

**ASSEMBLY COUNCIL**  
**January 19, 2022**

The Assembly Council met by video conference on Wednesday January 19, 2022. S. Cameron Evans, convener, opened the meeting with prayer.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT  
OF TRADITIONAL  
TERRITORY**  
248/22C

The convener acknowledged that The Presbyterian Church in Canada and its members are on the historic territory of the First Nations, Metis and Inuit Peoples of this land. As a church, we take seriously the challenge of reconciliation, to deepen bonds of friendship and solidarity, to strive to “walk together” in the present and future, and to Indigenous Peoples from 1994.

**PRESENT**  
249/22C

Assembly Appointees: The Rev. Cherie A. Inksetter, Mr. Peter A. Kinch, the Rev. Bethany McCaffery, the Rev. Jeffrey M. Murray, Ms. Ann Paterson, Ms. Barbara Sargent, Ms. Linda Shaw, the Rev. John R. Wilson.

Presbytery Representatives: The Rev. John C. Borthwick, Ms. Brenda Butler, Ms. Sandra J. Cameron Evans (convener), the Rev. Henry Heung Ryeol Han, Ms. Vivian Ketchum, the Rev. Jinsook Khang, the Rev. Robert J. Murray, the Rev. Dr. John-Peter C. Smit.

Ex-Officio – Voting: Ms. Cathy Reid, the Rev. Daniel D. Scott, Ms. Cindy Stephenson, Ms. Carol Stymiest.

Ex-Officio – Non-Voting: The Rev. Stephen Kendall (secretary), Mr. Oliver Ng, the Rev. Ian Ross-McDonald.

Staff: Ms. Terrie-Lee Hamilton, the Rev. Donald Muir.

**REGRETS**  
250/22C

The Rev. Jennifer L. Cameron, Ms Diane Reader Jones, the Rev. Dr. Ross Lockhart.

**ABSENT**  
251/22C

The Rev. Germaine Lovelace.

**PURPOSE FOR MEETING**  
252/22C

The convener reminded the Council that the reason for the meeting was to decide on the convening and location of the 2022 General Assembly.

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE  
Report**  
253/22C

The report of the Executive Committee was presented by R. Murray.

It was moved by J. Smit, duly seconded and

AGREED, that the report of the Executive be received and considered.

**General Assembly 2022**  
254/22C

**Recommendation No. 1**

It was moved by R. Murray, duly seconded and

AGREED, that the Moderator be invited to convene the 2022 General Assembly online.

**Dissents**  
255/22C

**Dissents**

H. Han requested that his dissent be recorded and the following individuals requested that their dissent with reasons be recorded: B. Sargent, L. Shaw and J. Wilson.

Linda Shaw

Experience indicates that those who are displeased are more likely to express themselves than those who are not dismayed. Nonetheless, apart from the summary of commissioner evaluations prepared by the Deputy Clerk, almost all the other feedback, formal and informal, related to the virtual 2021 General Assembly, of which I am aware is negative. All the commissioners from my presbytery [Paris] are of one mind and voice, asserting online is not an acceptable way to be the General Assembly. The presbytery agreed and communicated the same to the Assembly Council.

The report of the executive demonstrates an unhealthy fixation on June as the only acceptable time to hold General Assembly. Given the fluidity of the last several months, and the apparent peaking of the omicron variant, considering General Assembly in August would have offered greater flexibility. Wilfrid Laurier University may soon have been able to provide assurances. Presbyteries could have been consulted. While advocating use of progressive technology, we seemed entrenched in past traditions.

The report of the executive implies we will do better second time around, without offering any substantive cause for such optimism. Has the platform been significantly upgraded? What new things will guarantee the many flaws and frailties that plagued last year will not recur? Last year, most commissioners took advantage of the advance training and still the platform seriously underperformed. We were trained. We had support people in place. And still the experience failed to offer excellence.

From a more theological perspective, virtual Assemblies open the door to forms of tyranny antithetical to roots of Presbyterianism. It allows a very few to act with great authority hid from the view of the wider church. Here's a trivial example of this danger. The executive report states, 'The situation realistically leaves two options to consider.' The report doesn't list what were considered unrealistic options, for example meeting in August. Nor does it provide a rationale for discounting all other options. It doesn't invite wider discussion, either from the Council (except for the possibility of postponement to 2023) or from Presbyteries.

Less trivial examples can be drawn from the 2021 Assembly. Commissioners could not see who or how many were in the queue waiting to speak. That knowledge is often pertinent to deciding matters related to continuing the debate, tabling a motion or calling for an immediate vote. Dissent, like this one, is a critical component of our polity and observing someone standing and dissenting is a weighty aspect of the ethos of our conciliar system. Online Assemblies prevent that. Points of order are not easily advanced. Online Assemblies by nature centralize a process which the Book of Forms designs to be shared and participatory. Thus, the door for an episcopalian-like governance is opened.

A corollary example of this degradation of government, arises from the use of the omnibus motion. In recent years, in-person Assemblies permitted each report to have consensus recommendations and each commissioner would have the opportunity to request particular ones to be removed from the list. In the centralized online Assembly, this helpful process was dramatically altered. Now a pre-Assembly process, managed by a few, prepared a massive omnibus motion to pass most recommendations based on an undebated, advance poll. In 2021 Commissioners had to receive majority support to remove a recommendation from that list. It's like a debate before the debate to eliminate debate. Thus, the whole inertia of the omnibus process is to make removal for debate unwieldy.

One of the best parts of an in-person Assembly is the building of community. It doesn't happen online. Commissioners don't have access to table companions to engage about the business of Assembly, nor do they benefit from casual conversations at mealtime. For a long time, most commissioners have listed this personal connecting as the best part of an Assembly. Now for three years this will not happen. We should be absolutely convinced the possibility of such a gathering is not possible, before even considering another option. I am not convinced an in-person Assembly couldn't take place in 2022.

Barbara Sargent

I wish to record my dissent to the Assembly Council's decision to host a second online General Assembly.

After the last General Assembly, 2021, held online, a number of participants, congregations and presbyteries expressed concerns about a future online General Assembly. The Assembly Council is not considering a number of these issues and concerns affecting the denomination and the participants at another online General Assembly.

1. We are continuing to deal with the effects of the pandemic, but research shows we are at or nearing the peak at this time. The Assembly Council refused to consider that the General Assembly could still be held in person, even if we had to delay for a couple of months. Another venue could be obtained which would be suitable in the Toronto area at the end of August or early fall. A lack of consideration from the Assembly Council displays no openness to change, which we have learned through these times is needed, and no consideration for those delegates who find technology a challenge. This decision shows that we are not being inclusive as a denomination!

2. As a denomination, we are not considering the whole denomination. Our ethnic congregations and members are being dis-enfranchised because English may not be the first language for many of them. Privilege for white Anglo-Saxon members is demonstrated when time limits are imposed and the proper professional translation is not provided. Our ethnic congregations make up almost 25 percent of our denomination and they, for the most part, are the ones that are growing. Again we are not being inclusive!

3. The 2022 General Assembly will face important issues that decide the future of this denomination. To meet in person allows a good discussion by all. A major part of the General Assembly is in relationships formed and the time to share ideas and form strategies to deal with issues in a collegial way. This has not happened over the last two years and has created division. It is deeply concerning that with petitions from the Han-Ca Presbyteries regarding systemic racism, the report of Gracious Dismissal and Alternative Governance, only to name a few, we as an Assembly Council do not recognize the value of all members in this denomination. Again we are not being inclusive!

John Wilson

I wish to record my dissent to the Assembly Council's decision to host a second online General Assembly in the following comments:

Firstly, the decision reflects poorly on the Assembly Council's ability to listen to the wider church. Last year in the lead up to the first online General Assembly, the support for said online Assembly was tepid at best, with a number of presbyteries expressing disapproval for the decision to go online. In this year's follow up to the online Assembly, the Assembly Council has already received a number of letters from presbyteries seriously concerned with the errors of the last online General Assembly. The Assembly Council has chosen to go ahead with another online Assembly.

Secondly, the Assembly Council has given no real thoughts to a fall 2022 in person General Assembly, where the level of COVID-19 influence is likely to be considerably lessened. Its lack of consideration of this possibility reveals an intransigence that should be deeply troubling to the denomination.

Thirdly, and most importantly to this coming Assembly, in choosing to go ahead with another online General Assembly, the Assembly Council deeply prejudices The Presbyterian Church in Canada against the Han-Ca Presbyteries and other people with English as a second language. An online Assembly privileges those who speak English well, and dis-enfranchises those for whom English is a second, or additional language as the tight time limits advantage those who have dexterity in English; and, as witnessed at the 2021 Assembly, the tight time limits dis-enfranchise those speaking by translation. As

well, last year, a professional, accredited translator was not employed by the Assembly for the Korean delegates.

An online Assembly denies the physical presence of relational human beings. The consequence of this is significant for members of a minority culture who are not in the same physical space of the dominant culture. Thus, the words spoken and the decisions made are made without the physical presence of the ethnic contingent sitting a couple of tables over. Or even at the same table. An online Assembly silos people – allowing members of the dominant culture to ignore the fact that at least 12 percent of the membership of The Presbyterian Church in Canada is from a non-European ethnicity.

At this year's General Assembly, where petitions from the HanCa Presbyteries regarding systemic racism are to be discussed and issues of Gracious Dismissal, Alternate Synods, etc., pertaining to the very continuance of congregations in the denomination, it is deeply troubling that we are electing again to meet in such a disconnected way to discern such perilous issues.

**Permission to Withdraw**  
256/22C

B. Butler requested and was granted permission leave to withdraw.

**Report**  
257/22C

It was moved by J. Smit, duly seconded and

AGREED, that the report as whole was adopted.

**NEXT MEETING**  
258/22C

The Council will met from Sunday, March 20 to Tuesday, March 22, 2022.

The Executive will meet following this meeting.

**ADJOURNMENT**  
259/22C

R. Murray moved that the Council adjourn. Carried.

The convener closed with prayer.

Ms. Sandra Cameron Evans  
Convener

The Rev. Stephen Kendall  
Secretary