

APPROVED: November 12, 2023

**Commission to Unify the Office of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency
Minutes
St. Louis, MO
October 12-14, 2023**

Thursday, October 12, 2023

Gathering The Commission to Unify the Office of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency (“the Unification Commission”) held their eleventh meeting in-person at the Hyatt Regency at the Arch in St. Louis, MO, concurrently with the Polity, Benefits, and Mission Conference (formerly the Mid Council Leaders Gathering). 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):

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)
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
Frances Lin, Ruling Elder, Presbytery of San Diego; At-Large
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) [Recorder’s Note: Present
remotely for Friday, October 13, 2023]
José Rosa-Rivera, Ruling Elder, Presbiterio de San Juan; Per Capita and Financial
Sustainability Special Committee
Bill Teng, Teaching Elder, Presbytery of Peace River; Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), A
Corporation Board
Kris Thompson, Ruling Elder, Presbytery of National Capital; At-Large

Staff:

Camilla Cohen, interpreter
Barry Creech, Deputy Executive Director for Administration, Presbyterian Mission Agency
Ian Hall, Chief Financial Officer / Chief Operating Officer, Presbyterian Church
(U.S.A.), A Corporation
Kathleen Henrion, communications specialist
Kathy Lueckert, President, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), A Corporation
Kerry Rice, Deputy Stated Clerk, Office of the General Assembly
Alejandra Sherman, Executive Assistant to the President, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),
A Corporation

Guests:

Michael Wilson, Co-Moderator, Funding Model Development Team

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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. CT, and led the opening prayer and devotion, with a focus to on the task ahead, as informed by Isaiah 30:19-21.
Land Acknowledgment	Cristi Scott Ligon, co-moderator of the Unification Commission, led the land acknowledgment, which was written by Ryan Landino, the presbytery leader for the Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy (which includes the meeting site in St. Louis, Mo.). This included the Osage Nation, Missouri, and Illini Confederacy, and included the observation that Osage is the French transliteration of some original inhabitants with an original definition of “children of the middle waters.”
Introduction	Felipe Martínez introduced Kathleen Henrion, as contracted staff to assist with the communication to the various constituencies.
Agenda	By common consent, and without objection, <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 September 17, 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	Felipe Martínez and Cristi Scott Ligon shared the co-moderator report. Their work included meeting with the Finance Work Group and working with staff to prepare for this meeting, including the consultation with participants of the Polity, Mission, and Benefits Conference. The co-moderators also met with Kathleen Henrion to discuss a communication strategy.
Common Mission: Work Group Update	<p>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 previously presented a statement on common mission for the New Agency, and shared the rationale and influences (including the Gospel, gathering, governing, goodness and generosity). The statement reads:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">The New Agency exists to resource mid councils and equip congregations to engage others in thriving, vital covenantal communities as disciples of Jesus Christ.</p> <p>After discussion, and without objection, the Unification Commission received the statement, and tabled action until later in the meeting.</p>
Finance: Work Group Update	<p>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 update was posted to EQUIP (Attachment 1), and was read by Scott Lumsden, who also noted the agenda anticipates a discussion on the outcomes of the September 7, 2023, meeting on the unified budget priorities.</p> <p>The Finance Work Group was thanked for their work and update.</p>
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 Work Group strives to meet weekly to discuss the “new governance” / “new agency.” The Unification Commission was reminded the previously shared dates of the Governance Work Group were more of a “guideline” than a fixed timeline. Kathy Lueckert, President,

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), A Corporation, was thanked for ongoing support of the work group. The Governance Work Group continues to stay focused on the question of “what will be the best way to accomplish unification, which is centered in an supports the missional goals of the General Assembly.”

Ongoing exploration and conversation include existing committees of the General Assembly and committees of the Presbyterian Mission Agency. There are also independent groups including Presbyterian Women, and the Presbyterian Association of Musicians, that are structured as separate entities, and have connections to the work. Debra Avery concluded with an observation there may be recommendations for consideration on Saturday, after the scheduled day of work group meetings, scheduled for Friday, per the agenda as approved.

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

Consultation:
Work Group
Reminder

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 Kathy Lueckert, who has coordinated the timing of most of the consultations. Twenty (20) consultations have been completed, and there are four (4) remaining; and, Dee Cooper paused for a moment of celebration and thanksgiving for this work.

Dee Cooper continued with a high-level overview of the work ahead, including the following: the synthesis of the Mid Council surveys; a response for entities that request a second (follow-up) consultation; and, how the Consultation Work Group commissioners might continue to contribute, once the consultations have formally concluded.

Dee Cooper welcomed comments on what commissioners were seeing in the consultation data. There was an affirmation on the importance of culture.

Felipe Martínez reminded the commissioners to be mindful of the consultation observations while doing one’s own work group work. A very preliminary and high-level summary of the Mid Council survey was shared. The discussion focused on how to keep the broader church aware of the observations gleaned from the consultations; and affirming that consulted groups were indeed heard and impacted the conversation of the Unification Commission. Consultations with the racial-ethnic caucuses are still being scheduled. Commissioners affirmed the helpfulness of the consultation summaries.

The Consultation Work Group was thanked for their work.

Key Unification
Principles
Exercise

Felipe Martínez explained an exercise to discern key unification principles. Commissioners were provided with ten post-it notes, and were asked to write one principle per post-it, and each commissioner did not need to use all ten. Commissioner were asked to place their post-its on the wall, and Felipe Martínez and Cristi Scott Ligon would group the principles and share the observations later in the meeting.

Funding Model
Development
Team Update

After a brief break, Felipe Martínez introduced Michael Wilson, Co-Moderator, Funding Model Development Team for an update. The Funding Model Development Team, a special committee formed by the 225th GA (2022) was tasked with looking at funding models of all councils above sessions, specifically presbyteries, synods, and the national church. Another task is to address the presbytery responsibility to remit all per capita even if the per capita was not provided by all sessions.

Michael Wilson noted the challenges of experimenting with funding streams. Commissioners were reminded that councils above sessions typically have four funding streams: per capita; mission giving; investments; and, reserves. Commissioners received a verbal report on funding models that are being explored. First, the per capita model, which ties funding to membership, is challenging with a declining membership. Second, a participation model, which could eliminate

per capita giving to replace with mission giving. Third, a percentage model, which could be a fixed percentage of a congregation – and the challenges are defining the item to base the percentage, the perception of tying giving to membership. It was also noted the challenges with “experimenting” or “piloting” new funding mechanisms, if existing mechanisms are assessed as sufficient.

Michael Wilson shared the Funding Model Development Team had a parallel timeline to the Unification Commission, with an update to the 226th GA (2024) and a report for the 227th GA (2026).

The discussion included exploring how other denominations are funded. The conversation observed how presbyteries are different in size, and a challenge of the scope of sustainability for organizations that are not average. It was also observed how the Office of the General Assembly is primarily funded by per capita, and the Presbyterian Mission Agency is primarily funded by mission giving – and a challenge to describe how a unified agency would be funded. A challenge of identifying the funding model is collapsing all sources into per capita, when other sources exist such as Special Collections. A hope for a future funding model is one that is elegant and easy to describe, and also easy to assess. The challenges of duplicating work at the national level were also noted. It was also noted that the Board of Pensions pricing model for medical benefits is also under review and discussion, which is another financial impact for the broader church. The work of fundraising by Mission Engagement and Support, and World Mission, was also lifted up as an additional potentially helpful conversation.

Michael Wilson thanked the Commission for their time and input. The Commission thanked Michael Wilson for the update and conversation.

Communication Consultant Update	Felipe Martínez shared an update on retaining a communications consultant. There has been additional work done to clarify the scope of work. Carson Brown was thanked for contributions to summaries from previous meetings; and Kathleen Henrion was thanked for contributions to this meeting. It was emphasized that the minutes serve as the official record, and this communication strategy focuses on a pastoral and informational approach to potentially affected agencies and individuals.
Summary of Key Unifying Principles	<p>Cristi Scott Ligon shared a summary of the key unifying principles from the earlier exercise with the post-its. The top item was clarity of purpose. The second item was a sense of shared ministry / collaboration / connectivity. The third item was working in a nimble and adaptable matter. Other items included transparency and being Christ-centered. It was noted that finances were not explicitly a top-ranked item, affirming a focus on mission.</p> <p>Felipe Martínez noted that key unifying principles are intended to be dynamic and flexible. The Finance Work Group expressed thanks for this exercise, to ensure the entire Commission has an appreciation for principles and priorities.</p>
Executive Session	Upon motion, second, and an opportunity for discussion, <u>the Unification Commission entered executive session</u> to address personnel and property matters. Staff and Guests were invited to participate in the executive session. [Recorder’s Note: the livestream was paused. Per the agenda, the Unification Commission will rise from Executive Session and recess for the evening. Friday is scheduled as a day for work groups, and will not be livestreamed. The livestream is anticipated to start again when the Commission reconvenes on Saturday, October 14.]

Friday, October 13, 2023

Work Group / Committee of the Whole [Recorder's Note: following the agenda, as adopted and published, the Unification Commission met Friday, October 13, 2023, in work groups, and as a work group of the whole. Following the adopted practice, work group meetings were not livestreamed.]

Saturday, October 14, 2023

Reconvening and Returning to Open Session Upon resumption of the livestream video broadcast, Cristi Scott Ligon called the meeting back to order in open session at 9:00 a.m. CT, and recognized Francis Lin for an opening prayer. Felipe Martínez announced the Unification Commission voted to rise from executive session on Thursday, October 12, 2023, and no further action was taken. For the record, Felipe Martínez stated Friday, October 13, 2023, was a day for work groups, and the Commission took no action.

Agency Leader Participation Felipe Martínez provided an addition to the Co-Moderators Report. Felipe Martínez and Cristi Scott Ligon shared the expectations that the Office of the General Assembly and Presbyterian Mission Agency leaders (respectively Bronwen Boswell, Acting Stated Clerk, and Diane Givens Moffett, President) were neither required nor expected to participate in the meetings of the Unification Commission, and reiterated that all are welcome to view the livestream or the archived recording.

Working Mission Statement for New Agency Upon recognition, Bill Teng offered the following motion to accept the Common Mission Work Group working Mission Statement. The rationale – based on the Gospel, gathering, governing, goodness, and generosity – was referenced. Without objection, the Unification Commission adopted the following Working Mission Statement:

The New Agency exists to resource mid councils and equip congregations to engage others in thriving, vital covenantal communities as disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Common Mission Work Group was thanked for their work.

Working Purpose Statement for New Governing Body Upon recognition, Deborah Avery offered the motion from the Governance Work Group on the purpose statement for the New Governance (“NewGov”) to inform the New Agency (“NewAg”). The motion was appropriately amended to serve as a “working” purpose statement. Without objection, the Unification Commission adopted the following Working Purpose Statement for Governance:

NewGov sets the vision for NewAg, providing the resources and wisdom to assess emerging needs, develop program priorities, evaluate agency effectiveness, and serve as a bridge between General Assembly directives and the NewAg.

The Governance Work Group was thanked for their work.

2024-2025 Budget Directions Upon recognition, Scott Lumsden offered a motion with four parts, to further guide the work of the Administrative Services Group (“ASG”) and the work of the Finance Work Group. It was discussed the reference to “executive leadership” was intentionally broad to invite the appropriate staff into the conversations. The Finance Work Group perfected their motion. Without objection, the Unification Commission directed:

1. The Administrative Services Group to develop a unified chart of accounts for Fiscal Year 2025 working in consultation with the Office of the General Assembly and Presbyterian Mission Agency executive leadership under the direction of the Finance Work Group.
2. ASG to develop plans for changing the organization’s fiscal year from the current calendar year (Jan-Dec) to one that better coordinates with General Assembly (i.e., year-end giving, standing rules, and fiscal policy).

3. The Finance Work Group to oversee the Fiscal Year 2024 budget review. The Unification Commission empowers its Finance Work Group to provide regular updates to the full Commission and bring any requests which may come from Executive Leadership for expenditures outside of the current Fiscal Year 2024 budget for Commission approval.
4. The executive leadership to continue to prioritize programmatic, operational, and administrative work that ties directly to unification during Fiscal Year 2024. This will require increased strategic planning, coordination, and executive level conversations about potential cost/program reduction in order to begin moving all areas of ministry (programmatic, operational, and administrative) into alignment as we move toward a unified budget in Fiscal Year 2025.

The Finance Work Group was thanked for their work.

Unifying
Communicati
ons
Functions

Upon recognition, Dave Davis explained that executive leadership had approached the Unification Commission with a proposal to unify the communications function of the various agencies. This motion was inspired by additional conversations with Felipe Martinez and Carson Brown. Executive leadership across agencies are preparing for communications around the 226th GA (2024), and the technology processes to support the website; unifying this work now would yield efficiency and clarity.

The motion was perfected to use the same generous reference to executive leadership. There was a discussion on how the Commission should act if executive leadership does not make progress; and, there was a firm belief among the commissioners the executive leadership would act, and the Finance Work Group and Co-Moderators would have a proposal should there be no action. After second and further discussion, the Unification Commission voted to:

support and give the greenlight to the request of the executive leadership to move ahead immediately in unifying the communication functions of the Presbyterian Mission Agency, the Office of the General Assembly, and the Administrative Services Group. The executive leadership will provide a report to the Unification Commission as soon as possible and no later than its November meeting on the communications staffing and supervision plan. Specifically, the executive leadership will report on the naming of the leader of the unified communications team and to which current executive that position will report. If no plan or decision is made, the Unification Commission is prepared to take action specific to a leadership and supervision plan.

Overall
Commission
Work and
Timeline

Cristi Scott Ligon noted the next meeting is scheduled for Sunday, November 12, 2023, online. Felipe Martínez offered to coordinate the balance of the post-its observations into a format to be shared with the Commission.

Each Work Group responded to Cristi Scott Ligon's inquiry on an update on their work and where they hope to be.

Governance shared their appreciation for the adoption of the purpose statement, and their focus is on the New Governing Body, and not yet on the New Agency, with a goal of the working structure in January 2024 (with an affirmation the timelines are aspirational).

Finance shared their focus on the budget, and continues their weekly work group meeting.

Consultations shared there are four conversations left, in addition to the Administrative Services Group; and, an overview of items learned to be shared with the Commission. The idea of this continued feedback loop was warmly received by the Commission.

Common Mission shared appreciation for adoption of the statement; and suggested members of Common Mission could be repurposed to other work groups.

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Felipe Martínez is scheduled to participate in the Funding Model Team meeting in-person in Louisville, Ky.

Items for the
Good of the
Body

It was noted that in-person meetings tend to finish ahead of schedule, and if in-person meetings could be scheduled for full days, it might make travel easier. It was also noted the Friday work groups were exceptionally productive, leading to being ahead of schedule today.

There was a discussion on a communications strategy. Felipe Martínez reminded the Commission that the minutes remain the formal communication, and communications between meetings from the Commission are pastoral in nature, with an initial focus on groups impacted by unification. The consultant conversation is continuing with Felipe Martínez, Cristi Scott Ligon, Dee Cooper, and Kris Thompson. To help commissioners stay unified in their comments on each meeting, the circulation of a summary of key actions might be helpful.

There was a discussion around when to meet in-person for 2024 (January and April 2024, are scheduled in-person). There was consensus that was a sufficient schedule for in-person meetings. The discussion included a focus for the monthly meetings on specific topics, beyond the current general agenda.

The 226th General Assembly (2024) was discussed (also “GA”). There is no expectation for the Unification Commission to be present at the 226th GA (2024). The GA schedule calls for virtual committees, and in-person plenary. There are limited times outside of plenary to gather. There will be virtual “town hall” spaces to prepare and educate General Assembly commissioners in late May and early June. The Unification Commission could decide at the January 2024 meeting to participate in “town halls”. The 226th GA (2024) will receive a report from the Unification Commission, and no action is anticipated being requested. There was a discussion about the appropriate path for reports from the Unification Commission to go through a GA committee, when the Unification Commission should be directly accountable to GA (and therefore not be mediated through a committee).

Regarding reassigning the members of the Common Mission Work Group, the co-moderators of the commission will reassign members.

Thanks were expressed to all gathered, including staff, and guests.

Closing
Prayer

Cristi Scott Ligon noted the Unification Commission would adjourn with a closing prayer with entertained a motion to adjourn. With a closing prayer from Dee Cooper, the meeting was adjourned at 10:00 a.m. CT.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Raymond Bonwell
Recorder

Finance Workgroup Report // October 2023

Unification Commission Meeting, St. Louis

Summary: The finance workgroup continues to meet weekly to review finances, to listen to executive and key staff members involved in financial and programmatic decision making, to develop a new budget process for FY 2025, to evaluate current financial processes and procedures, and to think through the financial operations of the General Assembly in a unified way.

The goal of our work (as we understand it) is to bring recommendations to the commission that unify the overall financial operations of OGA and PMA in a way that promotes the unity of the mission and ministry of the General Assembly (as outlined in the Book of Order).

Culture: One insight that has arisen in our work lately, that bears on our work as a commission, is how financial operations aren't just limited to financial accounting, but rather speak to the larger culture of the national church. Though this may seem like an obvious point, it should be stated for the record, that though we may be able to find some consensus on how financial operations are to be conducted in a new unified structure—even within the FY 2025 deadline—the work of unifying the cultures of these two significant areas of ministry (OGA and PMA) will require time, attention, buy-in, cultivation, and leadership—beyond even the scope of this commission—to fully realize. We also need to recognize that ASG, which did not exist as a separate ministry entity when this commission was originally recommended, also has its own culture that will need to be included in this ongoing effort. It is not clear to the finance workgroup how we as a commission can best promote the formation of a new unified culture among these three ministry areas.

Unifying Principles: Over the past 9 months, the finance workgroup has identified some emerging principles that guide us in our work toward unifying the financial operations, AND some related challenges in helping us get there. We lift these up for your reflection and consideration as we move forward with our charter.

Abundance: The PCUSA is blessed with more than sufficient funds to support the overall mission and ministry of the General Assembly — provide necessary services to the national church, and to create innovative programs and partnerships as needed.

Challenge #1: Restricted funds. A good amount of the income for the national church comes from restricted funds through the Foundation and many of these restricted funds, when allocated to a program area, seems to stay in that program area and thus are relied upon to maintain that program in the future.

Challenge #2: For Everything There is a Season. Even though we are a reformed church, that doesn't mean that change is easy. Though there have been some changes to programs (layoffs and consolidation) over the years — letting go of some of the old ways and old structures to make room for something new — (unification?) — is easier said than done. In other words, we, as a commission,

will have to wrestle not just with the funding of ministries, but with those ministries themselves to truly get at a unified GA.

Executive Leadership: We have gifted executive leadership who need our support AND need to help lead us toward a more unified national expression of the General Assembly. In most nonprofits, it's clear that executive leadership doesn't just help set vision, but also are empowered to lead the organization toward its goals.

Challenge #1: Multiplicity of Constituencies. As a church, we seem to struggle to find a healthy balance between the necessity of making space and listening deeply to a diversity of voices across the PCUSA, and empowering and trusting our elected leadership (including boards) to lead. Hard decisions that might bring about change – perhaps by winding down a particular ministry to make room for something new – are sometimes avoided in favor of adding new programming, thereby making funding new and existing ministries increasingly difficult going forward.

Challenge #2: Governance. We need to acknowledge that when it comes to OGA and PMA, we are likely out of compliance with our own polity and good nonprofit governance practices. The Book of Order clearly outlines that as a council of the church, the General Assembly can delegate its work to committees and commissions. OGA is a committee and functions as such, but PMA is still called a board and functions somewhat independently. This is a financial issue as much as it is a polity, mission, and governance issue as we need to have clearer financial board accountability going forward.

Shared Ministry: Unification will not work as a simple reorganization of current ministries; in order to be successful, unification needs to be a complete rethinking and reconfiguration of the work of the General Assembly – in all its forms. We will need to partner with executive leadership to better understand the various ministries and programs that are supported at a national level. Again, unification is not just about OGA and PMA, it's about all the ministries that are supported at the General Assembly level – as they're all related/intertwined/connected/dependent when looked at from a financial perspective.

Challenge: How do we organize ourselves within our workgroups/commission to learn more about the ministries and programs that are supported by the General Assembly? This will take time and effort to understand the history and complexities of these areas of ministry. This is not a purely financial review. What is the timeline/plan for this?