



**THE ADVOCACY COMMITTEE FOR WOMEN'S CONCERNS &
THE ADVOCACY COMMITTEE FOR RACIAL ETHNIC CONCERNS**

16 FEBRUARY 2018

Dear colleagues serving on the Way Forward Commission,

We write to express our profound concern with the proposal by the Way Forward that creates a separate A Corp board, segregating the material voice and vote of the advocacy committees, centralizing fiscal power without regard for the ecclesiastical mutual responsibility and accountability that is assured in Presbyterianism. As we have previously shared and as you are aware the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (ACWC) and the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC) have been unambiguous in insisting that justice at the table is vital to the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s Christian witness and Presbyterian heritage. We took at face value the Way Forward's commitment to work for "all to live into our connectional church polity, avoiding compartmentalization and modeling (in our actions and in our recommendations) the collaborative working approach," and so we were disheartened that the final proposal reinforces structural inequalities and blatantly disregards the voices of those long silenced in the church and society.

As a moral document, under both this proposal and reasoning, a budget would do nothing to advance the values and priorities of the PC(USA). That is contrary to the substance of Reformed Christianity where we have never delineated between the sacred and the secular. Foundationally, Presbyterians have understood that God's sovereignty exists in all spheres of life and, as such, our missional and theological responsibility is reflected in all of our actions, including how to allocate our funds. It is deeply troubling that this proposal not only fails to recognize that but also, that the Way Forward claims that there is no need for a theological rationale or foundation in this proposal.

As you know, the Presbyterian Church (USA) established ACWC and ACREC to ensure that the church holds to our commitment to creating a church and world where gender and racial justice are realized. And, as ACWC and ACREC have stated previously, "Since the formation of the Presbyterian Church (USA) in 1983 there is no historical moment where there has been a more acute threat to women's rights, racial and ethnic rights, and LGBTQ+." As the results of the [Gender and Leadership Survey](#) by Research Services clearly show, PCUSA still has a long way to go to achieve equity for women even within the church itself, much less in the broader society. The denomination has clearly acknowledged the need to address racial injustice internally, as the last General Assembly approved multiple items of business related to racial justice, including requiring race audits of all of the PC(USA) agencies. It is rather unfortunate that the failure of the Way Forward to engage or even respond to communications from the advocacy committees underscores this very point.

We are a church that purports to value diversity and inclusion. Recently, the PMAB recognized that faithfully living out that value meant that advocacy and advisory committees should have voice and vote on a smaller PMAB. It is disconcerting that as soon as women, people of color, and those whose lens focuses on the most marginalized in our church and society have an

expanded role at the table, the Way Forward sees fit to restrict influence over something as critical as fiscal responsibilities.

Having just celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, it is important to recall that the primary impetus of the radical birth of Protestantism was a rebuke of corruption in the Roman Church. The way our branch of Protestantism has responded to the human and institutional propensity to this sin is through a structure of mutual accountability and responsibility and by rejecting episcopacy. Yet, instead of expressing any substance of this constitution, this proposal undermines the very spirit of our core ecclesiology by attempting to centralize financial power in the hands of a few, with one leader at the top. Not only will another layer of bureaucracy fail to aid in the church in doing mission but this concentrated power without any regard or process for accountability exacerbates the imbalance of power, perspective, and privilege that exists within the PCUSA.

The Talmud says, “Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.” We believe that there is much to learn from the wisdom of our Rabbinical cousins in the faith by living into a more just and diverse structure that doesn't seek to concentrate financial responsibility in the hands of a powerful few.

Your partners in ministry,

The Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns
The Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns

