

Calling for a New Missiological Statement for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

The Presbytery of the Miami Valley overtures the 227th General Assembly (2026) of the PC(USA):

1) To direct staff, accompanied by an advisory group to be named by the Moderator or Co-Moderators, to develop a new missiological statement on which the global engagement of the PC(USA) will be founded, answering at minimum these questions, and other questions as they emerge:

- a. What is the missiology of the PC(USA), and how does this guide the church to serve God and neighbor and inform the global engagement of the church?
- b. How does this missiology relate to past statements and mission work, and how does it serve the contexts of the mission of God undertaken by the PC(USA) nationally and internationally?
- c. Who engages in the global mission of the PC(USA), and how are each group or individual engaging?
- d. What new and renewed models are in place or emerging to serve God's mission through the PC(USA) and its members and member entities, agencies, networks, mid-councils, and congregations?
- e. What is the PC(USA) sending body framework or frameworks for mission, and what protections and safeguards for those sent and those with whom they serve are in place or need to be developed?
- f. What funding models are in place or need to be developed?

2) Staff and the advisory group are directed to ensure meaningful consultation with representatives of the following groups in their work:

- a. Missiological scholars who are members of the PC(USA)
- b. Former staff members of PC(USA) World Mission who have served internationally with and under the supervision of global partners
- c. PC(USA) Mission Networks
- d. PC(USA) mid councils engaged in global mission
- e. Congregations engaging in global mission
- f. PC(USA) global partners.

3.) To report to the 228th General Assembly

Rationale

The termination of Presbyterian World Mission (PWM) by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in 2025 exposes a profound lack of understanding by the denomination's leadership concerning a Reformed missiological framework. Since its inception, the Reformed theological tradition has distinguished itself as an ecumenical and transnational church, developing and funding partnerships at home and abroad as part of its evangelical* mission. In the sixteenth century, Calvin's Geneva became a haven for Protestant refugees fleeing persecution throughout Catholic Europe. Himself a displaced political refugee, John Calvin's ministry in Geneva became a beacon for

refugees throughout Europe, who came to Geneva to learn under Calvin to then replicate his successes back home. The Genevan church not only supported the repatriation of Protestant refugees in Europe, but it also funded the first Protestant mission in the New World with the establishment of a French Huguenot colony in Brazil in 1555.

However, not only is the closure of PWM a betrayal of the global scope of Presbyterian ministries, but it comes at the expense of our most foundational ecclesiological commitments. Protestant reformers in the sixteenth century were careful not to replace one clerical hierarchy with another, as evidenced by the representational church order described in the fourth book of John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559). Given every Christian is subject to Christ's lordship, from the lowliest laborer to the highest ruling monarch, the communion of saints (*communio sanctorum*) is ultimately an egalitarian fellowship (*koinōnia*), a shared life together in which all believers are responsible for and accountable to one another. This, above all else, is the basis on which ecclesiastical and civil polity is founded. Therefore, the kind of unilateral decision-making that led to the closure of PWM without adequate dialogue and consultation reflects a careless disregard for our most foundational Reformed theological commitments.

One of the reasons given by the Interim Unification Agency (IUA) to justify the closure of PWM was the inherent coloniality of missions. When we refer to the coloniality of missions, we are referring to a way of doing missions such that usually Western missionaries impose Western ideas of "gospel", "civilization," and "progress" onto local cultures. Historically, missions often marched in lockstep with colonial projects and for that reason the document, "Presbyterians Do Mission in Partnership," presented a model of partnership in which Presbyterian mission co-workers established partnerships with local communities, allowing themselves to be guided by their wisdom and guidance. Instead of perpetuating a colonial attitude marked by a one-sided relationship in which the missionary party holds the power and resources and could, therefore, dictate to the local mission partners what they should do, Presbyterian mission workers have followed this more egalitarian and contextual missiological model assiduously and, in the process, become valuable colleagues for local churches around the world.

If colonialism is marked by a one-sided relationship in which one party holds the power to dictate or compel the other party or parties, then the actions of the Interim Council fit that bill. If PC(USA) global partners were indeed partners, then they would've been consulted before engaging in the radical reconfiguring of PC(USA) World Mission. Based on the reactions of many global partners, it appears that this consultation did not happen, and the unilateral action came as a surprise to them. This not only violates the missiology of "Presbyterians Do Mission in Partnership" but also treats our global partners like expendable mission co-workers who could be terminated unilaterally and without consultation in order to preserve the financial viability of the PC(USA).

Second, if the PC(USA) is not adhering to its official missiological statements, what missiology then drives this move to eliminate PC(USA) World Mission? In statements on the matter, the leadership has moved to transition PC(USA) World Mission into a ministry called Global Ecumenical Partners. The rationale given by IUA staff for this abrupt restructuring was a desire to increase interconnectedness in the global church while addressing the financial instability of the PC(USA). With regards to the former, interconnectedness does not reduce the need for mission. Conservative denominations are doubling down on their missionary work, filling the void where the PC(USA) has withdrawn, advancing theological, ecclesiological, and missiological ideas that differ from our own. Furthermore, the work of PC(USA) World Mission was already ecumenical on a local level. Many mission co-workers participated in ecumenical partnerships locally to engage justice issues. However, what the IUA is referring to is not these local ecumenical efforts but supranational organizations such as the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). There is no evidence that the PC(USA) will increase its financial support to the WCRC while it presses the WCRC to take over the work of PC(USA) World Mission, which makes the decisions by IUA leadership look like an effort to outsource world missions to the WCRC. In other words, leadership has failed to demonstrate how the move toward increasing the interconnectedness of the world church translates to the drastic action of eliminating PC(USA) World Mission.

Sadly, this leaves financial sustainability as the only plausible rationale for the elimination of PC(USA) World Mission. Financial sustainability motivated by the fear of a declining denomination cannot serve as a theological “state of exception” that allows the PC(USA) to violate its own theological/missiological statements. We worship the God who sends the church into the world, not the Mammon who seeks its own self-preservation. In the end, there was no justifiable missiological justification for the termination of PC(USA) World Mission and the unjust firings of its mission co-workers. Granted, the closure of PC(USA) World Mission comes at a time when global ministries are struggling to make up for funding deficits after the Trump administration cut funding for programs the US Agency for International Development (USAID). But the PC(USA)’s fiscal worries cannot be allowed to constitute a state of exception that allows the denomination to act against its own doctrinal and polity statements. Such a “missiology” is neither a theology of missions nor is it decolonial in any sense of the term. This theological lacuna, which has already unjustly upended the work of 79 mission co-workers and thrown a curveball at so many partnerships around the world, needs to be addressed in a properly Reformed manner. This overture aims to produce a missiological statement that can guide the PC(USA)’s mission policy now and in the future.

* The term “evangelical” is here used in the original sixteenth century meaning to refer to the Gospel-centered reformations that came to differentiated Protestantism from the Roman Catholic Church. In our day and age, the capitalized form of this term (“Evangelical”) is used to refer to various conservative religious movements in the United States informed by the publication of *The Fundamentals* (1910-1915), a series

of tracts that provide "a new statement of the fundamentals of Christianity" in response to the Social Gospel and Protestant Liberalism.