

Well, good evening. As you all know, the 49th General Assembly of the PCA was held this past week right here in Birmingham at the BJCC. Many Briarwood members volunteered to serve and lead in a multitude of ways. Shane was there. John Haynes and the Briarwood Choir and the orchestra's leadership at the opening worship service on Tuesday was particularly outstanding. I know they spent a tremendous amount of time and effort preparing for this worship service. And God was glorified by it.

Now, Briarwood sent its fully allowed compliment of commissioners to the General Assembly. A commissioner is an elder that has the right to vote at the Assembly. This General Assembly set a new record of 2,380 registered commissioners, which is a 12.5% increase over the record that was set last year. Through focused attention and encouragement we have seen an increase in engagement from ruling elders over the last couple of years, and I expect this helpful trend to continue.

So on Monday afternoon and Tuesday morning, various committees met. These committees are essential to the functioning of the Assembly and your church was well represented on them. The Assembly started Tuesday evening after the opening worship service with the election of a moderator. This year ruling elder John Bice from Cornerstone Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama, was chosen and John did a very good job of navigating us through the assembly. The stated clerk provided an update where he noted that the PCA ended 2021 with 1,593 churches, which is a slight increase from last year. The overall membership, though, of PCA churches stayed flat or slightly declined during the COVID years, but held up better than most denominations.

While the pace of church planting also slowed during the COVID years, it was noted that the PCA is still planning a new church every two weeks on average. Just as we have seen here at Briarwood, overall giving remained healthy. We heard reports from each of the PCA'S agencies, including a report from Mission to the World concerning outreach to Ukraine and the neighboring countries.

We were also encouraged to hear that last year's Overture 14 from our own Evangelical Presbytery, which required that all MTW church planters be under the authority of ordained elders, is indeed being implemented. We elected men to serve on permanent committees of the various PCA agencies like MTW and NMA, as well as those to serve on PCA Standing Committees and the Standing Judicial Commission.

I was personally very encouraged by the slate of men that was elected to serve. Two years ago, an ad interim committee to study and report on domestic abuse and sexual assault was formed. This committee was made up of highly qualified men and women, including teaching and ruling elders and well-respected advisory members. They submitted their final report and provided a really good overview.

The report offers advice to Sessions, Presbyterians and Ministries within the PCA, and I am confident the recommendations will be beneficial to our churches. If you're interested, you can

find a copy of this report on the PCA General Assembly website. It's PCAGA.org. Or you can read an article that was recently posted on By Faith Online.

Now, there were a total of 47 overtures submitted to and dealt with by the General Assembly. So an overture is kind of like a bill that gets submitted to Congress. Before an overture makes it to the floor of the Assembly it is first reviewed and debated by the Overtures Committee, which is a very important process. The Overtures Committee will often take several overtures that deal with a common topic and consolidate them into one overture that the Assembly will focus on. I'll be honest, I can't imagine how the General Assembly would work if the Overtures Committee hadn't spent 20+ hours wrestling with these overtures prior to them even coming to the General Assembly floor. Drew Ricketts represented Evangel Presbytery on this crucial committee for the second year in a row. Andrew told me that he felt this year's Overtures Committee did an excellent job, and I completely agree with that.

Now I'll cover a few topics that the overtures addressed. First, a decision was made for the PCA to withdraw its membership from the National Association of Evangelicals or NAE. This item has come up several times at past assemblies with many commissioners expressing concerns with some of the positions taken by the NAE. There was also a desire for churches to be able to decide individually whether or not to participate in the NAE rather than the denomination making a commitment on their behalf.

Another topic is the Assembly unanimously voted to request that the federal government take any and all legal measures to protect the lives of unborn and newly born babies from the brutality of abortion and infanticide. Interestingly, this action was taken one day before the announcement came from the Supreme Court regarding the Roe versus Wade decision.

The Assembly approved several changes to the Book of Church Order regarding qualification stations for serving as a church officer. Overtures 29 and 31 were passed with greater than 90% approval. These overtures add language that clarifies that officers must affirm the sinfulness of fallen desires and the hope of progressive sanctification and more specifically, meant to address the wrong teaching of Side-B Christianity.

The Assembly also approved another book of Church Order change to address Side-B Christianity through Overture 15, which clearly states that men who describe themselves as homosexual are disqualified from holding office in the PCA. This overture passed with a smaller margin with 54% in favor. Some of the commissioners felt that the statements and overtures 29 and 31 were sufficient and therefore Overture 15 wasn't necessary, while others felt that the clarity offered and Overture 15 was indeed warranted. Now, as with all changes to the book or church order, these overtures will now have to be approved by two-thirds of the Presbyteries before they can be finally ratified by next year's General Assembly.

Two overtures from last year's Assembly that dealt with these same issues did not achieve the two-thirds approval needed from the Presbyteries. The hope is that these new overtures will address concerns previously voiced in the Presbyteries and gain the support needed. Many of

the other overtures address matters of process, which will allow various church courts to better protect the peace and purity of the PCA.

Now, as you can see from the size of my GA notebook, there was quite a bit of information provided, discussed and debated at the General Assembly. And if you want to find out more, I would suggest that you can read the report of the 49th General Assembly that is posted on By Faith online. You can also go to this GA website, PCAGA.org where you can even watch the whole thing. It's all there.

Now, if you're particularly interested in the overtures debate, look at the recordings from Thursday morning and afternoon. I would also encourage you to ask myself or any of the other elders that attended if you have any questions. There is already, and I'm sure will continue to be, many opinions tweeted and posted, some of which will not be well informed.

Overall, I was very encouraged by this year's General Assembly. I felt that the tone was better than last year's, and I am very hopeful that the Presbyteries will indeed provide approval to the actions taken.

I was also very well pleased that we were able to complete our business by 6:00 p.m. on Thursday as compared to 1:00 a.m. Friday morning last year. By completing our business at 6 p.m., we were able to officially end the Assembly with another wonderful time of worship and a sermon by the Reverend Kevin DeYoung. To God be the glory and may our PCA stay faithful to the Scriptures, true to the reformed faith and obedient to the Great Commission. Thank you.

Billy Ball