

PRESBYTERIAN MISSION AGENCY BOARD
September 21-23, 2017
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL WITNESS POLICY

ITEM H. 209
FOR INFORMATION

Advice and Counsel on Item H.001 (Governance Task Force Report) from the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP)

Summary Assessment: For six primary reasons, despite some improvements from past re-structure ideas, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy recommends that the current Governance Task Force recommendations not be approved. To our reading, the Governance Report Recommendations:

1. shrink not only the size of the Board but also significantly diminish its relation to the General Assembly and accountability for its actions (hardly mentioned in the text), reducing the PMA's capacity to strengthen the identity and purpose of the church;
2. leave unclear the relation between the work of existing agency ministries and the Board structures (naming incomplete lists of programs);
3. appear to create significant administrative duplication and continued imbalance toward management/overhead, by creating a Program Committee on Resource Allocation and Stewardship that oversees the other Program Committees and their strategies, as well as Administrative Committees on Property/Legal and Audit, and the Executive Committee;
4. continue Ministerial Teams that have arbitrary task definitions and unclear relations with particular PMA programs, confuse staff and voting member roles, and have no defined relations with Advocacy and Advisory Committees, which are tasked by the Design for Mission with addressing emerging issues in relation to Confessional and GA policy bases;
5. propose "Community Conversations" that, while flexible, suggest a non-strategic internal focus on members' interests rather than interaction with leadership of the church or convening significant conversations to contribute to church-wide deliberation and General Assembly action; and
6. continue the unfortunate shift from a deliberative and representative council of the church to a non-profit board, with board membership chosen not in relation to church categories but "professional experience," implicitly leaving the development of vision, based on diverse experience as well as commitment to the church, a secondary matter.

Contrast: The prior structure, even with its weaknesses, gave PMA ministries oversight tied to committees with clear purposes and gave members connections to a wide selection of related groups through dual membership. ACSWP can support some reduction in the size of the body, the 4 year terms, and increased frequency of meeting. We would also support increased emphasis in the nominating process for dedication to and experience in church leadership, including in the mid-councils, along with vocational diversity. The capacity to work with and assess the work of staff professionals is important, which could entail some of the re-balancing the Governance TF is seeking, but the PMAB should be seen not as joining with central management but in helping the agency serve the church as a whole. (We continue to believe that the Stated Clerk should be

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an ex officio member of the Executive Committee, as in the past, to strengthen coordination.)

Relation to Assignment:

The Governance Task Force has sought to respond to both the internal understandings of Board Members and to the strong critique of the Review Committee report to the 2016 General Assembly. That Review Committee did see the Board as too large, but organizational culture was also a major concern. The Board's time was often resourced in ways that were perceived not as engaging or deliberative, and sometimes the work of ministries was unclear. ACSWP's own communications with the Governance Task Force stressed the need for effective deliberation and having a more substantial relation with the General Assembly in terms of vision and ownership and relationship of people to programs. We join the Governance Task Force in wanting issues to be well-researched in "developing well-considered proposals for board actions," but do not see how mission, witness, and policy factors will be considered by the proposed Program Committees in setting the criteria for determining "effectiveness"—something that is to be "evaluated each year." This is an area where the contribution of an advisory body of persons with advanced degrees and deep experience in congregations might be helpful and cost-effective. ACSWP follows the 1993 directives for making a holistic social witness and integrates its work within the "Reformed and reforming" framework that defines what makes for a *Presbyterian* Mission Agency, complementing the ministries of other parts of the church. ACSWP develops policy studies mainly in response to overtures from presbyteries and produces resources for congregations and those engaged in social witness, both locally and with the Office of Public Witness. We believe that any governance proposal should refer to the primary assignments of the PMA as a whole, such as:

From the current *Book of Order*:

"...The General Assembly has the responsibility and power to. . . (c) nurture the covenant community of disciples. This responsibility shall include...warning and bearing witness against errors in doctrine or immorality in the church and in the world...providing encouragement, guidance, and resources... in the areas of mission, prophetic witness...discerning and presenting with the guidance of the Holy Spirit matters of truth and vision that may inspire, challenge, and educate both church and world...." (The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part II, Form of Government, 3.0501c).

From the assignment from the 1983 Articles of Agreement at Reunion:

"The General Assembly Council shall ensure the continuance of an organized approach in the areas of world mission, evangelism, education, church renewal, church extension and social-economic justice within the context of the unity of Christ's Church throughout the world... The General Assembly Council shall take particular care to design agencies and commit major resources, both human and financial, to put into action...ministries that serve the purpose of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to confront men and women, structures and principalities, with the claims of Jesus Christ." (Articles of Agreement, Article 5.5).

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Role of ACSWP itself: Note first our concern for the adequacy and workability of the proposal overall. The Agency's weakening relationship to the General Assembly is a primary concern and ACSWP has been designed to be a bridge between the two. ACSWP provides a key involvement of the PMAB in the policy formation of the General Assembly. The three dual members made for an integral relationship where the PMAB was always at the table when new proposals were being developed or commented upon. (Recent Research Services data shows 70% of the commissioners at the past two GA's using and appreciating the Committee's guidance.) While we do value the Governance, TF's continuing the "corresponding member" role for the chair (or co-chair) of ACSWP that is envisioned in the proposal, it becomes an external rather than integral relation to the Board, with no voting members in common.

ACSWP has different emphases than the Advocacy Committees, which are called to monitor proportionately more while our task has been to develop studies on a wider range of subjects, using professional member expertise on volunteer teams. The Advocacy Committees represent enduring struggles of the church to live out the declaration of equality in Galatians 3:28, and their voices continue to be needed, especially if the Board is reduced in size. We appreciate that the Governance TF sees that. Yet as in our case, a broader horizon and accompanying depth of vision are lost when current members are rendered outside input for a potentially more insular group. We believe that the proposed Governance plan fails to make use of resources and capacities that could strengthen the Board's own deliberations and its participation in the deliberations of the Assembly. In recommending disapproval at this time of the Governance proposal, it is our intent that a stronger deliberative board produce better leadership, resources for congregations, and opportunities for mission and witness for the church.