

Mission to North America
Response to Overture 19 (30th General Assembly – 2002)

The 31st General Assembly approved the following statement as a response to the growing challenges for ministry presented by the ethnic diversity of North America. Following the brief formal statement, the Assembly also approved a Working Paper, commending it to the churches of the PCA for their use in the further development of ministry.

Whereas, God promised that all nations (Hebrew: gowy) of the earth will be blessed through His covenant with His people Israel (Genesis 17:1-7; 18:18; Psalm 2:6-8; Isaiah 2:2-5; 49:6);

Whereas the Great Commission commands that it is the responsibility of the covenant community to disciple, baptize and, teach all nations, with the result of their following the Lord (Mathew 28:18-20);

Whereas the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost confirmed that the promises of God are for every people group (Greek: ethnos), the early church addressed the challenges resulting from the Church including people of various races and ethnic backgrounds, and the Revelation of the Sprit to the Apostle John points us forward to an assembly in heaven composed of every nation, tribe, people and language (Acts 2:1-6; 6:1-7; 13:46-49; 13:46-49; 15:12-19; Revelation 5:6-10; 7:9-10);

Whereas, the United States and Canada, historically composed of many people groups, are experiencing ever greater immigration from an increasing diversity of people groups;

Whereas, Chesapeake Presbytery overtured the 30th General Assembly, through Overture 19, to erect a special study committee to:

- 1) Explore the challenges presented to our ministry by the increasing ethnic diversity of our nation,
- 2) Suggest ways our General Assembly Committees, Presbyteries, and churches might meet these challenges,
- 3) Offer a statement of biblical values and commitments declaring to God, to the world, and to ourselves our convictions in these matters;

Whereas, the Presbyterian Church in America at the 30th General Assembly has expressed our repentance for the barriers created by racism, and its commitment to strive to remove them;

Whereas the 30th General Assembly instructed the MNA-GA staff to respond to Overture 19;

Therefore, the 31st General Assembly answers Overture 19 of the 30th General Assembly as follows:

That the General Assembly reaffirms that obedience to the Scriptures and the Great Commission includes proclaiming the Gospel in Word and deed among many people groups (gowy/ethnos) of North America, as well as to the uttermost parts of the earth.

That the General Assembly reaffirms our calling to be the fragrance of Christ, extending everywhere and among all people groups in our communities our evidence/witness in word and deed that Jesus Christ is Lord and the Kingdom of heaven has come.

That the General Assembly urges presbyteries and churches to give intentionally high priority to developing churches and ministries that are culturally sensitive, ministering among all people groups (gowy/ethnos) within our communities and spheres of influence in North America.

That the General Assembly calls the presbyteries, churches and members of the PCA to special focused prayer, vision and strategic steps for the fulfillment of the Great Commission among all people groups (gowy/ethnos) in North America.

That the General Assembly instructs the committees and agencies of the PCA to seek specific ways in which to increase their leadership and coordination of resources for a greater equipping of presbyteries and churches for ministry among all people groups (gowy/ethnos) of North America.

Further, that the MNA Working Paper, *Ministering Among the People Groups of North America*, be received as information and commended to the churches of the PCA for guidance in their ministries among the people groups of their respective communities. Additional resources on this subject are available on the MNA website or from the MNA office and are commended to elders, deacons, other church leaders and members.

Editorial Note: this concludes the statement approved by the 31st General Assembly.

MNA Working Paper: *Ministering Among the People Groups of North America*

The Growing Ethnic Diversity of North America: Opportunity for Ministry

North America is a land of rapidly increasing ripeness, God willing, because of the growing racial and cultural diversity. While both the United States and Canada have always been lands of assimilation of immigrants from many countries, the variety of countries of origin and sheer numbers of new immigrants have rapidly increased in recent decades.

This offers a unique opportunity: whereas in times past the primary way to minister among the nations was by going to another continent, today we have the exciting challenge of missions among the nations, right in our own communities. Because the Lord of the harvest has brought the nations to us, North Americans can now “go” to the nations in unprecedented numbers and varieties of ministry.

Consider these numbers (in thousands) and possible growth projections:

	1990	2000	%growth	2050	% growth
White, Non-Hispanic	188,315	196,659	4%	207,901	6%
Black, Non-Hispanic	29,304	33,476	14%	53,555	60%
Hispanic (of any race)	22,379	32,440	45%	96,508	197%
Asians	6,996	10,504	50%	32,432	209%
Am. Indians & Alaska Nat'ls	1,797	2,050	14%	3,534	72%

These population numbers provoke appropriate questions for the Presbyterian Church in America, born neither of political correctness nor of the so-called social Gospel, but born of God’s calling to minister the Gospel among all peoples. Is the PCA called to minister among only certain races or ethnic groups in North America, while other traditions are called to minister among others? Further, has God called us to minister among the many people groups of North America in the same way He calls us to minister among the many people groups of the world *outside* of North America (a calling which the PCA rightly places among the highest of priorities)?

We need not mechanically conclude that following God’s calling would necessarily bring the PCA to the same ethnic profile as the total population, but at the same time, the conclusion seems inescapable that if we were adequately addressing the mission field in which we live, there would surely be much greater numbers of non-Anglo ethnic groups within the PCA community of faith.

The Great Commission remains our constant challenge until Lord’s return. It is our prayer that North America is ripe for harvest in greater numbers than ever before.

For the purposes of this paper, two definitions are important as foundational assumption in the language used here:

- The biblical term “nation,” (Hebrew “gowy” and Greek “ethnos”) can be used to refer to a political nation state (e.g., Babylon, Egypt), but the term also is used throughout both Old and New Testament to refer to Gentiles,

heathen people, and racial or ethnic groups. Setting aside connotations that may be associated with the so-called “church growth movement,” the term “people group” is perhaps one of the best literal equivalents for biblical “nation,” and the term “people group” is used in that way in this paper.

- The Anglo/Caucasian/White people group is also just that – a people group/nation or ethnic group. Living in a land in which this ethnic group has been the dominant population group, it is easy for Caucasians to think of themselves as “people,” while other races are “ethnics.” In fact, Caucasians are a minority people group in the world population, and if current trends continue, they will be outnumbered by all other ethnic groups combined, within 50 years in North America. Therefore, in biblical language, all of us are “ethnics,” and the Church of Jesus Christ throughout history is composed of every nation (ethnos), tribe, people and language.

From the very beginning of God’s unfolding His great provision of redemption through the atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ, His plan was that the Gospel be proclaimed to the nations. Through the revealed Word and the mighty acts of our Triune God – with distinct provision ascribed to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – the Church is called to minister the Gospel among all people groups throughout the entire world and in every generation, as these Scriptures proclaim:

- Genesis 17:1-7 “¹ When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty ^[1] ; walk before me and be blameless. ² I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.”
³ Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴ “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵ No longer will you be called Abram ^[2] ; your name will be Abraham, ^[3] for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. ⁷ I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.””
- Genesis 18:18 – “¹⁸ Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. ”
- Leviticus 19:33-34 – “³³ “When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. ³⁴ The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God..”
- Psalm 2:6-8 – “⁶ “I have installed my King ^[1] on Zion, my holy hill.” ⁷ I will proclaim the decree of the LORD : He said to me, “You are my Son ^[2] ; today I have become your Father. ^[3] ⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.”

- Psalm 67:1-7 – “¹ May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, Selah ² that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. ³ May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. ⁴ May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth. Selah ⁵ May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. ⁶ Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us. ⁷ God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him.”
- Isaiah 2:2-5 – “² In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. ³ Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴ He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. ⁵ Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.”
- Isaiah 49:6 - “⁶ he says: “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”
- Matthew 28:18-20 – “¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in^[1] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”
- Acts 1:8 – “⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 2:1-6 – “¹When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues^[1] as the Spirit enabled them. ⁵Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.