

# General Assembly Urges Pension Benefits for Same Gender Spouses and Domestic Partners

## Resource Paper

This resource paper is provided by the Bills and Overtures Committee<sup>1</sup> of the Los Ranchos Presbytery. Included is a summary of the recommendations made by the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly's (2010) to the independent Board of Pensions relating to extending pension benefits to same-gender domestic partners and their children. This is not a position paper. Rather, this document provides links to groups and individuals who represent a variety of positions pertaining to this controversial action. Individuals and congregations may use this tool to obtain study materials and prepare an appropriate response.

### GENERAL ASSEMBLY ACTION

The 219th General Assembly (2010) voted to urge the independent Board of Pensions to extend benefits to same-gender spouses and domestic partners of church employees covered by the plan. The resolution stated:

*1. Urge the Board of Pensions to adopt amendments to the Benefits Plan to extend eligibility for spousal and dependent benefits under the Plan to Benefits Plan members, their same-gender domestic partners, and the children of their same-gender domestic partners, on the same basis as, and equivalent to, benefits made available to Benefits Plan members, their spouses, and the children of their spouses.*

*2. Approve an increase in dues for the Benefits Plan of up to 1 percent, effective January 1, 2012, to be allocated among the plans of the Board of Pensions, including but not limited to the Pension Plan, as the Board, in its sole discretion, deems necessary to fund the cost of the additional benefits. Should the Board not implement these benefits for any reason, approval of the increase in dues is rescinded.*

*Comment: That the Board of Pensions be highly urged to provide relief of conscience, to be implemented simultaneously with these actions, for those congregations for whom these actions cause a moral dilemma.<sup>2</sup>*

(Vote: Affirmative 366; Negative 287; Abstaining 9)

### SPECIAL COMMITTEE ESTABLISHED

In response, Thomas C. Paisley, chair of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s Board of Pensions (BOP) formed a special 9 member committee to study the issues and prepare the BOP's response. The members of the special committee were drawn from several of the BOP's committees and include Frank S. James III, Vestavia Hills, Ala., chair; Anne S. Drennan, Newtown, Pa.; the Rev. John A. Huffman, Newport Beach Calif.; Claude C. Lilly III, Clemson, S.C.; Christopher M. Mason, New York City; Carol Sheffey Parham, Annapolis, Md.; Nancy M. Rhodes, McLeansville, N.C.; the Rev. Laird J. Stuart, San Anselmo, Calif.; and Dr. Paul B. Volker, Boone, Iowa.

The Board of Pensions will make their decision in June 2011. Anyone wishing to provide input into the process should write to the board care of Mr. Andy Browne, Corporate Secretary of the Board of Pensions

Mr. Andy Browne, Corporate Secretary  
The Board of Pensions of the PCUSA  
2000 Market Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19103-3298

### RESOURCES<sup>3</sup> –

The following resources are available on line at <http://www.gahelp.net/2010/07/topic-same-gender-benefits.html>

**Video of General Assembly Debate** - The minority report, which eventually failed, was introduced at time marker 3:50 and includes relevant debate pertaining to the main motion. Debate on the main motion (18-06) begins at time marker 1:05:00. Video available at: <http://mediasuite.316networks.com/player.php?v=yi9puc5w> .

#### Websites

- Board of Pensions - <http://www.pensions.org/portal/server.pt> See News Archive Page
- Presbyterian Coalition - [http://www.presbycoalition.org/campaign\\_bop.cfm](http://www.presbycoalition.org/campaign_bop.cfm)

**Articles** (listed according to most recent posting date)

- Layman, "[San Diego Approves Overture on BOP Benefits](http://layman.org/News.aspx?article=27863)" (December 8, 2010) - San Diego presbytery sends overture to next General Assembly seeking a reversal of the action currently under consideration by the BOP. Link: <http://layman.org/News.aspx?article=27863>
- James R. Tony, *Theology Matters*, "[The GA 'Urges' Board of Pensions to Extend Benefits to Same-Sex Partners](http://www.theologymatters.com/GeneralAssembly2010.cfm)" (Sep/Oct, 2010) - see pp. 15-16 of a full issue reflecting on the "Three Important Votes in the Presbyteries and a Fourth Issue [that] Affects Every Congregation" Link to pdf copy: <http://www.theologymatters.com/GeneralAssembly2010.cfm>
- Carmen Fowler, *Layman*, "[Board of Pensions Forms Committee on Same-Sex Benefits](http://www.layman.org/news.aspx?article=27719)" (October 22, 2010) - same info as PNS article below, plus timetable of expected response and other summary analysis of denominational trends from the BOP fall meeting. Link: <http://www.layman.org/news.aspx?article=27719>
- Jerry Van Marter, *PNS*, "[Board of Pensions Appoints Special Committee to Consider Same-Gender Benefits](http://www.pcusa.org/news/2010/10/22/board-pensions-appoints-special-committee-consider/)" (October 22, 2010) - names of and charge to the special committee appointed to study extension of benefits. Link: <http://www.pcusa.org/news/2010/10/22/board-pensions-appoints-special-committee-consider/>
- Presbyterian Lay Committee Board, *Layman*, "[PLC's Open Letter to BOP: Attempt to amend medical and pension plan violates Scripture's clear counsel](http://www.layman.org/news.aspx?article=27707)" (10/21/10) Link: <http://www.layman.org/news.aspx?article=27707>
- Jerry Van Marter, *PCUSA News*, "[BOP Approves Health Care Reform-related Changes](http://www.pcusa.org/news/2010/8/3/bop-approves-health-care-reform-related-changes/)" (August 3, 2010) - more detail on the July 24 board meeting of the BOP, with some new statements about how the BOP plans to respond to GA action 18-06. Link: <http://www.pcusa.org/news/2010/8/3/bop-approves-health-care-reform-related-changes/>
- Lillian Kwon, *Christian Post*, "[PC\(USA\) Pensions Board Proceeds Cautiously with Domestic Partner Benefits](http://www.christianpost.com/news/pcusa-pensions-board-proceeds-cautiously-with-domestic-partner-benefits-46069/)" (July 27, 2010) - good overview with some quoting of the GA floor debate. Link: <http://www.christianpost.com/news/pcusa-pensions-board-proceeds-cautiously-with-domestic-partner-benefits-46069/>
- Karen J. Babik, *PCUSA News*, "[Board of Pensions to study General Assembly's action urging domestic partner benefits eligibility](http://www.pcusa.org/news/2010/7/26/board-pensions-study-general-assemblys-action-urg-i/)" (July 26, 2010) - news release about the July 2010 BOP board meeting. Link: <http://www.pcusa.org/news/2010/7/26/board-pensions-study-general-assemblys-action-urg-i/>
- Carmen Fowler, *Layman*, "[219th GA: the After Math](http://layman.org/News.aspx?article=27301)" (July 12, 2010) - article looks at the increased mission budget and the implications of the action approving same-gender Board of Pensions benefits. Link: <http://layman.org/News.aspx?article=27301>
- Paula Kincaid, *The Aquila Report*, "[More Mixed Signals: PCUSA approves up to \\$7M mandatory benefits increase to pay for 'same-gender domestic partners' of ministers and employees](http://theaquilareport.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2447:more-mixed-signals-pcusa-approves-up-to-7m-mandatory-benefits-increase-to-pay-for-same-gender-domestic-partners-of-ministers-and-employees&catid=92:pcusa-general-assembly&Itemid=145)" (July 10, 2010) - reports action taken, some of the discussion, and some of the implications. Link: [http://theaquilareport.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2447:more-mixed-signals-pcusa-approves-up-to-7m-mandatory-benefits-increase-to-pay-for-same-gender-domestic-partners-of-ministers-and-employees&catid=92:pcusa-general-assembly&Itemid=145](http://theaquilareport.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2447:more-mixed-signals-pcusa-approves-up-to-7m-mandatory-benefits-increase-to-pay-for-same-gender-domestic-partners-of-ministers-and-employees&catid=92:pcusa-general-assembly&Itemid=145)
- Dan Saperstein, *An Insider's Guide to the 219th General Assembly*, "[The YA\(A\)D Has Cried](http://ga219insider.blogspot.com/2010/07/yaad-has-cried.html)" (July 10, 2010) - executive presbyter of the Presbytery of Plains and Peaks describes (well) the conflicting viewpoints on item 18-06. He also speculates on some of the implications and potential consequences. Link: <http://ga219insider.blogspot.com/2010/07/yaad-has-cried.html>
- Signe Bell, David Wall, Arnold Rots, *Presbyterian Voices for Justice*, "[Overture Advocates' Statements \[on BOP Partner Benefits overtures\]](http://www.gahelp.net/2010/07/topic-same-gender-benefits.html)" (July 5, 2010) - the statements of three overture advocates for extending BOP benefits to same-gender partners of plan members; presented in Committee 18 at the 219th General Assembly (2010). Link to pdf copy: <http://www.gahelp.net/2010/07/topic-same-gender-benefits.html>

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<sup>1</sup> This material was compiled by Rick Hume, Elder Commissioner to the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly and committee member of the LRP Bills and Overtures Committee.

<sup>2</sup> Source: <https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3271> ; Text reformatted into paragraph form for ease of reading by this paper's author

<sup>3</sup> Source: "GA Help" <http://www.gahelp.net/2010/07/topic-same-gender-benefits.html> compiled by Rev Robert Austel. While this list is not comprehensive, Rev Austel provides a cross section of resources representing both sides of the debate on subjects pertaining to the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.