

June 14, 2010

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We are writing as a group of pastors who share a common concern for the work before you as a commissioner member of Committee 14. We know that each of you, whether Advisory Delegate, Elder or Minister Commissioner, undertakes your responsibility desiring to seek the mind of Christ, and wanting to do so in a way that is just and fair through a process that is decent and orderly. The method by which your committee considers items of business and makes its decisions is vitally important to this outcome. The structure of your committee's agenda itself will have an enormous impact on what you decide. Your committee's decisions will influence the actions of the entire assembly. The importance of process is one of the reasons Presbyterians insist things be done "decently and in order."

We ask you to look closely at the committee schedule proposed by staff and committee leaders. That schedule will greatly influence your decision making as a committee. As we have examined it, it appears egregiously skewed to privilege a single perspective on the issues you will be considering. For example, prior to giving you, as an advisory delegate or commissioner member any opportunity to weigh in on the issues, the agenda currently includes:

- 15 minutes of introduction to the special committee's material with no time allotted for differing perspectives
- 15 minutes of MRTI presenting its case against Caterpillar Corporation with no time allotted for differing perspectives
- 30 minutes for the Middle East Study Committee (MESC) members to tell their stories and views about the Middle East with no time allotted for differing perspectives
- 35 minutes for small group discussion of the study committee's presentation (presumably members of the MESC will be in the small groups but not others with differing perspectives)
- 90 minutes of open hearings, at least half of which is required to comment positively on the MRTI and MESC recommendations
- 30 additional minutes from the MESC to present its case
- 30 minutes devoted to hearing from overture advocates; 25 minutes of which will be devoted to five overtures highly critical of Israel; only 5 minutes for Overture 14-06, the only overture which presents an alternative to the MESC's recommendations

If your committee adopts this proposed agenda, then apart from testimony and discussions, you will be subject to nearly two hours of one-sided, uncontested, anti-Israeli messages, compared to the five minutes of counter argument favoring evenhanded treatment of Palestinians and Israelis. In short, at a minimum, almost 90% of the committee's instruction would be devoted to one perspective!

If, upon further reflection, you see how one-sided and unfair this schedule is, you can propose an amended schedule to your committee. You can work with your committee moderator to cut down on the presentation time in favor of certain items and add in equal presentation time in opposition. Your committee leadership has a major responsibility placed in their hands by the Manual of the General Assembly, which states unequivocally that "The committee moderator **shall** provide that the total time allotted to persons, other than members of the committee, who speak for or against a recommendation be equal so far as possible." (E.2.e.(8)).

As you consider the proposed schedule, please ask yourself the following questions. As currently designed, does this process reflect something that is done “decently and in order?” Does this agenda follow the Presbyterian principles of giving equal attention to both sides of an issue? We don’t think any fair minded person can respond “yes” to these questions.

What can you do about this unfair process? You have both the authority and responsibility to change it. It is your committee. Your committee leadership has an important responsibility to guide and ensure a fair process for the business before your committee. It is not their responsibility to dictate the agenda to suit any group, including the authors of the Middle East Study Committee’s report. You, the members of the committee ultimately determine the agenda. We encourage you to work together with other fair-minded commissioners to ensure that a full range of information is presented for your consideration. Your opportunity to do this comes right at the start of your committee work, so you will need to be alert and prepared. It is your committee. You create the agenda, not MRTI, MESC, or even Committee 14’s leadership.

Thank you for considering our request. We hope that you will ensure the adoption of a process that is worthy of our tradition of discerning God’s will on issues in a manner that is just and fair, and done “decently and in order.”

Sincerely,

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Rancho Santa Fe, CA

Rev. Dr. Mark Brewer – Senior Pastor  
\*Bel Air Presbyterian Church  
Los Angeles, CA

Rev. John Gable – Senior Pastor  
\*Tabernacle Presbyterian Church  
Indianapolis, IN

Rev. Dr. Bob Henley – Senior Pastor  
\*Presbyterian Church of the Big Wood  
Ketchum, ID

Rev. Dr. Edwin Hurley – Senior Pastor  
\*South Highland Presbyterian Church  
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Rev. Richard McDermott – Senior Pastor  
\*First Presbyterian Church  
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Rev. Dr. Mark Patterson – Senior Pastor  
\*Community Presbyterian Church  
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Rev. Dr. David Stoker – Executive Pastor  
\*First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu  
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