

Proposed Overture to the 219th General Assembly Concerning Iraq

Providence Presbytery, meeting at the Van Wyck Presbyterian Church, Van Wyck, South Carolina, on March 18, 2010, overtures the 219th General Assembly to:

A. Pray for

1. the churches in Iraq – the Reformed/Presbyterian Churches in Basrah, Baghdad, Mosul, and Kirkuk; the Chaldean Catholic, the Armenian Orthodox and Catholic, the Assyrian, and the Greek Orthodox Churches – as they strive to survive and witness during the chaotic period of rebuilding their nation and their churches;
2. all who grieve, both Iraqis and internationals, because of lost loved ones and those who have suffered from the hostilities;
3. all Iraqis that they may rebuild a nation that promotes the highest potential of all its citizens and responds to the continuing special needs of those who are displaced or refugees from warfare;
4. all refugees, both internally and externally displaced, who have often been forced from their homes by fear and threats of violence, that they may soon be able to resume their lives in safety and health.

B. Commend:

1. the agencies of the General Assembly Mission Council for making available members of our partner churches in Iraq to inform us about their churches' life and witness, at national gatherings such as the Big Tent and the Presbyterian Women's Triennium, the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program's International Peacemakers, and the Iraq Partnership Network; and we urge the GAMC to continue by these and other means to inform us about the life and witness of our partners in Iraq, the ways in which we may support them, and ways in which our partners may help us better understand our mission; *
2. Presbyterian Women for designating the Kirkuk Church Kindergarten and Child Care Center as a recipient of the 2010 Birthday Offering grant;
3. Congregations and individuals that have special ministries with Iraqi refugees, recognizing the connection between spiritual and other human needs.

C. Direct the GAMC to empower and equip presbyteries and congregations as they respond to the spiritual and material needs of Iraqi refugees arriving in the United States, including increased collaboration between Presbyterian Disaster Assis-

tance and the office of Middle Eastern Congregational Support to provide a holistic approach to this outreach ministry; and also direct the GAMC to work proactively with our regional partners as they respond to the ongoing needs of Iraqi refugees in the host countries in the Middle East. *

- D. Urge the GAMC to continue to provide spiritual and psychological services for those now or previously in military service related to Iraq, as well as to those who now or previously resisting military service in Iraq for reasons of conscience. *
- E. Direct the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy to study and report, from a perspective of Reformed theology and practice, the relationship between the expenditures for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the economic conditions in the U.S., including those who benefit from these expenditures and those sectors that are disadvantaged. *

(*These assume no additional budget is needed, and that the activities will reflect the priorities of the General Assembly.)

- F. Direct the Stated Clerk to call upon the church
1. to pray for the effectiveness of our national leaders in making peace;
 2. to encourage presbyteries to develop linkages between their congregations and agencies that assist in the relocation of Iraqi refugees in the USA;
 3. to commend the US government
 - for its responses to the massive Iraqi refugee situations;
 - for taking steps to return troops from combat;
 - for giving support to returned troops and their families;
 - for giving political and economic support toward rebuilding Iraq as an independent nation;
 - for limiting and reducing US intelligence sharing with Iranian and Turkey's military forces that has resulted in civilian casualties and destroyed properties in Iraq, especially in the north;
 4. to urge the US government to maintain its commitments to:
 - a) withdraw all U.S. combat troops from Iraq by August 31, 2010;
 - b) withdraw all U.S. armed forces and defense contractors from Iraq no later than December 31, 2011;
 - c) ensure that the U.S. not establish permanent US military bases in Iraq;
 - d) make available sufficient U.S. funds for the repatriation and resettlement of Iraqi refugees and for the post-war reconstruction of Iraq;
 - e) reduce the time that it takes to process refugees coming to the U.S; and
 - f) ensure that sufficient funds are provided for medical and psychological treatment of returning military personnel.

- G. Direct the Stated Clerk to send this overture to the Synods and Presbyteries and Churches in the most practical manner as soon as possible, requesting their concurrence and active participation in these ministries, especially in association with ecumenical and interfaith partners.

Rationale:

“Greetings from [Iraq] in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! Thank you for your concern and follow-up on our church situation in [Iraq}, and also I would like to thank all brothers in faith who support us and pray for our safety. ... Due to the occupation of Iraq in 2003 which resulted in loss of security, our country is considered [to be] the highest in number of orphans. ... We need your prayers, so that God may give us enough strength to stand with these difficult circumstances.”

This is typical of the greetings from Iraqi Presbyterians, who live in the spirit of Paul's words: “as dying, and see - we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.” (II Cor. 6:9-10 NRSV) We note with sadness that “killing” has taken place with one elder deliberately killed and another, who had been deliberately shot and later threatened, fleeing the country. Half of the Iraqi Christians have become internally displaced or refugees; they are among the several million whose lives have been terribly disrupted.

Yet those who remain persevere with worship in their sanctuaries where possible or in their homes, with programs for children, youth, and women, and with community activities such as prison visitation, kindergartens for children with families and for orphans, a radio station, and a medical clinic.

The suffering includes other Christian churches, as well as all other Iraqis, and those who have served with the military forces. Concern for those who grieve and for those who will spend their lifetimes with painful memories and physical and psychological challenges will need to be expressed as long as we live.

The refugees, who languish in the host countries in the Middle East, and those who find new beginnings in the US, will continue to need our attention for generations to their spiritual, psychological and physical needs. More coordination among GAMC offices and presbyteries and congregations will increase the caring and advocacy ministries that we are committed to provide, both in the host countries and in the US. Because processing refugees takes from 18 to 8 months, whatever we can do to encourage the government to speed up the process is worthwhile advocacy on their behalf.

Previous studies related to Iraq, most recently “To Repent, to Restore, to Rebuild, to Reconcile,” received by the 218th General Assembly (2008) and commended for study, have a solid basis in Reformed theology and practice, citing, for instance, the linkage

between peace and justice in the Confession of 1967. To bring these up to the present, a study relating U.S. expenses for war to economic justice would be very helpful.

Commitments and agreements with Iraqis have been made during the previous and current Administrations; public support for them on behalf of both the Iraqi and the U.S. military forces is advisable and necessary.

At the end of 2009, of the \$52.8 billion allocated for reconstruction, \$39.54 billion has been spent, with half of that going for security needs and not reconstruction or development. As this funding is anticipated to end by 2014, it is appropriate to call for a level of funding that will overcome much of the destruction caused by the war, similar to the Marshall Plan following WWII.

This overture brings up-to-date the overture on Iraq adopted by the 218th General Assembly (2008), which states, for instance, in paragraph 5: Call upon the United States government to develop and implement a lasting peaceful solution, responsibly bringing the troops home; and reaffirms the call of the 216th General Assembly (2004) for the United States government to engage with the international community through the United Nations and other international agencies to cooperate with the government of Iraq in providing security, peacekeeping forces, and funding the rebuilding of the country.