

## Summary of General Assembly Action on Marriage

The 221st General Assembly took two actions regarding marriage:

1. The first was an Authoritative Interpretation allowing pastoral discretion to conduct same-gender marriages in states where such marriages are legal. This went into effect immediately on conclusion of the General Assembly.
  - The action that passed by a vote of 371 to 238.
  - Teaching elders are empowered to use their discretion in performing marriage ceremonies, including civil unions permitted by the law and have the responsibility to assess the readiness of a couple to be married.
  - This action expressly does not require that congregations, sessions, or teaching elders perform civil unions or same-gender marriages. Congregations and their sessions still have the right to decide what happens in their facilities.
2. The second was a recommendation to change language in the *Book of Order* to indicate that “marriage involves a unique commitment between two people, traditionally a man and a woman.”
  - The *Book of Order* change requires the approval of a majority of presbyteries within the next year.
  - The action that passed by a vote of 429 to 175.

Both decisions came with much discussion and prayer on the part of the General Assembly commissioners.

We continue to be in dialogue, both in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and among our international partners. We will not end relations with a mission partner because of differing opinions and pray that those who may disagree with this action will remain in relationship to continue the work of the church.

## Summary of General Assembly Action on Divestment

The 221st General Assembly (2014) voted by a narrow margin to divest from three U.S. companies—Caterpillar, Hewlett Packard, and Motorola Solutions—whose products are used to further the Israeli occupation of Palestine. The assembly's vote was 310-303.

- These non-peaceful activities are inconsistent with the church's socially responsible investment policy. The church does not believe it should profit from the occupation.
  - Caterpillar provides bulldozers used in the destruction of Palestinian homes and for clearing land of fruit and olive tree groves.
  - Hewlett Packard provides electronic systems at checkpoints, logistics and communications systems to support the naval blockade of the Gaza Strip, as well as business relationships with illegal settlements in the West Bank.
  - Motorola Solutions provides military communications and surveillance systems in illegal Israeli settlements.
- The church's committee on socially responsible investing has been engaged with these companies for more than a decade urging change in these corporate activities with no results.
- This action is not divestment from Israel; the church has other significant investments in Israeli organizations which it will maintain.
- The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is explicit in:
  - Affirming the right of Israel to exist as a sovereign nation within secure and internationally recognized borders.
  - Advocating for the right of Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace, free from threats or acts of force.
  - Declaring that this action does not indicate alignment with the overall global Boycott, Divest and Sanctions (BDS) movement.
- Regarding *Zionism Unsettled*, the assembly declared that the publication does not represent the views of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) but that it will continue to be available through the online store.
- In the past year, the church has made several positive investments in economic development in Palestine.
- The measure also reaffirms the PC(USA)'s commitment to interfaith dialogue and partnerships with the American Jewish and Muslim friends, and with Palestinian Christians.

Charles Wiley described it in this way:

- “Love your neighbor as yourself.” We are trying to love two neighbors at the same time. In the midst of these two loves, we are compelled to speak for justice for what is occurring in the occupation. We refuse to choose between these two neighbors, even if our specific choices are difficult for one of our neighbors to understand.

## **Summary of General Assembly Action around Poverty with “Educate a Child, Transform the World” Initiative**

The 221st General Assembly approved an initiative that seeks to provide quality education to 1 million children in the U.S. and around the world in the next four years – as a way to alleviate poverty, especially for women and children.

- Educating a million children by the year 2020 – that is the goal of the “Educate a Child, Transform the World” campaign from the Presbyterian Mission Agency.
- Poverty is considered one of greatest challenges facing the world today. This initiative addresses the root causes of poverty, especially as they impact women and children.
- Millions of girls around the world never enter school, and many who do, drop out without acquiring adequate skills to thrive. In South Sudan, a girl is three times more likely to die in childbirth than to complete Grade 8.
- Around the world, 774 million adults are illiterate; 2/3 are women. Nearly 59 million school-age children are not enrolled in school for a variety of reasons.
- The Presbyterian Church has a 177-year history of providing educational access for children in the U.S. and around the world.
- Education promotes human development, improves household nutrition, and reduces childhood morbidity and mortality. Basic literacy empowers the poor to emerge from poverty.
- Together with our partners throughout the US and world, we will work to:
  - build communities capacity to strengthen quality education,
  - improve training and resourcing for teachers at all levels, and
  - create an environment for children, particularly girls, to have access to quality education
- How can you help?
  - Visit [presbyterianmission.org/poverty-alleviation](http://presbyterianmission.org/poverty-alleviation).

## **Summary of General Assembly Action on the “Living Missionally” Initiative**

The 221st General Assembly endorsed an initiative to encourage Presbyterians to go beyond the walls of their congregations and increase their engagement in service to their communities and the world. This is known as the “Living Missionally” initiative.

- For nearly 200 years, the Presbyterian church has served as one of the greatest forces for mission in the world. By “living missionally,” we are intentionally joining in God’s transformations of societal injustices by following Christ’s example of service through faith, hope, love, and witness.
- The Living Missionally initiative seeks to inspire Presbyterian congregations to reach out to their communities through intentional acts of service in Christ’s name, which many of our churches are already naturally doing.
- It is in our DNA. Presbyterians have sought to be mission-centered from their inception and have a strong, unwavering belief that there is no other way to truly be the church. This initiative calls us to reaffirm our historic commitment and reclaim our identity to be ministers to the immediate needs and hurts of the people in our neighborhoods and communities.
- This initiative will help the church to see normal, day-to-day interactions as part of following Jesus. It isn’t calling us to add a bunch of new programs or hire a bunch of staff or take on any new financial implications. It is the sweet spot of our work, core to our mission statement, and how we serve the church.
- The Presbyterian Mission Agency will be working together with mid councils and congregations to transform neighborhoods and communities by living missionally, and to develop plans and metrics to measure results in deeper engagement in years to come.

## Summary of General Assembly Action on Gun Violence

The 221st General Assembly (2014) voted with an overwhelming majority to approve recommendations that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) advocate measures to prevent gun violence.

- The General Assembly's decision calls for such actions as the formation of support, healing and advocacy groups for those who have experienced gun violence in their families; and opposition to "stand your ground" and other legislation that may entitle gun owners to shoot before taking alternative measures.
- The Presbyterian Disaster Assistance recently released the documentary *Trigger: The Ripple Effect of Gun Violence*. Through the work of its first-responders, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance has identified gun violence as a human made disaster. *Trigger* examines the impact of shootings on survivors, family members, the community and society. More information can be found at [pcusa.org/trigger](http://pcusa.org/trigger).
- Learn how you or your congregation can do to prevent gun violence by visiting [presbyterianmission.org/gunviolence](http://presbyterianmission.org/gunviolence).

## Summary of General Assembly Actions around 1001

- The 221<sup>st</sup> General Assembly in Detroit voted to encourage:
  - each mid council to sponsor a 1001 training event,
  - each session to pray at 10:02 a.m. the scripture passage from Luke 10:2,
  - each presbytery to watch the 1001 video, and start at least one new worshiping community in the next two years.
- A celebration was held for the 248 (and counting) new worshiping communities started in the first 2 years.
- In 2012, the 220th General Assembly approved the 1001 New Worshiping Communities initiative with a goal of starting 1001 new worshiping communities in 10 years.
- 1001 new worshiping communities is an innovative way of thinking outside the church as steeple and sanctuary—how to meet constituents in venues that are more authentic for them.
- The new worshiping community model is interdependent upon churches and presbyteries who support one another in their mission. Each new worshiping community is in relationship with at least one church or a presbytery.
- There is no set model for a new worshiping community as each one has its own identity.
- Some are meeting in coffee shops, some are meeting in RV parks, and some are nomadic by design to meet the needs of their communities.
- Over 50% of the new worshiping communities are predominantly racial ethnic, helping the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. reach a level of diversity never before achieved.
- 1001 new worshiping communities is one thing that is unifying the denomination around making disciples.
- 1001 videos are inspiring, creative and will challenge you to think outside the steeple – check them out on the 1001 YouTube channel – [youtube.com/1001newworshipping](https://youtube.com/1001newworshipping).

## Summary of General Assembly Events Around Young Adult Volunteers

With thousands in attendance, the Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) program celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary at the 2014 General Assembly in Detroit.

- The program started in 1994 and is promoted as “A year of service for a lifetime of change.”
- Over 1,500 young people have served in 20 years with new sites added to meet goal of tripling the number of YAVs serving around the world.
  - New national sites include Indianapolis, Little Rock and Washington DC. Where volunteers will address issues of poverty and reconciliation from inner city youth centers to sustainable farms to our nation’s capital.
  - New international sites are Colombia, Thailand and Zambia where volunteers will serve and learn alongside Presbyterian World Mission’s partners in holistic mission and ministry.
- There are countless ways for everyone – congregations, presbyteries, youth groups, friends, and families - can connect, partner and support the amazing things that are going on with the YAVs on their journey.
- All congregations are encouraged to become a **YAV a Year** congregation - by sending or supporting a promising young adult this next year.
- Go to [presbyterianmission.org/yav](http://presbyterianmission.org/yav) to learn more about how you can be involved.