

# Social Witness at the 220<sup>th</sup> General Assembly: Comprehensive Digest

*This digest is a compilation of the social witness-related items that came before the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) 2012 General Assembly. For each piece of business, the digest summarizes the Assembly action, the content of each proposal and its amendments, and (in some cases) the key points made in the Advice and Counsel (A&C). Such A&C memoranda are one of the stipulated methods by which advisory and advocacy committees resource commissioners. A&Cs from the [Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy](#) (which is responsible for the process of developing and recommending social witness policy to the General Assembly) provide relevant policy background, context, and possible consequences of Assembly action. They thus remain a handy reference for understanding Assembly action.*

*For the full text of each piece of business and for information on the vote tallies and committee recommendations, please refer to the links provided along with each item.*

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## **Church Growth**

Item 16-07: Report of the Special Committee on the Nature of the Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century  
(<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3915&promoid=224>)

**Approved with amendment by the Assembly.** This report made recommendations in ten areas to strengthen the church to face changing cultural, financial, and institutional contexts, including measures for new ministries (particularly among new immigrant communities and communities of color); support of underrepresented leadership; the supportive closing of church buildings, distributing the assets for new church development; bi-vocational ministry; seminary curriculum development; resource translations into Spanish, Korean, and other needed languages; articulating a Reformed understanding of compensation; the establishment of maximum compensation levels, which when exceeded, would match dollar for dollar a fund subsidizing the salaries and benefits of teaching elders compensated below the minimum standard; understanding privilege; and living out faith publicly. The Assembly amended language that might seem to alienate existing ministries and majorities. While affirming bi-vocational ministry, the Assembly eliminated the mandate for a taskforce to study and make recommendations on the subject. The Assembly replaced the call to “offer all” PC(USA) communications and resources in Korean, Spanish, and other languages, with the less clear injunction to “provide basic accessibility of essential” information.

ACSWP Advice and Counsel recognized the linkage between equitable compensation and mission strategy for smaller congregations. Readers interested in compensation levels may find the salaries of all General Assembly, synod, and presbytery staff listed in the Manual of the General Assembly, Part II, as a form of public accountability.

## Confessions of the Church

Item 18-01: On Amending The Book of Confessions to Include the Confession of Belhar  
(<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3805>)

**Approved with amendment by the Assembly.** This overture asked the Assembly to begin the process of amending *The Book of Confessions* to include the Confession of Belhar, as adopted by the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church. Belhar served a prophetic and reforming role during the theological struggle against apartheid in South Africa, a role modeled on the Barmen Declaration of 1930s Germany. The amendment allotted funds to the special committee, charged with studying the Confession, as a budget for education across the church.

The ACSWP Advice and Counsel related consideration of Belhar to work on the Accra Document ([http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/side.jsp?news\\_id=1157&navi=45](http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/side.jsp?news_id=1157&navi=45)) and other declarations of conscience, including Kairos Palestine (<http://www.pcusa.org/resource/kairos-palestine-document-and-study-guide/>).

## **Criminal Justice**

Item 11-06: For-Profit Prisons (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4059>)

**Approved with amendment by the Assembly.** This item directs the Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) to compile information on the corporate practices of publically traded corporations that operate for-profit prisons. The amendment eliminates the commitment not to invest in the future, and instead, indicates that MRTI's recommendations may include the proscription of investment (whereas tobacco, alcohol, and gambling are already proscribed). That same amendment also encourages congregational education.

Item 11-22: Commissioners' Resolution on Prolonged Solitary Confinement in U.S. Prisons (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4389>)

**Approved with amendment by the Assembly.** This item called for the limiting of the number of prisoners in, and the duration of, solitary confinement, recommending alternatives that address mental health needs and offer skill-building opportunities. It asked the PC(USA) to join other faith leaders in urging the President of the U.S. to sign and the Senate to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture. The amendment specified the work of PHEWA's new Presbyterian Criminal Justice Network.

## Denominational Structure & Polity

Item 04-01: Biennial Assemblies Report (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3911&promoid=222>)

**Approved by the General Assembly with amendment and disapproval of Recommendation 5 calling for the creation of young adult commissioners with voting power. The Assembly amended Recommendation 3 (intended to limit the number of overtures and commissioners' resolutions), so that concurrence is required only from one other presbytery or commissioner.**

ACSWP Advice and Counsel said of Recommendation 3 that “concern for the prophetic imagination makes the ability of a single presbytery to overture the whole assembly seem an important virtue of our democratic system. Requiring one or two concurrences would seem sufficient to ensure broader importance while encouraging the church’s creativity... [Otherwise] this could result in more ‘politicking’ and ‘lobbying’ by special interest groups... A further concern is diversity; seeking concurrence has the danger of ‘diluting’ distinctive concerns of presbyteries facing particular issues.”

Item 05-12: Mid-Council Report to the Assembly (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3913&promoid=223>)

**The Assembly referred Recommendations 1-4 (elimination of synods, enhancement of the role of presbyteries) to a task force for further discussion and refinement; approved Recommendations 5, 7, and 8 (creation of task forces, including a National Racial Ethnic Ministries Task Force); disapproved Recommendation 6 (creation of non-geographic presbyteries).**

The ACSWP Advice and Counsel stated, “the recommendation of non-geographic presbyteries threatens to balkanize the church into covenants of the like-minded. In the current climate, while claiming to want more ‘trust’ and even ‘mutual submission’, this proposal seems likely to weaken connectionalism and exacerbate division further.” Furthermore, ACSWP was “particularly concerned with the nature of the missional church that is to be recreated in the absence of significant attention to economic constraints and any corporate social witness or education... [through which] the church had a public role in civil rights, caring for the earth, resisting wars, advancing women, and addressing a host of human needs, while producing liturgies, resources, and programs to present the Gospel to people at all stages of the life cycle.”

## **Diversity & Representation**

Items 06-08, 06-13, and 06-17: Amending *Book of Order* F-1.0403 “United In Diversity” and G-2.0401 “Election of Ruling Elders and Deacons” (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3819>)

**Disapproved by the Assembly.** These items proposed the elimination of specific categories of human condition and discrimination; replacing the guarantee of full participation and representation with the more innocuous wording, “shall strive to ensure” or “commits”; and replaced God’s union of “all persons” through baptism with the un-Reformed language of “all believers” and the removal of the wording “through baptism”.

## Economic Justice

Item 11-01: On Economic Justice in These Troubled Times (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3827>)

**Approved with amendment by the Assembly.** This item condemned personal and corporate greed as sin; expressed concern for those affected by the troubled economy; and overtured for advocacy for those who have lost homes, jobs, health insurance benefits, and basic community services. It also requested advocacy for policies that meet human needs and support the public good. Amendments removed reference to Occupy Wall Street and added wording about upholding the church's role in supporting legislation, ballot initiatives, constitutional amendments, and other means to prevent unlimited money from corporations, unions, and individuals, while distinguishing between corporations and persons.

Item 11-02: On Calling for an End to Poverty Zone Development and for the Advocacy of Fair Development (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3835>)

**Approved with amendment by the Assembly.** This overture called for more equitable treatment of low-wage service workers in malls, tourist destinations, and re-development areas. It also requested that the church foster a national public policy dialogue on ways to ensure that public resources are used to benefit the public good instead of private development interests.

Item 11-09: World of Hurt, Word of Life: Renewing God's Communion in the Work of Economic Restoration (from ACSWP) (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3985&promoid=242>)

**Approved by the Assembly.** This recommendation, from the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, proposed a framework of principles and actions for faithful response to the economic crisis, while offering a supporting analysis documenting the economic dangers to jobs, families, neighbors, and long-term sustainability. This document probes the moral significance of these challenges based on the church's biblical and Reformed heritage.

[Download](#) the finished document (in PDF) as approved by the General Assembly. See the ACSWP *Salt & Light* summary (<http://www.pcusa.org/resource/salt-and-light-august-2012/>), including recommendations for a tax reform study.

Item 11-20: A Statement on the Housing and the Mortgage Crisis (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4137>)

**Referred by the Assembly to Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) to report back to the 221<sup>st</sup> General Assembly (2014).** This item overtured all PC(USA) councils and entities to review their financial ties to large banks and Wall Street institutions to determine whether any of them operate against the common good or the socially responsible investment policies of the General Assembly—and if so, to move their monies into local banks, savings and loans, and credit unions. It also called on Congress to initiate an independent investigation of large banks and practices that put corporate profit ahead of community and societal welfare.

## Environmental Justice

Item 09-08: Commissioners' Resolution on a Green Church Ecumenical Network (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4407>)

**Approved by the Assembly.** This resolution requests the General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations to explore the creation of a network of "Green Churches" seriously concerned with global climate change and its danger to future generations, building upon the Environmental Justice Working Group of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and building also on college and university campus ministries. The Committee is also tasked to explore the appeal of such names as "Green Church" for young people in U.S. culture, while also examining the relations of the NCC and CWS environmental ministries subsequent to administrative separation of the two groups.

This effort fits well with current PC(USA) policy as stated in *The Power to Change: U.S. Energy Policy and Global Warming* (<http://www.pcusa.org/resource/power-change-us-energy-policy-global-warming/>). The PC(USA) Environmental Ministries program has established a network of Earth Care congregations and the creation of this proposed network will complement existing work.

Item 11-03: On Endorsing "A Fifty Year Farm Bill" (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3845>)

**Approved with amendment by the Assembly.** Recalling the church's longstanding and regularly reiterated commitment to environmental protection, this overture sought the endorsement of a fifty-year program, proposed by the Land Institute, to improve progressively the sustainability of American agriculture and food supply. The Assembly added a new recommendation to orient advocacy and programs by principles such as sustainability, resilience, minimized carbon emissions, strong local food economies, security of food supply, ethical treatment of animals, and the fair and dignified treatment of laborers.

11-07: On Support of the Environmental Protection Agency (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4061>)

**Approved with amendment by the Assembly.** Among other things, the amendment urges Congress to restore the EPA's full oversight authority under the Clean Water and Safe Drinking Water Acts (which are currently restricted), and directs the Office of Environmental Ministries to produce or identify resources regarding extraction of natural gas (i.e. fracking).



## **Family Issues & Children's Welfare**

Item 11-05: Ending the Practice of Corporal Punishment in Homes, Schools, and Child Care Facilities (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3893>)

**Approved with amendment by the Assembly.** The Assembly added a recommendation to provide a limited bibliography of resources.

## Health Issues

Item 21-01: On Instructing MRTI to Study and Report Corporate Practices of Health Insurance Companies and Possible Divestment (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3735>)

**The Assembly approved an alternate resolution.** This overture recommended Mission Responsibility Through Investment investigate the corporate practices of the health insurance companies Cigna, Aetna, Humana, WellPoint, and United Health Care. The alternate resolution, approved by the Assembly, simply adds more specificity to the MRTI process and outcomes, while removing the names of the five companies identified in the original overture. The resolution specifies the information sought: state and federal lobbying expenditures and political/campaign contributions; government subsidies and profit margins related to provisions of the healthcare reform legislation; aggregate data on increases in premiums and deductibles over the past ten years; categories and percentages of claims denied; and percentages of profits used in compensation to top executives in comparison with return to shareholders.” The alternate resolution still names divestment as a possible outcome. It also names continued support for cost-effective health coverage for all through the single payer (or expanded Medicare) model.

Item 21-02: On Instructing the General Assembly to Take Action to Implement the PC(USA)’s Policy on Inclusion of People with Disabilities (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3771>)

**Approved with amendment by the Assembly.** This item called for the full implementation of *Living into the Body of Christ: Towards Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities*, approved by the 217<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in 2006. This item affirmed that persons with disabilities are effectively distinct cultures within the rich multicultural makeup of the church; proposed the creation of a working group to develop a plan for training all staff and commissioners in disability awareness and inclusion; directed the Presbyterian Mission Agency to fund the disability consultants; instructed Presbyterians to use “people first” language; and instructed the church to include people with disabilities in planning events and committee meetings, and to include people with disabilities in the church-wide worship leadership. The amendment eliminated the instruction to fund the disability consultants, and instead, identified designated funding for the working group to be used as they see fit.

Item 21-04: Commissioners’ Resolution on Compassionate Treatment of Veterans Suffering from PTSD, TBI, and/or Other Mental Afflictions Rising from Military Service (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4385>)

**Approved with amendment by the Assembly.** This resolution urges presbyteries to offer training to ministries and churches to recognize and intervene pastorally in instances of veteran military-related Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS) / Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). It also urges that this support be provided additionally to family members. It then asks the PC(USA) to advocate for rights for veterans along the categories of judicial/legal structures, psychiatric/mental health structures, and retraining/employment transitional structures.

Item 21-05: Commissioners’ Resolution on Funding for Presbyterian AIDS Network for AIDS Competency (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4387>)

**Approved with amendment by the Assembly.** This resolution commended both Johnson C. Smith Seminary for its prophetic witness in creating the “Certification of AIDS Competent Church and Church Leaders” program, and the Presbyterian AIDS Network. The

original resolution called for \$25,000 to support the development and expansion of the certification program. The amendment eliminated that allocation of funds and replaced it with the creation of an Extra Commitment Opportunity. The certification program builds on 2010 report, "[Becoming an HIV and AIDS Competent Church.](#)"

## Immigration

Item 12-01: Rescinding the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2010) Call to Stand with Immigrant Presbyterians (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3727>)

**Disapproved by the Assembly.** This overture specifically called for a rescinding of the previous GA commitment to selective patronage, namely not to hold any national meetings in Arizona and states with immigration legislation similar to SB1070/HB2162. The overture claimed that this selective patronage brought about harm, even to the populations the supporters of the strategy seek to help, and to the Arizona Presbyterians who feel abandoned in their own work from within the state to ameliorate conditions for immigrants.

The ACSWP Advice and Counsel noted that the overture “does not stipulate what the harmful effects have been... nor is there any taking account of possible positive results of the policy or its impact on the mission and witness of the PC(USA). Neither did this overture address other elements of advocacy for immigrant rights.” The A&C goes on to explain that “the primary purpose of the assembly’s action was to protect Hispanic Presbyterians visiting the state from racial profiling.” Moreover, “the influence of this and other decisions is estimated to have cost the state approximately \$140 million. It is further said to have prompted business leaders to join with others addressing punitive impacts of the law on citizens and immigrants in Arizona. Thus significant progress appears to be underway in Arizona, effectively modifying the enforcement of SB1070 legislation if not rescinding it.”

Items 12-02 and 12-03: The Plight of Immigrant People (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3881>)

**Approved with amendment by the Assembly.** These items call for the development of relationships with immigrant peoples in our communities; support of pastors and congregations impacted by immigration crisis; the financial support of the education of immigrant people; and a deepening of cross-cultural learning. They also recommend advocacy for legislative reform, including the DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors), legal assistance to immigrants, workplace rights, and the establishment of minimum standards of care for detainees (including legal representation).

Items 12-04 and 12-06: Comprehensive Immigration Reform (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3903>)

**Approved with amendment by the Assembly.** This item, with amendment, urges congregations to practical biblical hospitality to the stranger. Its identified elements of comprehensive immigration reform include: avoiding separation of families; providing a reasonable and inclusive path for undocumented migrants presently living in the U.S. eventually to gain citizenship; requiring humane enforcement procedures; eliminating lengthy detention of migrants, strengthening due process protections at every stage of the system, and establishing and enforcing minimum standards of care; and enforcing the right of workers to fair wages, to organize, and to seek redress. The overture also calls for the community and worship formation alongside and with immigrant peoples. The overture calls on Congress to pass immediately legislation comparable to the DREAM Act providing a pathway to citizenship for eligible students; to enact clear, enforceable detention reforms; to draw attention to the human rights crisis along the border region between Mexico and the

U.S. Finally, it directs ACSWP to investigate how free trade agreements are affecting immigration.

Item 12-05: On the Plight of Indonesian Christian Immigrants and the Passage of the Indonesian Refugee Protection Act (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4045>)

**Approved with amendment by the Assembly.** This overture requests advocacy for Indonesian Christian immigrants who fled their home country due to severe persecution some years ago and failed to apply for asylum within the one-year deadline because of lack of information or misjudgment. They now face deportation. The proposed IFRP Act asks, not for automatic asylum, but for a day in court to make a case for asylum. The amended version extends the call for protection to all Indonesian immigrant refugees, not just Christians.

Item 12-07: Churches in Relationship with Immigrant Communities (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4057>)

**Approved with amendment by the Assembly.** This overture calls upon the PC(USA) to explore what it means to be church together with immigrant brothers and sisters through shared worship, development of liturgical resources, development of spiritual disciplines, advocacy, deepening relationships, and development of best practices. For instance, it calls for quarterly worship services centered on immigrant voices and experiences, and a move away (in churches hosting immigrant fellowships) from the “landlord/tenant” model to the model of a spiritual covenant.

Item 12-10: Commissioners’ Resolution Regarding Safe Communities for Everyone (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4383>)

**Approved with amendment by the Assembly.** This resolution requests that the appropriate PC(USA) offices “address the civil liberties, racial profiling, security, and due process concerns related to the arrest and detention of immigrants through the Secure Communities program.” It also calls for the termination of that program and encourages participation in amicus curiae (friends of court) briefs in cases seeking to ameliorate or end S-Comm or other practices contrary to PC(USA) policies on immigration.

## International Issues & Human Rights

Item 14-01: On Supporting the United Nations (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3829>)

**Approved with amendment by the Assembly.** Affirming the church's historic support of the United Nations as an instrument of peacemaking and of guaranteeing human and legal rights, this item encourages Presbyterians to engage with the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations. It urges seminaries, colleges, universities, and campus ministries to provide faculty and students the opportunity to learn about the purposes and mission of the UN. It encourages the U.S. government to pursue multilateral diplomacy over unilateral force; to meet its financial obligations to the UN; to overturn laws that mandate an automatic cut-off of U.S. support to UN agencies that allow Palestine as a member; and to ratify major international treaties still pending, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Item 14-02: Support for the People of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4051>)

**Approved with amendment by the Assembly.** This overture addresses the sources of political instability, human rights abuses, and truncated development in the DRC. It offers recommendations to review election processes in the DRC and institute measures to reduce violence and criminal corruption in mineral mining. It also proposes expanded education, support for its efforts as a democracy, and the use of the DRC's resources for the benefit of its own people. The amendment asserts the important role of Congolese women and children in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all decision-making.

The ACSWP Advice and Counsel noted that Congo's per capita income of \$199 makes it one of the poorest countries in the world. A long-term climate of violence has produced nearly six million deaths since 1998 and displaced more than 300,000 persons. The DRC is ranked in the bottom 10 percent of the world's countries on the 2011 Index of Perceived Corruption.

Item 14-03: Movements for Democratic Change in the Arab World (from ACSWP) (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3987&promoid=243>)

**Approved by the Assembly.** In this item, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy responds to the wave of democratic changes in the Arab world begun in 2011. It affirms the courageous witness of millions of Tunisian, Egyptians, Libyans, Syrians, Yemenis, Bahrainis, Palestinians and others; the continued differentiation between the church's mission and the work of the U.S. military and other governmental agencies; opposition to U.S. policies that support dictatorships, repress populations, and enable discrimination; the significant role of women in movements for democratic change; objection to the United States' refusal to accept the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court; and the need for extensive public debate and greater transparency on decisions to use military force. Based on those affirmations, the item recommends that Presbyterians consider the justice implications of travel; that we examine what this awakening may mean for the United States; and that the appropriate ministries advocate on issues such as the reduction of influence of private contractors on military policy and operation and the development of public guidelines on the use of drone aircraft in targeted killings. ACSWP invites Presbyterians to share their responses to this resolution and other reflections.

Item 14-04: Human Rights Update (from ACSWP) (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3989&promoid=244>)

**Approved as amended by the Assembly.** Through this report, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy recommends attention to trends and developments in human rights, particularly in the areas of women’s reproductive health care, workers’ rights, and domestic civil liberties. This item requested that Human Rights Day (Dec. 10) be included in the PC(USA) program calendar, liturgical resources, web-postings, and public witness activities. These updates are available in the table of contents of this issue of *Unbound*. The Assembly amendment instructs ACSWP “to include forced abortions, gender and disability selection based abortions, and infanticide within its next Human Rights Update study.”

[Download](#) the finished document (a PDF) as approved by the Assembly.

## Israel & Palestine

Item 15-01: On Recognizing that Israel's Law and Practices Constitute Apartheid Against Palestinian People (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3769>)

**Disapproved by the Assembly.** Based on the success of the anti-apartheid movement regarding South Africa, this overture sought peaceful reconciliation for the people of Israel and Palestine through open acknowledgment of the gravity of the human rights violations and the racial/ethnic separation. This overture pointed to: PC(USA) statements acknowledging Israeli human rights violations; PC(USA) policies and statements on the occupation of the West Bank; and the UN and World Court definition of apartheid.

ACSWP Advice and Counsel had recommended this item be replaced with an alternate resolution, which identified the State of Israel's laws and policies as a form of apartheid or ethnic separation systematically favoring one ethnic and religious group over another; directed the Middle East Staff Team to examine the legal ramification if the United Nations were to deem these laws and policies apartheid; and provided for the education of the church. The counsel, however, also acknowledged the differences between South African practice and that of Israel (though international legal definition indicates that "similar" to South African practice is enough), and noted that the formal use of the word, apartheid, would not materially change the policies of the church. Divestment, in particular, does not require a determination of apartheid.

Item 15-02: On Boycotting Ahava Dead Sea Laboratories and Hadiklaim (an Israeli Date Growers Cooperative) (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3775>)

**Approved with amendment by the Assembly.** This item overtured the Assembly to condemn the production and sale of Israeli products that come from the Occupied Palestinian Territories, specifically Ahava and Hadiklaim (often marketed as King Solomon Dates and Jordan River). The amendment deleted the condemnation and instead, called "upon all nations to prohibit the import of products made by enterprises in Israeli settlements on Palestinian land." The amendment also extended the boycott beyond Ahava and Hadiklaim to include "all Israeli products coming from the occupied Palestinian Territories." According to the amendment, the boycott will end when "significant progress toward Palestinian rights and independence can be reported" to the Assembly.

The ACSWP Advice and Counsel recommended the clarification of the purpose and duration of the boycott (the extension of the boycott to include all similar products was recommended by the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns and by ACSWP's rationale). ACSWP noted PC(USA) boycott policy criteria: consistency with church policy, lack of other alternative means of influence, timeliness, effectiveness, impact on other aspects of our mission, and provision for review. ACSWP stated that it finds that these criteria are generally met by the proposed boycott, as such nonviolent economic pressure is called for by both Palestinian civil society and broad ecumenical and evangelical groups of Palestinian Christians.

Items 15-03, 15-08, and 15-11: Approving Recommendations on Selective Divestment Made by MRTI (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4065>)

**Answered with an alternative resolution** (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4021>). The first two items (15-03 and 15-08) recommend



approval of the report from Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) (15-11), which recommended PC(USA) divestment from “companies profiting from non-peaceful pursuits in Israel-Palestine,” namely Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard, and Motorola Solutions. MRTI and the former General Assembly Mission Council (now the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board) recommended divestment as a final step after a lengthy and comprehensive process of engagement, which, in the case of these three companies, produced no substantive change and, in their judgment, was not likely to do so in the future. The alternate resolution, approved by the Assembly and adapted from Item 15-10, calls on the PC(USA) to “pursue a positive and creative course of action” partnering Jews, Christians, and Muslims, and to “devise a plan of active investment in projects that will support” such collaboration and “help in the development of a viable infrastructure for a future Palestinian state.” Moreover, it calls for greater engagement around “issues of job creation and economic development” in the West Bank. This alternate resolution essentially replaced the divestment recommendations from MRTI with positive investment, though it proposed no specific strategy or plans for implementation of that investment.

ACSWP’s A&C observed that divestment, in this case, would have been consistent with the theology and policy of the PC(USA); would have been an act of investment responsibility reflecting the key moral criteria of integrity, effectiveness, and solidarity; and would have supported other witness to the key problem of the occupation and the failure of political, diplomatic, and violent measures to affect the situation.

Items 15-05, 15-07, and 15-10: On Rejecting the Use of Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction Policies, and Instead Pursuing Creative Actions for Peace (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4053> and <https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4145>)

**Answered with action on another resolution:** 15-11 (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4021>). The first two items would specifically forbid the church to engage in divestment in pursuit of justice for Palestine and restrict the church’s peacemaking efforts to a set of actions focused largely on dialogue with the U.S. Jewish community and the Israeli government. Item 15-10 requests engagement, education, and “active investment” in projects that will provide infrastructure, jobs, and development in the West Bank. While the Assembly did not adopt language precluding the possibility of divestment in the future, it did, through its alternate resolution, accept the basic proposal of these items to pursue positive investment rather than divestment.

The ACSWP Advice and Counsel maintained that “words-only” and positive investment approaches have failed to achieve peace and justice for Israel and Palestine. The items were seen to prevent the full exercise of corporate responsibility by the church itself, while attempting equating the negotiating position of a long-subjugated people with that of a powerful and prosperous nuclear-armed state. In response specifically to 15-10: “the hope of positive investment has been investigated over the years, but founders on the fact that capital is not the chief Palestinian need.” While positive investment could be pursued despite the disincentives of occupation, it would be ineffective in removing those restrictions without being paired with divestment, as is requested by Palestinian Christian partners.

Item 15-09: On Human Rights and Religious Freedom of Arab Christians and Other Palestinian Citizens (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4081>)

**Disapproved by the Assembly.** This item urged the Israeli government to end any and all religious discriminatory practices, and to enforce its own legal obligation to protect Christian holy sites throughout Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza (while the U.S. Department has reported on the failure of Israel to do so).

The A&C notes that the decline of the Christian population in occupied Palestine is due to a number of factors, one of which is the lack of equal rights and religious freedom.

## Marriage Equality

Items 07-17 and 07-18: Encouraging Continued Dialogue and Mutual Forbearance (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4063>)

**Approved with amendment by the Assembly.** These items, as amended, acknowledge the differences that exist among Christians regarding committed, same-gender relationships; states that the PC(USA) does not have one scriptural interpretation on this matter; and call upon the church to continue in respectful dialogue.

Items 13-01, 13-04, 13-06, and 13-11: Revising Definition of Marriage for the Purpose of Marriage Equality (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3739>)

**Answered with action on another resolution:** 13-NB (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4473>). These items overtured the Assembly to amend W-4.9000 to redefine Christian marriage to include covenants between persons of the same gender, by replacing “a man and a woman” with “two people”. In substance, these items went unanswered – no decision was made either way. Instead, all items in Committee 13 on Civil Union and Marriage Issues were answered by the Assembly’s decision to move the PC(USA) “into a season of serious study and discernment concerning its meaning of Christian marriage” for the next two years—in the interests of preserving the “peace, unity, and purity of the church.”

ACSWP Advice and Counsel pointed to the PC(USA)’s historic commitment to advocating equality under the law, to pastoral care and welcome for all people including same-gender couples and LGBT individuals, and to an understanding of marriage and family as shaped by historical and cultural developments (and as an evolving institution in the biblical witness). The church has offered its blessing to same-gender unions and committed itself to the wellbeing of children in same-gender unions as it has to all children. It has envisioned a church and society that welcomes and nurtures all and that does not value some more highly than others based on sexual orientation or any other qualification. But these policies, such as *Transforming Families* (<http://www.pcusa.org/resource/transforming-families/>), have not included same-gender couples in the church’s understanding of marriage, meaning these items propose a new policy. Thus, the question remains whether the church’s commitment to equality of civil rights for same-gender persons requires the church itself to receive such relationships into its body on an equal basis.

Items 13-02, 13-03, 13-05, 13-08, 13-09, 13-10, and 13-14: On Issuing an Authoritative Interpretation of W-4.900 to Ensure Pastoral Discretion (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3741>)

**Answered with action on another resolution:** 13-NB (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4473>). These items overtured the Assembly to provide an authoritative interpretation permitting clergy and commissioned ruling elders to officiate at services of Christian marriage for same-gender persons in those states where church marriages are legal. Since these proposed, not a change to, but an interpretation of, the *Book of Order*, this ruling would not have required ratification by the presbyteries. These items would not have changed the definition of marriage, but would have yielded pastoral discretion to teaching elders and to sessions, which could elect to perform or not perform marriages. In substance, these items went unanswered – no decision was made either way. Instead, all items in Committee 13 on Civil Union and Marriage Issues were answered by

the Assembly’s decision to move the PC(USA) “into a season of serious study and discernment concerning its meaning of Christian marriage” for the next two years—in the interests of preserving the “peace, unity, and purity of the church.”

ACSWP Advice and Counsel noted that PC(USA) policies have consistently called for equal civil rights for LGBT persons. The church has supported civil unions as one means of achieving this equality, and has blessed these unions in a service of worship. However, it has previously maintained a distinction between marriage that conferred a new status on the couple and the blessing of a civil union that existed prior to the blessing. Because, in fact, civil unions have not guaranteed same-gender couples equal civil rights, the quest for civil marriage continues. Eight states and the District of Columbia have legalized same-gender marriage, bringing church members in same-gender, committed relationships to their pastors for the same gift of marriage that the church has said “God [gives] to all humankind.” These overtures supported the church’s commitment to civil equality and nondiscrimination. They also recognize the complementarity that has long existed in the Reformed Tradition between the role of the state in legalizing marriage and the role of clergy who pronounce a couple married and sign their state license. None of these items would have compelled pastors to officiate, and none would have applied to states that have not legalized same-gender marriage.

Items 13-07, 13-12, and 13-13: Affirming the Definition of Marriage as Between a Man and a Woman (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3823>)

**Answered with action on another resolution:** 13-NB (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4473>). These items overtured the Assembly to affirm the church’s definition of marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman. Items 13-07 and 13-12 sought an authoritative interpretation of W-4.9001; Item 13-13 proposed amending W-4.9001 and stipulated that any changes to that section would require a super-majority vote by presbyteries. In substance, these items went unanswered – no decision was made either way. Instead, all items in Committee 13 on Civil Union and Marriage Issues were answered by the Assembly’s decision to move the PC(USA) “into a season of serious study and discernment concerning its meaning of Christian marriage” for the next two years—in the interests of preserving the “peace, unity, and purity of the church.”

ACSWP Advice and Counsel noted that W-4.9000 already and clearly defines marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman. Additionally, Item 13-13 would have subjected one part of the *Book of Order* to a standard not required by other parts. In fact, it would have elevated this issue to the same two-thirds majority required for adopting new confessions of the church. Such a change would have affected our historical understanding of majority rule.

## **Mission Coordination**

Items 10-05, 10-06, 10-14, and 10-19: Special Offerings (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3963>)

**The Assembly answered items 10-05 (on maintaining the integrity of the One Great Hour of Sharing), 10-06 (on retaining the Peacemaking Offering as an independent offering), and 10-19 (on restoring the objectives of One Great Hour of Sharing) with its approval with amendment of 10-14 (from the Special Offerings Advisory Task Force).**

The Assembly decided it was important to maintain existing programs, percentages, and designees in the One Great Hour of Sharing, the Christmas Joy Offering, the Pentecost Offering, and the Peacemaking Offering.

## Ordination Standards & LGBT Equality

Items 07-02, 07-03, 07-06, and 07-16: Amending *Book of Order* G-2.0104b Ordination Standards (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3731>)

**Disapproved by the Assembly.** These items overtured the Assembly to reinstate, as a standard for ordination, the requirement that candidates either live in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or live in chastity and singleness, excluding individuals in same-sex relationships from ordination. These items would have effectively reversed the action of the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2010), which was ratified by ninety-seven presbyteries, ten more than needed.

The ACSWP Advice and Counsel “recognized that ordination issues are justice issues. The history of the church’s struggle to embrace equality in ordination for women and racial ethnic men is a clear example of this connection.”

Item 07-08: Adding G-2.0104c to the *Book of Order* on Ordination Standards (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3757>)

**Disapproved by the Assembly.** This item asked that ordained councils be permitted to establish interpretations of Scripture and the church’s confessions and to require that judgments about a candidate’s adherence to ordination standards be based upon such interpretations. Presbyteries, therefore, could have re-inserted in their manuals language that had been removed which prevented the ordination of individuals in same-sex relationships.

Items 07-10 and 07-11: Refusal of Ordination to Lesbian and Gay Individuals (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3801>)

**Disapproved by the Assembly.** These items request permission for councils to refuse ordination to “practicing homosexual persons” without incurring disciplinary action, as an expression of a council’s freedom of conscience.

The ACSWP Advice and Counsel explained that, “in the Reformed Tradition, the concept of ‘freedom of conscience’ has been understood as a right of individuals,” not administrative bodies. In either case, that right is not “absolute... Without higher review, there would be no check on the abuse of power, no remedy of appeal for the misuse of power.”

## Peacemaking

Item 14-05: Encountering the Gospel Anew: An Invitation to Discernment and Witness (from the Peace Discernment Steering Team and ACSWP) (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4015&promoid=254>)

**Approved by the Assembly.** This report encourages Presbyterians (as individuals, congregations, presbyteries, colleges, and seminaries) to participate in churchwide discernment on current matters of peace and violence in light of the witness of Jesus Christ and Christian teaching. In 2010, the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly began a six-year process to update peace-related policies and reinvigorate the peacemaking work of the church, recognizing the major changes in the world since the influential *Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling*, a 1980 statement framed in the time of the Cold War, the nuclear freeze movement, increasing globalization, and the end of the Vietnam War. The process is intended to engage a wide range of Presbyterian views, from the Just War and Just Peacemaking traditions to nonviolence and pacifism. It asks Presbyterians to “meet the Prince of Peace again, as if for the first time.”

See the ACSWP *Salt & Light* summary (<http://www.pcusa.org/resource/salt-and-light-august-2012/>), and participate in the discernment process (<http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/peacemaking/peace-discernment/>) – where you can download a response form.

Item 15-04: On Supporting a Peaceful, Diplomatic Solution to U.S.-Iran Issues (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3825>)

**Approved with amendment by the Assembly.** This item expresses support for a peaceful, diplomatic resolution to the tensions developing as a result of Iran’s nuclear program. It calls for direct, unconditional negotiations between the United States and Iran; opposes preemptive military action; and calls for efforts to overcome tensions between the American and Iranian people at all levels, as part of efforts for the common good. The amendment broadens the nation-state players to include European Union nations, Iran’s Arab neighbors, and Israel; affirms the provisions of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Act and its application to *all* nations without double standards (i.e. including Israel); and names the longer goal of reestablishing diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Iran.

Item 15-12: Commissioners’ Resolution on Prayer and Action for Syria (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4379>)

**Approved with amendment by the Assembly.** This resolution responds to the ongoing virtual civil war in Syria. While calling on the church to pray, raise awareness, and stand with global partners, it urges the U.S. government “to support a mediated process of cessation of violence by all perpetrators; to call for all outside parties to cease all forms of intervention; to support a strong and necessary role for the United Nations, possibly including observers and peacekeeping forces; and to refrain from military intervention in Syria.” The amendment deleted the reference to churches in Syria and Lebanon helping Christian refugees from Iraq.

## Reproductive Justice

Item 20-02: Denial of Medical Benefits for Abortions (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3747>)

**Disapproved by the Assembly.** This item called for the PC(USA) Board of Pensions to provide a medical benefits plan that does not pay for abortions except to save the physical life of the woman. The overture sought “to protect Presbyterians, who believe abortion is a sin, from the sin of complicity in the taking of human life.” The Board of Pensions medical plan currently covers abortion under a wide range of circumstances.

The ACSWP Advice and Counsel points out that the Board of Pensions permits “churches and employing organizations that object as a matter of conscience to the use of their dues for abortion procedures” to apply for relief of conscience (less extensive than desired by proponents). Since 1970, the PC(USA) has strongly and consistently affirmed that women may face situations in which the decision to terminate a pregnancy may be a morally valid decision. Therefore, a woman’s right to have available to her the full range of reproductive options must also exist, and should be a part of the church’s own medical plan.

Item 21-03: On Providing Just Access to Reproductive Health Care (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4141>)

**Approved with amendment by the Assembly.** This item requested that the Assembly protect all women’s access to comprehensive health care, including access to health services that enable responsible family planning and honor the exercise of individual conscience. The amendment names access to health care as a “basic human right” and replaces some of the original overture’s language with direct quotations from a 1992 Assembly-approved report on “problem pregnancies and abortions.” New language, derived from the intent of the old, affirms that “no state or federal law should be enacted to defund or criminalize family planning”.

Item 21-06: Commissioners’ Resolution on Calling the Church to a New Way Forward on the Issue of Pregnancies (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4401>)

**Disapproved by the Assembly.** This resolution called upon the PC(USA) to conduct a new thorough study of scripture and its Confessions, and to conduct a new survey on crisis pregnancies and abortion. It called upon offices of the church to advocate only “in areas of essential unity,” leaving “areas of division” up to the individuals. In disapproving this item, the Assembly commended the 1992 report for study (<https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4515>).

The ACSWP Advice and Counsel notes that the [1992 Report of the Special Committee on Problem Pregnancies and Abortion](#) is a comprehensive policy including an extensive study of scripture and Reformed theology. That 1992 policy honors the diverse opinions of Presbyterians and urges respect for women and their capacity as individuals to make faithful moral decisions in complex situations involving crisis pregnancies. In contrast, this item would have denied that an action of the Assembly represents the voice of the church for public advocacy whenever some Presbyterians disagree, essentially silencing the church’s public witness on many issues.



*See also the reproductive health care section of the Human Rights Update located under the category of International Issues and Human Rights.*