

**COMMON QUESTIONS**  
concerning the  
**2005/2006 REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE**

**General questions regarding the proposed Strategic Plan:**

**1. What were the PCA Strategic Priorities that the Strategic Planning Steering Committee recommended?**

At the 2003 General Assembly, the Strategic Planning Steering Committee reported that the following priorities would guide it as it began to address the leadership, resources and structure of the PCA:

1. Empower church health and growth for new and existing churches local and worldwide
2. Develop leadership for the future
3. Increase denominational understanding and effectiveness
4. Engage the culture—timeless truth for our times.

These priorities helped shape the actual recommendations of the Strategic Planning Committee.

**2. What will the *Ad Interim* Committee do in the next year?**

It will have two purposes: The first is to communicate and help the body understand the full set of recommendations to the 2006 Assembly through presbytery visits, continued updates to this *Common Questions* document and the website. The second purpose is to receive suggestions that will enable it to perfect the document before bringing it back to the 2006 General Assembly in Atlanta.

**3. How should a suggestion for improvement be offered?**

The Committee asks that all recommended changes, whether from presbyteries or individuals, be sent directly to the *Ad Interim* Committee via email (to dhitzfeld@pcanet.org). The Committee must have all recommendations prior to February 28, 2006 to give time to prepare for General Assembly. It is important to remember that recommended “RAO” changes have been carefully made in such a way as to keep the entire set of recommendations internally consistent. The Committee also respectfully reminds everyone that any subsequent General Assembly action can change the “RAO” immediately with a 2/3 vote of commissioners (as long as at least half of registrants are present). In all probability, the *Ad Interim* Committee in its 2006 report will make a procedural recommendation that all “RAO” changes pertaining to a particular subject be considered as a whole without being subject to amendment. This has been done before and worked well in the case of complex, inter-related “RAO” changes.

**General questions regarding changes to the GA meeting structure:**

**4. What is the advantage of the changes to General Assembly that the SPC is suggesting?**

Before considering any specific changes, the SPC unanimously adopted five desirable outcomes:

1. Achieve a general balance between TE and RE commissioners to GA;
2. Make attendance at GA a significantly desirable and edifying experience;
3. Do the work of the court effectively and efficiently to allow significant time for events and activities that equip, connect, encourage and inspire the leaders of the Church;
4. Make GA a self-supporting event; and
5. Create an atmosphere/meeting where only issues of significance are approved and debated on the floor of GA.

The SPC believes that its recommendations make substantial progress toward these desirable outcomes.

**5. How will this restructuring of GA affect costs?**

The Committee debated having a bi-annual or tri-annual Assembly, but decided against it, and this was confirmed by the SPC’s survey. An “RAO” amendment is proposed that would give AC more flexibility in choosing locations so expensive sites could be avoided and cost-effective sites could be used more often. The SPC felt the way to making GA self-funding was to make attendance at GA a significantly desirable and edifying experience, thus increasing attendance.

**6. What effect will this have on ruling elder (RE) participation?**

We will know in 3-4 years! The SPC feels the restructuring will make it easier for most commissioners, especially REs, to follow the debate and make an informed vote, and thus make participation more attractive to all commissioners.

**7. What will be different about General Assembly?**

There are three fundamental differences: 1) the composition and role of the B&O committee of commissioners (CoC), 2) the reporting by the CoCs for the permanent Committees and Agencies, and 3) the handling of citations from review of presbytery minutes.

**Questions regarding changes to the Bills and Overtures committee:**

**8. Will the composition of Bills and Overtures change?**

Yes, each presbytery would be responsible for electing one RE *and* one TE representative on the Bills and Overtures (B&O) committee of commissioners. Also, B&O's proceedings are being expanded and "opened" to the public, so anyone may watch or be called upon to speak to an issue, if they are knowledgeable on that matter.

**9. How do we protect parity and assure participation when there may be a number of presbyteries that do not send an RE, and some even a TE representative, to serve on B&O?**

The SPC's General Assembly Task Force discussed at length various ways to achieve involvement and parity, including the possibility of limiting voting or attendance of *TEs* from presbyteries that do not send *RE* representation. Forcing TE/RE balance was deemed unwise, in that it had the ability to disenfranchise a lone representative. The Task Force reasoned that it would be much easier to find at least one RE from each presbytery to sit on Bills and Overtures, than to find as many *REs* as it would take to achieve parity on the floor of the Assembly. The key goal was for REs to be able to "make a difference," and the Task Force thought that more duly elected REs (and TEs) would be informed and prepared to speak to a group of 130+ Bills and Overtures members, than to 1500 commissioners on the floor (and more as the PCA grows). The Task Force wrestled with requiring presbyteries to pay expenses for Bills and Overtures representatives, but did not feel that it could make such a requirement, opting for "suggestion" language instead.

**10. How do we assure fair representation in the B&O committee?**

Much will depend on how seriously the presbyteries and their representatives take their responsibility. The SPC trusts presbyteries to pick men who are qualified and willing to expend the time and effort. If presbyteries will follow this intent, the B&O committee will have a large-group of members, as well as parity of TEs and REs. No system is perfect and no structure can assure human behavior or responsibility.

**11. Should a presbytery send the same representative(s) to B&O year after year?**

The GA Task Force considered this question but did not recommend restrictions on years of service on the Bills and Overtures committee. Because of the more advanced level of debate allowed in B&O, some repeated service on B&O may be beneficial and necessary to gain experience. The Task Force thought that it was better to allow presbyteries to decide this question.

**12. What if an overture is presented that really needs "fine tuning"?**

Because the SPC's proposal eliminates the ability to amend recommendations on the floor of the Assembly, the language in "RAO" 13-5.d was added to preserve that privilege in the committees of commissioners, particularly in the Bills and Overtures committee. Thus, perfecting of language can go on in committee of commissioner meetings, rather than on the Assembly floor, which often is ill-equipped in terms of time, qualification or temperament to do such work.

**13. Is it possible to have a minority report from the Bills and Overture committee?**

Yes, but the SPC recommends that at least 3 ruling elders and 3 teaching elders vote for a minority report before it is allowed to be presented on the floor of General Assembly. As the number of presbyteries grows, it may be wiser to set the threshold in terms of percent rather than absolute numbers. This is an example of the type of changes that the *Ad Interim* Committee might be considering this year, if suggested.

**14. Would there still be substantive debate on the floor of the Assembly?**

Yes, but there would be no option to amend. Thus, if the Assembly, after debate, decides that it cannot accept either the original recommendation or a minority report if presented, it can refer the matter back to the committee of commissioners for further consideration and rewording that would take into account the Assembly's debate.

**15. Referring a matter back to Bills and Overtures in "RAO" 14-3 is a new concept. Why did the SPC recommend that and how would that work since Bills and Overtures meets only once annually during GA?**

The SPC proposed this rule to avoid "rushing" business through the Assembly in a particular year. If a matter is referred back to B&O early in the Assembly, the committee may choose to meet again (after Assembly hours) to address the issue. Or, it may choose to send the item to the next year's Bills and Overtures committee as "old business." The intent is for the Bills and Overtures committee of commissioners to continue meeting only during the week of General Assembly.

**Questions regarding changes to reporting by permanent Committees and Agencies, and their committees of commissioners:**

**16. Explain the change regarding the committee of commissioners?**

The main recommendation is to allow the permanent Committees and Agencies to report directly to the Assembly rather than through their Committee of Commissioners. Permanent Committee members are nominated by presbyteries, then selected and nominated by a denominational nominating committee and elected by the entire Assembly. Thus, they should be heard from. The committee of commissioners' review will still occur but a majority opinion by the CoC will be required to substitute or amend a recommendation by the permanent Committee.

**17. Will the "average man on the floor" be able to give input on overtures or the business of permanent Committees and Agencies?**

Yes, all commissioners will have an opportunity to vote on all recommendations coming from each permanent Committee and Agency, even when there is not a substitute recommendation coming from the committee of commissioners. Furthermore, they will have opportunity to give input through presbytery's delegates to the CoCs.

**18. How do we assure that review by the committees of commissioners would still take place under the new proposal?**

The CoCs would continue to operate as they always have, reviewing the reports of the permanent Committees and Agencies. The difference would come when, and if, a CoC wanted to amend the permanent Committee report. The CoC would then have to present that amendment as a substitute when the permanent Committee reports on the floor of GA.

**19. What happens if there is a minority report to a permanent Committee or Agency report?**

Both the majority and minority report would go to the CoC, which would then decide by majority vote, between the two, which position it will present to the Assembly. If the CoC adopts the position of the minority report, then the CoC would present that as a substitute after the permanent Committee chair presented the report. Those who wish, as a "matter of conscience," may still have their negative vote recorded.

**Questions regarding changes to the Review of Presbytery Records:**

**20. What changes does the SPC recommend?**

Currently, when the Review of Presbytery Records Committee has citations, it is not clear how to resolve the issue. Sometimes, matters go back and forth from presbytery to subsequent Assemblies for multiple years. Under the new rules, the Review of Presbytery Records Committee can recommend that the lower court make its case before the SJC, the Assembly's commission for addressing any important delinquency or grossly unconstitutional proceedings.

**Questions regarding the survey and/or statistics:**

**21. I'd like to get more in-depth survey results or an explanation of what certain numbers mean.**

Detailed analyses are available on the Strategic Planning web page. [www.pcaac.org/StrategicPlan.htm](http://www.pcaac.org/StrategicPlan.htm). Contact information for specific questions is also provided.

**Questions regarding the proposed Cooperative Ministries Committee (CMC):**

**22. How do we assure that the CMC will be effective in resolving issues and continuing the strategic planning effort?**

Since the Coordinators and permanent Committee chairmen currently meet informally each January, it was agreed that work and momentum begun by the SPC should be carried on informally (until the CMC is formalized by Assembly action). Thus specific tasks for 2005-2007 were written into the SPC's recommendation to be handled by the informal gathering of Coordinators and chairmen. The recommendation was also written such that responsibility for the tasks was given to the Administrative Committee (AC) to coordinate. If the formal CMC and its responsibilities are not approved by the 2006 Assembly, the AC will have to pick up the work instead.

**23. Were resources discussed?**

Yes, the SPC Funding Task Force made significant recommendations designed to help the Committees and Agencies have the necessary resources for important ministry. However, the SPC and Coordinators did not have sufficient time to discuss and agree upon these recommendations so they were forwarded to the Coordinators and the AC with progress to be reported to the 2006 Assembly. (All budgets are currently submitted through AC).

**24. Would a "no pay, no say" approach to participation in denominational ministries be helpful?**

Ninety percent of respondents indicated that every church should contribute to PCA denominational administration but only 39% agreed or were aware that Committees and Agencies are good stewards. Fifty percent believe that giving should be completely voluntary and 45% disagreed with the notion of mandatory dues. The SPC concluded that the Assembly would not approve a "no pay, no say" approach. Instead, it suggested that annual reporting of giving to denominational ministries be enhanced in order to "shine the light" where local church members can more easily observe the churches that are and are not supporting the work of the denomination.

***For more information, please see the Strategic Planning web page, [www.pcaac.org/StrategicPlan.htm](http://www.pcaac.org/StrategicPlan.htm), or contact:***

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Or contact SPC Administrative Assistant Diane Hitzfeld at [dhitzfeld@pcanet.org](mailto:dhitzfeld@pcanet.org) or 770-513-9409 and she will forward your question or comments to the *Ad Interim* Committee.