

The Santa Barbara Presbytery Appropriate Response Task Force
A brief summary of the Task Force's work
Jim McClurkin

The Appropriate Response Task Force (ARTF) held its first meeting on February 13, 2008. The task force is presently made up of the following members:

Bruce Lethbridge, chairperson, pastor of Orcutt Pres.
Ted Brandt, recording secretary, pastor of Oxnard First Pres.
Stuart Bond, pastor of Emanuel Presbyterian Church in Thousand Oaks
Janet Loughry, stated supply associate pastor at Moorpark Pres.
Jim McClurkin, elder at CPC
Leslie Ooms, elder at Santa Ynez Presbyterian Church
Dale Paulsen, pastor at Morro Bay Pres.

At the task force's first meeting Bruce Lethbridge was elected Chair and Ted Brandt elected recording secretary. The mandate of the task force was reviewed based on An Appropriate Response (written by Rev. Mark Patterson) that was approved by the Presbytery of Santa Barbara. It was also agreed to gather and then circulate relevant denominational materials among the members. We also reviewed correspondence from the national church, sessions and individuals both in support of, and in opposition to, An Appropriate Response.

On February 20, 2008 the second meeting of the ARTF was held. Executive Presbyter Ken Working was our guest speaker. He stated that the AR and the Essential Tenets are documents that give expression of the heart of most of the churches in our presbytery. These documents say what kinds of people we want to call to our presbytery for ministry. Those documents can also be used as teaching materials. Although the documents can be used as guides in examining candidates, we are not to use them as a form of subscriptionism.

Bruce Lethbridge suggested the following kinds of work that we should be engaged in, and the task force concurred.

1. Communication/Information. Keep the presbytery abreast of what is going on in the PC(USA).
2. Reflection/Education
3. Reform/Advocacy

At the April 9, 2008 meeting we discussed how to present our task force and mission to the presbytery. It was decided that we will state in positive terms what we are, and we will name the task force members. We also plan to present something at each presbytery meeting. Documents from the San Diego Presbytery Presbytery and the Presbyterian Global Fellowship were read and discussed. A list of the key issues coming up at GA is to be drawn up so that members can pray for the 2008 GA with understanding.

The ARTF met again on August 20. The members worked on polishing a draft statement written by Bruce Lethbridge that expressed our disappointment with some key actions of the GA. The statement criticized GA for removing the Authoritative Interpretation regarding homosexuality. It gave its support to churches within our denomination that, for sake of conscience, chose to withhold per capita “funds to higher governing bodies.” And it criticized the interfaith proposals that played down the particularism of Christianity. It reminded the GA of Acts 4:12 and that the early church proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Jews and should accordingly proclaim it to Muslims as well. (This finished document was submitted to the presbytery and was approved by that body and then sent on to various GA entities and to every presbytery.)

On January 14, 2009, the ARTF met. It was noted that Santa Barbara Presbytery conforms to the property provisions recommended in the Appropriate Response document. Our presbytery has a history of being generous to churches that have wanted to leave the denomination. Both the Arroyo Grande church and the Fillmore church were allowed to leave. Since theological conservatives or evangelicals are in a strong majority in this presbytery, it was pointed out that we could pass an overture friendly to those churches who are finding it difficult to remain with the PC(USA). We can be a service to those churches in presbyteries less friendly to those who hold orthodox theology and moral standards. Overture A1, “On Amending the Form of Government to Clarify the Purpose of Property” that was presented to the 216th GA, was singled out as an example of a constructive overture. That overture was rejected by the GA.

At the February 18, 2009 meeting, Dan Carobini gave us a presentation of what he learned at a recent conference held by Pepperdine Law School on the subject of “Who owns the Lord’s House.” Sean Cowdrey was also a guest at the meeting and contributed to the discussion.

The ARTF recommended how to vote on two proposed amendments which were brought before the presbytery on January 31, 2009. We recommended a “no” vote to our presbytery commissioners on 08-B, an amendment that would have removed our ordination standards that require a person being ordained “to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness.” And we recommended a “no” vote on proposed Amendment 08-L, which would, among other things, “acknowledge each others churches [the PC(USA) and the Episcopal Church] belonging to the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church.” Below are the comments the ARTF made on these two proposed amendments.

08-B Ordained Officers – on amending G-6.0101(b), G-14.0240, and G-14.0450
The Appropriate Response Task Force recommends a **NO** vote on this proposed amendment; the Committee on Ministry and Committee on Preparation for Ministry also recommend a **NO** vote. [NOTE: This amendment was DEFEATED at Presbytery by a margin of 85 to 20.]

08-L Ecumenical Statement with the Episcopal Church on Adopting and Agreement
The Appropriate Response Task Force recommends a **NO** vote.

From the ARTF: While there is much we would like to affirm in this statement, we are wary about giving Episcopal clergy any standing in our church when some of their ordinations are unconstitutional by our standards of conduct for church officers. Anglicanism is in a world wide crisis, and we do not wish to introduce further friction into the Presbyterian Church [USA].