

## AS WE SEE IT TODAY – THE PERSPECTIVE OF SOME OF THE FOUNDING FATHERS

January 28, 2014

Dear Fellow PCA Ministers:

Forty years ago our founding fathers met at Briarwood Church for the First General Assembly of the Continuing Presbyterian Church, which was to be named the Presbyterian Church in America by the Second General Assembly. There were 260 churches representing 41,232 members and the enthusiasm and excitement filled every heart with anticipation. We had planned and worked through a year long process to be ready for this momentous occasion. A steering committee chosen from the Boards of the Presbyterian Churchmen United, the Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship, the Concerned Presbyterians and the Presbyterian Journal had led to a convocation of sessions and from that to an Organizing Committee. This committee prepared the documents, the structure and framework of the new denomination. These had been approved by an Advisory Convention meeting in Asheville in conjunction with Journal Day. There was unanimous agreement that the new denomination would be true to the Scriptures, loyal to the Reformed Faith and obedient to the Great Commission

Since that day in December of 1973 the Presbyterian Church in America has grown to realize the largest and strongest Reformed foreign mission program in North America (from six missionaries to over 600 career missionaries and many more short termers.) The PCA has been at the forefront of all denominations in planting new churches, growing from 212 churches to over 1400, plus many more that are in various stages of organization. She has successfully joined and received with the RPCES. This has been a boon to the ministries of both denominations, especially with regard to Covenant College and Covenant Seminary. The congregations of the PCA are demonstrating an ever increasing vitality in their support of missions at home and abroad and more and more of her young people are answering the call to ministry and missions. The second general assembly adopted *The Pastoral Letter* which went a long way toward resolving the issue of the gifts of the Spirit. Several years ago, after lengthy discussion, we affirmed “good faith” subscription which was a declaration of our commitment to love and respect each other and affirm doctrinal orthodoxy without becoming too broad or too narrow in the way we embrace our confessional standards.

The story of the PCA as outlined above is the story of a denomination that has been on the cutting edge of foreign missions practiced overseas and among immigrant populations within the USA, and of home missions being practiced at home and among American population centers overseas. And the decision to support foreign and home missionaries through individualized support, though not new to nondenominational missions agencies, is new to denominational missions. These strategies have pushed the PCA to a place among the leaders in per capita giving to missions. The critical decisions made by the General Assembly have, time and again, reflected the broad middle of the denomination rather than those who would take us too far in one direction or another.

There is substantial agreement across the PCA in her commitment to the Scriptures, to the Reformed Faith as defined in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms and to our obedience to the Great Commission. One of the paramount ministries of Mission to the World is her cooperative agreements with other evangelical mission agencies. By these, for instance, a PCA pilot can fly a plane owned and operated by Wycliffe's Jungle Aviation and Radio Service (JAARS) and continue as a fully credentialed MTW missionary. Although there is not complete agreement across the PCA that this should be MTW's policy, time and experience have proven it to be one of the most innovative and productive developments in modern missions.

There are issues that produce tension in the PCA. Though we were founded with a “grass roots” approach to Presbyterian polity, this is being questioned by some in our courts today. Some in our denomination feel that the denomination is too narrow and too strict while others feel that we are too broad. In our opinion, these differences of opinion reflect a healthy breadth of views and perspectives that produces an ever present need for love and mutual respect. It does, however, present the PCA with the need for our leadership to always be searching for the center so that unity might be maintained and our mission might be accomplished.

We are grateful to God that He is raising up the next generation of leaders for the PCA who fully embrace the principles upon which we were founded. We rejoice at their zeal for the Gospel and the Great Commission; the depth of their theological grounding; their understanding of our ever-changing culture; and their skill at communicating God's truth with grace and power to the post modern mind. It is encouraging for us to observe them taking the baton we once carried and effectively and faithfully leading the PCA with enthusiasm.

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In our minds, and the minds of the substantial middle of the PCA, there is respect for men at both ends of the spectrum and a sincere desire for all of us to remain in the fellowship and ministry that God is singularly blessing. We the undersigned who are a part of the “founding generation” of the PCA hereby re-commit to our original goals. We also warmly and wholeheartedly support the next generation of leaders in which we have great confidence. We invite you, both teaching and ruling elders, to join us in this renewed commitment and expression of confidence in the future of the PCA. We look forward to hearing from you.

Your brothers in Christ,

Jim Baird

E. Crowell Cooley

Frank M. Barker, Jr. Charles Dunahoo

James G. Edwards Frederick Curtis Fowler III

Paul B. Fowler Terry I. Nyger

Bill Fournier III

Larry C. Mills

John C. Neville, Jr.

Bill Robinson

Robert J. Schwanebeck Richard Watson

Paul G. Sefton

James B. Sherwood

Kennedy Smith

Cecil Williamson