

Commission on Middle Gov. Bodies

Item: 04-06 On Appointing a General Assembly Commission on Middle Governing Bodies from Committee on the Office of the General Assembly
(See also 04-05: Synod of the Southwest, and concurrences)

GA Committee Assignment: 04- Middle Governing Body Issues

Summary of the business and what it asks the Assembly to do:

This item requests that the Moderators of the 218th and 219th General Assemblies be directed to appoint a 21-person “General Assembly **Commission** on Middle Governing Bodies” with the powers defined in the recommendation.

Item 5 of the recommendation indicates that the **COMMISSION** would be authorized to act with the full powers of the General Assembly to **totally recreate synods** with the full power of G-13.0103m (“to organize new synods and to divide, unite, or otherwise combine synods or portions of synods previously existing;”) and the full powers of the General Assembly to **totally recreate presbyteries** with the power of G-13.0103n (“to approve the organization, division, uniting, or combining of presbyteries or portions of presbyteries by synods.”). This would grant to a commission an **unprecedented and almost unimaginable amount of power to act with the full authority of the General Assembly to totally reorganize the presbyteries and synods our denomination!**

Background

It is critical to remember that in Presbyterian polity a “**commission**” is **completely different from a “committee.”** We are most accustomed to working with committees, which recommend actions to a governing body or carry out decisions already made by a governing body. A “commission” is completely different because **the acts of a commission ARE the acts of the governing body itself.** If a General Assembly-created commission acts to create or abolish synods and presbyteries, it acts with the full authority of the General Assembly. **A General Assembly-created commission would not bring recommendations for creating, uniting or dividing synods or presbyteries back to a future General Assembly** for approval. Instead, the commission would take whatever actions it chose in creating, uniting, and dividing synods and presbyteries. **The actions of the commission would have the same authority as if the General Assembly itself had taken those actions** and the commission would only submit a report of its actions to the General Assembly to be incorporated into the minutes of the General Assembly.

The “presenting issue” behind this recommendation is a particular situation in the Synod of Puerto Rico. The rationale for the recommendation indicates that a five-member, General Assembly moderator-appointed special committee was formed in July 2009 because of reports of “conflict and dissension” within Puerto Rico’s presbyteries and synod. The rationale further indicates that the special committee’s recommendations are “likely to include the exploration of combining the three presbyteries into one and putting that presbytery into a different synod.” Because the special committee apparently will not be ready to bring such a recommendation to the full General Assembly, it will request that the General Assembly appoint an administrative commission to act on its recommendation. The proposal brought by the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly goes far beyond that and would give the commission authority to act not only in regard to the presbyteries and synod of Puerto Rico, but across the whole denomination.

Analysis of the business and how it would affect the church:

The “elephant in the room” in authorizing a commission to have the full powers of the General Assembly to create, unite and divide synods and presbyteries is that presbyteries must approve any proposed changes to the Constitution, both the *Book of Order* and the *Book of Confessions*.

An Advisory on Business to the 219th General Assembly (2010)

From the Joint Renewal GA Team

Checks and balances are built into Presbyterian polity in recognition of the fallen state of our human nature. We do not place high levels of power in individuals. Instead, power is placed in groups, and the higher the governing body, the larger the number of persons in the group making the decisions. This concept would be completely abandoned by empowering a commission with ability to act with the full authority of the General Assembly to make potentially sweeping changes. Creating, uniting and dividing synods and presbyteries is never an emergency and is never urgent. The lack of urgency is demonstrated by the failure of the special committee reviewing the situation in Puerto Rico to bring a recommendation to this General Assembly, The power to make unlimited changes to all of the synods and presbyteries of the denomination is of such critical significance to the church that it should be done only by the full General Assembly.

Especially in our current climate of distrust, authorizing a commission to act on matters that would affect the “balance of power” in voting by presbyteries on constitutional amendments would be extremely unwise.

Pertinent Resources

The *Book of Order* is very clear that action of a “Commission” is the action of the governing body itself:

G-9.0500	5. Committees and Commissions
G-9.0501 Committee	a. A committee is appointed either to study and recommend appropriate action or to carry out directions or decisions already made by a governing body. It shall make a full report to the governing body that created it, and its recommendations shall require action by the governing body.
Membership	b. Committees of governing bodies above the session shall consist of laypersons and ministers of the Word and Sacrament with at least one half the members being laypersons.
G-9.0502 Commission	A commission is empowered to consider and conclude matters referred to it by a governing body. The appointing body shall state specifically the scope of power given to a commission. A commission shall keep a full record of its proceedings , which shall be submitted to its governing body to be incorporated in its minutes and to be regarded as the actions of the governing body itself.

Action by GA that will help the Church:

Remove language from 04-06 that authorizes commission functions (delete Recommendations 4-6), and appoint the body to carry out Recommendations 1-3 as a committee, not as a commission; or Adopt Item 04-05 (Synod of the Southwest) or one of its concurrences.