

From: Robert Brashear <rlbrashear@gmail.com>

Sent: Monday, June 8, 2020 4:35 PM

Committee on the General Assembly (COGA), Stated Clerk and Co-Moderators
Office of the General Assembly
100 Witherspoon St.

Dear Colleagues in Ministry:

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator and the Lord Jesus Christ in this season of Pentecost in the liberating and ever sustaining power of the Holy Spirit.

Thank you for your letter of June 8th seeking to respond to our letter of May 11th. We appreciate the time taken to respond, especially in light of the demands of the fast approaching General Assembly. It appears, however, that you have not fully understood nor responded to the major concern of our letter.

We understand the thinking that informed your decision and likewise understand the postponing of many proposed actions relevant to our work...reports, overtures, etc...until the 2022 Assembly. We also appreciate your awareness that faithful work in service and witness continues always. And that the action of the church at any level represents the whole church.

What you did not address was the church's historic calling to interpret and speak to the times in which any Assembly meets. Since we last wrote, over 100000 of our fellow citizens have died from the Corona virus. (And according to a Columbia University study, *at least 40,000 needlessly.*) *That alone would be sufficient reason to respond.*

However, since we first wrote, the spectre of deadly violence by police against the Black community has once again commanded our attention. The deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery have painfully revealed the ongoing unacknowledged constant threat under which our African American citizens live their lives. The death of George Floyd with graphic images of a man's life expiring while again we hear those chilling words " *I can't breathe*" has struck Americans, and people of conscience around the world, in a profound way.

The response to these deaths has been deep and wide. Every city across the country and major cities globally have experienced outpourings of grief and anger. Peaceful protests have demanded a new accountability and justice. Voices of support have been heard from churches, religious organizations, civic groups, businesses and athletes in an unprecedented response defining this moment.

At the same time our President has threatened martial law and used excessive force to clear a path to church and appropriate our sacred imagery, even the Bible as essentially a photo op.

We are at a critical crisis point in our nation's history. We well understand the logistical exigencies that led to the formulation of an assembly dealing with only institutional essentials and postponing everything else for two years. But our world has changed. At this moment there is no more essential business than responding to this national crisis. . How we as a people deal with this moment will have long lasting, perhaps permanent effects on our nation. How we as a church respond to this moment will define us for years to come.

Our members need to hear from our church. And we have an obligation to add our prophetic voice to the national dialogue. It is unconscionable to think that this Assembly would have no word or that we would seek to delay response for two years. We are well aware that the Stated Clerk can speak on behalf of the church. *But the power of the church's voice, our very identity as Presbyterians has been the collective voice of commissioners elected from Presbyteries across the country. That is who we are.*

Therefore, we once again implore the COGA do everything in its power to facilitate commissioners in fulfilling their historic calling. The fact that lected commissioners retain their commission until the next Assembly should provide more flexibility in developing a strategy. The Assembly could act to empower a committee to draft an immediate response to be acted on in timely way following the Assembly to be approved by the commissioners in a single action meeting. The larger issue of the systematic dismantling of white privilege could be addressed at an Assembly one year from now.

This moment demands our timely response in the name of Jesus....

We thank you for your consideration and look forward to your response.

Yours in Christ,

PHEWA Board of Directors

George Kerr (PHIVN) Sarah McKenney (PDC) Rev. Bonnie Orth (PADVN)
Washington D.C. Minneapolis, Minnesota Oswego, New York

Rev. Ann Hayman (PARO) Rev. Douglas Mitchell Rev. Trina Zelle
Santa Monica, California Minneapolis, Minnesota Hawaii

Rev. Bebb Wheeler-Stone Robert Schminkey Rev. Robert Brashear
Nyack, New York Wilmington Delaware New York, New York

Rev. John R. Scotland
Brigantine, New Jersey