

# GENERAL ASSEMBLY



## **THIS WILL BE A GENERAL ASSEMBLY UNLIKE ANY OTHER.**

For the first time in four years, General Assembly commissioners will gather in person – at least for committee meetings – for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s first hybrid assembly, built around the theme “From Lament to Hope.” The assembly will be longer than usual: stretched out from June 18 to July 9, three action-packed weeks instead of one, with 471 commissioners and 111 advisory delegates. Committees will meet in newly-renovated space at the PC(USA)’s national offices in Louisville with mandatory masks and COVID-19 vaccinations.

Plenary sessions will be online — including a Juneteenth worship service on June 19, commemorating the emancipation of enslaved African Americans. An online “Hands and Feet” event July 7 will focus on ending cash bail.

The business coming this year reflects public policy concerns – from racism to gun violence to global warming – as well as internal issues facing a denomination such as declining membership and a growing number of small but faithful congregations. Here’s some of what to expect.

**Climate change.** The Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) is recommending that the PC(USA) divest from five energy companies – Chevron, ExxonMobil, Marathon Petroleum, Phillips 66, and Valero Energy – that MRTI says are not making sufficient progress to protect the planet from global warming. An overture from Hudson River Presbytery is calling for the denomination to fully divest from fossil fuel companies — setting up a likely debate over what’s the most responsible approach and whether the PC(USA) is moving quickly and forcefully enough in its response to climate change.

**Racism.** This assembly has a committee devoted specifically to issues of race and gender justice — including a report from the Special Committee on Racism Truth and Reconciliation, which calls for more work to be done to “explore and expose where White supremacy is embedded institutionally and foundationally” in the PC(USA), and encourages congregations to investigate their own histories involving people of color. An overture from the Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy calls for the PC(USA) to apologize to African Americans “for the sin of slavery and its legacy.” And the committee will consider a report from the Disparities Experienced by Black Women and Girls Task Force.

**Israel/Palestine.** There have been rumblings in recent months over remarks that J. Herbert Nelson, the PC(USA)'s stated clerk, made describing Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories as "21<sup>st</sup> century slavery." Debate over that may rise up again — perhaps as the assembly considers an overture from Grace Presbytery to declare that Israel's policies, laws and practices regarding the Palestinian people amount to apartheid.

**Financial sustainability.** The Special Committee on Per-Capita Based Funding and National Church Financial Sustainability is proposing a restructuring of the top levels of the national church — a recommendation that reflects concern about the ability of the current per capita funding system to sustain the denomination when so many mid councils and small congregations are feeling financial pressure. At the heart of this discussion: what structure and funding systems are needed for a denomination that's half the size it was 20 years ago?

**Gun violence.** Week after week, people of faith are called to pray for those killed and injured after yet another mass shooting. An assembly committee on Addressing Violence in the USA will consider overtures calling for the PC(USA) to support tighter gun control, including universal background checks before firearms can be purchased and a ban on the sale and ownership of assault weapons. The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy wants the assembly to approve the "Decade to End Gun Violence," a 10-year campaign from 2022 to 2032 "to be conducted at all levels of the church."

**Denominational matters.** The assembly also will consider issues affecting the church itself, including a proposed amendment to the PC(USA) constitution to require that the minimum terms of call for all ministers would include 12 weeks of paid family medical leave. Also of interest: several recommendations to write new confessions for the PC(USA) and measures seeking to provide more flexibility for new worshipping communities and immigrant congregations in allowing their leaders to become ruling elders with voice and vote at presbytery.

**Leadership.** Two teams are standing to serve as the assembly's co-moderators:

- **Josefina Ahumada**, a commissioned ruling elder from the Presbytery de Cristo, with **Marilyn McKelvey Tucker-Marek**, a minister from Flint River Presbytery; and
- **Shavon Starling-Louis** of Charlotte Presbytery with **Ruth Santana-Grace** of the Presbytery of Philadelphia, both ministers.

The election will be held June 18.



*Follow along from home:* Presbyterians can watch General Assembly committee and plenary sessions via a live stream on the internet, and can track assembly business through [www.pc-biz.org](http://www.pc-biz.org).