

Unification Commission consolidates PC(USA) agencies, resulting in program changes and staff reduction

'Interim Unified Agency' to be led by Stated Clerk Jihyun Oh.

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The Unification Commission of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has recently taken several actions affecting agency leadership, staffing and structure over the past six weeks toward their goal of “facilitat[ing] the unification of the Office of the General Assembly (OGA) and the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA) into a single agency.”

Among the actions was the announcement of a reconfiguration plan that included the restructuring or elimination of several ministry areas and a 12-person reduction in force. The reduction included two positions from the Compassion, Peace and Justice program, six positions from the Theology, Formation and Evangelism program area and four communications positions. Additionally, two vacant positions in the Office of the General Assembly will remain unfilled.

During its October 10-11, 2024, meeting, commissioners dissolved the position of Presbyterian Mission Agency president and executive director effective October 31, 2024, and gave thanks to Diane Moffett, who had served in that position since 2018.

“I’m very grateful for the leadership of the Rev. Dr. Diane Givens Moffett and the impact that she had in the work of the national church and the local church,” Felipe Martínez, co-moderator of the Unification Commission said in an interview following the meeting. “The impact of Matthew 25 will continue to be felt. It is a legacy of service and of prophetic word that we as a denomination do well to keep alive because that’s part of our tradition.”

Concurrently, the commission named Jihyun Oh, current executive director and stated clerk of the General Assembly, as leader of the “Interim Unified Agency,” created through the unification of the Office of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency.



Felipe Martinez, co-moderator of unification commission

Their respective boards – the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly (COGA) and the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board (PMAB) – will complete their work by early 2025, and the Unification Commission will serve as the board of the Interim Unified Agency until the next PC(USA) General Assembly in 2026.

“Unified leadership is central to moving this process forward,” said Martínez. “Unifying two agencies is not a small task, it’s not a task that is straightforward or simple. It’s a lot of moving pieces that require the kind of integrated strategy that is necessary to move us forward — moving together in the wisdom of the General Assembly and 225th General Assembly we needed to unify these two agencies.”

At this same meeting, commission member Scott Lumsden provided a budget summary for the Interim Unified Agency. As approved by the 226th General Assembly (2024), the 2025-2026 budget included a \$5 million budget reduction over two years. Lumsden reported “a small reduction in force” would provide some of these savings.

Three weeks after this October Unification Commission meeting, Oh and denominational leaders announced the reconfiguration plan that included the reduction in force and the specified ministry areas’ restructure or elimination. The employees affected by the layoff received severance packages.

According to a [Presbyterian News Service article](#), these changes include:

- Reconfiguring the work of the Peacemaking Program, dissolving much of its work and eliminating all staff positions except one employee engaged in gun violence prevention, which will now reside in the Office of Public Witness.
- Reconfiguring the Theology and Worship program area.
- Integrating the Vital Congregations Program with 1001 New Worshiping Communities including integrating these programs more closely with the work of intercultural associates in Racial Equity and Women’s Intercultural Ministries (RE&WIM).
- Reviewing the committee and board structure of the denomination. All meetings of the Presbyterian Historical Society Board, Educator Certification Committee and advisory committees related to One Great Hour of Sharing (advisory committees for Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, Self-Development of People and the Hunger Program) will pause in-person meetings in 2025 while the Unification Commission reviews all committees related to the Interim Unified Agency.
- Reimagining the Presbyterian Historical Society Journal of Presbyterian History as an online ecclesial-focused publication.



These changes resulted in a net expense reduction for 2025 and 2026 of \$5,294,372. — A Corp President Kathy Lueckert

Kathy Lueckert, president of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), A Corporation (A Corp), said in an email that these changes resulted in a net expense reduction for 2025 and 2026 of \$5,294,372. Respectively in 2025 and 2026, these amount to:

- Salaries and benefits, savings of \$760,239 and \$824,519;
- Travel, savings of \$331,116 and \$286,797;
- Meetings, savings of \$174,376 and \$76,975;
- Administration costs, savings of \$52,337 and \$65,960;
- Program costs, savings of \$682,492 and \$727,871; and
- Grants, savings of \$957,370 and \$459,034.
- She said more details on these cost savings will be available in the December budget report.

The reconfiguration of the Theology and Worship program area will be achieved by “transforming how we cultivate and curate theology and worship leadership and resources in an ecosystem that is already producing them all the time,” according to Lueckert, who recently [announced her retirement from A Corp.](#)

“As we realign what was ‘Theology, Formation, and Evangelism’ around the priorities of mid council support and leadership development we will continue to connect, convene, and curate theology and worship leadership, expertise and resources with our broader ecosystem, while we take steps away from producing them.”



Kathy Lueckert (Contributed photo)

The “broader ecosystem,” she noted, includes, “12 seminaries, 52 PC(USA)-aligned colleges and universities (in the U.S. alone) along with 8,000+ congregations and hundreds of New Worshiping Communities where theology and worship is practiced, caught, taught, deepened, written about, resourced and knowledge is advanced.”

According to Oh, these changes are necessary to help right-size the denomination’s mission to meet the needs of its churches.

“Folks really want to make sure that mission and vision and mission alignment conversations are driving [restructuring efforts] and not that the financial reality is ultimately making us make decisions,” said Oh in an interview with the *Outlook*.

Yet, the historical realities of declining contributions, increased operating expenses and a cautious approach to withdrawing endowment funds led Oh to question, “How do we get to a sustainable and balanced budget given the projections that we have about the denomination and our continuing trend in terms of membership and per capita

apportionment?”

In the case of the [Presbyterian Peacemaking Program](#), two of its headline programs — Travel Study Seminars and the International Peacemakers program — have been put “on pause for additional conversation,” according to Oh, as its work is integrated into other ministry areas.

Over the past four decades, the International Peacemaker Program has provided financial resources to host more than 350 peacemakers from 60 countries who traveled throughout the denomination to share their experiences of peace and justice work in their contexts. [Nine peacemakers visited PC\(USA\) churches this year from September 13 to October 7.](#)



Support for some of the paused work may come from outside the national church. The [Presbyterian Peace Fellowship](#) (PPF), an independent national fellowship of Presbyterians founded in 1944, is one such organization.

“We grieve and feel the loss of those partners [in the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program],” said Laurie Lyter Bright, executive director of PPF. “The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship is not the same thing as the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program; we’ve been here for 80 years and we’re not going anywhere. We will gladly walk with anybody who wants to channel their energy for peacemaking.”

Asked if the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship could assume the work of a large program such as the International Peacemakers, Lyter Bright referred to the structure of PPF in which its members form working groups and raise funds for their objectives.



“If there are five or more people willing to commit to building a working group around how we would support a program like that, we will give it our very best,” she said. “That’s not to say we could do it at the level the denomination could do it because we are a small staff. But we’ve always been small, and we have done huge things.”

Oh conceded some of the historic work of the denomination may need to be done by ecclesial partners or local congregations. She also acknowledged the difficulty the denomination will have in continuing all its historical work and even in receiving enough nominations for new members to fully staff the committees of the existing structure while achieving the hoped-for diversity among these working groups.



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As the Interim Unified Agency and Unification Commission continue their work, Oh noted the structure of committees and boards at the national setting of the PC(USA) has not changed much in 40 years.

“How can we rethink committees, while also still being absolutely committed to full participation and representation in all the ways that it means for our denomination?” Oh pondered. “Are there ways in which we can reimagine how the work gets done? I think so.

“[This has] been a part of the Unification Commission’s work and mandate. I know that they’re going to be focusing on some of that work in the months to come.”

A November 16, 2024, meeting of the Unification Commission resulted in no decisions although commissioners had closed session discussions with Oh, “regarding personnel, selection of her leadership team, and the upcoming interviews regarding positions in the new Unification Management Office.” The next meeting of the [Unification Commission](#) is scheduled for December 14, 2024, from 3-5 p.m. ET.



Stated Clerk Rev. Jihyun Oh, assumes the Moderator’s chair for the close of the assembly. Photo by Jonathan Watson for Presbyterian Outlook.



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