



**Minutes
of the
122nd
General Assembly**

**Presbyterian Church
In the United States**

**PART I
JOURNAL
with Directory and Appendix**

**June 11-17, 1982
Columbus, Georgia**

**Exhibit 6 to
Dardenne Petition**

APPENDIX

REPORT OF THE STATED CLERK

I. Office Administration

The Office of the Stated Clerk is one of the smaller agencies of the General Assembly, with nine permanent staff members as its normal compliment. Since the 1981 General Assembly, three of those staff members have resigned, and a fourth has moved into a completely different job assignment, for a turnover of more than 40%. The Reverend Ms. Joyce Tucker resigned at the close of the 1981 General Assembly to accept employment with the Division of Court Partnership Services of the General Assembly Mission Board. At the end of December Ms. Patricia Richardson resigned because of the relocation of her family to another city. Less than one month ago Ms. Ollie Gannaway completed her term of service as Print Coordinator and is now in training to assume her appointment as a missionary of this denomination, serving in Nigeria. Ms. Catherine M. Shipley has relinquished her duties as office coordinator to devote full time to responsibilities connected with the work of the Joint Committee on Reunion and a limited number of other committees. All of these colleagues left behind them gaps that have been difficult to fill, and the work of the office has not been accomplished as efficiently immediately following these changes.

Because of the small size of the staff, it is rare that an incoming staff member will have exactly the same job description as her or his predecessor. We are making the adjustments that will utilize the best talent of continuing and new staff members, and expect to continue to provide to the Church the services for which the office was established.

II. Ecumenical Representation

The 121st General Assembly (1981) received a report which described a necessary reduction in participation in ecumenical meetings as a result of the impending vote on Presbyterian reunion. It has been possible to maintain that reduced schedule while still concentrating on the work of the Joint Committee on Reunion. During the coming year requests for services in resourcing the consideration of reunion at the Presbytery level will very likely reduce further staff ability to deal with other ecumenical issues.

III. Assembly Sessions

The 122nd General Assembly has been planned on a schedule which requires only six nights accommodation for most Commissioners, participants and staff. The Reverend Mr. Flynn V. Long, Jr., is responsible for the careful arrangement of a docket which permits the Assembly to complete its business 24 hours ahead of its usual adjournment time. Such an arrangement results in a significant saving in funds as well as time, but does require the Assembly to surrender its tradition of avoiding business sessions on Sunday.

This Assembly will have before it for final consideration a number of constitutional amendments discussed in Part IV of this report. In order to facilitate discussion, each commissioner has been provided with a copy of 1981 Ballot II, which provides the text of the proposed revision of Chapter 6 of the Form of Government along with the commentary ordered printed with the ballot by the 121st General Assembly (1981). The appropriate Standing Committees have been provided with Ballots I and III, and Commissioners can review the texts of the amendments proposed in those ballots by consulting the Minutes of the General Assembly, 1981, pages 206 and following and pages 225 and following.

IV. Constitutional Matters

The 121st General Assembly (1981) sent to the Presbyteries for their advice and consent a number of amendments to the Book of Church Order, two of them of more than usual significance. All of the amendments have been approved by the constitutionally required voting margins, and will be before the 122nd General Assembly (1982) for final consideration. The votes of the Presbyteries are summarized in Appendix 3 to this report.

The most complex package of amendments is that which proposes a revision of the Rules of Discipline. Less complex, but much more heavily debated during Presbytery consideration, is the recommended revision of Chapter 6, Form of Government, which deals with matters of property and incorporation.

Numerous persons with special competence to lead discussions of the proposed new Chapter 6, and members of the staff of the Office of the Stated Clerk, have been heavily engaged in responding to requests for speakers and resource persons where the proposed amendment has been under consideration. It is the opinion of the person submitting this report that needless anxiety and concern has been generated by unfounded rumor and misleading information about the proposed revision. The office has even been asked how particular churches could transfer property titles to Presbytery in the event of the passage of the amendments. Some persons have claimed that changes in the chapter will require revision of the terms by which special funds and bequests must be handled by congregations and trustees, despite the fact that such changes were not required in 1925 and 1949 when the chapter was previously amended. The six Ruling Elder

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attorneys who drafted the proposed new chapter see no need to change the ways in which such funds are supervised. It has also been claimed that the presentation of a revised Chapter 6 is related to the proposal for Presbyterian reunion, and may even be intended to deprive congregations of property rights in advance of the reunion vote. In response to all inquiries about such misleading statements, the Office of the Stated Clerk has provided interpretive statements similar to the following:

The proposed revision of Chapter 6, Form of Government, is intended to gather into a single place in the Constitution all material dealing with property matters, including those statements of the General Assembly which are definitive interpretations of the Constitution. The drafters deliberately set themselves to make no changes in the basic understanding of the denomination's position on church property, but rather intended to clarify and organize existing provisions.

The language dealing with trust does not in any way establish any kind of an encumbrance on church property as that term is understood in connection with real estate. The denomination has always understood that title to property is to be held by the congregation, and the proposed new Section 6-8 is intended to make congregational ownership explicit. Section 6-7 makes clear the authority of Presbyteries to dismiss congregations with property.

Should a particular church elect, under the provisions of Article 13 of the Plan for Reunion, to request dismissal to another Reformed body, Constitutional action by Presbytery dismissing the congregation with its property would terminate any encumbrance or claim of any kind on behalf of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, so long as all regular and Constitutional procedures were followed.

The passage of proposed Chapter 6 will not require any changes in the way a congregation deals with its property so long as that congregation desires to remain a part of the PCUS, or seeks dismissal by orderly Constitutional means. It will make a difference in those situations where a congregation is persuaded to attempt unilateral withdrawal or to ignore the decision of a Presbytery with regard to a request for dismissal.

It is to be hoped that a careful study of the proposed revision, and the accompanying documents distributed with the proposed amendments by action of the 121st General Assembly (1981) will eliminate the high degree of emotionalism that has attended many of the debates on this issue, and permit the Assembly to reach a responsible and thoughtful decision with regard to final enactment of these provisions.

James E. Andrews,
Stated Clerk