

# Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

## Assembly adopts statement laying out 'Interreligious Stance' of PC(USA)

June 19, 2014



Jihyun Oh, moderator of Committee 7, Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, addresses plenary during the 221st General Assembly (2014) of the PC(USA) in Detroit, MI on Thursday, June 19, 2014. —*Danny Bolin*

General Assembly News

BOB SLOAN

Affirming a commitment to work for the common good in society together with people of other faiths, the 221st General Assembly (2014) on Thursday voted to approve a policy statement titled “The Interreligious Stance of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)”

Also on Thursday, commissioners followed the recommendation of the Committee on Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations and voted 506-72 not to approve the development and distribution of material making a distinction between ancient and modern Israel.

“Relationships are a way in which we live out our faith in Christ,” said Aimee Moiso, corresponding member of the Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations, in introducing the ‘interreligious stance’ recommendation. “In 2008 the General Assembly adopted the Ecumenical Stance of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), which reiterated our relationship with Christians of other denominations. It also stressed the ongoing and mounting need for similar guidance on how we relate to people of other religious traditions.”

Moiso said in 2013, the General Assembly on Interfaith and Ecumenical Relations convened a diverse group of 65 Presbyterians,

Christians of other denominations and representatives of many faith traditions to study how Presbyterians should best engage in relationships with people of different faiths. What resulted was the ‘interreligious stance’ policy statement approved on Thursday. Moiso called it a “framework for how we as Presbyterians understand and relate to people of other religions’ traditions.”

If ratified by the presbyteries, section G-5.0102 of the *Book of Order* shall be amended to include “The Interreligious Stance of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),” which reads as follows:

“The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at all levels will be open to and will see opportunities for respectful dialogue and mutual relationships with entities and persons from other religious traditions. It does this in the faith that the church of Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is a sign and means of God’s intention for the wholeness of all humankind and all creation.”

The recommendation also calls for the Presbyterian Mission Agency to develop and promote resources explaining the “interreligious stance.”

After commissioners approved the recommendation, Committee on Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Vice-Moderator John Vest led the Assembly in reciting the words of An Affirmation of Interreligious Commitment.

In regards to Overture 07-01, which called for the General Assembly to make a distinction between ancient and modern Israel, Moderator Jihyun Oh said members of the Committee on Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations “wrestled over this for quite some time.” After much debate, the committee voted 53-8 to recommend the Assembly not approve the overture.

Oh then read an accompanying statement from the committee: “Though the committee voted not to approve Item 07-01, we take the matter of language, and specifically the tension around the use of the term ‘Israel,’ very seriously. We hope the discussion and education about the use of language continues.”

The overture, submitted by the Presbytery of Chicago, was prompted by the heading “God’s Covenant with Israel” in the publication of *Glory to God, The Presbyterian Hymnal*.

The Assembly also heard a report on Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and Seventh Day Adventist Dialogue and a report from the World Council of Churches Delegation.

Tags: 221st general assembly, 221st general assembly 2014, ecumenical and interfaith relations, general assembly

Departments: 221st General Assembly (2014)

Agency: Office of the General Assembly

I am deeply shocked that the General Assembly decided that no distinction is to be made between Israel of the old Testament and the modern state of Israel. God's covenant with Israel of the Old Testament thus justifies the State of Israel to oppress the Palestinians, carry out home demolitions, destruction of orchards (including that of the "Tent of Nations", steal Palestinian's water, prevent Palestinian Christians to visit their places of worship in Bethlehem , prevent Palestinian Muslims to visit their holy sites in Jerusalem, prevent family members from Gaza, Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Israel to visit each other or live together . Shocking, deeply disappointing, to justify injustice because " this is God's will as revealed to (ancient) Israel"

## Resources

**Presbyterian Church in the U.S., *A Study of Universalism*.** 112<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1972). PDS 70-420-98-010

**Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). *Building Community Among Strangers*.** 211<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1999). PDS OGA-99-028

Brochures from the Office of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations (on-line at [www.pcusa.org/interfaith/tools.htm](http://www.pcusa.org/interfaith/tools.htm)):

*Children of Interfaith Families*  
PDS 74-292-02-006

*Christians and Jews*  
PDS 74-292-01-001

*Christians and Muslims*  
PDS 74-292-04-002

*Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue*  
PDS 74-292-02-005

*Interfaith Celebration, Prayer, and Worship*  
PDS 74-292-97-010

*Interfaith Marriage*  
PDS 74-292-97-008

*Interfaith Participation*  
PDS 74-292-97-007

*Presbyterians and Latter-day Saints*  
PDS 74-292-97-009

*Witness and Evangelism Among People of Other Faiths*  
PDS 74-292-01-003

“As much as I can, [with people of other religions] I should meet friendship with friendship, hostility with kindness, generosity with gratitude, persecution with forbearance, truth with agreement, and error with truth. I should express my faith with humility and devotion as the occasion requires, whether silently or openly, boldly or meekly, by word or by deed. I should avoid compromising the truth on the one hand and being narrow-minded on the other. In short, I should always welcome and accept these others in a way that honors and reflects the Lord’s welcome and acceptance of me.”

“The limits to salvation, whatever they may be, are known only to God. Three truths above all are certain. God is a holy God who is not to be trifled with. No one will be saved except by grace alone. And no judge could possibly be more gracious than our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

*Study Catechism (#52,49)*

“Central to the ongoing story of the Bible is God’s long-term, patient, merciful purpose of recreating a human community in which the love of God and neighbor becomes a fact of history.

“In the spirit of Jesus Christ, we are called to maintain a respectful presence with people of other faiths. We commit ourselves to meet such persons with gentleness and humility and to seek to learn more about the worshiping practices and faiths that they represent as a way of deepening our own. And we acknowledge that we are called, by the God who created us and the world in which we live, to remain faithful in our proclamation of the gospel in Jesus Christ, and to work with others irrespective of their practices and faith commitments, toward a world marked by justice and peace and in which the whole creation is nurtured and protected.”

*Building Community Among Strangers*

# PRESBYTERIAN PRINCIPLES FOR INTERFAITH DIALOGUE



## Interfaith Relations

World Mission  
General Assembly Council  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)  
100 Witherspoon Street  
Louisville, KY 40202-1396  
1-888-728-7228, ext. 5289  
[www.pcusa.org](http://www.pcusa.org)

PDS 26-474-08-001

To order call 1-800-524-2612 or email [pds@pcusa.org](mailto:pds@pcusa.org)



## **1 Pluralistic U.S. and global societies are the context within which Christians relate to people of other faiths.**

Christians live among people grounded in other religions and ideologies, or in none. If our immediate circle of neighbors or friends does not reveal the religious plurality of the world, we need look no further than our cities, our nation, and our globally-connected world to see the diverse religious traditions which increasingly intermingle there. In this environment, persons and communities affect one another even when they are unaware of doing so.

## **2 God is the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of our world.**

**God's Spirit works in surprising places throughout creation and is found even among people who are unaware of the Spirit's presence.**

The Creator endows all persons with God's own image and has pronounced the world "good" in its wholeness and integrity. God wills that, in newness of life, the world and its inhabitants live according to the intent of their Creator. Even when we have failed or have not affirmed God's presence, God continues to be present in the world. We are called to attend to God's work not only in our own lives but also throughout creation and in all God's creatures.

## **3 We are called to work with others in our pluralistic societies for the well-being of our world and for justice, peace, and the sustainability of creation.** We do so in the faith that, through God's Spirit, the Church is a sign and means of God's intention for the wholeness and unity of humankind and of all creation.

At a time when the cultural hegemony of the Christian religion in many parts of the world is waning, we may have new roles among other people.

- When religion is used for purposes of power, and when religion is manipulated as an instrument of conflict, our role is to be peacemakers and peacekeepers.
- When all inhabitants of the planet bear joint responsibility for its life (e.g., for the environment or the globalized economy), our role is to cooperate with others in seeking mutually acceptable ethical standards for behavior.
- When privilege is granted to some and denied others, our role is to be advocates for others' freedom, just as Jesus approached others with full awareness of their freedom.
- When persecution is unleashed upon fellow Christians or upon other religious communities, our role is to champion the cause of those marginalized by their minority status and to practice our own faith in ways that do not abridge the freedoms of others.

## **4 In our pluralistic world, we confess that Jesus is the truth and the way; through him God gives life. Jesus does not point to truth but is the truth, in his person.** Jesus' life showed the limits of religious words and propositions as objects of our loyalties. Jesus made us aware of the truth found in knowing God relationally.

- When we seek to discern God's presence in the world, we look to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as the unique and sufficient revelation of God's love, grace, truth, power, and righteousness. Jesus is Lord and Savior.
- When God gives us courage to engage in the giving and receiving--the listening and speaking--of dialogue, Jesus is present. Through the power of his Spirit, we are enabled to be truly ourselves in authentic relationships.

## **5 We are called to relate to people of other faiths in full humility, openness, honesty, and respect.** We respect both others' God-given humanity and the seriousness of their spiritual quests and commitments. It is our Christian faith in the Triune God and our intention to live like Jesus, not our cultural standards, that require this of us.

- We recognize that all religions, including our own, stand under the judgment of God and we acknowledge our own sins against others both in the historical past and in our own times. These realities keep us from condemnation of others while they encourage our own commitment to the Christ who forgives and reconciles.
- We recognize that our culture relativizes and privatizes all religion--propagating marketplace attitudes toward religious choices. We pray for God's power to live in firm commitment without trampling upon the God-given freedom that Jesus respected and challenged in all persons. In our journey, we are helped by ecumenical partners around the world who, with us, are part of the church yet who live with different cultural values.
- We recognize the integrity of others' religious traditions yet we avoid any attempt to create some new religious community by merging our separate identity with theirs.

- When we interact with others personally, Jesus offers reconciliation, healing, teaching. Through his body, the church, he extends his ministry of love.
- When we confess our faith, Jesus is proclaimed as our salvation. Through him we share joyously the good news of life abundant, with its invitation to receive.
- When we hear God's love for the world proclaimed, the risen Jesus makes that love real and enables us to believe that God wills salvation for all who will receive it. In Christ are hidden all wisdom and knowledge and in him all things come together (Col. 2:2-3).

## **6 We need to be equipped to meet others in dialogue and witness.** This calls for understanding our own confession deeply, adopting appropriate forms of witness, and acting sensitively upon issues requiring pastoral care. As we meet one another in dialogue, we face our own needs.

- We need to explore theologically the significance of Jesus Christ in our present-day pluralistic world.
- We need to learn to articulate our faith (personal and corporate) in ways that can be understood by others, that recognize both our own and others' experiences.
- We need to learn about and understand the religions to which others adhere. Because our witness is relational and dialogical, we ask others to teach us who they are.
- We need to discern idolatries of race, nation, or philosophy that may become demonic forces in human life. Idolatrous ideologies may be present in any religious system, including our own.
- We need to acknowledge that our fundamental relationship is to persons, not religions and systems.
- We need to listen for others' concerns so that we may minister to human needs in our common public life, interreligious families, and shared religious celebrations.
- We need to recognize that others' religions have brought them comfort, identity, and meaning. We are not called to approach others in judgment but in awareness of God's limitless love and grace.

*Presbyterian Principles for Interfaith Dialogue adopted by 211th General Assembly (1999)*