

A PLEA FOR EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT COOPERATIVE MINISTRY IN THE PCA

Working Paper, Strategic Planning Task Force on Funding
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INTRODUCTION

In His great mercy, God has raised up the Presbyterian Church in America, a denomination solidly based on biblical faith and committed to the Great Commission, a denomination that might be the envy of many generations of Christians. Today we, both local church bodies and individuals, are faced with a fundamental question: What would God have us do regarding the financial support of the PCA? Is it His will for His people to support the church to which they have given public allegiance with their contributions as well as their profession?

The Strategic Planning Committee study of the funding of the PCA General Assembly Committees and Agencies reveals the need for a fundamental paradigm shift in our PCA culture regarding the matter of church giving to our General Assembly ministries. The objective of this report is, by God's grace, to address this issue forthrightly and to propose a better direction.

Every local church has many financial responsibilities and all face multiple requests for funds. Some of these funding responsibilities are for the ministries of the particular church, some are for PCA ministries at the presbytery or General Assembly level, and others are for para-church ministries. Both individuals and churches are often solicited for support of cultural causes such as scouting, art, music, and education. Our commitment to the Great Commission and our Christian world-and-life view teach us that all of these causes may be deserving objects of our good stewardship; and we wish to exercise discernment in giving funds in such a way that the cause of Christ is advanced and He is honored. There is good evidence that PCA members and churches are among the very generous and may generate an annual benevolent economy in the range of one billion dollars.

In our review of PCA giving as it is reported to the Stated Clerk's Office, it also appears that, while we are strong in overall benevolence, we are weak and inconsistent in our support of the GA ministries. We are weak in what we may call "cooperative ministry" within our own denomination. Some of our churches are disinclined for a variety of reasons to support significantly the PCA ministries, which are established by strong consensus in our church courts. How can we – both ministries and churches – address this discrepancy? How can a change in the current mind-set be achieved? What changes in the ministries (or changes in the way their work is communicated to the church at large) can be made to encourage broad, wholehearted, cheerful support from all our PCA constituency?

It is the opinion of the SPC that if the GA Committees and Agencies are to merit the broad support of our PCA people, they must be streamlined, transparent, and accountable: *streamlined* in the sense of being efficient and effective in their missions; *transparent* in the sense of having open, clear reporting of ministries and finances; and *accountable* in the sense that good oversight and evaluation of kingdom contribution continuously takes place.

Although the PCA is a church of inestimable value, it appears that some within the denomination have developed attitudes about the PCA that need to be changed by wholesome discussion and even open godly debate. A leadership process must begin to advocate broad, significant, and habitual support of PCA ministries by all churches able to do so. If not, we will at best weaken our kingdom ministries or at worst lose the denomination that the Lord has given to us. Basically, if we do not have the commitment to labor together in the fellowship of gospel ministry, our theological and ecclesiastical commitments will not be adequate to sustain a healthy denomination.

In the next few pages we wish to make our case, first by taking note of our history both in terms of our roots and our efforts to address funding issues. Then we want to discuss the realities of “cooperative ministry” or the lack thereof. Finally, we want to present some solutions and factors, which, we believe, could give us a stronger PCA and greater kingdom ministry for the glory of God.

Please read carefully and bear with us, as we wish to begin a dialogue to address this matter in a godly fashion.

I. Historical Roots of the Presbyterian Church in America

There is a consensus that an individual's personality is a product of his or her heredity and environment. In similar fashion, the present mentality and practices of the PCA are a product of our origins and the North American twenty-first century culture in which we presently minister.

The PCA had its first General Assembly, using initially the name National Presbyterian Church, in 1973 as a result of more than a generation of evangelicals' resistance to liberal theological trends and the abuse of ecclesiastical power in our former denomination, the Presbyterian Church in the United States (popularly known as the "Southern Presbyterian Church"). Several of the founding fathers of the PCA have written about their recollections of those formative years.¹

Theological liberalism and neo-orthodoxy did not spread as rapidly or as widely in the Southern Presbyterian Church as they did in its northern counterpart. Over a period of time, however, from the founding of the Fellowship of St. James in 1929, that was begun in order to move the PCUS toward a more liberal direction, to the PCUS General Assembly of 1972 which adopted "The Meaning of Doctrinal Loyalty in Ordination Vows" that departed from the position of plenary, verbal inspiration of the Bible, and weakened doctrinal integrity, the PCUS evolved into a more theologically diverse, and ecclesiastically hierarchical denomination.

After seeing only minor gains in years of effort to stem the tide of liberalism in the PCUS, many conservative leaders moved in the early 1970s toward the peaceful formation of a new denomination that would be "faithful to the Scriptures, true to the Reformed faith, and obedient to the Great Commission." The time was at hand, they believed, to concentrate their energies, attention, and resources in a positive direction.²

¹ See, *I Am Reminded*, Kennedy Smartt; *The Historic Polity of the PCA*, Robert C. Cannada, W. Jack Williamson; *The Historical Birth of the PCA*, John E. Richards; *Hitherto . . . A Biographical Testimony*, Harold Borchert; *How the Gold Is Become Dim*, Morton H. Smith; *To God All Praise and Glory*, Paul G. Settle.

² Evangelicals sought to turn the tide by establishing *The Presbyterian Journal* in 1942, Concerned Presbyterians (laymen) in 1964, Covenant Fellowship of Presbyterians (a church renewal fellowship), and Presbyterian Churchmen United (ministers) in 1969. In 1967, 675 PCUS ministers (out of 4,400) signed a "Declaration of Concern" expressing their concerns of the theological decline of the Church. Though there were some temporary and isolated gains for the conservatives,² after the General Assembly of 1973, many conservatives concluded that the battle had been lost. Leaders of the Concerned Presbyterians and Presbyterian Churchmen United argued for a peaceful separation to begin a new denomination "Faithful to the Scriptures, True to the Reformed Faith, and Obedient to the Great Commission" so as to concentrate their energies, attention and resources in a positive direction. The Covenant Fellowship of Presbyterians, however, decided to continue reform efforts within the PCUS and turned their short-term efforts to persuading evangelical churches and ministers to remain within the PCUS. A 1972-1973 study by the PCUS magazine, *The Presbyterian Survey*, revealed that 200,000 of the denomination's 985,000 members favored the formation of a new evangelical denomination. When the actual formation of the new denomination took place, however, only 40,000 members, 260 churches (mostly in the Southeast) and 196 ministers became part of the First General Assembly.

Influences on PCA Polity and Funding of Cooperative Ministries

A number of factors influenced the development of PCA polity and consequently the funding of cooperative ministries.

- The Founding Fathers of the PCA reintroduced the “Eight Preliminary Principles” of the First General Assembly in America of 1789. *These principles that form the introduction to our present Book of Church Order are not simply historical words, but guiding principles that reflect the deliberate action of the PCA to have a “grass-roots,” non-coercive, non-hierarchical, bottom-up, more democratic presbyterian polity.*³
- The PCA began to write its *BCO* using the 1933 edition of the PCUS *BCO* because it was after 1933 that many of the more coercive and hierarchical changes in PCUS polity were believed to have taken place.
- The PCA established General Assembly Committees⁴ rather than Boards, being more influenced by J. H. Thornwell than by Charles Hodge’s views in that debate of the previous century.
- For several decades before the formation of the PCA, conservative PCUS churches and individuals had gravitated toward supporting independent faith missions and para-church ministries as they lost confidence in the PCUS denominational ministries. It could be argued that *the para-church mentality (not just Thornwell’s views)* was also a strong influence on the initial structuring and funding of PCA General Assembly Committees.⁵
- The Assembly Committees were structured as quasi-independent ministries under the umbrella of the Assembly, making an annual report to the Assembly.
- No General Assembly Council was created to coordinate ministries as in the PCUS. No mechanism was provided in the PCA for the coordination of the efforts and programs of the Assembly Committees other than the Committee on Administration’s review of budgets,⁶ and the requirement that each Committee submit a monthly financial report to the Committee on Administration.⁷

³The Presbyterian Church in Scotland was created in 1560 from “the top-down.” That is, in Scotland the General Assembly was created first. It was a state church as well. In America, however, Presbyterianism developed from the “bottom-up,” first congregations, then the Presbytery of Philadelphia (1706), then the Synod of Philadelphia, (1717), and finally the General Assembly (1789). Presbyterianism in America originated as a free church and on a more democratic model. In Seventeenth Century two varieties on Presbyterianism were extant in Scotland and England; one a more hierarchical, prelati, top-down (William Cunningham called it “aristocratic”) view advocated by Samuel Rutherford and Robert Baillie and the other a more democratic, bottom-up, view proposed by Alexander Hamilton, George Gillespie, and John Paget.³ The PCA is the patterned after the latter view.

⁴ Committee on Administration, Committee on Christian Education and Publications, Committee on Mission to the United States, and Committee on Mission to the World.

⁵ In fact, though a few historical scholars among the Founding Fathers were aware of the bearing of the nineteenth-century *history* of the Thornwell-Hodge Debate on the polity of the new denomination, many were probably more affected by their more recent *experience* of supporting independent faith missions and para-church ministries as they lost confidence in the PCUS denominational ministries.

⁶ “The Committee on Administration shall review the budget requests of the three other committees; shall consider the requests of each committee as it relates to the budget requests of other committees, to needs and to opportunities, and shall recommend a budget for each of the three committees to the General Assembly.” Administrative costs of each Committee were to be raised by that Committee. *MIGA*, 1973, p.

- There was to be no combined budget; each PCA Committee was to be responsible to raise its own funds.⁸
- Designated giving was encouraged.⁹
- There was to be no “equalization of funds” in the PCA.¹⁰ That principle is stated in our “RAO” 4-12.
- Administrative costs of each committee were to be raised by each Committee, and the Committee on Administration was explicitly directed to raise its own funds for its operations that are almost entirely support services.¹¹ (Administrative costs in a range of 15-50% are part of standard operating procedures for para-church ministries and non-profit agencies).
- The General Assembly itself was set up as a non-delegated Assembly, because conservatives had found it difficult to be elected as commissioners to the General Assembly in the PCUS when presbyteries elected commissioners to a delegated assembly. As the PCA has grown, every attempt to move to a delegated, more deliberative assembly has failed.

IN SHORT, due to a complex of factors that led to its formation, the PCA was begun without any structure or process that required the coordination of efforts and funding of its Committees and Agencies. The Assembly Committees were structured as quasi-independent ministries under the umbrella of the Assembly. A system was set up whereby churches could have all of the privileges of membership in the PCA without any financial responsibility whatsoever.

51. It should be noted that any reference to the AC’s present consideration of a committee’s budget “as it relates to the budget requests of other committees, to needs and to opportunities,” does not appear in our present RAO 4-11.

⁷ *M2GA*, 1974, p. 82.

⁸ “Each committee shall be responsible to raise the financial support for its work . . .” *MIGA*, 1973, p. 51.

⁹ “It shall be clearly understood that churches and individual donors shall be free to designate their gifts to the causes they desire to support . . .” *MIGA*, 1973, p. 52.

¹⁰ Conservative churches in the PCUS were reluctant to support the Board Christian Education because of its objectionable materials channeled their giving to the Board of World Missions. The PCUS General Council of the General Assembly (an agency with representatives from all Boards, Agencies, and Permanent Committees, the “heads” of the Boards, Agencies, and Permanent Committees, the Moderator, the Immediate Past Moderator, and the Stated Clerk, to foster coordination and planning for the work of the whole Church) could “equalize” funds, i.e. transfer funds from fully funded Boards to under funded Boards. Therefore our First General Assembly stated, “There shall be no equalization of gifts so designated.” *MIGA*, 1973, p. 52.

¹¹ “The suggested budget of the Committee on Administration shall be presented to the General Assembly. Upon adoption by the General Assembly, funds for the operation of this committee shall be raised by the committee and distributed through its treasurer.” *MIGA*, 1973, p. 52.

II. The Track Record of the PCA on Cooperative Ministries

The Presbyterian system of church government is a *biblical, representative, and cooperative* system.¹² Presbyterians do not believe that they are the only Christians, or that churches with other types of church government are not valid Christian churches. Presbyterians do believe, however, that the presbyterian, biblical, representative and cooperative system is that which conforms most consistently to the Scriptures (*BCO* 21-5, Q. 3; 24-5, Q. 3).

- Presbyterian church government is *biblical* because it is based on biblical directives and principles drawn from both the Old and New Testaments (not just the New Testament). The historical development of church government is informative, but not determinative for us. Both our form of government and our theology are based on the entire Bible.
- Presbyterian church government is *representative* because the people choose their spiritual leaders to govern the church (its members and officers) on the local, regional, and national levels. We practice mutual accountability and discipline through our representative government as set forth in our *Book of Church Order*.
- Presbyterian church government is *cooperative*; local churches see themselves as part of the larger Church. We hold to a common, binding doctrinal, confessional standard of the Reformed faith, the *Westminster Standards*. Local churches, we believe, regardless of their size, minister best not alone but in cooperation with the larger Church. Therefore, we engage in cooperative ministry as a body of churches to carry out the Great Commission Christ gave to the Church.

The PCA shares common commitments to:

1. Reformed theology, a binding confessional standard (*The Westminster Standards*);
2. Mutual accountability and discipline through our representative government (*Book of Church Order*); and
3. Cooperative ministries (local churches, presbyteries, General Assembly, networks, and likeminded brothers and sisters in the Church universal).

The experience of the last three decades has shown that the PCA is strongest in the areas of theology and polity. However, while many PCA churches have effective local ministries and engage in fruitful work for the Kingdom of God through networks and para-church ministries with likeminded brothers and sisters in the Church universal, the PCA has not realized the full potential of her own presbytery and General Assembly cooperative ministries.

Perusing the *Minutes* of the General Assemblies of the PCA, particularly the reports of the Committee on Administration (renamed Administrative Committee in 1988), one finds two recurring issues addressed again and again: 1) concern over

¹² For fuller discussion see “Presbyterianism,” L. Roy Taylor, in *Who Runs the Church? Four Views on Church Government*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 2004, 73-111.

inadequate coordination of efforts and cooperation among General Assembly Committees and 2) concern over inadequate funding of several General Assembly Committees.

Coordination Efforts

1975: Since the Committee on Administration's review of budgets did not seem to have accomplished an overall coordination of ministries, the Third General Assembly approved a resolution (not a directive or policy recorded in the "RAO") that the Moderator and immediate Past Moderator, along with the Stated Clerk, the other Coordinators, and one representative from each Committee meet twice each year "to discuss the issues facing the program of the Church."¹³ These "Moderator's Conferences" continued with varying regularity until about 1982, when they were discontinued because of some objections to the procedure,¹⁴ inadequate funding, and decline of interest in the meetings.

1981: The Ninth General Assembly addressed the "age-old dilemma of the freedoms of decentralization versus the efficiencies of centralization" by adopting a recommendation:

That the General Assembly authorize the Committee on Administration, in consultation with each Permanent Committee of the General Assembly, to review and evaluate the organizational structure and interrelationships of Permanent Committees; identify areas of duplication, ambiguity, competition in Committee assignments and responsibilities; suggest appropriate revisions; and report the same to the Tenth General Assembly.¹⁵

1982: The COA reported to the Tenth General Assembly that the COA was serving as a computer service bureau for the Assembly Committees and was studying the matter of a common office location for the four Committees.¹⁶ The Tenth General Assembly approved the relocation of the committee offices to Atlanta and added representatives of the program committees as voting members on the COA.¹⁷ The common use of a computer system and the consideration of a common office site did not, however, address all the issues contained in the recommendation cited above.

The study of structure and interrelationships of Permanent Committees continued after the Joining and Receiving of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod in 1982, a union that had occupied much of the attention of the PCA.

1984: An *ad interim* committee on General Assembly structure and procedures was erected. In 1985, the membership was expanded to include four additional brethren of

¹³ M3GA, 1975, p. 78.

¹⁴ M7GA, 1979, pp. 29, 32, 138.

¹⁵ M9GA, 1981, p. 155, recommendation 6.

¹⁶ M10GA, 1982, p. 130.

¹⁷ M10GA, 1982, p. 135.

differing views.¹⁸ The *ad interim* committee's report was partially adopted in 1986,¹⁹ a delegated assembly proposal being voted down. The Standing Judicial Commission was inaugurated. But not addressed in the report were the matters of reviewing and evaluating the organizational structure and interrelationships of Permanent Committees; identifying areas of duplication, ambiguity, competition in Committee assignments and responsibilities; and suggesting appropriate revisions.

1983-2001:

Attempts have been made to coordinate efforts through the expansion of the COA (later AC). Voting representatives from CE&P, MTW, and MUS were added to the COA in 1983.²⁰ In 1991, voting members of all Committees and Agencies (not just CE&P, MNA, MTW) were added to the Administrative Committee.²¹ When Reformed University Ministries became a Program Committee, the AC was again expanded to include a voting member from RUM.²² The AC, however, though composed of at-large members and voting representatives of all Committees and Agencies, with all C&A chief administrative officers having the right to attend and participate in discussion ("RAO" 5-1), has not been extensively utilized as a forum for coordination of efforts, for identifying areas of duplication, ambiguity, competition in Committee assignments and responsibilities, and for crafting solutions.

Cooperation Unstructured Among Committees and Agencies

When the first PCA Office Building was purchased in Atlanta and several Committees and Agencies moved into the same building,²³ the move was made with the provisos that no Committee or Agency would be required to share common space, services, functions, and equipment, and that any Committee or Agency could withdraw from shared common space, services, functions, and equipment by unilateral action, simply notifying the others.²⁴ In other words, the General Assembly purchased a building, moved C&As into it, but did not require the C&As to cooperate.

In the early years of the PCA, coordinators were not encouraged to meet with each other. When several C&As had moved to the greater Atlanta area (Decatur) in 1982-3, some meetings were held from time to time. In 1985 the Coordinator for COA reported that coordinators were meeting monthly to collaborate on items of mutual concern, share needs, and pray. Later, quarterly meetings were held for information, fellowship and prayer. *It should be noted, however, that the General Assembly has never initiated a structure or process whereby the Chief Administrative Officers of the General Assembly Committees and Agencies are required to meet together for the purpose of coordinating the efforts of the various ministries.*

¹⁸ M13GA, 1985, p. 121.

¹⁹ M14GA, 1986, pp. 81,102,103,106, 107, 425-448.

²⁰ M11GA, 1983, p. 296.

²¹ M19GA, 1991, pp. 48-50.

²² M29GA, 2001, pp. 53-54.

²³ In the early years of the PCA, the Committee offices were located in separate cities.

²⁴ M15GA, 1987, p. 192.

IN SHORT, though the General Assembly has studied (several times) the issue of ways to review and evaluate the organizational structure and interrelationships of Permanent Committees and to identify areas of duplication, ambiguity, and competition in Committee assignments and responsibilities, such studies thus far have been largely ineffectual. Though efforts have been made (COA/AC review of budgets, periodic financial reports directed to be made in uniform manner to the COA/AC, Moderators Conferences, adding C&A representatives to the AC), these efforts have not produced well-coordinated ministries.

Challenges to Funding of Committees and Agencies

From the beginning and throughout the history of the PCA, concerns have been expressed about the inadequate funding of several PCA ministries (COA, CE&P, MUS). As early as the Third General Assembly, the Assembly answered in the affirmative an overture from New River Presbytery on the issue.²⁵ In 1974, “by mutual consent,” the four committees had joined together in an effort to promote their budgets, an effort coordinated by the Committee on Administration and known as the “King’s Million” program.²⁶ Yet by 1978, the Committee of Commissioners of COA was discussing “how to administrate better our General Assembly Operations so as to help overcome what many believe is a growing imbalance in budgeting among the four Permanent Committees.”²⁷ The Assembly adopted a resolution originating with the COA Committee of Commissioners noting, “what appears to be competition between some of the Permanent Committees, over promotion of program, solicitation of funds, and levels of budgets.” The Assembly decided to:

Direct the four permanent Committees and their Sub-Committees not to lose the vision of over-all work of the church so necessary to her welfare; to direct the staff to maintain such vision even when pursuing the objectives of their particular areas of responsibility. And to so conduct their promotional and fund raising efforts as well as the development of their budgets in a manner that will also promote and consider the needs

²⁵ 1. Whereas, the principal [sic] of freedom of conscience of individual Christians to give where he feels the Lord is calling him to give is recognized,

2. And whereas three of our Assembly’s committees have received far less than they had anticipated for the vital operation of their work,

3. And whereas it is recognized that the work of Mission to the World justly deserves all the funds it receives and more,

Therefore, New River Presbytery (unanimously) overtures the General Assembly:

1. To commend people for their giving to world missions.

2. Urge that they increase their giving to world missions but at the same time also that the individuals and congregations of the PCA prayerfully consider the needs and responsibilities of the Committee on Administration, the Committee on Christian Education and Publications, [and] the Committee on Mission to the U.S., and without taking anything away from the Committee on Mission to the World, yet increase their giving so that these other three committees may receive sufficient funds on which to operate efficiently. *M3GA*, 1975, pp. 31, 64.

²⁶ *M2GA*, 1974, p.130.

²⁷ *M6GA*, 1978, p. 97.

and responsibilities of the other committees as charged to them by the General Assembly; to the end that we will move forward in unity and harmony under our Lord's banner to be used mightily in his work.²⁸

Evidently, the advice did not have the desired effect, because the Eleventh General Assembly passed a similar resolution, noting that "it appears that our permanent committees are operating as para-church agencies" and "that [the] situation appears to generate harmful conflict among the committees as they strive toward their individual committee's respective goals," all of which had resulted in a financial "disaster."²⁹

From the outset, Assembly Committees and Agencies have depended upon undesignated gifts to fund the administration of their work. The First General Assembly developed an "Askings" plan for undesignated giving. The formula used is that the operating budgets of all Assembly C&As are totaled. The sum is then divided by the reported communicant membership of the PCA. This yields a per capita request. In theory, if every PCA church would give at the per capita request level, all General Assembly ministries' operating expenses would be met. The plan is based on several assumptions that are contrary to fact.

- ***It is assumed*** that all PCA churches will contribute; ***the fact is*** that a discouraging number of PCA churches give nothing to any General Assembly ministry.
- ***It is assumed*** that all PCA churches will contribute at the level of the per capita request; ***the fact is*** that many that give, give below the per capita request and some give more than requested.
- ***It is assumed*** that all churches have the same giving potential; ***the facts are*** that for churches with lower per capita incomes, the per capita request is a sacrifice and for churches with higher per capita incomes, the per capita request is minimal.
- ***It is assumed*** that all PCA churches will give to all General Assembly ministries; ***the fact is*** that, for various reasons, many contributing PCA churches give selectively to some C&As, but not all.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the per capita request method has never fully funded General Assembly ministries.

From the beginning, PCA churches and individuals have preferred designated giving to specific individuals and projects instead of supporting a denominational ministry as a whole. As early as the Third General Assembly, the COA's Sub-committee on Stewardship reported: "The experience of the past year [1974] reveals that the majority of our funds [about two thirds] are being received as designated funds. Approximately one third of the funds are being given in an undesignated way to be divided as the Assembly directs." The report went on to note that "some of the Committees are having difficulties meeting their operational expenses."³⁰

²⁸ M6GA, 1978, pp. 98-99.

²⁹ M11GA, 1983, pp. 82-83.

³⁰ M3GA, 1975, 13.

Not only have PCA churches and individuals revealed a preference for designated giving when giving to the PCA, they have also demonstrated a preference for giving more to non-PCA causes than to the PCA. The 1974 *PCA Yearbook* reveals that PCA reporting churches gave 1.38 times more to non-PCA ministries than to PCA presbytery and General Assembly ministries. The 2004 *PCA Yearbook* reveals that PCA reporting churches gave 2.18 times more to non-PCA ministries than to PCA presbytery and General Assembly ministries.³¹

PCA members tend to support some General Assembly ministries by direct individual contributions rather than giving through their churches. For example, the 2003 MTW Budget was \$39,560,000.³² PCA churches reported total contributions to MTW in the amount of \$9,268,558.³³ A similar phenomenon in varying degrees is the case with RUM and MNA as well. Other C&As, the AC for example, receive the great majority of their support from churches rather than individuals.

The PCA does not have a system whereby churches are required to give something to the denomination.³⁴ A church may be a member in of the PCA, with all the attendant rights and privileges, and never give any financial support to any presbytery or General Assembly ministry. Sadly, that is the case with a number of PCA churches.

IN SHORT, the Committees and Agencies were set up as quasi-independent ministries under the umbrella of the General Assembly. The result has been a competitive ethos for fund-raising among PCA C&As. Some PCA C&As are well funded; others are consistently under-funded. The General Assembly originally encouraged designated giving. The result has been that from the beginning to the present, the majority of funds received by General Assembly ministries are designated to the support of individuals or projects. A per capita system of funding, established on factually incorrect premises, has never fully funded General Assembly ministries (and probably never will). Ministries that facilitate contributions to individual missionaries, campus ministers, and church planters are more effective in fund-raising than ministries that do not or cannot facilitate contribution to individual servants of the Church. PCA individuals and churches have over the last thirty years demonstrated an increasing preference for giving to non-PCA causes over PCA causes.

³¹ The church statistics are skewed because some churches do not submit annual reports and submit incomplete reports, omitting financial data.

³² *M30GA*, 2002, p. 449.

³³ *2004 Yearbook*, vol. 1, p. 609.

³⁴ Contrast the PCA (a presbyterian denomination) with the Southern Baptist Convention. Local Baptist churches are congregational in polity. In order to have a vote in the local county association, the state convention, and the Southern Baptist [national] Convention, a church must contribute *something* to the “Cooperative Program.” Churches are encouraged to tithe to the denomination, though the average church contribution is now about 8% of its income. Cooperative Program contributions are sent to the state convention. The state convention decides how much to send down to local associations and up to the national convention. In this manner, all denominational ministries are funded. It is a “no-pay, no say” rule.

III. Cooperative Ministry Scriptural and Reformed

At the formation of the PCA, the church did recognize its responsibility for cooperative ministry. The understanding of the PCA General Assembly, as developed in the *Book of Church Order*, is laid out in the “Principles for the Organization of the Assembly.”³⁵ Numbers 1 through 6 of these principles express a strong biblical sense of cooperative ministry:

1. The Church is responsible for carrying out the Great Commission.
2. The initiative for carrying out the Great Commission belongs to the Church at every court level, and the Assembly is responsible to encourage and promote the fulfillment of this ministry by the various courts.
3. The work of the Church as set forth in the Great Commission is one work, being implemented at the General Assembly level *through equally essential committees* (emphasis added).
4. It is the responsibility of every member and every member congregation to support the whole work of the denomination as they are led in their conscience held captive to the Word of God.
5. It is the responsibility of the General Assembly to evaluate needs and resources, and to act on priorities for the most effective fulfillment of the Great Commission.
6. The Church recognizes the right of individuals and congregations to labor through other agencies in fulfilling the Great Commission.

Note that number 4 above delivers the forceful punch for cooperative ministry, but is tempered by number 6, which acknowledges the biblical right (Acts 5:4) of individuals and congregations to govern the resources God has entrusted to them. Nevertheless, the thrust of this part of the *BCO* is cooperative ministry.

These principles are consistent with “cooperative ministry” concepts flowing through the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. It is to the visible church that Christ has given “the ministry, order, and ordinances of God for the gathering and perfecting of the saints in this life.”³⁶ Christians, “united to one another in love . . . have communion in each other’s gifts and graces” and “are obliged to the performance of such duties, publick and private, as do conduce to their mutual good.”³⁷ Further, they are “bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification.”³⁸

The *Book of Church Order* and the *Confession of Faith* both envision the people of God working cooperatively together expressly because Scripture itself teaches this understanding of Christ’s Church. Scripture is replete with the idea that believers should be working and serving the Lord together. A few examples illustrate the many that can

³⁵ *BCO* 14-1.

³⁶ *WCF* 25.III.

³⁷ *WCF* 26.I.

³⁸ *WCF* 26.II.

be gleaned from God's Word. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) is in one sense a unifying command in that it is given to all and assumes some type of cooperation. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) is focused on maintaining unity, both in the truth of the message and in faithfulness in the distribution of the message to the world. In II Corinthians 8 and 9 Paul calls for culturally and geographically diverse churches to minister to and for one another. It seems evident that cooperative ministry is a significant aspect of our gospel work and our Presbyterian heritage.

It should then be no surprise that cooperative ministry surfaced once again as one of four aspects of PCA identity and a key concept in the PCA Mission Statement presented by the Strategic Planning Committee to the 31st General Assembly in Charlotte, North Carolina, in June 2003³⁹. The steering committee's report brought into focus the value of belonging to a denomination (for us, the PCA). Functioning at its best, in the power of the Holy Spirit, a denomination "provides the local church [and presbyteries and individuals] with vision, accountability, fellowship, and resources."⁴⁰ One of four aspects of the PCA's identity is:

Cooperative ministry.

The denomination seeks to accomplish more together than the separate units of the church could accomplish on their own (local church, presbytery, General Assembly, networks, and like-minded brothers and sisters in the Church of Jesus Christ worldwide).⁴¹

The Mission Statement again picks up the idea of cooperative ministry:

The mission of the Presbyterian Church in America is to glorify and enjoy God by equipping and enabling the churches of the PCA to work together to fulfill the Great Commission by making disciples of all nations, so that people will mature as servants of the triune God, will worship God in spirit and truth, and will have a reforming impact on culture.⁴²

Embracing the presbyterian form of government means embracing a spirit of mutual service and accountability among our churches, presbyteries, and General Assembly Committees and Agencies. United and ever working toward agreement on our identity, mission, values, vision, and strategic priorities, we can develop structures and allocate resources and personnel to carry out the Great Commission. As we minister together sacrificially in love,⁴³ our adherence to a common theology and ecclesiology will be proved.

³⁹ See "Being Revived and Bringing Reformation: A Framework for Planning for the Presbyteries and Churches of the Presbyterian Church in America," pp. 4-5. See also *M31GA, 2003*, Appendix C, Attachment A, pp. 301-2.

⁴⁰ "Being Revived," Foreword.

⁴¹ "Being Revived," p. 4.

⁴² "Being Revived," p. 5.

⁴³ Philippians 2:1-8.

IN SHORT, concepts of cooperative ministry are integral to the Scriptural doctrine of the Church as mirrored in the Reformed tradition of the Christian faith set forth in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and Presbyterian polity outlined in the *Book of Church Order*. Cooperative ministry within the PCA is a major focus of the Strategic Planning Committee's study.

Church Vows Presuppose Cooperation

Note one further matter, the content of church vows. When members unite with a congregation in their profession of faith, they promise “to support the church in its worship and work to the best of [their] ability” and “to submit to the government and discipline of the church.” In a similar vein, officers are asked, “Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?” and “Do you accept the office . . . and promise faithfully to perform all the duties thereof . . . ?”⁴⁴ In a system involving the courts (Session, Presbytery, and General Assembly) of a connected church system, these vows are made in a context of “cooperative ministry” and envision “cooperative ministry.”

THE POINT HERE is not to denigrate cooperation with other evangelical Christians or to deny “networking” as a viable reality in accomplishing ministry; both are consistent with a biblical view of the Church universal and with the concept of cooperative ministries. The point is that “cooperative ministry” within the PCA should be never neglected but rather maximized because this is the portion of God’s church and the context wherein we have made our vows and to which we have made commitment. There is a serious inconsistency in identifying with a part of the church, vowing submission to the brethren, and voting for her ministries, and then, in this context, neglecting to do everything possible to resource properly those ministries.

IV. Providential Blessings and Opportunities

Life in God’s Church has never been easy. From the New Testament era on through the turbulent flow of church history, there has been opposition from without, conflicts within, and persecution to the point of bloodshed and martyrdom.

Few generations or centuries have enjoyed the freedom to proclaim and enjoy the gospel as have we in the PCA. Few if any have had the blessing of Christian books and material, trained teachers and preachers, Christian colleges and seminaries. Over the course of history, who has had more ready access to truth and more resources than the PCA and a few other denominations and churches of our own day? Few if any have had the material blessings the PCA enjoys. Herein, however, lies the danger. Material things can be the occasion for good stewardship in the progress of the gospel or they can

⁴⁴ BCO 21-5; 24-5.

offer a type of ease and comfort that leads to a lukewarm church (Revelation 3:14ff) and to hardness of heart toward needy souls and even toward God.

The question is what our response should be to these blessings. We are taught that “to whom much is given much is required.” We have great blessings and we must use them effectively for the progress of God’s kingdom and the glory of His gospel of grace.

Think of the movement of the gospel reported in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Then think of the hardness of the cultures and societies of Europe and North America! God’s blessings to us must be unleashed to meet spiritual needs both where there are hungry souls and where there is hardness of heart. Consider the availability of the written word and the potential of technology to carry the truths of the Reformed faith into places where God’s Spirit can work through the Word to bring spiritual awakening and revival of previously unknown magnitude and depth.

If in “cooperative ministry” more can be done in our time to share our blessings and maximize our opportunities, then we should zealously cultivate a spirit of “cooperative ministry” and sacrificially return to our Lord and to His cause the blessings and resources with which He has provided us.

V. Barriers and Obstacles

In the way of any spiritual movement are barriers and obstacles. The world, the flesh, and the devil will not surrender the fight until the Lord’s return!

Let us face a few barriers and knock them down with the truth of God’s word.

Barrier 1: Worldliness. Some are simply caught up in the attractiveness of our material blessings. They would rather spend more on their own amenities in the here and now than invest in the means of grace where dividends are paid throughout eternity.

Let us pray that God will continue to bless the western church, the PCA particularly included, with rich resources so that churches can be built and ministries operated on the home front. Let us be equally diligent to use our God-given resources to take the gospel to the ends of the earth and minister mercy wherever God enables us.

Barrier 2: Aversion to Administration. The PCA has an aversion to administration. Note the neglect of commitment to the partnership shares, which are aimed primarily to cover the administrative costs of the ministries. The best-loved ministries, MTW and RUM, receive respectively about 25% and 35% of the partnership share. Covenant College and Covenant Seminary battle similar realities, and funding drops off from there. Because of an unbiblical, reactionary view of administration, conceived in the historical struggle out of which the PCA was born, PCA ministries suffer from lack of sound funding.

Administration is essential to the work of any ministry, and, generally speaking, the more complex the work the greater the need for administration. Indeed, the word “administration” comes from the words for “toward ministry,” indicating that its very

purpose is to facilitate ministry. Administration is built in to the created order and is listed among the gifts God gives to His church for its operation. We need to get our attitude toward administration lined up with God's attitude or run the risk of being ungrateful to Him for this good gift.

If there is reason to believe our ministries are too fat or too ineffective, this issue should be put squarely on the table to be carefully reviewed and examined. If ministries can be altered for improvement, these alterations should be implemented. If they are obsolete and cannot be corrected, they should be terminated and creative structures and ways found to achieve any ministry, which might be needed.

Barrier 3: Independent mentality. Too many of us avoid cooperative ministries because we have adopted from our Western culture a spirit of independency. Sometimes this spirit can be a positive thing, in that it leads to creative ministry. But sometimes, independent mentality is pushed to the extent that our relationship to the whole of the church is neglected.

Rather than put our plans before peers in a spirit of cooperative ministry, we choose to fly solo. Such an approach runs the risk of being prideful action rather than a work of the Spirit and misses the advantage of the wisdom of many counselors. On the other hand, sometimes our brothers who by God's gracious leaning are focused on outreach ministries feel pushed to avoid PCA structures because in them they find endless red tape and harsh criticism. The first approach obstructs ministry; the second discourages it.

A healthy use of presbyterianism harnesses the wisdom of godly counselors with the full gifts and resources God has placed in His church and thrusts them out in the world to do the work of the kingdom.

Barrier 4: Hesitancy to Teach Stewardship

The Bible is clear about the stewardship of material blessings. C. S. Lewis once said that everyone should give at least to the level that it hurts. This was one way of saying that giving should be sacrificial and that sacrifices hurt!

God says in Malachi, "Bring the full tithes into the storehouse . . . and thereby put me to the test . . . if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no need" (3:10 ESV). And again, the New Testament teaches, "On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper . . ." (I Corinthians 16:2 ESV). The Bible does teach giving and giving should be taught in all of our churches without apology. Imagine what might be the financial strength of the PCA if all her people at least tithed and imagine what might be the response of God as He poured down blessings from the windows of heaven. If we encourage our PCA church members give their local churches priority in their giving, would it not also be reasonable to encourage PCA churches to give Presbytery and General Assembly cooperative ministries priority in their giving as well?

There will be no "cheap" progress for the people of God. We have not been called to ease and comfort, but to the battle and to spiritual warfare.