GA-1731

SOCIAL WITNESS TASK FORCE PROGRESS REPORT

At the 2015 General Assembly in Columbus, Ohio, GA 1524 called for a task force to be formed by the Office of General Minister and President, Disciples Home Missions and the Division of Overseas Ministries for the purpose of:

“...bringing to the 2017 General Assembly, meeting in Indianapolis, IN, a jointly sponsored process for discussion of and education about important religious, ethical and social issues.”

The resolution stated “the task force shall include representatives of, but not limited to”:

- Central Pastoral Office for Hispanic Ministries
- Council on Christian Unity
- Disciples Home Missions
- Diverse congregations throughout the United States and Canada
- Division of Overseas Ministries
- General Board
- Historic justice and peace advocacy groups in the church
- National Convocation
- North American Pacific/Asian Disciples
- Office of General Minister and President

In addition to representatives of those ministries, the final task force also includes an equal number of congregational representatives. They have met twice face-to-face and numerous times by conference call and email.

Consensus has been reached that a process favoring wide conversation and learning is desirable. To facilitate the ongoing conversation within the task force and across the life of the church, a working document of what such a procedure might look like is in development. The document does not yet represent a consensus of the task force at every point, but it does put ideas into writing, so that it is easier to determine where consensus exists, where it does not, and how the process, as it is shaping up, would actually work.

The working document proposes that pastoral “statements of witness” replace “resolutions” for matters of social, theological and ethical concern. The “statement” format acknowledges the wide diversity of opinion church-wide on most issues and makes it clearer that the General Assembly is speaking to the church and not for the church.
The working document describes three "tracks" for statements of witness:

- **a Direct Track** to be used when the church is believed to be at substantial consensus;
- **an Assembly Prayer and Study Track**, calling for resource groups and plenary conversation at General Assembly; and
- **a Whole Church Prayer and Study Track**, calling for longer study and review of a concern in congregations between assemblies.

The statement of witness would provide for "alternative points of view" to be expressed both at assembly and in writing. It would include a living "call to action" section that would grow over time (possible in our electronic age) as more and more congregations and ministries respond to the statement.

Though much headway has been made, there are many questions yet to be answered and consultation to do across the life of the church before the task force is ready to present a finished proposal to the General Assembly. Therefore, we offer this report, along with our statement of intention to continue the work, with progress reports being made to the Administrative Committee and General Board over the next biennium, with the goal of bringing a finished proposal to the 2019 General Assembly.

The Social Witness Task Force

Task Force Members
Ken Brooker Langston
Julia Brown Karimu
Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder
Robert Cayton
Ron Degges
Shannon Dycus
Charisse Gillett
Jeff Goodier
Sekinah Hamlin
Richelle Himaya
Mark Johnston
Fiyori Kidane
Scott Kinnaird
Rebecca Littlejohn
Vangie Perez
Dean Phelps
Katherine Raley
Paul Tche
Sharon Watkins
Twanda Wilson

The General Board has reviewed GA-1731 from the Social Witness Task Force. The report is submitted to the General Assembly for presentation and discussion. No action is required. (Discussion time: 12 minutes)
Moving a Statement of Witness through the General Assembly Summary of Process Currently Under Discussion (rev. 02/2017)

- **A Statement of Witness** must be submitted to the OGMP 180 days prior to a General Assembly.
  - It should include information about the topic or issue being considered and provide a few suggestions for action steps that one might take.
  - Regional endorsement is not required but should be part of the dialogue throughout the process.

- **A Review Committee**, chosen by the Moderator, with input from submitters, will be appointed to help prepare the Statement for review and inclusion in the General Assembly Docket and to select a GA track.
  - This includes developing accompanying documents, engaging in conversations with Regional Minister(s), and exploring alternative perspectives.

- **The General Board** reviews the Statement, offering its recommended action and determining the proper General Assembly track.

- **The submitters**, in consultation with the Review Committee, broaden the circle of conversation by seeking the endorsement of diverse congregations and groups within the church.

- As presented in the **General Assembly Docket**, the Statement should include:
  - Statement(s) of Endorsement
  - Suggested Action Steps
  - Discussion guide & additional information to enhance smaller group study
  - Summary of discussions that produce a different perspective from the submitters

- **The Statement** will be placed in one of three tracks:
  - **Direct Track**:
    - For Statements assumed to have already built a substantial consensus on the topic and are ready for a vote to Affirm or Not Affirm. A two-thirds majority is required for affirmation.
    - Motions may be made for twelve (12) minutes of floor discussion.
  - **Assembly Prayer, Study, and Reflection Track**:
    - For Statements that have not built a strong consensus yet but the topic is still of great importance and warrants attention.
    - Additional study, prayer, and reflection time at assembly needed to hear multiple perspectives.
    - Workshops will be provided and additional summaries (alternative perspectives) may be included as part of the Statement.
    - Motions are made to accept any additional reports.
    - As with the Direct Track, motions are made to conduct floor discussions and same majority needed for affirmation.
  - **Whole Church Prayer, Study and Reflection Track**:
    - For statements that warrant further study over the coming biennium.
    - These statements are still of great importance to the church but a significant consensus does not yet exist for affirmation.
- Submitters will have the option for workshop discussion and motions can be made for floor discussions.
- The Assembly will only vote to accept the item for further study. A simple majority is needed.