Martínez, co-moderator of the Commission to Unify the Office of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency (“Unification Commission”), called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. ET. Carson Brown led the opening prayer.
Land Acknowledgment	Bill Teng led the land acknowledgment, which was informed by the Presbytery of Peace River (Fla.), specifically the unincorporated town of Lake Suzy in DeSoto County, and the Muskego, Colusa, and Miccosukee peoples. Upon inquiry, no one identified as being Native American from Lake Suzy or Florida, and Bill Teng asked more broadly to be welcomed to the land; and, concluded with thanks.
Agenda	By common consent, <u>the Unification Commission adopted the agenda</u> . Materials, including the agenda and minutes, were available to the public via EQUIP, a learning management system administered by the Office of the General Assembly.
Minutes	By common consent, and without objection, <u>the Minutes of the August 20, 2023 meeting were approved</u> .
Covenant	Felipe Martínez and Cristi Scott Ligon, as co-moderators, read the covenant as a reminder of what the Unification Commission had adopted.
Co-Moderator Report	<p>Felipe Martínez and Cristi Scott Ligon shared the co-moderator report. Cristi Scott Ligon welcomed Felipe Martínez, who returned after what was confirmed to be a meaningful sabbatical. Since the August 20, 2023, meeting, the recent work included the various work groups and broader updates from the work group would follow in this agenda just approved. It was shared that the commission co-moderators participated in the Finance Work Group in-person consultation on September 7, 2023 in Louisville, Ky. on the priorities for a unified budget.</p> <p>Felipe Martínez concluded with thanks for the ongoing work of the commissioners, and expressed gratitude for the support of staff. There was an emphasis on the task to address the structural elements outlined in the mandate from the General Assembly.</p>
Consultation: Work Group Reminder	<p>Upon recognition, Dee Cooper, facilitator, provided an update for the Consultation Work Group (also comprised of Cristi Scott Ligon and Emily Martin). Dee Cooper thanked staff for the ongoing work to coordinate the consultations, and specifically the contributions of Susan Barnett, PhD, MSSW, Director, Research Services, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), A Corporation. Susan Barnett included a summary of the observations from the consultations held to date (and Dee Cooper reminded the commissioners all the raw data was available in the secure section of the Unification Commission in EQUIP).</p> <p>Dee Cooper provided a high-level summary of the four-page Listening Sessions document (Attachment 1), which was also publicly available on EQUIP. Upon discussion, it was clarified that the summary was from consultations beyond solely employees of PMA and OGA, including 17 (to date) broader consultations. A common theme of participants was appreciation for being invited to their consultation.</p> <p>It was noted there was a recent conversation with Committee on the Office of the General Assembly, and a scheduled conversation with the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board.</p>

Dee Cooper expressed thanks for Kathy Lueckert for arranging the conversations, and for Susan Barnett's contributions for the research summary, and noted the various caucuses remain a potential conversation partner.

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). The Finance Work Group continues to follow the timeline previously approved, with weekly meetings. The Key Unified Budget Priorities meeting was held on September 7, 2023, with the executive leader (and a guest selected by the leader) from A Corporation, the Office of the General Assembly, and the Presbyterian Mission Agency. Ian Hall, Chief Financial Officer, Presbyterian Church (USA) A Corporation, was also present.

The target for meaningful recommendations is the October 2023 meeting (including a written report). A verbal brief overview of the budget priorities was provided, and the culture of the entities was also addressed. It was shared that some key unification principles might be considered and adopted by the Unification Commission, to serve as a guide and framework for anticipated future decisions. These key unification principles would be discussed and adopted by the commission at the October 2023 meeting. (An example as provided: the Finance Work Group enters conversations from a theology of abundance, and not a theology of scarcity.)

The Finance Work Group was thanked for their work and update.

Governance: Work
Group Update

Upon recognition, Debra Avery, facilitator, provided an update for the Governance Work Group (also comprised of Carson Brown, and José Rosa-Rivera), noting the Governance conversation would continue within executive (closed) session. Deborah Avery provided an overview of the model used by the Governance Work Group to frame the "new governance" / "new agency" with an emphasis on culture – and the parallels to the Finance Work Group emphasis on culture were noted. A vision statement would describe the future state of the organization. The mission statement would define the value for stakeholders, including decision-making, and performance objectives. The value statement would make clear the priorities and core beliefs, and strategic structuring begins with an emphasis on strategic direction.

The Governance Work Group meets weekly. Immediate topics include vision statements for the "new governance" and again for the "new agency." There is a hope for collaborative conversations with the Common Mission Work Group.

Common Mission:
Work Group
Update

Upon recognition, Bill Teng, facilitator, provided an update for the Common Mission Work Group (also comprised of Frances Lin and Felipe Martínez). This work group has not convened, and welcomes invitations to join in conversation with other work groups.

Plans for
Consultations with
Mid-Council
Leaders

Felipe Martínez introduced the discussion the Plans for Consultations with Mid-Council Leaders in October 2023 (distributed in the advance material on EQUIP). Cristi Scott Ligon continued to moderate the meeting, and noted that mid-council leaders who are part of the Unification Commission are welcome to participate as mid-council leaders. It is anticipated there will be 30 tables – each table will have a note-taker, and taking notes would not be the responsibility of the commissioners.

It was shared the mealtimes are not meant to be working meetings, and to be a time for fellowship.

There was a discussion on the process of setting the agenda for the commission, for both in-person and online meeting agendas. The commission co-moderators welcomed input from the commissioners.

A Timeline to July
1, 2023 – A First
Reading

Upon recognition, Kathy Lueckert, President, A Corporation, shared a reverse timeline, titled ““Backwards” Planning for Unification by July 1, 2025” (Attachment 1). This material was distributed in the advance material on EQUIP.

Various implications were shared, including financial, and human resources, and how decisions for some areas would need to be reached by the fall of 2024 (approximately nine months before the targeted July 1, 2025 target date). The appropriate level of structural decisions made by the Commission was noted, and the depth and detail of decisions was briefly addressed. A suggestion for a “Unification Director” to address the detailed decisions of unification was mentioned. Kathy Lueckert concluded with appreciation for colleagues within the Administrative Services Group, the Office of the General Assembly, and the Presbyterian Mission Agency, for the collaborative nature and effort behind the first reading of the planning timeline.

It was observed the October 2023 meeting would provide time and space for additional clarification.

Executive Session

Upon motion, second, and an opportunity for discussion, the Unification Commission entered executive session to address personnel and property matters. Staff and Guests were invited to participate in the executive session. (Recorder’s Note: the livestream was paused, and then restarted upon rising from executive session.)

Rising from
Executive Session

The Unification Commission voted to rise from executive session.

Felipe Martínez reported during executive session the Unification Commission that no actions were taken.

Closing Prayer

Felipe Martínez noted the Unification Commission would adjourn with a closing prayer with Cristi Scott Ligon entertained a motion to adjourn. With a closing prayer from Cristi Scott Ligon, the meeting was adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Raymond Bonwell
Recorder

Listening Sessions

**Themes from
April through August 2023**

**Susan Barnett, PhD
Research Services, ASG
September 2023**

Structure

Listening Sessions

This is an analysis of the listening sessions* that have been conducted from April 19 through August 28, 2023, by members of the Unification Commission as part of their fact-finding efforts as they move toward the unification of the Office of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency in 2026.

SILOS

Each listening session was conducted with a siloed group. The individuals who participated shared from a position, the perspective of their silo. What they shared is:

- the value of their silo,
- what they want for their silo in the new organization, and
- how important, expanded, prominent their silo should be in the new agency.

AGENCIES

A second observation is these individuals came into the sessions as members of an agency: the Office of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency **AND** they left as members of the Office of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency. Nothing in the comments suggested that they saw themselves as part of something different and new.

In less than three years unification is to occur. As each siloed staff left the consultation, they went back to *their agency*. They had not begun their process of unification. The question is when does it begin? Naming the new agency is one way to begin unification. It will assist in pointing staff toward the same goal.

*Presbyterian Foundation and Presbyterian Publishing Corporation were included but they will not be a primary focus of the report.

New Agency Name

Purpose Statement

Structure

- Flexible, yet strategic
- Do not simply mesh the two agencies, make thoughtful innovative change
- Create thematic work groups
- Eliminate redundancies
- Eliminate ministries/programs that are no longer relevant
- Do not keep functions that do not support the new agency's purpose
- Create clearly identifiable work groups, easy to navigate for those in &/or outside of the agency
- Avoid pitfalls of previous unified agency
- Determine the balance of domestic and international work

Polity

- Reduce bureaucracy for appointments

Culture

- Diverse, vibrant
- Create something new, do not maintain the status quo
- Be supportive of People of Color
- Increase communication among staff, between agencies, and aligned entities
- Promote purposeful, bidirectional communication
- Be supportive of staff as some are fearful of this change
- Accept that some staff will not be retained

Basics

- Be responsive to the needs of congregations and partnering agencies

Finances

- Do not increase the costs for congregations rather create savings for them
- Be efficient, reduce duplication
- Plan for funding that is adequate to accomplish the objectives of the new agency's & the GA's goals
- Competitive salaries to attract skilled staff and retain qualified staff

Governance

- Seek new leadership models
- Reduce bureaucracy

Research Services helps the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) make data-informed decisions using surveys, focus groups and interviews, demographic analysis, and program evaluations.

We are social scientists with backgrounds in sociology, public policy, and economics. We serve congregations, presbyteries and synods, PC(USA) national agencies, and other PC(USA)-related organizations. Research Services is a ministry of the Administrative Services Group.

If you have any questions or would like a copy of this report, contact us at 502-569-5077 or research@pcusa.org.



**RESEARCH
SERVICES**

“Backwards” Planning for Unification by July 1, 2025

ASG gathered a group of staff from ASG, PMA, and OGA to begin “backwards planning” for a unification date of July 1, 2025. There are a number of behind the scenes system and process changes that must be undertaken to be ready for that date. The Commission will need to make key decisions by certain dates in the next 21 months (or whatever the unification date is). The attached documents are the initial readout from the staff about decisions and activities. This is a first reading and more discussion will be docketed for the Commission’s October meeting.

Some notes:

Financial - Implementing a financial structure to reflect unification will require at least 4 months. Probably best to plan on 6 months, so January 1, 2025. Implication: the Commission has made high level decisions about the structure of the unified agency during the fall of 2024.

Human Resources - The attachment shows a potential process for unifying a program that has some overlap in both OGA and PMA. There is a decision making process of 3 – 6 months, and then another 6 – 12 months implementation period—so some decisions needed by the Commission in 2024. What hasn’t happened yet in this example is overlaying the separation timeline on top of this particular example.

Some decisions/questions for the Commission:

- Clarifying the extent and meaning of unification on July 1, 2025. The high level timeline assumes that July 1, 2025, is the date of a unified budget, a unified agency at least at the director level, and an interim governance structure to shepherd more specific unification activities from July 2025 – June 2026 General Assembly.
- What is the appropriate level of structural decisions for the Commission? What can the Commission reasonably decide? Perhaps a reasonable level of decision is the executive level and then the director level and let the executive/directors implement the more detailed programmatic and staff decisions.
- What type of consultants may be needed? What about the idea of a “Unification Director?”

Backwards Planning for Unification – Finance and Budget 2025

Organizational Structure & Priorities

Prior to the creation of a unified budget and the establishment of the mechanisms to oversee it, a high-level organizational structure that aligns with identified ministry priorities should be established. A comprehensive understanding of the foundational ministries that will support the new structure should also be in place.

Timeline

Assuming that a framework is in place regarding priorities and structure it is feasible to undertake the following administrative tasks, which calls for collaborative efforts across the entire organization, within a 120-day (four-month) timeframe:

- Identify funding sources to support both new priorities and foundational ministry activities.
- Establish a new unified budget and fiscal year.
- Create a new chart of accounts and corresponding reporting structure.
- Configure accounting software and update accounting procedures.

Unification will likely necessitate the creation of two budgets within a fiscal year; one to continue operations in the existing framework and one post-unification.

Fiscal Year

The formation of a new fiscal year should align with the commencement of the unified organization.

Prior to establishing a new fiscal year, PC(USA) should assess essential programmatic ministry cycles, the seasonal patterns of income and expenses, and the potential impact of the chosen fiscal year on financial operations like General Assembly, audits, budgeting, and financial reporting. The ASG finance and accounting office is considering forming a team to offer a fiscal year recommendation to the Finance Workgroup

Reporting

Defining the intended reporting outcomes is a critical component of the initial design phase for a new accounting structure. *What are the anticipated reporting requirements? Should budget reporting align with organizational priorities, structure, or a blend of both?*

PC(USA) currently utilizes the following financial expense reporting structures:

Functional Categories:

- Cost of Sales
- Salaries and Benefits
- Travel
- Meetings
- Administration
- Depreciation
- Programs
- Resource Development
- Grants

Organizational Structure:

1. Entity: OGA, PMA, ASG, etc.
2. Office: MCM, EDO, MES, etc.

Comparability

It's important to highlight that modifications to PC(USA)'s chart of accounts and fiscal year will temporarily remove the capability for comparative analysis across fiscal periods.

3 – 6 Months Decision-Making Phase

Define “Program X” (a body of work currently in both Agencies).

What does “unify Program X” mean?

What is the vision for the unified body of work?

Assess the total body of work.

What is the current work and who is doing it?

Identify the anticipated date Program X work will be unified.

This body of work would be where a consultant would be most valuable. Would need time to onboard before work begins. A 90-day onboarding is recommended.

Determine where Program X will be housed structurally:

Does it stay in either OGA or PMA until full unification?

Does it move to ASG temporarily or permanently?

Commission empowers the Executive of that organization/ department to implement the full unified process of Program X.

Another option would be a role such as a “Unification Director” shepherd and manage the unification. This person would have authority to make decisions and implement changes.

6 – 12 Months Implementation

If existing departments exist that do Program X work, combine both departments and current work in to one new department.

If stand alone departments don't exist in PMA and/or OGA, determine where and who is doing the work. Uncouple Program X work from positions that do other work.

Determine if work and employee move or just the work.

Create and implement selection process to determine the Director of the unified department.

Look internally only? Look externally only? Do both at the same time? Develop Director job description.

Once Director is named, determine any staffing implications. Retention needs? Separation packages? Other impact?

Ongoing work to assess programmatic needs and needed shifts

Key Considerations

1. Timing ... 21 months to full unification.
2. Minimum 6 months will be needed for director-level and above recruitment and hiring processes.
3. Consultant selection and onboarding should begin very soon.
4. Cost analysis for various retention, reduction scenarios should be completed Q1 2024.