

February 28, 2024 | Waynesboro, Virginia | *a newsletter supplement*

## **PC(USA)'s Unification Commission outlines its work to date in its report to the 226th General Assembly**

By Mike Ferguson,  
Presbyterian News Service

(PNS) — Ahead of the 120-day deadline for the 226th General Assembly, the Unification Commission on Saturday unanimously approved its interim report, with a final report due to the 227th General Assembly in 2026.

“The Commission is on track to accomplish its mandate within its four-year term,” the report states, “and is pleased with the progress that has been made to date.”

The report notes the commission is leveraging technology “to be as accessible as possible to the larger Church.” It’s established [a landing page](#) and notes that recordings of its meetings [are available online](#), and meeting materials are available [here](#).

“The Unification Commission believes this high degree of transparency has uniquely fostered trust among stakeholders,” the report states. The report to the General Assembly also includes minutes from every commission meeting.

According to the report, the commission or its workgroups will have held 24 consultations and listening sessions throughout the wider Church and has met regularly with executive staff from both the Presbyterian Mission Agency and the Office of the General Assembly. “A key fruit of this collaboration is the current process to shape a unified budget for 2025 and 2026,” the report states. In addition, the commission “is making progress to define the details of the new governance body and new unified agency it will oversee,” noting that the unification rollout is “planned to begin July 1, 2025.”

The commission “has been inspired and encouraged by the response of staff, denominational agencies and groups, and mid council leaders to the process of unification so far,” the report states. “Our desire is to continue being sensitive to the unique opportunities, concerns, and challenges presented by unification, and walking through this work in the spirit of collaboration, openness and trust.” The commission said it celebrates the work of the staff in the OGA and PMA “for embracing this unprecedented time of transition with a willingness to engage with the Commission and all the while continuing their excellent work.”

“We continue to invite you, the Church, to pray for the Commission,” the report concludes, “and to watch and follow our work.” Continued on page 3

# Lenten Lunches



## at FPC

Join each at noon Wednesday in Lent  
for a simple meal  
and discussion of the Book of James.



### OUR WORSHIP CHANNELS

CLICK ON THE LOGOS



### Music Notes for Sunday 3 March

As we do every first Sunday of the month, we will celebrate communion on 3 March. The choir will sing *Bread of the World*, with music by Louis Bourgeois' (1510-1599). The tune, known as *Rendez à Dieu*, is one of many Bourgeois composed for the Genevan Psalter, a collection of metrical Psalms created in 1539 to encourage congregational participation during worship. The closing hymn, *Be Known to Us in Breaking Bread*, also refers to communion and how we respond to Jesus in our lives.



# PC(USA) Unification Commission, continued

## On confidentiality

Commission Co-Moderator Cristi Scott Ligon addressed a rumor regarding a statement supposedly made by a commissioner that changes are coming, PC(USA) employees will lose their jobs and that separation packages will be offered to employees over the age of 60. “It caused all kinds of anxiety and chaos,” she said. “We want to be very clear: We want to communicate to OGA and PMA staff, to those on the livestream and to the world, the commission has not discussed nor made such a statement.”

“Of course, there will be changes coming, but we have not identified any changes that would result in people losing their jobs and people over 60 asked to voluntarily separate,” she said, noting that second part would be illegal. “We certainly don’t have time or energy to chase a rumor,” she said, asking that anyone with questions contact her or the commission’s co-moderator, the Rev. Dr. Felipe Martínez. “We ask people to support us by praying for us and to keep the negativity at bay,” she said. “This is a distraction, and we’re going to do our work in the midst of distractions.”

## Listening Sessions

Dr. Susan Barnett, director of Research Services, reported on listening sessions that were held from April through November of 2023. According to the report, five themes emerged from the sessions: *structure, culture, governance, finances and polity*. Also among the repeated themes were:

- What are the core, essential functions of the national agencies as defined in various governing documents? These are the essential tasks of the new agency.
- National agencies and programs are not relevant to the local congregation. How does the national church better connect with the local congregation?
- Can the new agency succeed with existing leadership relocated to new positions?
- There are differing viewpoints on the current Matthew 25 emphasis.
- Misconception exists as to why unification is happening. Some see it as a way to settle disagreements/poor working relationships with the PMA. Others see it as a cost-reduction plan. Some see it as solving problems that arose in the 1983 unification. Some see it as reflecting denominational decline.

“Participants expressed that this is a time for something new, a new vision and opportunity,” the report states. “At the same time, they offered caution to care for staff during this time of transition and to not lose sight of the mandated functions and offices.”

“Frequent communication from the Commission will assist staff and leaders to move through this process with greater success,” Barnett’s report says. “It also models what will be expected in the new agency, in communicating the changes to the congregations and other agencies.”

The report notes “many questions as to the final structure and governance. How will this impact the to-be-hired Stated Clerk? Will there be a defined location for committees and their support staff? Will there be offices and staff to support the caucuses and other language groups? Will there be sufficient funds to support the work?”

“The participants were asked four questions,” Barnett wrote, “and they asked many more in return.”

Continued

# PC(USA) Unification Commission, continued

## Updates from workgroups and others

Commissioners approved three actions proposed by the Finance Workgroup. The first was to affirm 2025-26 unifying budget values and a vision statement offered by executives and members of the Coordinating Table at a recent retreat. Values include openness, courage, equity, and justice and trustworthiness. The vision statement says the unified budget will “enable us to be a partner in mission and ministry, complementing and strengthening congregations, mid councils and other faith communities, and stewarding faithfully all of our resources.” The budget “equips the PC(USA) to be formed and re-formed as a covenant community of vibrant and growing disciples who embody a fresh expression of a Reformed witness to Christ’s love and justice in the world, present and responsive to the challenges of this time.”

The second was to approve that all actions of the upcoming Assembly that have financial implications outside of the presented 2025-26 budgets be charged to per capita funds. “This is a familiar process,” said the Rev. Scott Lumsden, a member of the Finance Workgroup. “We want to provide some stability in the midst of lots of things that are in conversation and changing.”

With unification on the horizon, “we won’t have the ability to parse out if it’s OGA or PMA activity” as determined by General Assembly actions, said Barry Creech, Deputy Executive Director for Administration in the PMA. “It’s our activity working together. That’s why this approach is needed.”

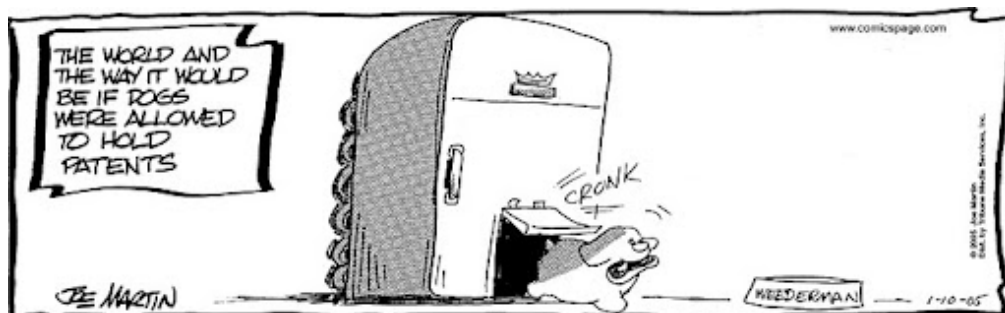
The third was to approve actions taken earlier this month by the PMA Board, including a revised 2024 GA Mission Budget of about \$76.5 million and the allocation of up to \$1 million to fund the third phase of the Information Technology Roadmap.

Commissioners received a report on communications ministry in the OGA and PMA that’s being unified and is expected to be complete by mid-April. That process is in the second phase, labeled “Revise and Re-envision,” which will “articulate a preferred future including vision, mission and organizational culture for communications ministry and test it with stakeholders.” Once that phase is complete in mid-March, the focus will shift to rebuilding a new ministry, which calls for naming “the new communications ministry personnel, operations and game plan for the present and future.”

The new denominational website is set to launch in late June, amidst the upcoming General Assembly.

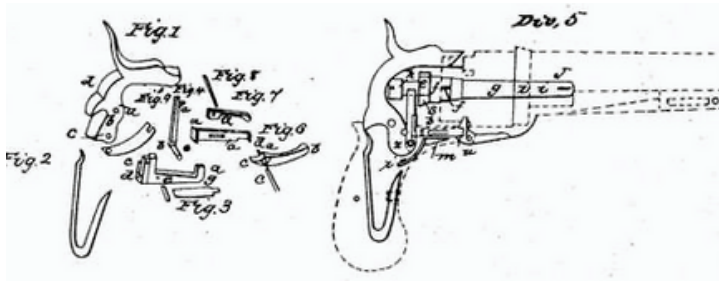
Commissioners met in closed session for nearly an hour to discuss personnel and property matters. They then opened a brief public session to announce they’d taken no action as a result of the closed session.

The Unification Commission’s next meeting begins at 6 p.m. Eastern Time on March 21. It’ll be held online and available for viewing [here](#).



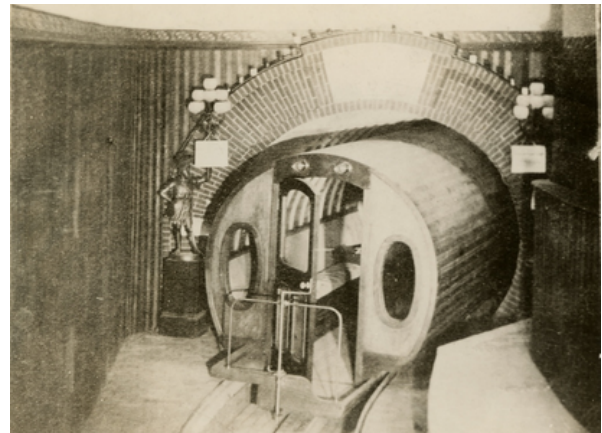


# This Week in History.



Samuel Colt is granted a United States patent for a 'revolving gun.'

February 25, 1836



The Beach Pneumatic Transit opens, the first attempt to build an underground public transit system in New York City. It was developed by Alfred Ely Beach as a demonstration subway line running on pneumatic power.

February 26, 1870



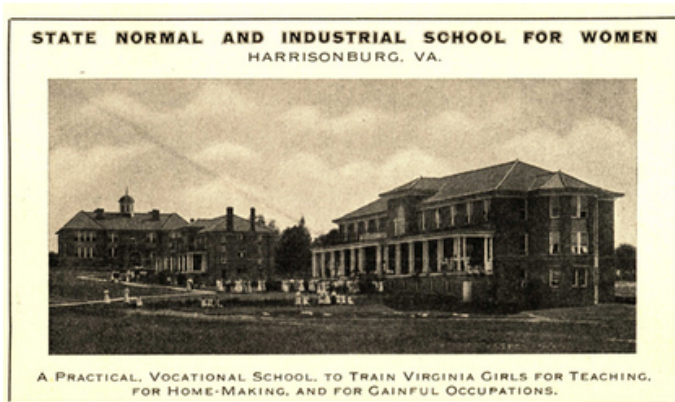
The Twenty-second Amendment to the United States Constitution is ratified, limiting Presidents to two terms.

February 27, 1951



NASA astronauts Elliot See and Charles Bassett die when their T-38 Talon crashes into the McDonnell Aircraft factory while attempting a poor-visibility landing at Lambert Field, St. Louis MO.

February 28, 1966



The Virginia General Assembly charts **James Madison University** at Harrisonburg as *The State Normal and Industrial School for Women*.

February 29, 1908

## Big Bomber Is Refueled in Air 4 Times In 4-Day, 23,452-Mile Trip From Texas



**B-29 'Tankers' Used to Provide Gas Supply**  
By John A. Giles  
Fort Worth, Tex., Mar. 2—The first non-stop flight around the world was completed here this morning in less than four days by a new Boeing B-29 Superfortress which refueled four times in the air.  
The swift, high-powered bomber is the first B-29 to be used in a non-stop flight.

Captain James Gallagher completes the first non-stop around-the-world airplane flight. His B-50 Superfortress Lucky Lady II lands in Fort Worth, TX after in 94 hours and one minute.

March 2, 1949



Sixty-three Huguenots are massacred in Wassy, France, marking the start of the French Wars of Religion.

March 1, 1562