

CLERKS OF ASSEMBLY

PURPOSE

There are two clerks of the General Assembly: The Rev. Stephen Kendall, Principal Clerk, and the Rev. Don Muir, Deputy Clerk. Before each Assembly, the Clerks assist with the collection and distribution of reports to be considered by the Assembly and set the provisional agenda. During the Assembly, they record minutes and advise the Moderator on procedure. After the Assembly, the Clerks complete the Acts and Proceedings, review Assembly evaluations and inform the lower courts of matters referred to them by the General Assembly. Throughout the year, they monitor responses from presbyteries to these referrals, act as consultants to the General Assembly commissions and committees, respond to queries from officers and members of lower courts as well as from individual members of the church and prepare their own report to the Assembly.

REPORT SUMMARY

The Clerks of Assembly report deals primarily with governance issues. This year, however, the report begins with a salute to the Rev. Dr. Tony Plomp. On April 4, Dr. Plomp became the longest serving Clerk of Assembly in the history of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. July 1 will mark the 29th anniversary of his appointment to this office.

In consultation with the Trustee Board, the Assembly Council and the Pension Board, the Clerks offer a response to overtures requesting a process by which congregations could leave the denomination taking their assets with them. There is also a response to an overture that asks about the impact an individual's dissent to a presbytery decision during the Barrier Act process.

As requested, the Clerks provide a definition of the scope and purpose of a Declaratory Act. Coincidentally, they recommend a Declaratory Act that would reflect the decision of the 2015 General Assembly to permit ministers, who belong to member church of the World Council of Reformed Churches, to celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion for Presbyterian congregations.

The Clerks propose four changes to the Book of Forms. (1) A deletion of a section about dissent; (2) A revision to sections dealing with overtures and petitions; (3) A slight amendment to legislation regarding the circulation of the Acts and Proceedings and; (4) the addition of an appendix that will provide an orderly way for a synod to be dissolved – if this Assembly grants legislation allowing the dissolution of synods.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Consent Recommendation

That Recommendation Nos. 3, 4, 5 and 9 (identified by ►) be adopted by consent.

The Rev. Dr. Tony Plomp

In 1987, the Rev. Dr. Tony Plomp was named Deputy Clerk of the General Assembly, a position he has served with distinction ever since. On July April 6, 2016, he became the longest serving Clerk of the General Assembly in the history of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. (For full report see page XXX.)

Recommendation No. 1

That the General Assembly express its profound thankfulness to the Rev. Dr. Tony Plomp for 29 years of extraordinary commitment to the office of Clerk of the General Assembly and to the courts of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Overture Nos. 37, 2015, 4, 5 and 7, 2016

Process for a congregation leaving the denomination

Four overtures, requesting the establishment of a means for congregations to leave the denomination while retaining their property and assets, were referred to the Clerks of Assembly. The Clerks consulted with the Trustee Board, the Assembly Council and the Pension and Benefits Board as well as with legal counsel. Our polity does not include provision for a congregation to be dismissed as an entity from the denomination, with or without its property and

assets. The Clerks do, however, explore a scenario by which Presbyterians who leave the denomination might be able to purchase their former property. (For full report see page XXX.)

Recommendation No. 2

That the above be the response to Overture No. 37, 2015 and Overture Nos. 4, 5 and 7, 2016 re request for process for a congregation leaving the denomination.

Memorial No. 1, 2015

Definition of scope and purpose of a Declaratory Act

A memorial was referred to the Clerks of Assembly by the 2015 General Assembly with the request that that the Clerks provide a definition of the scope and purpose of a Declaratory Act. While past General Assemblies seem to have occasionally passed Declaratory Acts that may have verged on changing doctrine or law rather than simply interpreting it, the Clerks of Assembly stand by a plain interpretation of section 293, namely that a Declaratory Act ‘affirms what a General Assembly understands to be the law of the church regarding any particular matter’. (For full report see page XXX.)

► **Recommendation No. 3**

That the above definition of the scope and purpose of a Declaratory Act be the response to Memorial No. 1, 2015.

Overture No. 3, 2016

Barrier Act and an individual’s dissent

The purpose of the Barrier Act is to prevent a sudden alteration to the doctrine, worship, discipline or government of the church. It is also meant to encourage prayer, reflection and discussion before a significant change is made to any of these fundamental aspects of the life of the church. Overture No. 3, 2016 accurately notes that if a member of presbytery votes against approving a remit, that presbyter may ask to have his or her dissent recorded in the presbytery minutes. The overture goes on to express concern that even though the member expresses dissent, that member is included in the total number on the roll of the presbytery that supports the overture. It is important to understand that counting the constituent membership of a presbytery is not a means of determining how many individuals approve or disapprove a particular remit during the Barrier Act process. It is a way of ensuring that at least half of all members of all the presbyteries are represented in the vote on a particular proposal. An individual’s dissent to a specific decision is intended to be handled by the court in which the vote was held. That dissent does not figure into the calculation of support for a remit at that point in the process. Since the Barrier Act process is based on the vote of the presbytery and not the individual, the Clerks are of the opinion that it is unnecessary to amend the legislation. (For full report see page XXX.)

► **Recommendation No. 4**

That Overture No. 3, 2016, re Barrier Act and an individual’s dissent be answered by the above response.

CLERKS OF ASSEMBLY

To the Venerable, the 144th General Assembly:

Throughout the year, the Clerks of Assembly respond to queries from officers and members of lower courts as well as from individual members of the church. In addition, they monitor the receipt of responses from presbyteries to remits sent down under the Barrier Act and to referrals from the General Assembly. They also act as consultants to General Assembly commissions and committees. The three clerks meet together twice each year. In the autumn they discuss and designate the work referred to them by the Assembly. In the spring they finalize their responses to overtures and prepare their report to the General Assembly. Matters of polity are discussed at both meetings.

THE REV. DR. TONY PLOMP

On April 4, 2016, the Rev. Dr. Tony Plomp became the longest serving Clerk of Assembly in the history of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. It was the 1987 General Assembly that adopted the following motion, “That the Rev. Tony Plomp of Richmond, British Columbia, be appointed as a Deputy Clerk of the General Assembly effective July 1, 1987 for a term of five years.” Interestingly, Dr. Plomp was elected Moderator of that same Assembly.

The original appointment has been renewed five times in succession. Across the decades, Dr. Plomp has been a faithful servant of the church alongside three Principal Clerks and three other Deputy Clerks. He is also widely respected as a compassionate pastor, thoughtful theologian and kind friend to many. Regrettably, ill health has prevented Dr. Plomp from attending a General Assembly since 2006. He continues, however, to work closely with Mr. Kendall and Mr. Muir, providing wise council and unstinting dedication to our denomination.

Recommendation No. 1 Adopted/Defeated/Amended

That the General Assembly express its profound thankfulness to the Rev. Dr. Tony Plomp for 29 years of extraordinary commitment to the office of Clerk of the General Assembly and to the courts of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

REFERRALS AND OVERTURES

OVERTURE NO. 37, 2015 (A&P 2015, p. 610–11, 249, 17)

Re: Process for a congregation leaving the denomination

OVERTURE NOS. 4, 5 AND 7, 2016 (p. 28.1.2–3, 28.1.4)

Re: A policy for a congregation leaving the denomination

These various overtures request the establishment of a means for congregations to leave The Presbyterian Church in Canada, retaining their property and assets, if they find themselves unable to accept changes in doctrine or discipline made by the General Assembly. Some of the overtures refer to current discussions around human sexuality as the source of the request.

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<<The report continues>>

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Stephen Kendall and Don Muir
Clerks of Assembly