

# **The Role and Purpose of the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board**

The PMAB's Governance Taskforce has wrestled with defining the Board's responsibilities while maintaining an appropriate distinction from General Assembly. It is not easily and adequately capsulated in the Organization for Mission. This white paper provides a starting point and we welcome the opportunity for a discussion with The Way Forward Commission.

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Mission, God's mission, is at the heart of the work to which God calls us. The primary purpose of the Board is to lead and coordinate the total mission program of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). This is a high honor and a great responsibility. Standing between the General Assembly and the staff of the Presbyterian Mission Agency, the Board's work focuses on advising the General Assembly regarding mission priorities, programs and strategies; leading staff to implement the directives of the General Assembly; and then reporting back to the General Assembly with results and additional advice.

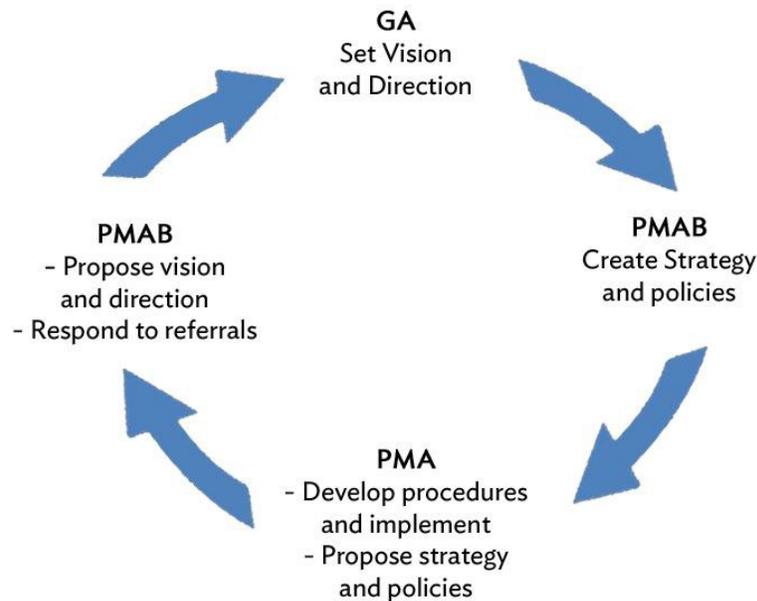
As the General Assembly embraces the vision for mission within the Presbyterian Church and gives voice to that vision through its directives, the Board of the Presbyterian Mission Agency works to align that with the pressures of budget (restricted and unrestricted dollars), international situations, national laws and competing interests. We work to make the vision for mission become reality helping to manage the practical problems those visions and dreams might face. For example, the Board has the responsibility to ensure that the Presbyterian Mission Agency is:

- sending mission personnel where they are most needed (as requested by partners), even as we work diligently to keep personnel safe in all parts of the world,
- supporting the creation of innovative new worshiping communities,
- speaking truth to power on behalf of and with marginalized groups,
- lifting up new and exciting ways to worship God, while maintaining the time-honored traditions of the Reformed faith,
- creating the tools needed for worship and discipleship in multiple languages, while recognizing that all product lines may not be able to cover costs individually.

The Board's work moves in a flow from General Assembly to General Assembly. It begins by advising the General Assembly on mission priorities, programs and strategies. At a General Assembly, we receive guidance and direction. The Board then leads

staff in the agency to fulfill those General Assembly directives. We oversee and align assets toward the fulfillment of those directives and work to read the context for mission and discern potential shifts in God's calling. We then respond to General Assembly directives and provide advice on revised priorities at the next General Assembly. This process is cyclical and continues from each General Assembly to the next.

The Governance Task Force has found it useful to view this relationship through the following lens:



Missional and organizational expertise is required in order to:

- discern where God is leading,
- oversee the development of plans to pursue that calling,
- attend to the long-term sustainability of the PC(USA)'s work,
- react to changing priorities within the context of organizational mission,
- inspire, equip and connect the broader PC(USA) for mission engagement,
- ensure that gift restrictions are honored, and
- manage the assets of General Assembly toward mission fulfillment.

To do this, the work of the board is sometimes spoken of in corporate, legal or fiduciary terms. Setting strategy and developing policy are important tasks for any board. This work cannot be done effectively without attention to corporate/legal/fiduciary concerns. It is a necessary part of moving from vision to implementation. Determining the appropriate balance in these responsibilities is a critical element of the Board's purpose. Without one body to hold this balance, the church runs the risk of returning to a prior model which lodged these responsibilities in separate, and sometimes competing,

bodies.<sup>1</sup> The current system prevents one board, which has corporate responsibilities, from trumping another board, which concentrates solely on mission. When it put all of the tools necessary for mission in the purview of one board, the General Assembly recognized that legalities should be a tool for mission, not a deterrent. Just as Paul used his legal standing as a Roman citizen and invoked the rights and privileges of the state to continue his ministry and, especially, to minister to the poor in Jerusalem, so too does the Board use legal and corporate tools to further the reach of the agency.

Not everyone has an appetite for this complex work. Doing it well requires:

- A keen sense of discernment, fueled by prayer;
- Awareness of the political and legal contexts for mission—in order to minimize short-sighted mistakes;
- Relationships with members, mid councils, staff and the best thinkers in various fields;
- Commitment to the Presbyterian connectional system—where no one has sole authority, and everything is worked out through prayerful dialogue, patient discernment and submission to the will of the General Assembly;
- Listening to diverse constituencies in the church, while not losing sight of the direction of the General Assembly.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is a large, complex organization. Very small organizations can escape dealing with corporate issues over the short-term, but denominations cannot. Therefore, it is vitally important for the mission of the church, that we handle our corporate affairs wisely. A return to the model of separating the functions runs the risk of increasing conflict and distancing us from mission. Finding ways to balance the Board's fiduciary responsibilities with its passion for mission is one of the goals for the Board's Governance Task Force. Having a single forum where these issues are resolved allows all voices to be heard and prayerful discernment to occur, so that we balance those interests in the pursuit of God's mission.

## **Conclusion**

The role of the Board of PMA is to fill in the gaps left after General Assemblies - taking GA directives and making them viable within the larger organization, dealing with issues that arise at the Mission Agency between General Assemblies, handling the myriad of details that would bog down General Assemblies. Because General Assemblies meet every two years with very different people as its voting members, there is not the level of knowledge or the time and ability to pay attention to the details so the Board is needed to step in to finish the necessary oversight, create viable strategies, and develop policies that will allow mission, in all of its complex and wonderful ways, to happen.

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<sup>1</sup> If more information is needed about the prior CTC corporate model, the Governance Task Force has a two-page historical perspective from two of our members who served on that body.