February 15, 2017

Greetings from the Way Forward Commission in the name of the One who binds us as One Body and who claims us as His own!

In furtherance of the Way Forward Commission’s living our values of open and transparent communications and collaborative engagement, we wanted to give you a brief update on the Commission’s approach to the PMA Governance Task Force proposal regarding changes to the PMA board structure. We received the proposal the week before our February 7 conference call, which call was set up as a bridge to keep our work moving forward between our longer in-person meetings.

At the outset, we are so encouraged by your initiative, responsiveness and invitation to engage in collaborative discernment. We also want to explicitly affirm our deep appreciation and gratitude for the good work of the PMA and the faithful commitment of both PMA staff and board towards living out our Christian witness in the world.

I’m sure you have read about our three-part approach to the tasks before the Commission: (1) public affirmation of the values underlying our approach to give insight into our vision for how we might relate to each other within our church (completed in March 2017); (2) looking into implemention of short-term improvements within and between agencies, both in response to agency review suggestions and continued conversations with the agencies (completed by fall 2017); and (3) discernment and refinement of a way forward on our primary mandate regarding the structure and staffing of the General Assembly agencies. The Commission intends to move forward with candor, courage and collaboration, responding to the sentiment of urgency in the 2016 General Assembly’s creation of our Commission.

The process of discernment is by nature an evolving one in response to our collaborative approach, and we look forward to continuing conversations over the months ahead. Our very brief consideration so far on your encouraging proposal centered on two areas for further thought: how is the strength of the diversity of our denomination best included (a point also raised by the Advocacy Committees), and the broader question of the unique role a national church agency should play in our changed and changing times (a question the PMA itself has been grappling with itself) and how that might best be structured.

The PMA proposal answers many of the points raised in the past regarding efficiency and nimbleness, and together with diverse voices we can work through the important issues raised by the Advocacy Committees. That process could result in implementation of a similar but revised proposal or a recommendation to the 2018 General Assembly – either way, such changes could potentially happen within the relatively short timeframe of 16 months from now, or possibly sooner if a consensus emerges. It should be noted that those changes, however, basically leave unaltered the current
configuration of the functions and roles of the PMA within our current agency structure. Even if such changes are made or recommended, the Commission does not lose sight of its broader assigned task in looking at the overall function and structure of the national church, how we work together as one body in Christ.

The immediate tasks you have identified are indeed helpful: continuing to think through the issues raised by the Advocacy Committees; looking at past church structures that separated out mission from support services; and continuing conversations about implementing past review recommendations. Keeping in close, candid and transparent conversation will be important as our discernment together moves forward. Flexibility will be key, even as we think quickly and deeply. And perhaps most importantly, we feel we must all step out of our traditional silos to think and act in primary loyalty and service to our lord Jesus Christ, rather than to a particular agency or structure.

Finally, a word of caution necessitated by the transparency implemented by the Commission. Our discernment process is and will be open and public. As a result, various perspectives will be presented (and reported on) that do not represent the conclusions of the Commission or even its members, but are merely part of ensuring that everything is on the table. As I mentioned at the outset, we are deeply appreciative of the commitment and work of all in our community of faith.

This is a continuing process of discernment together, and as you have stated in your initial proposal, we too look forward to ongoing discussions as we collectively discern how to faithfully move forward.

Mark Hostetter,
Moderator, Way Forward Commission