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Presbyterian Church of the Big Wood Task Force

PC(USA) information per Outline

Overview:

- 1. Size: 1,760,200
- 2. Headquarters: Louisville, Kentucky
- 3. When formed: 1983 when the Presbyterian Church in the US and the United Presbyterian Church in the USA merged.
 - (Tab 1) Chart of The Presbyterian Family Connections

(Tab 2) Wikipedia Summary of PCUSA

- 4. How many Churches: 10,038 with 24 new congregations formed in 2013 plus 200 new worshiping communities not included in numbers total
- 5. How many members: 1,760,200
- 6. Trend of Churches and Membership: decreasing in membership numbers but increasing local mission spending increased by \$1.85 million over 2012. Non-local mission spending increased as well by \$5.6 million.
 - (Tab 3) PCUSA 2013 statistics summary letter and chart
- 7. Per capita per member for 2014: PC(USA) \$7.02; Synod of the Pacific \$5.22 (.05 for support of Presbytery of Cascades for 2016 GA), Presbytery of Kendall \$30.76: Total per capita \$43.00 for 2014.

Theological Beliefs and Tenants vs PC(USA): See attached chart as prepared by PCUSA

- (Tab 4) Comparison chart from PC(USA)
- (Tab 5) What are the "Essential Tenets" of the Reformed Faith from Ron Lavoie Kendall exec
- (Tab 6) The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity Chapter One from PC(USA) & Living the Life of Faith from Ron Lavoie
- (Tab 7) Building a Community of Faith, Hope, Love and Witness from PC(USA)

What would be involved in making a change

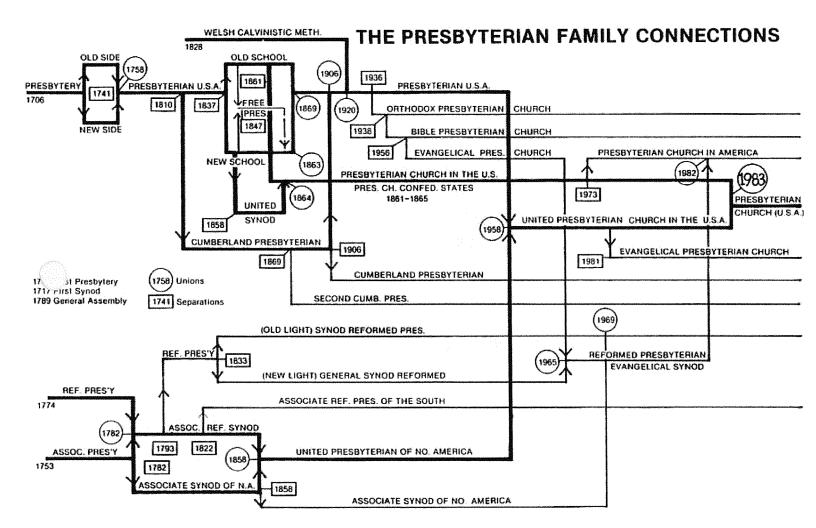
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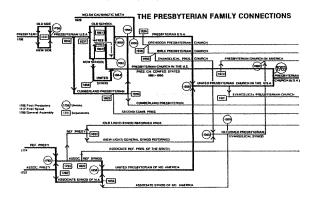
Benefits of belonging to PC(USA)

- A. (Tab 8) Why Choose PC(USA) from PC(USA)
- B. (Tab 9) Constitution Musings RE: Misrepresentations about PC(USA) and Framing Our Discussion in a Time of Schism from PC(USA)
 - (Tab 10) Answers to Objections from Ron Lavoie Kendall Presbytery Stated Clerk/Executive Presbyter
- C. Widely recognized denomination that continues to appeal to the Wood River Valley residents and resort visitors population
- D. Reputation for strong preaching
- E. PCBW has proven small group bible studies, outreach to youth and children, young adult programs, family programs, Big Wood School
- F. PCBW has vigorous mission program with Northrise University, Orphanage in Zambia and Nick and Laura Armstrong's ministry. PCBW per capita helps supports Presbytery of Kendall, Synod and PC(USA) missions. Many church members are active in local community outreach programs.
- G. Strong pension program for pastor, pension and insurance program available for employees
- H. Session and pastor can choose how to respond to GA from Ron Lavoie
 - (Tab 11) Coming to Terms with GA and the Democratic Process in PC(USA)
 - (Tab 12) Embracing the Wider Circle of the Universal Church

Additional Information

(Tab 13) Reports of telephone conversations with members of 3 different Idaho churches that transferred membership





Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (abbreviated)

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)



Abbreviation PC(USA) **Classification** Protestant

Orientation Mainline Reformed

Polity Presbyterian Moderator Heath Rada

Associations National Council of Churches;

World Communion of Reformed Churches; World Council of

Churches

Region United States

Headquarters Louisville, Kentucky

Origin June 10, 1983

Merge of The Presbyterian Church in the

United States and the United Presbyterian Church in the United

States of America

Congregation 10,038^[1]

S

Members 1,760,200^[1] communicant

members, roughly 3 million

adherents

Ministers 20,562^[1]

Official www.pcusa.org

website

The **Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**, or **PC(USA)**, is a mainline Protestant Christian denomination in the United States. Part of the Reformed tradition, it is the largest Presbyterian denomination in the U.S. The PC(USA) was established by the 1983 merger of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, whose churches were located in the Southern and border states, with the United

Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, whose congregations could be found in every state.

The denomination had 1,760,200 members and 20,562 ordained ministers in 10,083 congregations at the end of 2013.^[1] Though its membership has declined significantly in the past several years,^{[2][3]} the PC(USA) remains the most visible Presbyterian denomination in North America.^[4] The PC(USA) is a member of the National Council of Churches, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the World Council of Churches, and Christian Churches Together.

Denominational offices are located in Louisville, Kentucky.

Contents [hide]

1 History

- 1.1 Origins
- 1.2 19th century
- 1.3 20th century to the present
 - 1.3.1 Mergers
 - 1.3.2 Social Justice Initiatives and the Rise of the Presbyterian Renewal Movement
 - 1.3.3 Breakaway Presbyterian denominations
 - 1.3.4 Youth
- 2 Structure
 - 2.1 Constitution
 - 2.2 Councils
 - 2.2.1 Session
 - 2.2.2 Presbytery
 - 2.2.3 Synod
 - 2.2.4 Synods of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
 - 2.2.5 General Assembly
 - 2.2.5.1 Elected officials
 - 2.2.5.2 Structure
 - 2.3 Affiliated seminaries
 - 2.4 Demographics
- 3 Worship
 - 3.1 The Service for the Lord's Day
- 4 Missions
- 5 Ecumenical relationships and full communion partnerships
 - 5.1 National and international ecumenical memberships
 - 5.2 Formula of agreement
 - 5.3 National and international ecumenical memberships

- 5.4 World Communion of Reformed Churches
- 5.5 Churches Uniting in Christ
- 6 Current controversies
 - 6.1 Homosexuality
 - 6.2 General Assembly 2006
 - 6.3 General Assembly 2008
 - 6.4 General Assembly 2010
 - 6.5 Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians
 - 6.6 Property ownership
 - 6.7 Divestment from corporations operating in Israel
 - 6.8 Israeli-Palestinian conflict
- 7 List of notable congregations
- 8 See also
- 9 References
- 10 Bibliography
- 11 Further reading
- 12 External links

History[edit]

See also: Presbyterianism in the United States

Origins[edit]

Presbyterians trace their history to the 16th century and the Protestant Reformation. Presbyterian heritage, and much of what they believe, began with the Swiss/French theologian and lawyer John Calvin (1509–64), whose writings solidified much of the Reformed thinking that came before him.

Calvin did most of his writing from Geneva, Switzerland. From there, the Reformed movement spread to other parts of Europe. John Knox, a Scotsman who studied with Calvin in Geneva, Switzerland, took Calvin's teachings back to Scotland (see Scottish Reformation). Other Reformed communities developed in England, Holland and France. The Presbyterian church traces its ancestry back primarily to Scotland (see Church of Scotland).

The early Presbyterians in America came from Scotland and Ireland. The first American Presbytery was organized at Philadelphia in 1706. The first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) was held in the same city in 1789. The Assembly was convened by the Rev. John Witherspoon, the only minister to sign the Declaration of Independence. This was indicative

of the active support of most Presbyterians for the American War of Independence.

The First Great Awakening had a major impact on the American Presbyterians. Inspired by the evangelical preaching of George Whitefield and others, Gilbert Tennent delivered a sermon in West Nottingham, Maryland in 1740 on "The Dangers of an Unconverted Ministry." In the sermon, he asserted some current Presbyterian church leaders might be academic "Pharisee-teachers" who did not have the same faith or enthusiasm as newly converted followers, a controversial view which divided the church. Together with his brother William Tennent, he led the Presbyterian part of the Great Awakening revivalist movement in America.

In the South the Presbyterians were evangelical dissenters, mostly Scots-Irish Americans who expanded into Virginia between 1740 and 1758. Spangler (2008) argues they were more energetic and held frequent services better atuned to the frontier conditions of the colony. Presbyterianism grew in frontier areas where the Anglicans had made little impression. Uneducated whites and blacks were attracted to the emotional worship of the denomination, its emphasis on biblical simplicity, and its psalm singing. Some local Presbyterian churches, such as Briery in Prince Edward County, owned slaves. The Briery church purchased five slaves in 1766 and raised money for church expenses by hiring them out to local planters. [5]

19th century[edit]

In the early years of the 19th century, the church carried on revivals and organized congregations, presbyteries, and synods wherever pastors and lay people went, emphasizing the connectional nature of the church. Presbyterians also helped to shape voluntary societies that encouraged educational, missionary, evangelical, and reforming work. As the church began to realize that these functions were corporate in nature and as the century proceeded, it formed its own boards and agencies to address these needs at home and abroad. Mission to Native Americans, African Americans, and populations all over the world became a hallmark of the church.

The 19th century was also characterized by disagreement and division over theology, governance, and reform - particularly slavery. In 1803, Barton W. Stone led a group of revivalist New Light Presbyterian ministers to form independent Springfield Presbytery

which eventually became the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). In 1810, a number of Presbyterian congregations and ministers, ejected by Kentucky Synod for their pro-revival position and their relaxation of ordination requirements in a frontier setting, formed the Cumberland Presbyterian denomination, although they never intended the split to be permanent. In 1837, the church was split by the Old School-New School Controversy. The century also saw the formation of the United Presbyterian Church of North America in 1858. When the country could not reconcile the issue of slavery and the federal union, the southern Presbyterians split from the original PCUSA, forming the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America in 1861, which became the Presbyterian Church in the United States after the American Civil War.

20th century to the present[edit]

Main article: Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy The early part of the 20th century saw continued growth in both major sections of the church. It also saw the growth of Fundamentalist Christianity (a movement of those who believed in the literal interpretation of the Bible as the fundamental source of the religion) as distinguished from Modernist Christianity (a movement holding the belief that Christianity needed to be re-interpreted in light of modern scientific theories such as evolution or the rise of degraded social conditions brought on by industrialization and urbanization). Open controversy was sparked in 1922, when Harry Emerson Fosdick, a modernist pastoring a PCUSA congregation in New York City, preached a sermon entitled "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" The crisis reached a head the following year when, in response to the New York Presbytery's decision ordain a couple of men who could not affirm the virgin birth, the PCUSA's General Assembly reaffirmed the "five fundamentals": the deity of Christ, the Virgin Birth, the vicarious atonement, the inerrancy of Scripture and Christ's miracles and resurrection. [6] This move against modernism caused a backlash in the form of the *Auburn Affirmation* — a document embracing liberalism and modernism. The liberals began a series of ecclesiastical trials of their opponents, expelled them from the church and seized their church buildings. Under the leadership of J. Gresham Machen, a former Princeton Theological Seminary New Testament Professor who had founded Westminster Theological

Seminary in 1929, and who was a PCUSA minister, many of these conservatives would establish what became known as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1936. Although the 1930s and 1940s and the ensuing neo-orthodox theological consensus mitigated much of the polemics during the mid-20th century, disputes erupted again beginning in the mid-1960s, over the extent of involvement in the Civil Rights Movement and the issue of ordination of women, and, especially since the 1990s, over the issue of ordination of gays and lesbians.

Mergers[edit]

See tab "The Presbyterian Family of Connections" for Chart

Evolution of Presbyterianism in the United States. Courtesy of the Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America was joined by the majority of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, mostly congregations in the border and Southern states, in 1906. In 1920, it absorbed the Welsh Calvinist Methodist Church. The United Presbyterian Church of North America merged with the PCUSA in 1958 to form the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA).

Under Eugene Carson Blake, the UPCUSA's stated clerk, the denomination entered into a period of social activism and ecumenical endeavors, which culminated in the development of the Confession of 1967 which was the church's first new confession of faith in three centuries. The 170th General Assembly in 1958 authorized a committee to develop a brief contemporary statement of faith. The 177th General Assembly in 1965 considered and amended the draft confession and sent a revised version for general discussion within the church. The 178th General Assembly in 1966 accepted a revised draft and sent it to presbyteries throughout the church for final ratification. As the confession was ratified by more than 90% of all presbyteries, the 178th General Assembly finally adopted it in 1967. The UPCUSA also adopted a *Book of Confessions* in 1967, which would include the Confession of 1967, the Westminster Confession and Shorter Catechism, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Second Helvetic and Scots Confessions and the Barmen Declaration.[7] Moreover, the UPCUSA would alter the ordination vows for ministers. having them "sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the

Reformed faith as expressed in the confession of our church as authentic expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do" and vow to "be instructed and led by the these confessions as [they] lead the people of God," whereas the initial vows had them "sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms as containing the system of doctrine taught in Holy Scripture".[8] An attempt to reunite the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. with the Presbyterian Church in the United States in the late 1950s failed when the latter church was unwilling to accept centralization. This reflected its support for local decision making and concern about central organizations having greater power, a historically Southern attitude about civil government as well as ecclesiastical matters. In the meantime, a conservative group broke away from the Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1973, mainly over the issues of women's ordination and a perceived drift toward theological liberalism. This group formed the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA).

Attempts at union between the churches (UPCUSA and PCUS) were renewed in the 1970s, culminating in the merger of the two churches to form the Presbyterian Church (USA) on June 10, 1983. At the time of the merger, the churches had a combined membership of 3,121,238. [9] Many of the efforts were spearheaded by the financial and outspoken activism of retired businessman Thomas Clinton who died two years before the merger. [citation needed] A new national headquarters was established in Louisville, Kentucky in 1988 replacing the headquarters of the UPCUSA in New York City and the PCUS located in Atlanta, Georgia.

The merger essentially consolidated moderate-to-liberal American Presbyterians into one body. Other U.S. Presbyterian bodies (the Cumberland Presbyterians being a partial exception) place greater emphasis on doctrinal Calvinism, literalist hermeneutics, and conservative politics.

For the most part, PC(USA) Presbyterians, not unlike similar mainline traditions such as the Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ, are fairly (in some instances, strongly) progressive (liberal) on matters such as doctrine, environmental issues, sexual morality, and economic issues, though the denomination remains divided and conflicted on these issues. Like other mainline denominations, the

PC(USA) has also seen a great deal of demographic aging, with fewer new members and declining membership since 1967.

Social Justice Initiatives and the Rise of the Presbyterian Renewal Movement[edit]

In the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s, the General Assembly of PC(USA) adopted several social justice initiatives, which covered a range of topics including: stewardship of God's creation, world hunger, homelessness, and LGBT issues. As of 2011, the PC(USA) no longer excludes Partnered Gay and Lesbian ministers from the ministry. Previously, the PC(USA) required its ministers to remain chastly in singleness or with fidelity in marriage. Currently, the PC(USA) permits teaching elders to perform same-gender marriages in states in which it is legal. On a congregational basis, individual sessions (congregational governing bodies) may choose to permit samegender marriages in states in which it is legal. [10] These changes have led to several renewal movements and denominational splinters. Some conservative-minded groups in the PC(USA), such as the Confessing church movement and the Presbyterian Lay Committee (formed in the mid-1960s) have remained in the main body, rather than leaving to form new, breakaway groups. The Lay Committee's autobiography can be found here. Breakaway Presbyterian denominations[edit] Several Presbyterian denominations have split from PC(USA) or its predecessors in interest. For example, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church broke away from the Presbyterian Church in the USA (PC-USA) in 1936.

More recently formed Presbyterian denominations have posed a more serious threat to modern day PC(USA) congregations disenchanted with the direction of PC(USA) but wishing to continue with a Reformed, Presbyterian tradition. The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), which does not allow ordained female clergy, separated from Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1973 and has subsequently become the second largest Presbyterian denomination in the United States. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), which gives local presbyteries the option of allowing ordained female pastors, broke away from the United Presbyterian Church and incorporated in 1981. A PC(USA) renewal movement, Fellowship of Presbyterians (FOP), held several national conferences

serving disaffecting Presbyterians. FOP's organizing efforts culminated with the founding of ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO), a new Presbyterian denomination that allows ordination of women but is more conservative theologically than PC(USA).

EPC and ECO are both attempting to serve disaffected former PC(USA) church congregations that wish to allow female ordained ministers. Both denominations are more theologically and socially conservative than PC(USA) but more liberal than PCA. On January 1, 2014, a former PC(USA) church from Ohio became the 100th congregation to join ECO. As of May 15, 2014, 127 church congregations with their 40,000 members have joined ECO. Almost all of these churches are former PC(USA) congregations. Similarly, 507 Presbyterian churches containing 150,000 members have aligned with the EPC. A chart produced by the Layman, a separatistfriendly news source, compares PC(USA), EPC, and ECO here. The disposition of the church property is a significant hurdle facing PC(USA) churches deciding whether to enter into a "process of discernment," the PC(USA) required process before voting to break from the denomination. PC(USA) claims that all church property is held by the congregation in trust for the use of the church denomination. Some state incorporation statutes, however, permit individual church congregations to retain the church's real estate. Often, courts are finding that a thorough history of the church and its denominational affiliation is paramount. See, e.g., Highland Park Presbyterian Church v. Presbytery of Grace, which is scheduled for trial in October 2014.[11]

Youth[edit]

Since 1983 the Presbyterian Youth Triennium has been held every three years at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, U.S. and is open to Presbyterian high school students throughout the world. The very first Youth Triennium was held in 1980 at Indiana University and the conference for teens is an effort of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the largest Presbyterian denomination in the nation; Cumberland Presbyterian Church; and Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America, the first African-American denomination to embrace Presbyterianism in the reformed tradition. For information on this year's triennium, go to http://presbyterianyouthtriennium.org/

Structure[edit]

Main article: Presbyterian church governance

Constitution[edit]

The Constitution of PC(USA) is composed of two portions: Part I, the *Book of Confessions* and Part II, the *Book of Order*. The *Book of Confessions* outlines the beliefs of the PC(USA) by declaring the creeds by which the Church's leaders are instructed and led.

The Nicene Creed

The Apostles' Creed

The Scots Confession

The Heidelberg Catechism

The Second Helvetic Confession

The Westminster Standards

The Theological Declaration of Barmen

The Confession of 1967

The Brief Statement of Faith – Presbyterian Church (USA) Complementing that is the *Book of Order* which gives the rationale and description for the organization and function of the Church at all levels. The *Book of Order* is currently divided into three sections - 1) Form of Government, 2) The Directory For Worship, and 3) The Rules of Discipline.

Councils[edit]

Main article: List of Presbyterian Church (USA) synods and presbyteries

See also: List of Moderators of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA)

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) has a representative form of government, known as presbyterian polity, with four levels of government and administration, as outlined in the *Book of Order*. The councils(governing bodies) are as follows:

- 1 Session (of a Congregation)
- 2 Presbytery
- 3 Synod
- 4 General Assembly

Session[edit]

At the congregational level, the governing body is called the *session*, from the Latin word *sessio*, meaning "a sitting". The session is made

up of the pastors of the church and all elders elected and installed to active service. Following a pattern set in the first congregation of Christians in Jerusalem described in the Book of Acts in the New Testament, the church is governed by *presbyters* (a term and category that includes elders and Ministers of Word and Sacrament, historically also referred to as "ruling or canon elders" because they *measure* the spiritual life and work of a congregation and ministers as "teaching elders").^[12]

The elders are nominated by a nominating committee of the congregation; in addition, nominations from the floor are permissible. Elders are then elected by the congregation. All elders elected to serve on the congregation's session of elders are required to undergo a period of study and preparation for this order of ministry, after which the session examines the elders-elect as to their personal faith; knowledge of doctrine, government, and discipline contained in the Constitution of the church, and the duties of the office of elder. If the examination is approved, the session appoints a day for the service of ordination and installation.[13] Session meetings are normally moderated by a called and installed pastor and minutes are recorded by a clerk, who is also an ordained presbyter. If the congregation does not have an installed pastor, the Presbytery appoints a minister member or elected member of the presbytery as moderator with the concurrence of the local church session.[14] The moderator presides over the session as primus inter pares and as moderator also serves a "liturgical" bishop over the ordination and installation of elders and deacons within a particular congregation.

The session takes care of the guidance and direction of the ministry of the local church, including almost all responsibilities of spiritual and fiduciary leadership. The congregation as a whole has only the responsibility to vote on: 1) the call of the pastor (subject to presbytery approval) and the terms of call (the church's provision for compensating and caring for the pastor); 2) the election of its own officers (elders & deacons); 3) buying, mortgaging, or selling real property. All other church matters such as the budget, personnel matters, and all programs for spiritual life and mission, are the responsibility of the session. In addition, the session serves as an ecclesiastical court to consider disciplinary charges brought against church officers or members.

The session also oversees the work of the deacons, a second body of leaders also tracing its origins to the Book of Acts. The deacons are a congregational-level group whose duty is "to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress both within and beyond the community of faith." In some churches, the responsibilities of the deacons are taken care of by the session, so there is no board of deacons in that church. In some states, churches are legally incorporated and members or elders of the church serve as trustees of the corporation. However, "the power and duties of such trustees shall not infringe upon the powers and duties of the Session or of the board of deacons." The deacons are a ministry board but not a governing body.

Presbytery[edit]

A *presbytery* is formed by all the congregations and the Ministers of Word and Sacrament in a geographic area together with elders selected (proportional to congregation size) from each of the congregations. Four PC(USA) synods (see below) have a nongeographical presbytery for Korean language Presbyterian congregations. One synod has a non-geographical presbytery for Native American congregations, the Dakota Presbytery. There are currently 173 presbyteries for the more than 10,000 congregations in the PC(USA). The five presbyteries are "non-geographical" only in that they overlay other pre-existing English-speaking geographical presbyteries; they are in fact "geographical" in that they are geographically limited to the boundaries of a particular synod. It may be more accurate to refer to them as "trans-geographical" presbyteries.

Only the presbytery (not a congregation, session, synod, or General Assembly) has the responsibility and authority to ordain church members to the ministry of Teaching Elder (formerly called Ministry of Word and Sacrament), to install Teaching Elders to (and/or remove them from) congregations, and to remove a minister from the ministry of Teaching Elder. A Teaching Elder is a Presbyterian minister by virtue of membership on a roll of a presbytery. The General Assembly cannot ordain or remove a Teaching Elder, but the Office of the General Assembly does maintain and publish a national directory with the help of each presbytery's stated clerk. [15] Bound versions are published bi-annually with the minutes of the General Assembly. A

pastor cannot be a member of the congregation he or she serves as pastor because his or her primary ecclesiastical accountability lies with the presbytery. Members of the congregation generally choose their own pastor with the assistance and support of the presbytery. The presbytery must approve the choice and officially install the pastor at the congregation. Additionally, the presbytery must approve if either the congregation or the pastor wishes to dissolve that pastoral relationship.

The presbytery has authority over many affairs of its local congregations. Only the presbytery can approve the establishment, dissolution, or merger of congregations. The presbytery also maintains a Permanent Judicial Commission, which acts as a court of appeal from sessions, and which exercises original jurisdiction in disciplinary cases against minister members of the presbytery.[16] A presbytery has two elected officers: a moderator and a stated clerk. The Moderator of the presbytery is elected annually and is either a minister member or an elder commissioner from one of the presbytery's congregations. The Moderator presides at all presbytery assemblies and is the chief overseer at the ordination and installation of ministers in that presbytery.[17] The stated clerk is the chief ecclesial officer and serves as the presbytery's executive secretary and parliamentarian in accordance with the church Constitution and Robert's Rules of Order. While the moderator of a presbytery normally serves one year, the stated clerk normally serves a designated number of years and may be re-elected indefinitely by the presbytery. Additionally, an Executive Presbyter (sometimes designated as General Presbyter, Pastor to Presbytery, Transitional Presbyter) is often elected as a staff person to care for the administrative duties of the presbytery, often with the additional role of a pastor to the pastors. Presbyteries may be creative in the designation and assignment of duties for their staff. A presbytery is required to elect a Moderator and a Clerk, but the practice of hiring staff is optional. Presbyteries must meet at least twice a year, but they have the discretion to meet more often and most do. See "Map of Presbyteries and Synods".[18]

Synod[edit]

Presbyteries are organized within a geographical region to form a *synod*. Each synod contains at least three presbyteries, and its

elected voting membership is to include both elders and Ministers of Word and Sacrament in equal numbers. Synods have various duties depending on the needs of the presbyteries they serve. In general, their responsibilities (G-12.0102) might be summarized as: developing and implementing the mission of the church throughout the region, facilitating communication between presbyteries and the General Assembly, and mediating conflicts between the churches and presbyteries. Every synod elects a Permanent Judicial Commission, which has original jurisdiction in remedial cases brought against its constituent presbyteries, and which also serves as an ecclesiastical court of appeal for decisions rendered by its presbyteries' Permanent Judicial Commissions. Synods are required to meet at least biennially. Meetings are moderated by an elected synod Moderator with support of the synod's Stated Clerk. There are currently 16 synods in the PC(USA) and they vary widely in the scope and nature of their work. An ongoing current debate in the denomination is over the purpose, function, and need for synods.

Synods of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)[edit]

- · Synod of Alaska-Northwest
- Synod of Boriquen (Puerto Rico)
- · Synod of the Covenant

- Synod of Lakes and Prairies
- · Synod of Lincoln Trails
- Synod of Living Waters
- Synod of Mid-America
- · Synod of Mid-Atlantic
- Synod of the Northeast
- · Synod of the Pacific
- Synod of the Rocky Mountains
- Synod of South Atlantic
- · Synod of Southern California and Hawaii
- Synod of the Southwest
- · Synod of the Sun
- Synod of the Trinity

See also the List of Presbyterian Church (USA) synods and presbyteries.[19]

General Assembly[edit]

The General Assembly is the highest governing body of the

PC(USA). Until the 216th assembly met in Richmond, Virginia in 2004, the General Assembly met annually; since 2004, the General Assembly has met biennially in even-numbered years. It consists of commissioners elected by presbyteries (not synods), and its voting membership is proportioned with parity between elders and Ministers of Word and Sacrament. There are many important responsibilities of the General Assembly. Among them, *The Book of Order* lists these four:

- 1 to set priorities for the work of the church in keeping with the church's mission under Christ
- 2 to develop overall objectives for mission and a comprehensive strategy to guide the church at every level of its life
- 3 to provide the essential program functions that are appropriate for overall balance and diversity within the mission of the church, and
- 4 to establish and administer national and worldwide ministries of witness, service, growth, and development.

Elected officials[edit]

Main article: List of Moderators of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

The General Assembly elects a moderator at each assembly who moderates the rest of the sessions of that assembly meeting and continues as moderator until the next assembly convenes (two years later) to elect a new moderator. The current moderator is retired Ruling Elder Heath Rada, who was elected as moderator of the 221st General Assembly (2014).^[20]

A Stated Clerk is elected to a four-year term and is responsible for the Office of the General Assembly which conducts the ecclesiastical work of the church. The Office of the General Assembly carries out most of the ecumenical functions and all of the constitutional functions at the Assembly. The current Stated Clerk of the General Assembly is the Rev. Gradye Parsons, who has served in that role since 2008 and was unanimously reelected in 2012.[21][22] The Stated Clerk is also responsible for the records of the denomination, a function formalized in 1925 when the General Assembly created the "Department of Historical Research and Conservation" as part of the Office of the General Assembly. The current "Department of History" is also known as the Presbyterian

Historical Society.[23]

Structure[edit]

Six agencies carry out the work of the General Assembly. These are the Office of the General Assembly, the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program, the Board of Pensions, the Presbyterian Foundation, and the Presbyterian Mission Agency (formerly known as the General Assembly Mission Council).

The General Assembly elects members of the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board (formerly General Assembly Mission Council). There are 48 elected members of the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board (40 voting members; 17 non-voting delegates), who represent synods, presbyteries, and the church at-large. [24] Members serve one six-year term, with the exception of the present Moderator of the General Assembly (one 2-year term), the past Moderator of the General Assembly (one 2-year term), the moderator of Presbyterian Women (one 3-year term), ecumenical advisory members (one 2year term, eligible for two additional terms), and stewardship and audit committee at-large members (one 2-year term, eligible for two additional terms). Among the elected members' major responsibilities is the coordination of the work of the program areas in light of General Assembly mission directions, objectives, goals and priorities. The PMAB meets three times a year. The General Assembly elects an Executive Director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency who is the top administrator overseeing the mission work of the PC(USA). The current Executive Director of the PMA is Ruling Elder Linda Bryant Valentine.

The General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission (GAPJC) is the highest Church court of the denomination. It composed of one member elected by the General Assembly from each of its constituent synods (16). It has ultimate appellate jurisdiction over all Synod Permanent Judicial Commission cases involving issues of Church Constitution, and original jurisdiction over a small range of cases. The General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission issues Authoritative Interpretations of The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) through its decisions.

Affiliated seminaries[edit]

The denomination maintains affiliations with ten seminaries in the

United States. These are:

- · Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Austin, Texas
- · Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia
- Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia
- Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Louisville. Kentucky
- McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois
- · Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
- Princeton Theological Seminary, the first chartered by the General Assembly, in Princeton, New Jersey
- San Francisco Theological Seminary in San Anselmo, Marin County, California
- Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Virginia and Charlotte, North Carolina
- University of Dubuque Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa Two other seminaries are related to the PC(USA) by covenant agreement: Auburn Theological Seminary in New York, New York, and Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico in San Juan, Puerto Rico. There are numerous colleges and universities throughout the United States affiliated with PC(USA). For a complete list, see the article Association of Presbyterian Colleges and Universities. For more information, see the article PC(USA) seminaries.

Demographics[edit]

When the United Presbyterian Church in the USA merged with the Presbyterian Church in the United States there were 3,131,228 members. Statistics shows steadily decline since 1983.

Ye ar	Membersh ip	pct change
19 84	3,100,951	-0.98
19 85	3,057,226	-1.43
19 86	3,016,488	-1.35
19 87	2,976,937	-1.33
19	2,938,830	-1.30

88	a acabata i usada come e engoli mer en ulumente la acabata i en tra la entre en elemente de la la entre en elemente de la come en elemente de la entre en elemente de la entre en elemente	
19 89	2,895,706	-1.49
19 90	2,856,713	-1.36
19 91	2,815,045	-1.48
19 92	2,780,406	-1.25
19 93	2,742,192	-1.39
19 94	2,698,262	-1.63
19 95	2,665,276	-1.24
19 96	2,631,466	-1.28
19 97	2,609,191	-0.85
19 98	2,587,674	-0.83
19 99	2,560,201	-1.07
20 00	2,525,330	-1.38
20 01	2,493,781	-1.27
20 02	2,451,969	-1.71
20 03	2,405,311	-1.94
20 04	2,362,136	-1.83
20 05	2,316,662	-2.10
20 06	2,267,118	-2.05

20 07	2,209,546	-2.61
20 08	2,140,165	-3.23
20 09	2,077,138	-3.03
20 10	2,016,091	-3.03
20 11	1,952,287	-3.29
20 12	1,849,496	-5.26 ^[25]
20 13	1,760,200	-4.83[1]

The PC(USA) maintains extensive statistics on its members. [26] In 2012 PC(USA) reported 1.84 million members, less than half of its peak membership of 4.25 million members in 1965 and down from 1.95 million members in 2011. [27] Membership decreased by 4.83% in 2013, [1] continuing a three decade-long decline in membership for PC(USA). [28][29] Recent declines in numbers are consistent with the trends of most mainline Protestant denominations in America since the late 1960s. In 2013, Jan Armstrong, Executive Presbyter of the Presbytery of Santa Barbara, said that the most recent informal OGA (Office of the General Assembly) projections are for an anticipated loss of perhaps 500,000 members over the next 3–4 years, roughly 25% of the denomination's membership. [30]

The average Presbyterian Church has 175 members (the mean in 2013). About 25% of the total congregations report between 1 and 50 members. Another 23% report between 51 and 100 members. The average worship attendance as a percentage of membership is 51.7%. The largest congregation in the PC(USA) is Peachtree Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Georgia, with a reported membership of 8,989 (2009).

Most PC(USA) members are white (92.9%). Other racial and ethnic members include African-Americans (3.1% of the total membership of the denomination), Asians (2.3%), Hispanics (1.2%), Native Americans (0.2%), and others (0.3%). Despite declines in the total membership of the PC(USA), the percentage of racial-ethnic minority

members has stayed about the same since 1995. The ratio of female members (58%) to male members (42%) has also remained stable since the mid-1960s.[31]

Worship[edit]

The session of the local congregation has a great deal of freedom in the style and ordering of worship within the guidelines set forth in the Directory for Worship section of the *Book of Order*. [32] Worship varies from congregation to congregation. The order may be very traditional and highly liturgical, or it may be very simple and informal. This variance is not unlike that seen in the "High Church" and "Low Church" styles of the Anglican Church. The Book of Order suggests a worship service ordered around five themes: "gathering around the Word, proclaiming the Word, responding to the Word, the sealing of the Word, and bearing and following the Word into the world." Prayer is central to the service and may be silent, spoken, sung, or read in unison (including The Lord's Prayer). Music plays a large role in most PC(USA) worship services and ranges from chant to traditional Protestant hymns, to classical sacred music, to more modern music, depending on the preference of the individual church and is offered prayerfully and not "for entertainment or artistic display." Scripture is read and usually preached upon. An offering is usually taken.[33] The pastor has certain responsibilities which are not subject to the authority of the session. In a particular service of worship the pastor is responsible for:

- 1 the selection of Scripture lessons to be read,
- 2 the preparation and preaching of the sermon or exposition of the Bible.
- 3 the prayers offered on behalf of the people and those prepared for the use of the people in worship,
- 4 the music to be sung,
- 5 the use of drama, dance, and other art forms.

The pastor may confer with a worship committee in planning particular services of worship.

-[W-1.4005]

The Directory for Worship in the Book of Order provides the directions for what must be, or may be included in worship. During the 20th century, Presbyterians were offered optional use of liturgical books:

The Book of Common Worship of 1906

- The Book of Common Worship of 1932
- The Book of Common Worship of 1946
- The Worshipbook of 1970 (spelling is correct)
- The Book of Common Worship of 1993

For more information, see Liturgical book of the Presbyterian Church (USA)

In regard to vestments, the Directory for Worship leaves that decision up to the ministers. Thus, on a given Sunday moring service, a congregation may see the minister leading worship in street clothes, Geneva gown, or an alb. Among the Paleo-orthodoxy and emerging church Presbyterians, clergy are moving away from the traditional black Geneva gown and reclaiming not only the more ancient Eucharist vestments of alb and chasuble, but also cassock and surplice (typically a full length Old English style surplice which resembles the Celtic alb, an ungirdled liturgical tunic of the old Gallican Rite).

The Service for the Lord's Day[edit]

The Service for the Lord's Day is the name given to the general format or ordering of worship in the Presbyterian Church as outlined in its Constitution's Book of Order. There is a great deal of liberty given toward worship in that denomination, so while the underlying order and components for the Service for the Lord's Day is extremely common, it varies from congregation to congregation, region to region.

The creation of the Service for the Lord's Day was one of the most positive contributions of the Worshipbook of 1970. The Book of Common Worship of 1993 leaned heavily upon this service.

Missions[edit]

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has, in the past, been a leading United States denomination in mission work, and many hospitals, clinics, colleges and universities worldwide trace their origins to the pioneering work of Presbyterian missionaries who founded them more than a century ago.

Currently, the church supports about 215 missionaries abroad annually.[34] Many churches sponsor missionaries abroad at the session level, and these are not included in official statistics.

A vital part of the world mission emphasis of the denomination is building and maintaining relationships with Presbyterian, Reformed and other churches around the world, even if this is not usually considered missions.

The PC(USA) is a leader in disaster assistance relief and also participates in or relates to work in other countries through ecumenical relationships, in what is usually considered not missions, but deaconship.

Ecumenical relationships and full communion partnerships[edit]

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) determines and approves ecumenical statements, agreements, and maintains correspondence with other Presbyterian and Reformed bodies, other Christians churches, alliances, councils, and consortia. Ecumenical statements and agreements are subject to the ratification of the presbyteries. The following are some of the major ecumenical agreements and partnerships.

The church is committed to "engage in bilateral and multilateral dialogues with other churches and traditions in order to remove barriers of misunderstanding and establish common affirmations." As of 2012 it is in dialog with the Episcopal Church, the Moravian Church, the Korean American Presbyterian Church, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America, and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. It also participates in international dialogues through the World Council of Churches and the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The most recent international dialogues include Pentecostal churches, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Orthodox Church in America, and others.

National and international ecumenical memberships[edit]

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is in corresponding partnership with the National Council of Churches, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, and the World Council of Churches. It is a member of Churches for Middle East Peace.

Formula of agreement[edit]

In 1997 the PCUSA and three other churches of Reformation heritage: the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Reformed

Church in America and the United Church of Christ, acted on an ecumenical proposal of historic importance, known as A Formula of Agreement. The timing reflected a doctrinal consensus which had been developing over the past thirty-two years coupled with an increasing urgency for the church to proclaim a gospel of unity in contemporary society. In light of identified doctrinal consensus, desiring to bear visible witness to the unity of the Church, and hearing the call to engage together in God's mission, it was recommended: That the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ declare on the basis of A Common Calling and their adoption of this A Formula of Agreement that they are in full communion with one another. Thus, each church is entering into or affirming full communion with three other churches.[37] The term "full communion" is understood here to specifically mean that the four churches:

- recognize each other as churches in which the gospel is rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered according to the Word of God;
- withdraw any historic condemnation by one side or the other as inappropriate for the life and faith of our churches today;
- continue to recognize each other's Baptism and authorize and encourage the sharing of the Lord's Supper among their members; recognize each other's various ministries and make provision for the orderly exchange of ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament;
- establish appropriate channels of consultation and decision-making within the existing structures of the churches;
- commit themselves to an ongoing process of theological dialogue in order to clarify further the common understanding of the faith and foster its common expression in evangelism, witness, and service;
- pledge themselves to living together under the Gospel in such a
 way that the principle of mutual affirmation and admonition
 becomes the basis of a trusting relationship in which respect
 and love for the other will have a chance to grow.

The agreement assumed the doctrinal consensus articulated in A Common Calling: The Witness of Our Reformation Churches in North

America Today, and is to be viewed in concert with that document. The purpose of A Formula of Agreement is to elucidate the complementarity of affirmation and admonition as the basic principle of entering into full communion and the implications of that action as described in A Common Calling.

The 209th General Assembly (1997) approved A Formula of Agreement and in 1998 the 210th General Assembly declared full communion among these Protestant bodies.

National and international ecumenical memberships[edit] The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is in corresponding partnership with the National Council of Churches, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, Christian Churches Together, and the World Council of Churches.

World Communion of Reformed Churches[edit]

In June 2010, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches will merge with the Reformed Ecumenical Council to form the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The result will be a form of full communion similar to that outline in the Formula of Agreement, including orderly exchange of ministers.

Churches Uniting in Christ[edit]

The PC (U.S.A.) is one of nine denominations that joined together to form the Consultation on Church Union, which initially sought a merger of the denominations. In 1998 the Seventh Plenary of the Consultation on Church Union approved a document "Churches in Covenant Communion: The Church of Christ Uniting" as a plan for the formation of a covenant communion of churches. In 2002 the nine denominations inaugurated the new relationship and became known as Churches Uniting in Christ. The partnership is considered incomplete until the partnering communions reconcile their understanding of ordination and devise an orderly exchange of clergy.

Current controversies[edit]

Homosexuality[edit]

Main article: Homosexuality and Presbyterianism

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is currently struggling with the issue of Biblical interpretation and faithfulness, particularly as it relates to homosexuality. Paragraph G-6.0106b of the Book of Order

prohibited the ordination of those who are not faithful in marriage or chaste in singleness. This paragraph was included in the Book of Order from 1997–2011, and was commonly referred to by its preratification designation, "Amendment B."[39] Several attempts were made to remove this from the Book of Order, and in 2011, the Presbyteries of the PC(USA) passed Amendment 10-A permitting congregations to ordain elders and deacons and presbyteries to ordain ministers without reference to the fidelity/chastity provision. saying "governing bodies shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates".[40] Many Presbyterian scholars, pastors, and theologians have been heavily involved in the debate over homosexuality. In 2005, a female minister in Pennsylvania came under scrutiny after performing a marriage between a lesbian couple, including some Buddhist rites in the ceremony. Her case is to be heard by the church's court. Officially, the church does not prohibit clergy-performed blessing ceremonies for same sex unions, as long as it is clear that the blessing ritual is not a marriage ceremony. The Presbyterian Church of India cooperation with Presbyterian Church (USA) was dissolved in 2012 when the PC(USA) voted to ordain openly gay clergy to the ministry.[41]

Since 1980, the More Light Churches Network has served many congregations and individuals within American Presbyterianism who promote the full participation of all people in the PC(U.S.A.) regardless of sexual identity or lifestyle. The Covenant Network of Presbyterians was formed in 1997 to support repeal of "Amendment B" and to encourage networking amongst like-minded clergy and congregations. Other organizations of Presbyterians, such as the Confessing Movement and the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, have also organized on the other side of the issue to support the fidelity/chastity standard for ordination.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) voted to allow same-gender marriages on 19 June 2014 during its 221st General Assembly, making it one of the largest Christian denominations in the world to condone same-sex unions. This vote effectively lifted a previous ban and allows pastors to perform marriages in jurisdictions where it is legal. Additionally, the Assembly voted to send out a proposed amendment to the Book of Order that would change the definition of

marriage from "between a man and a woman" to "between two people, traditionally between a man and a woman." This amendment will need to be approved by a majority of the 172 Presbyteries to take effect. [43]

General Assembly 2006[edit]

The 2006 Report of the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church, in theory, attempted to find common ground. Some felt that the adoption of this report provided for a clear local option mentioned, while the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, Clifton Kirkpatrick went on record as saying, "Our standards have not changed. The rules of the Book of Order stay in force and all ordinations are still subject to review by higher governing bodies." The authors of the report stated that it is a compromise and return to the original Presbyterian culture of local controls. The recommendation for more control by local presbyteries and sessions is viewed by its opposition as a method for bypassing the constitutional restrictions currently in place concerning ordination and marriage, effectively making the constitutional "standard" entirely subjective.

In the General Assembly gathering of June 2006, Presbyterian voting Commissioners passed an "authoritative interpretation", recommended by the Theological Task Force, of the *Book of Order* (the church constitution). Some argued that this gave presbyteries the "local option" of ordaining or not ordaining anyone based on a particular presbytery's reading of the constitutional statute. Others argued that presbyteries have always had this responsibility and that this new ruling did not change but only clarified that responsibility. On June 20, 2006, the General Assembly voted 298 to 221 (or 57% to 43%) to approve such interpretation. In that same session on June 20, the General Assembly also voted 405 to 92 (with 4 abstentions) to uphold the constitutional standard for ordination requiring fidelity in marriage or chastity in singleness.

General Assembly 2008[edit]

The General Assembly of 2008 took several actions related to homosexuality. The first action was to adopt a different translation of the Heidelberg Catechism from 1962, removing the words "homosexual perversions" among other changes. This will require the approval of the 2010 and 2012 General Assemblies as well as the

votes of the presbyteries after the 2010 Assembly. [dated info][45] The second action was to approve a new Authoritative Interpretation of G-6.0108 of the Book of Order allowing for the ordaining body to make decisions on whether or not a departure from the standards of belief of practice is sufficient to preclude ordination.[46] Some argue that this creates "local option" on ordaining homosexual persons. The third action was to replace the text of "Amendment B" with new text: "Those who are called to ordained service in the church, by their assent to the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003), pledge themselves to live lives obedient to Jesus Christ the Head of the Church, striving to follow where he leads through the witness of the Scriptures, and to understand the Scriptures through the instruction of the Confessions. In so doing, they declare their fidelity to the standards of the Church. Each governing body charged with examination for ordination and/or installation (G-14.0240 and G-14.0450) establishes the candidate's sincere efforts to adhere to these standards."[47] This would have removed the "fidelity and chastity" clause. This third action failed to obtain the required approval of a majority of the presbyteries by June, 2009. Fourth, a resolution was adopted to affirm the definition of marriage from Scripture and the Confessions as being between a man and a woman.[48]

General Assembly 2010[edit]

In July, 2010, by a vote of 373 to 323, the General Assembly voted to propose to the presbyteries for ratification a constitutional amendment to remove from the Book of Order section G-6.0106.b. which included this explicit requirement for ordination: "Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness." This proposal required ratification by a majority of the 173 presbyteries within 12 months of the General Assembly's adjournment. [49][50] A majority of presbytery votes was reached in May, 2011. The constitutional amendment took effect July 10, 2011. This amendment shifted back to the ordaining body the responsibility for making decisions about whom they shall ordain and what they shall require of their candidates for ordination. It neither prevents nor imposes the use of the so-called "fidelity and chastity" requirement, but it removes that decision from the text of the

constitution and places that judgment responsibility back upon the ordaining body where it had traditionally been prior to the insertion of the former G-6.0106.b. in 1997. Each ordaining body is now responsible to make its own interpretation of what scripture and the confessions require of ordained officers.

Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians[edit] In January, 2012, The Fellowship of Presbyterians (an alliance within PC(U.S.A.) of conservative-leaning members) gathered to create a "New Reformed Body," an alternative denomination to which congregations disaffected by the change in ordination standards could transfer their membership. A gathering of members of the PC(USA) met in Orlando to form a denomination that sought to be free from an increasingly liberal theology. [52] Ultimately their work led to the formation of ECO (denomination). Although significantly more conservative than PC(USA), ECO affirms the ordination of women (a position not taken by some conservative Presbyterian groups such as Presbyterian Church in America or Evangelical Presbyterian Church (United States)), while maintaining that ordained officers of the church are to remain faithful within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chaste in singleness. It also affirms that Jesus Christ is the only way to God's salvation.

Property ownership[edit]

In the event of a congregational split, dissolution (closing), or disassociation from the PC(U.S.A.), the presbytery may assert a claim to the property. State law (which varies) determines the ownership of property despite the denomination's property clause in the *Book of Order*. This clause does not prevent particular churches from leaving the denomination, but if they do, they may not be entitled to any physical assets of that congregation unless by agreement with the presbytery. Recently this provision has been vigorously tested in courts of law.

Despite the historically connectional structure of Presbyterianism, this issue is, surprisingly, relatively new. Until recently the "connection" referred to doctrinal coherence and had no reference to physical property. In 1981, UPCUSA leaders persuaded the General Assembly to amend the *Book of Order* in order to add the "property trust" elements. The denomination did this in reaction to three developments over the previous decade:

- 1) A case involving a Pittsburgh ministerial candidate who opposed the ordination of women led several congregations in western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio to leave in favor of the new Presbyterian Church in America, a conservative body with origins in the Southern U.S., in the mid-1970s.
- 2) The Supreme Court case *Jones v. Wolf*, 443 U.S. 595 (1979), allowed for church property cases to be adjudicated in civil courts in the U.S., giving churches hostile to national or regional bodies a possible platform to secede.
- 3) Some months prior to that General Assembly, a number of disaffected congregations formed a new conservative denomination, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. UPCUSA loyalists interpreted that move as having been encouraged by the 1979 ruling. The secessions in the first and third points were occasioned in part by factors including the UPCUSA's approval of abortion rights, its stands on world peace and concomitant suspicion of an aggressive U.S. foreign policy (brought about by the trauma of the Vietnam War), and its support of controversial social justice causes such as a wellpublicized General Assembly contribution to the defense fund of Angela Davis, a Communist, accused, but subsequently acquitted of murder and kidnapping. The first instance in particular reflected that candidate's and those churches' opposition to female leadership in the church and feminism in general. Later, in the 1980s, Presbyterian evangelicals added homosexuality to their list of grievances, although the UPCUSA decided in 1978 not to ordain non-celibate gays to the ministry or eldership, a decision that liberal groups succeeded in

The PCUS, already deeply in preparation for the UPCUSA merger, followed suit in 1982, but managed to gain a concession for its conservative congregations in the form of a two-year grace period to take effect after the consummation of the merger, to enable dissenting churches to defect, by consent of presbytery, without suffering any loss of assets. The PCUS had to agree to this limit on eligibility as a condition of union, due to the so-called "Northern Presbyterians" being by far the majority numerically. In ensuing years, disaffection has grown among PC(USA) conservatives (from both predecessor traditions) due to feelings that presbyteries have no right to congregational property, since national

reversing in 2011.

agencies and local pledges usually finance building programs, with little or no presbytery fiduciary interest. In fact, prior to World War II, more often than not, new churches started from the initiative of larger congregations (e.g., Sunday School missions), not presbyteries, as became the case increasingly from the 1950s onward, due to suburban mission planning and ecumenical concerns. Several cases in California seem to have halted the practice in that state—the courts have allowed individual churches to leave the PC(USA) and keep their own assets, as well as parishes of the United Methodist and Episcopal denominations. State courts have varied as to whether they grant property to congregations or presbyteries in disputes, with states like Louisiana and Kansas deferring to local congregations. In 2006, a few top staff in the national denominational offices (two attorneys named, the Clerk suggested by role in the exposé article cited below; none of those staff still serve in those offices) produced documents labelled "Privileged and Confidential Attorney Work Communication" recommending that presbyteries use "spiritual language" in defending property rights and assuming a defensive posture, obligating congregations to file suit. The so-called "Louisville Papers" caused a firestorm of controversy when they were exposed and publicly distributed.[53]

Divestment from corporations operating in Israel[edit]

Main article: PC(USA) Divestment from Israel

See also: Disinvestment from Israel

In June 2004, the General Assembly met in Richmond, Virginia and adopted by a vote of 431-62 a resolution that called on the church's committee on Mission Responsibility through Investment (MRTI) "to initiate a process of phased, selective divestment in multinational corporations operating in Israel." The resolution also said "the occupation... has proven to be at the root of evil acts committed against innocent people on both sides of the conflict."[54] The church statement at the time noted that "divestment is one of the strategies that U.S. churches used in the 1970s and 80s in a successful campaign to end apartheid in South Africa."

A second resolution, calling for an end to the construction of a wall by the state of Israel, passed. [55] The resolution opposed to the construction of the Israeli West Bank barrier, regardless of its location, and opposed the United States government making

monetary contribution to the construction. The General Assembly also adopted policies rejecting Christian Zionism and allowing the continued funding of conversionary activities aimed at Jews. Together, the resolutions caused tremendous dissent within the church and a sharp disconnect with the Jewish community. Leaders of several American Jewish groups communicated to the church their concerns about the use of economic leverages that apply specifically to companies operating in Israel. [56] Some critics of the divestment policy accused church leaders of anti-Semitism. [57][58][59][60] In June 2006, after the General Assembly in Birmingham, Alabama changed policy (details), both pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian groups praised the resolution. Pro-Israel groups, who had written General Assembly commissioners to express their concerns about a corporate engagement/divestment strategy focused on Israel, [61] praised the new resolution, saying that it reflected the church stepping back from a policy that singled out companies working in Israel. [62] Pro-Palestinian groups said that the church maintained the opportunity to engage and potentially divest from companies that support the Israeli occupation, because such support would be considered inappropriate according to the customary MRTI process.

In August 2011, the American National Middle Eastern Presbyterian Caucus (NMEPC) endorsed the boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel. [63]

On June 20, 2014 the General Assembly in Detroit approved a measure (310-303) calling for divestment from stock in Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard and Motorola Solutions in protest of Israeli policies on the West Bank. The vote was immediately and sharply criticized by The American Jewish Committee which accused the General Assembly of acting out of anti Semitic motives. Proponents of the measure strongly denied the accusations.^[64]

Israeli-Palestinian conflict[edit]

In May 2008, [65] the denomination's Office of Interfaith Relations issued a statement titled "Vigilance against anti-Jewish ideas and bias." This statement reported that "strains of an old anti-Jewish tradition are present in the way we ourselves sometimes speak and in the rhetoric and ideas of some writers that we may read" regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict. [66] The Church revised and expanded this document in June, removing acknowledgment of such sentiment as a

matter of current church practice, instead declaring that the church's current stands are not anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish — in part because they reflect criticisms of Israel meted by Jews and Israelis. The revisions resulted in a rebuke from the major Jewish denominations in a June 13, 2008 letter to the head of the PCUSA [67] and a similar condemnation in the form of a statement from the denominations and ten other organizations. [68] In July 2014 the church voted to divest from three companies doing business with Israel.

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Pesbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Stated Clerk releases PC(USA) 2013 statistics

Decline in membership slows

May 29, 2014

Office of the General Assembly

Louisville

TOYA RICHARDS JACKSON

Total membership in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at the end of 2013 was 1,760,200, according to statistics released today by the Office of the General Assembly. That's compared to 1,849,496 at the end of 2012.

Associate for Communications

"Yes, the numbers reflect a decrease in active members in the denomination," said the Reverend Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly. "But the numbers also illustrate fewer losses than the previous year. The membership

declined by 89,296 in 2013, compared to 102,791 in 2012.

"We are meeting the challenges we have had and it's showing," he said. "And, our decline in total congregations is holding fairly steady."

The tal number of churches in 2013 was 10,038, compared to 10,262 in 2012. That's a loss of 224 churches, including 148 congregations dismissed to other denominations and 74 dissolved. The PC(USA) lost 204 churches between 2012 and 2011.

Parsons said it is important to note that the total number of congregations does not include new church developments, new immigrant fellowships, or other worshipping communities within the denomination. More than 200 new worshipping communities have been identified as part of the PC(USA)'s movement to start 1001 new worshipping communities in 10 years, according to the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

Worth noting also is the fact that the number of churches organized in 2013 - 24 – was the highest in four years, and that local mission spending increased by \$1.85 million over 2012. Non-local mission spending increased as well by \$5.6 million.

"What we are seeing in many of our congregations, old and new, is a commitment to more fully engage in their communities," Parsons said. "That means the number of lives our 10,038 congregations are touching in any given week far supersedes what the membership figures reflect."

That is certainly the case at Cornerstone Church of Silicon Valley, located in Los Altos, Calif. The church, which existed as a new church development for a number of years, fully chartered as a PC(USA) congregation in 2013. The roughly 80-member congregation will celebrate with an installation service on June 8.

"The church is reaching out and bringing more people in," said the Reverend Joseph Sohn, pastor at Cornerstone Charles on Silicon Valley. "It's focused on outreach."

Already members of the church provide meals for the homeless, and beginning in the fall they will dedicate one Saturday a month to community service projects. "We want to make a more conscious effort to serve," Sohn said.

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Comparison of Basic Beliefs and Viewpoints of Three Presbyterian Denominations: Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (PCUSA), Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians (ECO), and Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC)

At the request of Mid-Council leaders in the Presbyterian Church (USA) this comparison chart has been developed. Every effort has been made to make this as accurate as possible, using the official documents of each denomination as sources.

Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Mission Agency ($\underline{\text{taw@pcusa.org}}$) May 20, 2014

Issue	PC(USA)	ECO	EPC
When did the	1983. The PC(USA)	2012 (and is still being	1980
denomination come into	claims continuity back	formed)	
existence in its current	to the founding of the		
structure/form?	Synod of Philadelphia		
	in 1706. In 1983 the		
	United Presbyterian		
ŕ	Church in the United		
	States and the		
	Presbyterian Church in		
	the United States		
	reunited to form the		
	PC(USA).		
Does the denomination list	Not in Detail. One of	Yes. Its essential tenets	Yes. A summary of its
what it considers to be	the ordination vows for	are attached.	essential tenets are
essential tenets of the	PC(USA) officers is "Do		attached.
faith? (Essential tenets are	you sincerely receive		
foundational beliefs.)	and adopt the essential		
	tenets of the Reformed		
	faith as expressed in the		
	confessions of our		
	church as authentic and		
	reliable exposition of		
	what Scripture leads us		
	to believe and do?" The		
	themes of the		
	Confessions are listed in		
	F-2 of the "Form of		
	Government"—Trinity,		
	incarnation of the Word		
	of God in Jesus Christ,		
	grace alone, faith alone,		
	scripture alone, and the		
	affirmation of the		
	majesty, holiness, and		
	providence of God who in Christ and by the		
	power of the Spirit		
	creates, sustains, rules,		
	and redeems the world		
	in the freedom of		

What are deacons, ruling elders, and teaching elders asked in their ordination vows about Scripture?	sovereign righteousness and love." That chapter is attached. "Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ universal, and God's Word to you?"	"Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the Word of God, and, inspired by the Holy Spirit, the unique witness to Jesus Christ and the authority for Christian faith and life?"	"Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, totally trustworthy, fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, the supreme, final, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice?"
What are deacons, elders, and pastors asked concerning Jesus Christ as Savior?	"Do you trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?"	"Do you believe in One God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and do you boldly declare Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and acknowledge Him Lord of all and Head of the Church?"	To affirm without exception the essential tenets, including the statement on Jesus Christ (see attached).
Is the incarnation (that Jesus is fully God and fully man) upheld?	Yes. The official statements of the PC(USA) uphold this.	Yes (included in its essentials)	Yes (included in its essentials)
Is substitutionary atonement by Jesus upheld?	Yes. The official statements of the PC(USA) uphold this.	Yes, in the ECO's Book of Confessions. There is no specific mention of the substitutionary atonement in summary of its essential tenets attached.	Yes (included in its essentials)
Confessions/Creeds	8 confessions plus 3 catechisms	8 confessions plus 3 catechisms (same as PC[USA])	Westminster Confession of Faith (The EPC lifts up only one confession.)
Are women ordained into leadership positions?	Yes. The belief that women can be ordained into leadership is required to be affirmed by all ordained leaders and congregations.	Yes. Like the PC(USA), the view on women's ordination is required to be affirmed by all ordained leaders and congregations.	Yes and no. "The Evangelical Presbyterian Church has chosen to leave this decision to the Spirit-guided consciences of particular congregations concerning the ordination of women as Elders and Deacons, and to the

Per capita (request for funds to help pay for	\$7.02 per member and	budget and is	member and cannot
	Yes. It is currently	Yes. It is 1% of church	Yes. It is \$17 per
View on abortion	"Abortion ought to be a last resort, because life is sacred to God." In its resource for women facing problem pregnancies, the PC(USA) writes that the church "would like to support you as you make decisions about your pregnancy" and explores three options: 1) keeping the baby; 2) making an adoption plan; and 3) having an abortion.	Has no formal stand. On FAQs about the ECO, one will find statements such as "ECO clearly states that all human life is sacred, from conception until natural death," but no formal statement is available on its website, nor does this broad statement suggest how the ECO would deal with rape, incest, and life of the mother situations.	Should be legal only to protect the physical life of the mother.
Are ordained leaders expected to live in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness?	The PC(USA) has decided to practice mutual forbearance toward each other and other councils of the church regarding ordination.	Yes	Yes
Affirms the view that marriage is between one man and one woman?	Yes. This is the official position of the denomination. The understanding of Christian marriage is currently being studied in the PC(USA).	Yes	presbyteries concerning the ordination of women as Teaching Elders." Yes

CHAPTER TWO THE CHURCH AND ITS CONFESSIONS

F-2.01 THE PURPOSE OF CONFESSIONAL STATEMENTS

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) states its faith and bears witness to God's grace in Jesus Christ in the creeds and confessions in *The Book of Confessions*. In these statements the church declares to its members and to the world who and what it is, what it believes, and what it resolves to do. These statements identify the church as a community of people known by its convictions as well as by its actions. They guide the church in its study and interpretation of the Scriptures; they summarize the essence of Reformed Christian tradition; they direct the church in maintaining sound doctrines; they equip the church for its work of proclamation. They serve to strengthen personal commitment and the life and witness of the community of believers.

The creeds and confessions of this church arose in response to particular circumstances within the history of God's people. They claim the truth of the Gospel at those points where their authors perceived that truth to be at risk. They are the result of prayer, thought, and experience within a living tradition. They appeal to the universal truth of the Gospel while expressing that truth within the social and cultural assumptions of their time. They affirm a common faith tradition, while also from time to time standing in tension with each other.

F-2.02 THE CONFESSIONS AS SUBORDINATE STANDARDS

These confessional statements are subordinate standards in the church, a subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to him. While confessional standards are subordinate to the Scriptures, they are, nonetheless, standards. They are not lightly drawn up or subscribed to, nor may they be ignored or dismissed. The church is prepared to instruct, counsel with, or even to discipline one ordained who seriously rejects the faith expressed in the confessions. Moreover, the process for changing the confessions of the church is deliberately demanding, requiring a high degree of consensus across the church. Yet the church, in obedience to Jesus Christ, is open to the reform of its standards of doctrine as well as of governance. The church affirms *Ecclesia reformata*, semper reformanda secundum verbum Dei, that is, "The church reformed, always to be reformed according to the Word of God" in the power of the Spirit.

F-2.03 THE CONFESSIONS AS STATEMENTS OF THE FAITH OF THE CHURCH CATHOLIC

In its confessions, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) witnesses to the faith of the Church catholic. The confessions express the faith of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church^b in the recognition of canonical Scriptures and the formulation and adoptolic

tion of the ecumenical creeds, notably the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds with their definitions of the mystery of the triune God and of the incarnation of the eternal Word of God in Jesus Christ.

F-2.04 The Confessions as Statements of the Faith of the Protestant Reformation

In its confessions, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) upholds the affirmations of the Protestant Reformation. The focus of these affirmations is God's grace in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures. The Protestant watchwords—grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone—embody principles of understanding that continue to guide and motivate the people of God in the life of faith.

F-2.05 THE CONFESSIONS AS STATEMENTS OF THE FAITH OF THE REFORMED TRADITION

In its confessions, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) expresses the faith of the Reformed tradition. Central to this tradition is the affirmation of the majesty, f holiness, and providence of Godh who in Christ and by the power of the Spirit creates, sustains, rules, and redeems the world in the freedom of sovereign righteousness and love. Related to this central affirmation of God's sovereignty are other great themes of the Reformed tradition:

The election of the people of God for service as well as for salvation;

Covenant life marked by a disciplined concern for order in the church according to the Word of God;

A faithful stewardship that shuns ostentation and seeks proper use of the gifts of God's creation; and

The recognition of the human tendency to idolatry^p and tyranny,^q which calls the people of God to work for the transformation of society by seeking justice and living in obedience to the Word of God.

Evangelical Presbyterian Church's Essentials of Our Faith

All Scripture is self-attesting and being Truth, requires our unreserved submission in all areas of life. The infallible Word of God, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is a complete and unified witness to God's redemptive acts culminating in the incarnation of the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible, uniquely and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the supreme and final authority on all matters on which it speaks. On this sure foundation we affirm these additional Essentials of our faith:

- 1. We believe in one God, the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To Him be all honor, glory and praise forever!
- 2. Jesus Christ, the living Word, became flesh through His miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit and His virgin birth. He who is true God became true man united in one Person forever. He died on the cross a sacrifice for our sins according to the Scriptures. On the third day He arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven, where, at the right hand of the Majesty on High, He now is our High Priest and Mediator.
- 3. The Holy Spirit has come to glorify Christ and to apply the saving work of Christ to our hearts. He convicts us of sin and draws us to the Savior. Indwelling our hearts, He gives new life to us, empowers and imparts gifts to us for service. He instructs and guides us into all truth, and seals us for the day of redemption.
- 4. Being estranged from God and condemned by our sinfulness, our salvation is wholly dependent upon the work of God's free grace. God credits His righteousness to those who put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation, thereby justifies them in His sight. Only such as are born of the Holy Spirit and receive Jesus Christ become children of God and heirs of eternal life.
- 5. The true Church is composed of all persons who through saving faith in Jesus Christ and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit are united together in the body of Christ. The Church finds her visible, yet imperfect, expression in local congregations where the Word of God is preached in its purity and the sacraments are administered in their integrity; where scriptural discipline is practiced, and where loving fellowship is maintained. For her perfecting, she awaits the return of her Lord.
- 6. Jesus Christ will come again to the earth—personally, visibly, and bodily—to judge the living and the dead, and to consummate history and the eternal plan of God. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." (Rev. 22:20)
- 7. The Lord Jesus Christ commands all believers to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world and to make disciples of all nations. Obedience to the Great Commission requires total commitment to "Him who loved us and gave Himself for us." He calls us to a life of self-denying love and service. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:10)

These Essentials are set forth in greater detail in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

The 19 Key Points of

Evangelical Covenant Order Of Presbyterians' Essential Tenets (to read the entire statement, go to http://eco-pres.org/theology/essential-tenets/)

- 1. The great purpose toward which each human life is drawn is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.
- We glorify God by recognizing and receiving His authoritative self-revelation, both in the infallible Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and also in the incarnation of God the Son
- 3. With Christians everywhere, we worship the only true God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who is both one essence and three persons.
- 4. Jesus Christ is both truly God and truly human.
- 5. The divinity of the Son is in no way impaired, limited, or changed by His gracious act of assuming a human nature, and that His true humanity is in no way undermined by His continued divinity.
- 6. The risen Jesus, who was sent from the Father, has now ascended to the Father in His resurrected body and remains truly human.
- 7. The same Jesus Christ who is now ascended and who will one day return visibly in the body to judge the living and the dead.
- 8. We are able to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and God only through the work of the Holy Spirit.
- 9. The present disordered state of the world, in which we and all things are subject to misery and to evil, is not God's doing, but is rather a result of humanity's free, sinful rebellion against God's will.
- 10. No part of human life is untouched by sin. Our desires are no longer trustworthy guides to goodness, and what seems natural to us no longer corresponds to God's design.
- 11. In union with Christ through the power of the Spirit we are brought into right relation with the Father, who receives us as His adopted children. Jesus Christ is the only Way to this adoption, the sole path by which sinners become children of God.
- 12. Having lost true freedom of will in the fall, we are incapable of turning toward God of our own volition. God chooses us for Himself in grace before the foundation of the world, not because of any merit on our part, but only because of His love and mercy.
- 13. Through His regenerating and sanctifying work, the Holy Spirit grants us faith and enables holiness, so that we may be witnesses of God's gracious presence to those who are lost.
- 14. In Christ, we are adopted into the family of God and find our new identity as brothers and sisters of one another, since we now share one Father.
- 15. Within the covenant community of the church, God's grace is extended through the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and the faithful practice of mutual discipline.
- 16. The ministries of the church reflect the three-fold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king—reflected in the church's ordered ministries of teaching elders, deacons, and ruling elders.
- 17. Jesus teaches us that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. There is no part of human life that is off limits to the sanctifying claims of God.

- 18. Progress in holiness is an expected response of gratitude to the grace of God, which is initiated, sustained, and fulfilled by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.
- 19. As we practice the discipline of regular self-examination and confession, we are especially guided by the Ten Commandments.

WHAT ARE THE "ESSENTIAL TENETS" OF THE REFORMED FAITH?

A simmering controversy in the Presbyterian Church (USA) over the last decade has been taking place over identification of the *essential tenets*, prompted by the third ordination question which reads as follows:

"Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?" B. o. O. W-4.4003

Naturally, this has led many to ask, "Where can I get my hands on this list of essential tenets?" and the murky response from all levels of the Church has led many to jump to the conclusion that the Presbyterian Church (USA) is itself unclear about what it believes or unwilling to express itself clearly when it comes to core theological beliefs. Many have asked, rhetorically and out of irritation, "What about something about Jesus Christ being the Son of God? ... surely, we can include that!" But the response has been somewhat murky, at least for those who will not sit still long enough to listen to a nuanced answer, or whose suspicion of the Church is so near the surface that they are ever-willing to indict, rarely willing to listen - many are impatient and implacable.

Often little can be done to change this nearly-hostile attitude toward the Church, and it makes me wonder how we ever got to the point where people think that such negative feelings toward the Church can be pleasing to God. What has the Church done that deserves such a reception? Why would Christians be so ready to join the chorus of the world in hateful words against the Church? and where is the fear of God in those who name the name of Christ but fail to recognize that He will one Day come in judgment to redeem and vindicate His Bride against all foul, un-founded accusations? Where is the fear of God in harboring such attitudes of "guilty until proven innocent" against the Church or any part of her?

Of all the failures of our present age, ours is, in my opinion, likely to be reckoned one day, like those of the past, to be something that we do not now readily recognize. Consider that one day our age will prove to have been soiled not so much by the controversy over sexuality, but over a widespread contempt for the Bride of Christ.

For those who are still listening, here is the explanation of the *Essential Tenets*: In the Presbyterian Church, "essential tenets" is a term of art, deriving from the English syntax of the 18th century, and growing out of our unique experience in examining ministers for ordination. In other words, the words mean something special to us, owing to their ancient origination and coming out of our history - they do not mean what they sound like to modern ears, separated from this historical context.

Long ago, the third ordination question used to read something like this: "Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Reformed faith as expressed in the confession of our church?" Notice that there is no reference to essential tenets, and there is reference to only one confession of faith, namely, the Westminster Confession of Faith from the 'mid 17th century, together with the Longer and Shorter Catechisms written to assist adults and children, respectively, learn the theological content of the Confession (how times have changed!).

In response to this question, more and more ministerial candidates began answering something like, "essentially, yes." By the middle of the 18th century, differences between Calvin's Institutes and the Westminster Standards began to be noticed and debated. This was especially true in regard to Sabbath-keeping which was fraught with strict codes of behavior in the Westminster Standards and seemed to derive not from Calvin's theology but from the Puritan influences in England which were at a high pitch at the time of the priting of the Westminster Confession.

Increasingly, candidates would qualify their support of the Westminster Confession in some way. A testament to this "tempest in a teacup" is found in the footnotes of today's edition of Calvin's Institutes where

Calvin expounds on the Sabbath commandment and gives voice to a startlingly different interpretation - a New Testament interpretation completely lost on the Puritans, famous for their "stern, impassioned, stress" and the subsequent witch trials of Salem, Massachusetts.

In response to the trend of trained seminarians qualifying their otherwise solid support of the Westminster Confession, examining presbyteries would ask a follow-up question, such as: "What, then, are your scruples?" Scruples were, in the language of the day, minor objections to the Confession as plainly written. Examiners would then determine if the scruples constituted an "incidental" or "essential" departure from the Reformed Faith. In regard to very-strict Sabbath keeping, some judicatories were more lenient than others, and the principle of allowing the local examining body "to determine, in the midst of the concrete encounter with the candidate, what was essential and what was incidental" began to work its way out.

It is important to recognize that at no time was the deity of Christ, salvation only through His atoning grace, Scripture as the Word of God, and such things as this, ever (then or since) held in doubt by any presbytery. It was simply an adjustment to the examination of candidates that allowed for an honest expression of their conscience and actually served, over time, to help us identify an unexamined absorption of Puritan mannerisms into the Reformed Tradition. For this and other reasons, the Westminster standards today are viewed by many as Puritan confessions, not Reformed confessions, per se.

Having successfully navigated the examination process, the candidates were, then as now, subsequently presented for ordination in a public service of worship. At such occasions, the candidates were again asked to respond to the ordination questions for the edifying benefit of the gathered congregation. In this context, however, is was considered unseemly to receive a qualified response such as "essentially, yes," so the question was revised to provide the already-approved candidate with a platform to answer with an unequivocal "I do." The question now was adjusted to read like this, "Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confession of our church?," to which the candidate would be expected to reply with an unqualified affirmation.

For a time, the question was asked one way for the examination and the adjusted version was asked at the time of public ordination. Any scruples the candidate might have were evaluated on a case by case basis during the examination process and, inevitably, the standards being upheld in regard to the permissibility of any given scruple would vary from time to time or from one region to another. This was a cause for some concern and many sought standardization, but that was not easily achievable through a democratic process. Differences remained - in regard to the Sabbath and later in regard to the doctrine of double-predestination. In their wisdom, our forefathers decided to leave the matter in the hands of the Holy Spirit and to restrict the power of the Church. Their statements to this effect, still dripping with 18th century English syntax, are found in today's Book of Order: (*emphasis supplied*)

"F-3.0102 Corporate Judgment

... every Christian Church, or union or association of particular churches, is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its communion, and the qualifications of its ministers and members, as well as the whole system of its internal government which Christ hath appointed; that in the exercise of this right they may, notwithstanding, err, in making the terms of communion either too lax or too narrow; yet, even in this case, they do not infringe upon the liberty or the rights of others, but only make an improper use of their own."

"F-3.0107 Church Power

... all Church power, whether exercised by the body in general or in the way of representation by delegated authority, is only ministerial and declarative; that is to say, that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners; that no Church judicatory ought to pretend to make laws to bind the conscience in virtue of their own authority; and that all their decisions should be founded upon the revealed will of God. Now though it will easily be admitted that all synods and councils may err, through the frailty inseparable from humanity, yet there is much greater danger from the usurped claim of making laws than

from the right of judging upon laws already made, and common to all who profess the gospel, although this right, as necessity requires in the present state, be lodged with fallible men."

In my opinion, all widely-repeated accusations against the Presbyterian Church (USA) - accusations of infidelity to the Scriptures, accusations of lack of conviction necessary to articulate its beliefs, accusations of moral laxity in regard to examination of its officers for ordination, accusations of every type by those ready, if not eager, to hear and repeat some tiding of ill-will against the Church - all such accusations are as easily dismissed as this simmering controversy over essential tenets - for those who have ears to hear.

I appeal to my brothers and sisters throughout the Presbyterian Church (USA), to rekindle their love for the Church and speak words of tender compassion for her as she faces the ire and contempt of Satan in this world. Come to her aid. Come to her defense. Love her. Pray for her.. Cherish her as does Christ Himself ... "lest perhaps you find yourselves fighting against God." (Acts 5:39)

In His Love,

Ron Lavoie,

Stated Clerk/Executive Kendall Presbytery

THE FOUNDATIONS OF PRESBYTERIAN POLITY CHAPTER ONE

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH¹

F-1.01 God's Mission

The good news of the Gospel is that the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—creates, redeems, sustains, rules, and transforms all things and all people. This one living God, the Scriptures say, liberated the people of Israel from oppression and covenanted to be their God. By the power of the Spirit, this one living God is incarnate in Jesus Christ, who came to live in the world, die for the world, and be raised again to new life. The Gospel of Jesus Christ announces the nearness of God's kingdom, bringing good news to all who are impoverished, sight to all who are blind, freedom to all who are oppressed, and proclaiming the Lord's favor upon all creation.

The mission of God in Christ gives shape and substance to the life and work of the Church. In Christ, the Church participates in God's mission for the transformation of creation and humanity by proclaiming to all people the good news of God's love, offering to all people the grace of God at font and table, and calling all people to discipleship in Christ. Human beings have no higher goal in life than to glorify and enjoy God now and forever, living in covenant fellowship with God and participating in God's mission.

F-1.02 JESUS CHRIST IS HEAD OF THE CHURCH

F-1.0201 The Authority of Christ

Almighty God, who raised Jesus Christ from the dead and set him above all rule and authority, has given to him all power in heaven and on earth, not only in this age but also in the age to come. God has put all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and has made Christ Head of the Church, which is his body. The Church's life and mission are a joyful participation in Christ's ongoing life and work.

F-1.0202 Christ Calls and Equips the Church

Christ calls the Church into being, giving it all that is necessary for its mission in the world, for its sanctification, and for its service to God. Christ is present with the Church in both Spirit and Word. Christ alone rules, calls, teaches, and uses the Church as he wills.

¹ Throughout this document and the Form of Government, the capitalized term "Church" refers to the Church Universal, the Church as it is called to be in Christ; except as part of a title (i.e. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

F-1.01-F-1.02

F-1.0201-1.0202

Book of Order 2013/2015 1

F-1.02-F-1.03 The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity F-1.0203-F-1.0302

F-1.0203 Christ Gives the Church Its Life

Christ gives to the Church its faith and life, its unity and mission, its order and dis-cipline. Scripture teaches us of Christ's will for the Church, which is to be obeyed. In the worship and service of God and the government of the church, matters are to be ordered according to the Word by reason and sound judgment, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

F-1.0204 Christ Is the Church's Hope

In affirming with the earliest Christians that Jesus is Lord, the Church confesses that he is its hope, and that the Church, as Christ's body, is bound to his authority and thus free to live in the lively, joyous reality of the grace of God.

F-1.0205 Christ Is the Foundation of the Church

In Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Christ God recon- ciles all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross (Col. 1:19–20). In Christ's name, therefore, the Church is sent out to bear witness to the good news of reconciliation with God, with others, and with all creation. In Christ the Church receives its truth and appeal, its holiness, and its unity.

F-1.03 THE CALLING OF THE CHURCH

F-1.0301 The Church Is the Body of Christ

The Church is the body of Christ^c. Christ gives to the Church all the gifts necessary to be his body. The Church strives to demonstrate these gifts in its life as a community in the world (1 Cor. 12:27–28):

The Church is to be a community of faith, entrusting itself to God alone, even at the risk of losing its life.

The Church is to be a community of hope, rejoicing in the sure and certain knowledge that, in Christ, God is making a new creation. This new creation is a new beginning for human life and for all things. The Church lives in the present on the strength of that promised new creation.

The Church is to be a community of love, where sin is forgiven, reconciliation is ac-complished, and the dividing walls of hostility are torn down.

The Church is to be a community of witness, pointing beyond itself through word and work to the good news of God's transforming grace in Christ Jesus its Lord.

F-1.0302 The Marks of the Church² With all Christians of the Church catholic, we affirm that the Church is "one, holy,

catholic, and apostolic."

² See "The Nicene Creed," *The Book of Confessions*, 1.3.

2 Book of Order 2013/2015

The Mission of the Church F-1.03 F-1.0302a-c

a. The Unity of the Church

Unity is God's gift to the Church in Jesus Christ. Just as God is one God and Jesus Christ is our one Savior, so the Church is one because it belongs to its one Lord, Jesus Christ. The Church seeks to include all people and is never content to enjoy the benefits of Christian community for itself alone. There is one Church, for there is one Spirit, one hope, "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:5–6).

Because in Christ the Church is one, it strives to be one. To be one with Christ is to be joined with all those whom Christ calls into relationship with him. To be thus joined with one another is to become priests for one another, praying for the world and for one another and sharing the various gifts God has given to each

Christian for the benefit of the whole community. Division into different denominations obscures but does not de-stroy unity in Christ. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), affirming its historical continuity with the whole Church of Jesus Christ, is committed to the reduction of that obscurity, and is willing to seek and to deepen communion with all other churches within the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church^d.

b. The Holiness of the Church

Holiness is God's gift to the Church in Jesus Christ. Through the love of Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God takes away the sin of the world. The holiness of the Church comes from Christ who sets it apart to bear witness to his love, and not from the purity of its doctrine or the righteousness of its actions.

Because in Christ the Church is holy, the Church, its members, and those in its or- dered ministries strive to lead lives worthy of the Gospel we proclaim. In gratitude for Christ's work of redemption, we rely upon the work of God's Spirit through Scripture and the means of grace (W-5.5001) to form every believer and every community for this holy living. We confess the persistence of sin in our corporate and individual lives. At the same time, we also confess that we are forgiven by Christ and called again and yet again to strive for the purity, righteousness, and truth revealed to us in Jesus Christ and prom- ised to all people in God's new creation.

c. The Catholicity of the Church

Catholicity is God's gift to the Church in Jesus Christ. In the life, death, and resur- rection of Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God overcomes our alienation and repairs our division.

Because in Christ the Church is catholic, it strives everywhere to testify to Christ's embrace of men, women, and children of all times, places, races, nations, ages, conditions, and stations in life. The catholicity of the Church summons the Church to a deeper faith, a larger hope, and a more complete love as it bears witness to God's grace.

Book of Order 2013/2015 3

F-1.03 The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity *F-1.0302d–F-1.0303*

d. The Apostolicity of the Church

Apostolicity is God's gift to the Church in Jesus Christ. In Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God sends the Church into the world to share the gospel of God's redemption of all things and people.

Because in Christ the Church is apostolic, it strives to proclaim this gospel faithfully. The Church receives the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ through the testimony of those whom Christ sent, both those whom we call apostles and those whom Christ has called throughout the long history of the Church. The Church has been and is even now sent into the world by Jesus Christ to bear that testimony to others. The Church bears witness in word and work that in Christ the new creation has begun, and that God who creates life also frees those in bondage, forgives sin, reconciles brokenness, makes all things new, and is still at work in the world. To be members of the body of Christ is to be sent out to pursue the mission of God and to participate in God's new creation, God's kingdom drawing the present into itself. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) affirms the Gospel of Jesus Christ as received from the prophets and apostles, and stands in continui- ty with God's mission through the ages.

The Church strives to be faithful to the good news it has received and accountable to the standards of the confessions. The Church seeks to present the claims of Jesus Christ, leading persons to repentance, acceptance of Christ alone as Savior and Lord, and new life as his disciples.

The Church is sent to be Christ's faithful evangelist:

making disciples of all nations in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit;

sharing with others a deep life of worship, prayer, fellowship, and service; and

participating in God's mission to care for the needs of the sick, poor, and lonely; to free people from sin, suffering, and oppression; and to establish Christ's just, loving, and peaceable rule in the world.

F-1.0303 The Notes of the Reformed Church³

Where Christ is, there is the true Church. Since the earliest days of the Reformation, Reformed Christians have marked the presence of the true Church wherever:

the Word of God is truly preached and heard, the Sacraments are rightly administered, and ecclesiastical discipline is uprightly ministered.

³ See The Scots Confession, Ch. XVIII (*The Book of Confessions*, 3.18) 4 Book of Order 2013/2015

The Mission of the Church F-1.03-F-1.04 F-1.0303-F-1.0401

In our own time, we affirm that, in the power of the Spirit, the Church is faithful to the mission of Christ as it:

Proclaims and hears the Word of God,

responding to the promise of God's new creation in Christ, and inviting all people to participate in that new creation;

Administers and receives the Sacraments, welcoming those who are being engrafted into Christ, bearing witness to Christ's saving death and resurrection, anticipating the heavenly banquet that is to come, and committing itself in the present to solidarity with the marginalized and the

hungry; and

Nurtures a covenant community of disciples of Christ, living in the strength of God's promise and giving itself in service to God's mission.

F-1.0304 The Great Ends of the Church

The great ends of the Church are:

the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind;

the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth;

the promotion of social righteousness; and

the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.⁴

F-1.04 OPENNESS TO THE GUIDANCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

F-1.0401 Continuity and Change

The presbyterian form of government set forth in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is grounded in Scripture and built around the marks of the true Church. It is in all things subject to the Lord of the Church. In the power of the Spirit, Jesus Christ draws worshiping communities and individual believers into the sovereign activity of the triune God at all times and places. As the Church seeks reform and fresh direction, it

⁴This statement of the Great Ends of the Church, slightly edited here, came from the United Presbyterian Church of North America, which united with the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in 1958. The statement was then made a part of the Constitution of The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, as the united body was called. This now classic statement was adopted by the United Presbyterian Church of North America in 1910, following various actions between 1904 and 1910 looking forward to the revision of the church's Constitution.

Book of Order 2013/2015 5

F-1.04 The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity F-1.0401-F-1.0404

looks to Jesus Christ who goes ahead of us and calls us to follow him. United with Christ in the power of the Spirit, the Church seeks "not [to] be conformed to this world, but [to] be transformed by the renewing of [our] minds, so that [we] may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2).

F-1.0402 Ecumenicity

The presbyterian system of government in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is established in light of Scripture^e but is not regarded as essential for the existence of the Christian Church nor required of all Christians.

F-1.0403 Unity in Diversity

"As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:27–29).

The unity of believers in Christ is reflected in the rich diversity of the Church's membership. In Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God unites persons through baptism regardless of race, ethnicity, age, sex, disability, geography, or theological conviction. There is therefore no place in the life of the Church for discrimination against any person. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall guarantee full participation and representation in its worship, governance, and emerging life to all persons or groups within its membership. No member shall be denied participation or representation for any reason other than those stated in this Constitution.

F-1.0404 Openness

In Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all creation, the Church seeks a new openness to God's mission in the world. In Christ, the triune God tends the least among us, suffers the curse of human sinfulness, raises up a new humanity, and promises a new future for all creation. In Christ, Church members share with all humanity the realities of creatureli-ness, sinfulness, brokenness, and suffering, as well as the future toward which God is drawing them. The mission of God pertains not only to the Church but also to people everywhere and to all creation. As it participates in God's mission, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) seeks:

a new openness to the sovereign activity of God in the Church and in the world, to a more radical obedience to Christ, and to a more joyous celebration in wor-ship and work;

a new openness in its own membership, becoming in fact as well as in faith a community of women and men of all ages, races, ethnicities, and worldly conditions, made one in Christ by the power of the Spirit, as a visible sign of the new humanity;

6

Book of Order 2013/2015

The Mission of the Church F-1.04 F-1.0404

a new openness to see both the possibilities and perils of its institutional forms in order to ensure the faithfulness and usefulness of these forms to God's activi- ty in the world; and

a new openness to God's continuing reformation of the Church ecumenical, that it might be more effective in its mission.

Book of Order 2013/2015 7

Living the Life of Faith in the The Presbyterian Church (USA):

(My Understanding and Perspective) by Ron Lavoie

(On pages 1-3, excerpts from the Book of Order and Book of Confessions appear in italicized print)

THE WATCHWORDS OF THE REFORMATION:

- ➤ Grace alone ~ salvation is an undeserved gift of God's mercy and love.
- Faith alone ~ we receive salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and place no hope or trust in our own goodness or deeds.
- > Scripture alone ~ we look to the Bible alone to determine the truth about all things pertaining to God, our salvation, and His will for our lives.

†(The Book of Order, F-2.0400)

THE GREAT ENDS OF THE CHURCH: ††

- > to proclaim the gospel of salvation ~ by preaching the gospel of God's love in Jesus Christ and seeking to share it with our neighbors through words and deeds.
- ➤ to provide shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship to the children of God ~ by fostering the ties of fellowship and loving concern for one another in our congregation.
- > to maintain divine worship ~ by regularly gathering to worship God and sing His praises.
- > to preserve the truth ~ by studying and teaching the Scriptures to young and old alike.
- ➤ to promote social righteousness ~ by proclaiming and living out, to the best of our ability, the imperatives of God's Word.
- > to demonstrate the Kingdom of Heaven to the world ~ by acting ethically and with love in all that we do, by engaging in acts of charity, and by supporting humanitarian relief efforts locally and around the world.

††(Book of Order, F-1.0304)

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

The Preliminary Principles of Presbyterian Polity contain items of immense importance for all ordained fficers and inform and guide all actions and all conduct in church leadership. Elders and deacons are especially urged to study and contemplate these principles, as excerpted below from the Book of Order, as they exercise the responsibility of leadership during their terms of office:

BOOK OF ORDER

Jesus Christ is Head of the Church F-1.0201

F-1.0201: Almighty God, who raised Jesus Christ from the dead and set him above all rule and authority, has given to him all power in heaven and on earth, not only in this age but also in the age to come. God has put all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and has made Christ Head of the Church, which is his body.

F-1.0202: Christ calls the Church into being, giving it all that is necessary for its mission to the world, for its sanctification, and for its service to God. Christ is present with the Church in both Spirit and Word. Christ alone rules, calls, teaches, and uses the Church as he wills.

F-1.0203: Christ gives to the Church its faith and life, its unity and mission, its order and discipline. Scripture teaches us of Christ's will for the Church, which is to be obeyed. In the worship and service of God and the government of the church, matters are to be ordered according to the Word by the reason and sound judgment, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

F-1.0204: In affirming with the earliest Christians that Jesus is Lord, the Church confesses that he is its hope and that the Church, as Christ's body, is bound to His authority and thus free to live in the lively, joyous reality of the grace of God.

The Great Ends of the Church F-1.0304

The great ends of the Church are the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, urture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

The Historic Principles of Church Order F-3.01

In setting forth the Book of Order, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) reaffirms the historic principles of church order which have been a part of our common heritage and which are basic to our Presbyterian concept and system of church government, namely:

F-3.0101: (a) That "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to His Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship."

(b) Therefore we consider the rights of private judgment, in all matters that respect religion, as universal and unalienable: We do not even wish to see any religious constitution aided by the civil power, further than may be necessary for protection and security, and at the same time, be equal and common to all others.

F-3.0102: That, in perfect consistency with the above principle of common right, every Christian Church, or union or association of particular churches, is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its communion, and the qualifications of its ministers and members, as well as the whole system of its internal government which Christ hath appointed; that in the exercise of this right they may, notwithstanding, err, in making the terms of communion either too lax or too narrow; yet, even in this case, they do not infringe upon the liberty or the rights of others, but only make an improper use of their own.

F-3.0103: That our blessed Savior, for the edification of the visible church, which is his body, hath appointed officers, not only to preach the gospel and administer the Sacraments, but also to exercise discipline, for the preservation of both truth and duty; and that it is incumbent upon these officers, and upon the whole church, in whose name they act, to censure or cast out the erroneous and scandalous, observing, in all cases, the rules contained in the Word of God.

F-3.0104: That truth is in order to goodness; and the great touchstone of truth, its tendency to promote holiness, according to our Savior's rule, "By their fruits ye shall know them." And that no opinion can be

either more pernicious or more absurd than that which brings truth and falsehood upon a level, and represents it as of no consequence what a man's opinions are. On the contrary, we are persuaded that there is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty. Otherwise, it would be of no consequence ither to discover truth or to embrace it.

F-3.0105: That, while under the conviction of the above principle we think it necessary to make effectual provision that all who are admitted as teachers be sound in the faith, we also believe that there are truths and forms with respect to which men of good characters and principles may differ. And in all these we think it the duty both of private Christians and societies to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other.

F-3.0106: That though the character, qualifications, and authority of church officers are laid down in the Holy Scriptures, as well as the proper method of their investiture and institution, yet the election of the persons to the exercise of this authority, in any particular society, is in that society.

F-3.0107: That all church power, whether exercised by the body in general or in the way of representation by delegated authority, is only ministerial and declarative; that is to say, that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners; that no church judicatory ought to pretend to make laws to bind the conscience in virtue of their own authority; and that all their decisions should be founded upon the revealed will of God. Now though it will easily be admitted that all synods and councils may err, through the frailty inseparable from humanity, yet there is much greater danger from the usurped claim of making laws than from the right of judging upon laws already made, and common to all who profess the gospel, although this right, as necessity requires in the present state, be lodged with fallible men.

F-3.0108: Lastly, that if the preceding scriptural and rational principles be steadfastly adhered to, the vigor and strictness of its discipline will contribute to the glory and happiness of any church. Since ecclesiastical discipline must be purely moral or spiritual in its object and not attended with any civil effects, it can derive no force whatever but from its own justice, the approbation of an impartial public, and the countenance and blessing of the great Head of the Church universal.

Principles of Presbyterian Government F-3.02

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) reaffirms, within the context of its commitment to the Church universal, a special commitment to basic principles of Presbyterian polity:

- that the several different congregations of believers, taken collectively, constitute one Church of Christ, called emphatically the Church;
- that a larger part of the Church, or a representation of it, should govern a smaller, or determine matters of controversy which arise therein;
- that, in like manner, a representation of the whole should govern and determine in regard to every part, and to all the parts united: that is, that a majority shall govern; and consequently
- that appeals may be carried from lower to higher governing bodies, till they be finally decided by the collected wisdom and united voice of the whole church.

For these principles and this procedure, the example of the apostles and the practice of the primitive church are considered as authority.

A PERSONAL STATEMENT OF FAITH BY REV. RON LAVOIE

I believe in one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, co-equal and co-eternal. I believe in three distinct persons, rather than merely three modes of revelation, or three dispensations during which God acted in certain ways.

I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God: born of a virgin, fully God and fully human - one person in two natures which are distinguishable but inseparable. I believe in His atoning death on the cross for our sins - providing salvation through faith in Christ. I believe in His bodily resurrection and ascension into Heaven. I believe in the Holy Spirit, who calls us to faith and nurtures us in the Christian life. The Spirit's presence in the human heart becomes the defining reality for all believers and brings them, by God's grace, into conformity to the image of Christ. I believe that the Holy Spirit's presence in the human heart is responsible for an experience of walking with God - a communion with God.

I believe in the Church - the Body of Christ, called to salvation and discipleship, commissioned to proclaim salvation through Christ, and to demonstrate the mercy and justice of God to the world. I believe in the power and privilege of prayer, by which we maintain a right relationship with God - a relationship characterized by love. Such a relationship demands surrender of self to worship and obey God, whose will is made known through the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and especially through the example and teachings of Jesus Christ. The Holy Scripture are, for the Christian, the most important rule and guide to faith and practice. I believe the study of the Scriptures rightly consists of private, prayerful meditation as well as in fellowship with other believers - that we might share the with one another what God has taught us for the benefit of all. To this end, the Confessions allow our present generation to benefit from the experience and insights of the Church of years ago that we might better overcome the peculiar shortcomings of our own day and age. I believe that truth is often counter-intuitive, i.e., things that do not seem right at first can turn out to be true and things that seem at first to be mutually exclusive may not be. It is important, therefore, to remain open and humble in our pinions as God reveals truth to us in Holy Scripture and through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ our Lord.

I believe the pulpit is the place to teach God's Word with faithfulness and relevance to the world today, but I do not see it as an instrument to foster political agendas. It is my hope that all who are touched by my preaching ministry will be blessed by it. I have experienced that this can cut across traditional lines of division, even as Jesus' message did long ago, bringing into fellowship the likes of Matthew the tax collector and Simon the Zealot. The message of the gospel should not be confused with the rhetoric of party politics. I believe in the theological perspective of faith embodied in the Reformed Tradition. I place a high value on the proclamation of the gospel of salvation (the first of the six "Great Ends") in my understanding of the mission of the Church, yet I am committed to pursuing all of the "Great Ends" of the Church in my ministry. With the help of God's grace, I strive to be:

- faithful to Jesus Christ,
- obedient to the Scriptures,
- loving in my dealings with all people.
- a living example of the gospel I preach,
- respectful of my colleagues and co-workers,
- · dignified and gracious in my deportment,
- prompt and professional in my work habits,
- flexible in all things non-essential,
- uncompromising in all things essential... and I pray for the wisdom to know the difference.

In Christ's Love and Grace,

Zon Lavoie

Executive Presbyter/Stated Clerk Kendall Presbytery

Building a Community of Faith, Hope, Love and Witness Jesus Christ and the New Form of Government Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

With greater freedom and flexibility, the new Form of Government encourages congregations and councils to focus on God's mission and how they can faithfully participate in this mission. In offering a structure that is more horizontal than hierarchical, the new Form of Government encourages the church to be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as it seeks to be Christ's body and live out its calling as a community of faith, hope, love and witness.

IESUS CHRIST AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

It is no coincidence that, "The Mission of the Church" (F-1.01), is directly followed by the section "Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church" (F-1.02). As The Confession of 1967 reminds us:

The life, death, resurrection, and promised coming of Jesus Christ has set the pattern for the church's mission. His human life involves the church in the common life of all people. His service to men and women commits the church to work for every form of human well-being. His suffering makes the church sensitive to all human suffering so that it sees the face of Christ in the faces of persons in every kind of need. His crucifixion discloses to the church God's judgment on the inhumanity that marks human relations, and the awful consequences of the church's own complicity in injustice. In the power of the risen Christ and the hope of his coming, the church sees the promise of God's renewal of human life in society and of God's victory over all wrong. The church follows this pattern in the form of its life and in the method of its action. So to live and serve is to confess Christ as Lord.¹

Indeed, Christ sets the pattern for the Church's mission and it is with a sense of "Emmanuel," that is that "God is with us," that we can survive and sustain the mission work needed to engage and transform an often unjust and difficult world.²

JESUS CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH (F-1.02)

The new Form of Government testifies that "Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church" and recognizes that God has set Jesus Christ above all rule and authority and given Christ all power in heaven and on earth.³ Indeed, God has put all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and Christ is the head of the church, which is Christ's body.⁴ The Church's life and mission are a joyful participation in Christ's ongoing life and work.⁵

IESUS CHRIST CALLS AND EQUIPS THE CHURCH (F-1.0202)

Christ calls the church into being, giving it all it needs for its mission, sanctification and service.⁶ Christ is present with the Church in both Spirit and Word.

JESUS CHRIST GIVES THE CHURCH ITS LIFE & SCRIPTURE (F-1.0203)

Christ gives the Church its faith and life, unity and mission, and order and discipline.⁷ Scripture teaches us Christ's will for the Church, which is to be obeyed.⁸ Matters of worship, service and government are to be ordered according to the Word by reason and sound judgment, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.⁹

IESUS CHRIST IS THE CHURCH'S HOPE (F-1.0204)

Faced with a broken economy, dysfunctional government, endless wars, enormous poverty and suffering, the new Form of Government offers us a prophetic reminder that we must place our hope in Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ In a world where it is easy to lose hope or have our hopes be misguided, the Church has a duty to remember, reclaim, and remind folks that Jesus is Lord and we are to place our hope in Christ. As theologian Paul Tillich reminds us, when we place our hope and faith in finite things, we will end up infinitely disappointed. However, when we place our hope and faith the infinite and triune God, then not only will our hope and faith not be disappointed, but we will also come to find infinite meaning and purpose in our lives. ¹¹ It is precisely in difficult times that John Calvin says: "We should ask God to increase our hope when it is small, awaken it when it is dormant, confirm it when it is wavering, strengthen it when it is weak, and raise it up when it is overthrown."

JESUS CHRIST IS THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH (F-1.0205)

Through Christ, God reconciles all things and Christ sends the church to bear witness to the good news of reconciliation with God, others and all creation.¹³ In Christ, the Church receives its truth, appeal, holiness and unity.¹⁴

THE CHURCH IS SENT TO BE CHRIST FAITHFUL EVANGELIST (F-1.0302(D))

As apostolic, "the Church seeks to present the claims of Jesus Christ, leading persons to repentance, acceptance of Christ alone as Savior and Lord, and new life as his disciples." The "Church is sent to be Christ's faithful evangelist," making disciples of all nations; sharing with others a deep life of worship, prayer, fellowship and service; and participating in God's mission to care for the needs of the sick, poor, and lonely; to free people from sin, suffering, and oppression; and to establish Christ's just, loving and peaceable rule in the world. 16

JESUS CHRIST CALLS THE CHURCH AHEAD (F-1.0401)

In calling for us to be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the new Form of Government reminds us that "in the power of the Spirit, Jesus Christ draws worshipping communities and individual believers into the sovereign activity of the triune God at all times and places. As the church seeks reform and fresh direction, it looks to Jesus Christ who goes ahead of us and calls us to follow him."¹⁷

IESUS CHRIST IS THE FOUNDATION & STANDARD FOR ALL MINISTRY (G-2.0101)

The new Form of Government reminds us, "Christ's ministry is the foundation and standard for all ministry, the pattern of the one who came 'not to be served but to serve (Matt. 20:28)." ¹⁸ The "Church's ministry is a gift from Christ" and Christ alone rules, calls, teaches and uses the Church as he wills, exercising his authority by the ministry of women and men for the establishment and extension of God's new creation. ¹⁹ Indeed, "members and those in ordered ministries serve together under the mandate of Christ." ²⁰ Along these lines and regarding ordered ministry, it is important to recognize that the first constitutional question for ordination, installation, and commissioning is: "Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?" ²¹

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1. How does your relationship with Christ and sense of "Emmanuel" guide and sustain you as you engage in transformative mission in your community?
- 2. How can you help the church remember, reclaim, and remind folks that Jesus is Lord and Savior and that we are to place our hope in Christ?



² See Matthew 1:22-23. It is important to recognize that Matthew's gospel not only begins with the reminder of Jesus Christ as "Emmanuel," that is that "God is with us," but also concludes with Jesus' promise in Matthew 28:20 of "remember I am with you always, to end of the age."

³ F-1.0201; see also Ephesians 1:21-23; Colossians 2:10.

⁴ F-1.0201; see also Ephesians 1:21; 1 Corinthians 13:12-27.

⁵ F-1.0201

⁶ F-1.0202; see also Acts 17:28; The Westminster Confession of Faith, 6.075; The Larger Catechism, 7.185; The Theological Declaration of Barmen, 8.13.

⁷ F-1.0202; F-1-1.203; *See also* The Confession of 1967, 9.31.

⁸ F-1.0203

⁹ F-1.0203

¹⁰ F-1.0204

¹¹ See Paul Tillich, Dynamics of Faith, (New York, Harper & Row, 1957).

¹² John Calvin, Commentary on the Book of Psalms, in Calvin's Commentaries, Vol. 4, trans. By Rev. James Anderson (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Book House, 1993), 434. "Psalm 25:19."

¹³ F-1.0205; See also 2 Corinthians 5:11-21; The Second Helvetic Confession, 5.098. The Confession of 1967, 9.31, reminds us: "[t]o be reconciled to God is to be sent into the world as God's reconciling community. This community, the church universal, is entrusted with God's message of reconciliation and shares God's labor of healing the enmities which separate people from God and from each other. Christ has called the church to this mission and given it the gift of the Holy Spirit. The church maintains continuity with the apostles and with Israel by faithful obedience to his call."

¹⁴ See also F-1.0302(a-b) Regarding the "unity" and "holiness" of the Church.

¹⁵ F-1.0302 (d)

¹⁶ F-1.0302 (d)

¹⁷ F-1.0401

¹⁸ G-2.0101

¹⁹ G-2.0101

²⁰ G-2.0101

²¹ W-4.4003(a)

Why Choose the PC(USA)?

Some congregations are wrestling with whether or not to maintain their connection to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The following are just a few of many reasons for them to choose to remain within the denomination.

- The national agencies of the PC(USA) are focusing energies on important, faithful work. For example, the Presbyterian Mission Agency is working to grow 1001 new worshiping communities designed to foster new disciples by "doing church" in new ways, to develop transformational capabilities in our leaders, and to engage young adults. The agencies are pursuing ministries which join witness in word (evangelism) and witness in deed (justice), illustrated in only one way by World Mission's focus on three critical global issues of addressing the root causes of poverty, witnessing in word to God's love in Christ, and working for reconciliation in cultures of violence.
- God's Spirit continues to work in congregations throughout this denomination. Even as
 we decline in membership numbers, there is new life springing up all over, often in
 surprising places: <u>UKirk college ministries</u>; <u>Presbyterian Disaster Assistance</u> work teams;
 smaller churches engaging their communities with the Gospel; downtown <u>churches</u>
 addressing sex trafficking on their corners; and in many other shapes and forms.
- The PC(USA) in its many expressions is engaged in work across the full range of the Gospel's concerns, preaching and worship, evangelism, education, care for the poor, work for the well-being of the environment, and more. The PC(USA) is committed to the Great Ends of the Church, a commitment to the whole gospel for all people.
- The PC(USA) is the heir of a great confessional tradition, found in <u>The Book of Confessions</u>. These statements of faith remind the church who and what it is, what it believes, and what it resolves to do.
- Stewardship of inherited resources. The PC(USA) has incredible resources under the care of its various councils and partners of long-standing all over the world—churches, hospitals, schools, seminaries, financial wills, and bequests. To stay is to be part of the body that stewards these great resources for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Scriptural emphasis on unity. While unity does not require all Christians to be in one denomination, it is important for all of us to consider what Jesus' prayer for unity among his followers (John 17:20-24) means for us today.
- The challenge of retaining missional focus. Some churches have found that the decision whether or not to leave a denomination focuses their energies inwardly and actually makes it more difficult to return to an outward-focused ministry for some time.

GIVE NOW to support Presbyterian Disaster Assistance and World Mission responses to urgent humanitarian crises in West Africa and the Middle East. <u>Give now</u> \rightarrow *

Lesbyterian Mission Agency

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"Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law." Rom. 13:10

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Why Missing BELONG

For more than 200 years, Presbyterians have remained unwavering in this one conviction: Jesus is Lord (1 Cor. 12:3). All power, truth, and salvation rest with God alone. Today, millions of people ldwide worship in Presbyterian churches; they gather as a grateful and loved people, eager to hear Scripture and celebrate the sacraments. They gather because God has called them into community to share with one another and the world a greater love, a brighter witness, a truer

faithfulness, than they could achieve alone.

Presbyterians have always chiefly been a "sent" people. Today, the PC(USA) shares the gospel ough the ministry of 200 mission coworkers in 75 countries working on matters of evangelism, reconciliation, and the alleviation of poverty. Presbyterian Disaster Assistance witnesses to the healing love of Christ by caring for communities in the midst of crisis. And heeding the call of the Holy Spirit, Presbyterians across the country are building up 1,001 new worshiping communities and empowering congregations to seek out new beginnings and engage their diverse communities.

Presbyterians may not agree on all things, but we do commonly stand with one another as a people saved and in service of God. Presbyterians affirm the following central commitments.

That's why I belong.



The Trinity

We believe in the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is not an optional "extra" to God; it is the very nature of God as revealed to us in Scripture.

Sources: Matthew 28:19; The Trinity: God's Love Overflowing, lines 154-55



The Nature of God

"The good news of the Gospel is that the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—creates, redeems, sustains, rules, and transforms all things and all people." Source: *Book of Order*, F-1.01



The Person of Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is the only savior of the world, and the true awaited Messiah. Sources: Acts 16:31; *Book of Confessions*, 5.077



Salvation

"Jesus Christ is the only Savior and Lord, and all people everywhere are called to place their faith, hope, and love in him." Sources: Ephesians 1:3–14; *Hope in the Lord Jesus Christ*, lines 155–57; *see also Book of Confessions*, 5.107–5.110



Sacraments

We celebrate two sacraments—baptism and the Lord's Supper—because these are uniquely instituted by Christ.

Sources: Matthew 28:19; Luke 22:19–20; 1 Corinthians 11:23–25; Book of Confessions, 3.21



Scripture

"The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures."

Sources: John 1:1-18 and 21:24-25; Book of Confessions, 9.27



The Church

"Christ Jesus is the only Head of the Kirk [Church], even as it is the body and spouse of Christ Jesus."

Sources: Ephesians 4:15; Book of Confessions, 3.16



Ordination

All ordained leaders in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) publicly affirm that Jesus Christ is Savior and "acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church." Sources: 1 Timothy 3:1–13; Book of Order, W-4.4003a



Evangelism

"God sends the church in the power of the Holy Spirit . . . to tell all nations and

peoples of Christ's call to repentance, faith, and obedience." Sources: Matthew 28:16–20; *Book of Order*, W-7.2001



Missional Ministry

"The Church participates in God's mission for the transformation of creation and humanity by proclaiming to all people the good news of God's love."

<u>Sources: 2 Corinthians 5:18–21; Book of Order, F-1.01</u>



Stewardship

"The ways in which a believer uses God's gift of material goods, personal abilities, and time should reflect a faithful response to God's self-giving in Jesus Christ." Sources: 2 Corinthians 9:6–7; *Book of Order*, W-5.5004



Women in Ministry

We believe women and men are called to all ministries of the church. Sources: Joel 2:28–30; Galatians 3:28; *Book of Order*, G-2.0101

To Top

Constitutional Musing

Misrepresentations about the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

The Office of the General Assembly has had an increase in the number of inquiries about printed materials from outside of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), being distributed within congregations, that ascribe to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) beliefs and standards which are meant to show that the church is no longer worthy of support. Over the past years the list of these misrepresentations have varied little and most have been answered in detail in the religious press, study papers adopted by the church or by specific action of the General Assembly. Whenever possible, the Office of the General Assembly directs those who inquire about specific conclusions drawn by these papers to resources which give a broader understanding of the issues.

Typically the materials being circulated focus on four broad areas of concern, each of which speaks to the core of who we are as a denomination and a covenant community. In response to these recent inquiries, we remind the church about who the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is both historically and in our current ministry.

1. It is said that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has distanced itself from historical tenets of the faith, especially identifying the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of Scripture.

The Lordship of Jesus Christⁱⁱ and the authority and centrality of Scriptureⁱⁱⁱ are clearly expressed in the constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). These affirmations of our Reformed tradition found, most notably, in The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity in the *Book of Order* and in *The Book of Confessions* present the fundamental proclamation of the church concerning our historical faith.

There is no clearer refutation of this allegation than the witness articulated in the answers to the constitutional questions asked at ordination. In ordination, and subsequent installations, every deacon, ruling elder and teaching elder stands before the church proclaiming their trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior and their acceptance of Scripture as the authoritative witness to Jesus Christ and God's Word to them. One cannot embrace a view of the whole church that claims distance from the Lordship of Jesus and the authority of scripture while every person serving in ordered ministries of our church has steadfastly proclaimed their personal commitment to these very truths.

No other actions of the church, or parts of the church, can dispute the primary commitment of the ordained leadership of the church to their vows of ordination and to the affirmation of reformed theology set out so clearly in the constitution.

2. It is said that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has adopted a liberal political agenda as a core mission.

The *Book of Order* describes the core mission of the church this way: "In Christ, the Church participates in God's mission for the transformation of creation and humanity by proclaiming to all people the good news of God's love, offering to all people the grace of God at font and table, and

calling all people to discipleship in Christ." v

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) expresses God's mission differently in each of its 10,000 congregations, 173 presbyteries, 16 synods and six agencies. Historically this mission has been active in promoting the social good. At the second meeting of the original presbytery of our denomination, in Philadelphia in 1706, the presbytery adopted as a goal that "every minister of the Presbytery supply neighboring desolate places where a minister is wanting and opportunity of doing good offers." This commitment to doing good in wanting places has been lived out in our powerful history of starting public schools, building hospitals, reaching out to the poor and those cut off from family, in promoting racial equality and lifting up the whole society by standing with those alienated from it. The church's commitment to doing good in wanting places has never wavered.

While a few of these ministries have been interpreted by some as being part of a liberal political agenda, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) understands that it is the mission of God in Christ which gives shape and substance to the life and work of the Church. vii

3. The decline in church membership is cited as a marker of Spiritual illness and a failure of the church as a whole.

Leaders on all levels of the church are concerned about the decline in Protestant churches across the nation. This is not a uniquely Presbyterian issue, nor is it unique to churches, for a profound cultural shift in what it means to join a society and engage in committed covenants has affected religious, civic and volunteer organizations equally.

More important than identifying these trends is listening to Christ's call to fulfill a dynamic mission in a way most appropriate to the mission field around us. The Church continues to be "sent to be Christ's faithful evangelist:

making disciples of all nations in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; sharing with others a deep life of worship, prayer, fellowship, and service; and participating in God's mission to care for the needs of the sick, poor, and lonely; to free people from sin, suffering, and oppression; and to establish Christ's just, loving, and peaceable rule in the world."

The church's vision for 1001 New Worshiping Communities^x is one example of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) responding to this challenge. To do this the church is encouraging entrepreneurial young leaders and finding ways to provide a structure which supports the historical faith in innovative ways. A less-restrictive Form of Government and a focus on governance at the more local levels all give credence to our trust that Jesus Christ is not finished with this vibrant church.

4. It is said that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is at odds with the global Presbyterian Church.

A unifying element of the global partnership of Reformed churches is a principle of our order and government that: "...every Christian Church, or union or association of particular churches, is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its communion, and the qualifications of its ministers and members, as well as the whole system of its internal

government which Christ hath appointed ... "xi There are times when it is necessary for a church to make a decision on theological grounds about which other churches might not necessarily agree. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s actions which make it possible for sessions and presbyteries to ordain people without regard to their sexual orientation is one such instance and has placed the church in a minority within the world community of Reformed churches. One of our global partners has broken relations with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) over the decision and the church's leadership is actively engaged in conversations with other partners who have also expressed their dissatisfaction.

The global church is hardly of one mind on this or any number of issues. Some within the community still object to our decision 50 years ago to ordain women, though there is virtual agreement across the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that it is the correct action. Many of our global partners consider holding the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) accountable to justice and stewardship issues, expressed in the Accra Confession, to be of primary importance in our dialogues. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) continues to engage in building relationships with open humility with all those whom Christ has called.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is a member of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The WCRC has a global membership of over 80 million congregants in over 200 denominations. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church is a member and the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians has applied for membership.

Prayer for Guidance

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with your most gracious favor and further us with your continual help, that in all our works, begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy name, and finally, by your mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.xii

- · We affirm the one triune God.
- We affirm the uniqueness of God's incarnation in Jesus Christ.
- We affirm the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for our salvation.
- We affirm that the Scriptures, by the Holy Spirit, are the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ.
- We affirm, again and again, the faith once delivered historically expressed in the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds, and the other historic confessions of our church.

We reject teachings that deny the tenets of our faith. Let there be no doubt that theology matters, that our Reformed tradition is precious to us, and that we intend to hand it down to the next generation-our children and our grandchildren." [Minutes of the 206th General Assembly (1994) page 88]

F-1.0201 The Authority of Christ
Almighty God, who raised Jesus Christ from the dead and set him above all rule and authority, has given to
him all power in heaven and on earth, not only in this age but also in the age to come. God has put all
things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and has made Christ Head of the Church, which is his body. The
Church's life and mission are a joyful participation in Christ's ongoing life and work.

For example: the 1993 "Reimagining God" conference is often listed as proof of a move away from reformed standards. Seldom do those making this accusation include the response of the following (1994) General Assembly which replied to critics of the church of this conference by, among other things, overwhelmingly adopting the following statements:

F-1.0202 Christ Calls and Equips the Church

Christ calls the Church into being, giving it all that is necessary for its mission in the world, for its sanctification, and for its service to God. Christ is present with the Church in both Spirit and Word. Christ alone rules, calls, teaches, and uses the Church as he wills.

F-1.0404 Openness

In Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all creation, the Church seeks a new openness to God's mission in the world. In Christ, the triune God tends the least among us, suffers the curse of human sinfulness, raises up a new humanity, and promises a new future for all creation. In Christ, Church members share with all humanity the realities of creatureliness, sinfulness, brokenness, and suffering, as well as the future toward which God is drawing them. The mission of God pertains not only to the Church but also to people everywhere and to all creation.

The Book of Confessions: See 1.2, 2.2, 5.062, 5.131, 6.141, 8.11-8.15, 9.10.

iii F-1.0203 Christ Gives the Church Its Life

Christ gives to the Church its faith and life, its unity and mission, its order and discipline. Scripture teaches us of Christ's will for the Church, which is to be obeyed. In the worship and service of God and the government of the church, matters are to be ordered according to the Word by reason and sound judgment, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

F-1.0401 Continuity and Change

The presbyterian form of government set forth in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is grounded in Scripture and built around the marks of the true Church. It is in all things subject to the Lord of the Church. In the power of the Spirit, Jesus Christ draws worshiping communities and individual believers into the sovereign activity of the triune God at all times and places. As the Church seeks reform and fresh direction, it looks to Jesus Christ who goes ahead of us and calls us to follow him. United with Christ in the power of the Spirit, the Church seeks "not [to] be conformed to this world, but [to] be transformed by the renewing of [our] minds, so that [we] may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2)

W-2.2001 Centrality of Scripture

The church confesses the Scriptures to be the Word of God written, witnessing to God's self-revelation. Where that Word is read and proclaimed, Jesus Christ the Living Word is present by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. For this reason the reading, hearing, preaching, and confessing of the Word are central to Christian worship. The session shall ensure that in public worship the Scripture is read and proclaimed regularly in the common language(s) of the particular church.

The Book of Confessions: See 3.19, 5.001-5.002, 6.004, 7.002 & 7.113, 9.27-9.30.

W-4.4003 Constitutional Questions for Ordination, Installation, and Commissioning

v F-1.01 God's Mission

The mission of God in Christ gives shape and substance to the life and work of the Church. In Christ, the Church participates in God's mission for the transformation of creation and humanity by proclaiming to all people the good news of God's love, offering to all people the grace of God at font and table, and calling all

people to discipleship in Christ. Human beings have no higher goal in life than to glorify and enjoy God now and forever, living in covenant fellowship with God and participating in God's mission.

vi James H. Smylie, A Brief History of the Presbyterians (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1996) 42.

- F-1.0302 d. The Apostolicity of the Church
- x 1001 Worshiping Communities: http://www.onethousandone.org/Home.aspx
- xi F-3.0102 Corporate Judgment
- Book of Common Worship Pastoral Edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993) 348.

vii F-1.01 God's Mission

viii "Nones" on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation. This report, released in October 2012, was produced by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life. The full report can be found at: http://www.pewforum.org/Unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx

ANSWERS TO OBJECTIONS

Some of the often-expressed reasons given for leaving the PC(USA) are stated in **bold print** below and are esponded to by Rev. Ron Lavoie, Executive Presbyter and Stated Clerk of Kendall Presbytery.

"For years we have been devoting time, talent, and resources to internal struggles" That is true. It has ever been an important part of the Church's witness, since the days of the Apostles to bear internal witness to the Church as it also bears external witness to the world about us. We invite the world to accept what God has done for us in Jesus Christ and we also seek to obey the Apostle Paul's instruction: "Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction." II Timothy 4:2. It is frustrating at times, so we are admonished to exercise great patience and provide careful instruction. At what point in the history of the Church has this responsibility been less needed or difficult? At what point did this Apostolic instruction apply more than it does to us today?

"The PC(USA) refuses to identify essential tenets" Or, more precisely, when we've met in General Assembly and considered this point, we decided that this responsibility rightly belongs to each Session and each Presbytery which bears the responsibility to examine candidates for ordination, whether Teaching Elders, Ruling Elders, or Deacons. I emphasize that we've done this because the General Assembly is not a distant, detached "other" to be regarded with suspicion and charged with every cowardly and malevolent motive. The General Assembly is we ourselves gathered together in prayer, discussion, wrangling, in the grace of God and all the imperfection of our human condition. We gather to seek and sort out our way as best we can in spite of our shortcomings and we ultimately yield ourselves to God's corrective and guiding hand, trusting that God will correct our mistakes (which we will undoubtedly make whenever we gather) and give us discernment to recognize the bitter fruit of wrong decisions made in the past. We are "ever Reformed, ever being reformed" under the grace of God's Almighty hand.

We fully recognize that in giving such responsibility to individual Sessions and Presbyteries, "in the exercise of this right they may, notwithstanding, err, in making the terms of communion either too lax or too narrow; yet, even in this case, they do not infringe upon the liberty or the rights of others, but only make an improper use of their own." (Book of Order F-3.0102). In other words, understanding that people will inevitably make mistakes, we protect the Church from wholesale corruption by assigning this responsibility to individual Sessions and Presbyteries who, when they err (and they surely will, from time to time) affect only a smaller circle rather than devastate the entire Church as would happen if we assigned this responsibility to the General Assembly and they, in turn, erred (and they surely would, from time to time). This same recognition of human frailty and the reluctance to assign such power to the highest levels of government is reflected in the federal system (states' rights) of the U.S. Government and the checks and balances instituted among the Executive, Judicial, and Legislative branches of the government. These concepts were derived from the Calvinist Reformation.

"The PC(USA) no longer clearly communicates why and how Jesus matters to a world that needs to know" On the contrary, all across this country, from the pulpits on Sunday mornings, to pastor's bible studies during Sunday mornings or 'mid week events, from congregational websites to Church newsletters, the Teaching Elders and Commissioned Ruling Elders regularly preach the gospel of Jesus Christ with power and eloquence. Those who expect this to be the job of the General Assembly and not the job of the thousands of congregations and their pastors labor under a misconception of both roles and it is no wonder that they are frustrated.

"A recent survey ... found that less than half of PC(USA) members, elders, and pastors agree that less Christ is the only way to salvation" Surveys are a tricky business and are not for amateurs. Much depends on how the question is worded and how it is interpreted by the one answering the question. In regard to this particular question, one likely "interpretation" of the question being responded to was "Can anyone be saved who has not personally confessed faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?" If that was what they

thought the question was actually asking, they might have questioned back in reply, "What about Moses, Isaiah, infants who die in infancy, or the severely mentally challenged?" ... Presbyterians are a thoughtful, sensitive people and they would not have answered an unqualified "yes" to such a question unless they were clear on exactly what was being asked.

"The Session of our Church believes in the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ, in the unquestionable means of salvation for the world through Him, and in the infallible authority of God's Word in all matters of faith. We consider these to be essential tenets of our faith."

Amen! We knew you could do it! When we decided at General Assembly to assign this responsibility of defining the essential tenets of the faith to each individual Session and Presbytery, we did so because we had confidence that our Sessions and Presbyteries had the faith and the devotion to search the Scriptures and the Confessions and to do exactly what you have done. And, no doubt, you are the stronger for it. Other Sessions have done and are doing the same, using similar words in many cases and living out their faith. You shouldn't want to have this spoon-fed to you by the General Assembly. In the same way, and for the same reason, local school boards do not want their curriculums dictated to them in every detail by the Federal Government.

"The PC(USA) fails to affirm the authority of Scripture." I find this objection stunning. What other denomination has so fully and so boldly confessed what it believes as we have done? Where would you look for stronger statements about the role and authority of Scripture than in our Confessions? One such example from the Book of Confessions is as follows: "CANONICAL SCRIPTURE: We believe and confess the canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles of both Testaments to be the true Word of God, and to have sufficient authority of themselves, not of men. For God himself spoke to the fathers, prophets, apostles, and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures. And in this Holy Scripture, the universal Church of Christ has the most complete exposition of all that pertains to a saving faith, and also to the framing of a life acceptable to God; and in this respect it is expressly commanded by God that nothing be either added to or taken from the game. SCRIPTURE TEACHES FULLY ALL GODLINESS: We judge, therefore, that from these Scriptures are to be derived true wisdom and godliness, the reformation and government of churches; as also instruction in all duties of piety; and, to be short, the confirmation of doctrines, and the rejection of all errors, moreover, all exhortations according to that word of the apostle, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof," etc. (II Tim. 3:16-17). Again, "I am writing these instructions to you," says the apostle to Timothy, "so that you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God," etc. (I Tim. 3:14-15). SCRIPTURE IS THE WORD OF GOD: Again, the selfsame apostle to the Thessalonians: "When," says he, "you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it, not as the word of men but as what it really is, the Word of God," etc. (I Thess. 2:13.) For the Lord himself has said in the Gospel, "It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of my Father speaking through you"; therefore "he who hears you hears me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me" (see Matt. 10:20; Luke 10:16; John 13:20)." (The Second Helvetic Confession 5.001-5.003)

"The 2010 General Assembly voted to remove the "fidelity and chastity" clause from our Book or Order, so our denomination no longer requires that persons wishing to be ordained as pastors, elders and deacons be faithful in their marriages or chaste in their singleness." Not even close! What we decided, at General Assembly, was to trust the Sessions and Presbyteries, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and subject to the chastening hand of Almighty God, to examine each candidate in the light of Scripture and the Confessions. The new language is more in keeping with our historic polity and practice. The much-disputed G-6.0106b was an aberration and the beginnings of a forfeiture of the historic rights of Sessions and Presbyteries to the General Assembly. This would eventually have led to a longer list of specific qualifications and prohibitions as it has done in other Reformed bodies which have taken that route. I know of several such ministers who have been drummed out of the ministry for failing to acknowledge that the world was created in six literal 24-hour days or that the earth was less than 10,000 years old. I know of another who lost his credentials because he refused to subscribe to the doctrine of double predestination.

The much-disputed paragraph was replaced with the following from G-2.0104 "Gifts and Qualifications:"

a. To those called to exercise special functions in the church—deacons, ruling elders, and teaching elders—God gives suitable gifts for their various duties. In addition to possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, those who undertake particular ministries should be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world. They must have the approval of God's people and the concurring judgment of a council of the church.

b. Standards for ordained service reflect the church's desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (F-1.02). The council responsible for ordination and/or installation (G-2.0402; G-2.0607; G-3.0306) shall examine each candidate's calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of ordered ministry. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate's ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003). Councils shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.

Few congregations would have any difficulty in applying this standard as they examine candidates for ordination. And, since 2010, very few have. In 2010, we pulled back from a decades-long argument that had intoxicated the national press (giving us nothing but *bad* press) and distracted us from the real work of examining candidates, which had become perfunctory and shallow over the years. *We* called each Session and Presbytery back to the serious task of examining candidates, not only in terms of their personal Christian lives, but in their theology, their temperament, and their suitability to serve in specific times and places. After decades of "mucking in the mire," *we* found the sense to take the high road and to trust our Presbyteries and Sessions and the results since speak for themselves. If some should on occasion fail in upholding the clear standards of Scripture and the guidance of our Confessions, (and some will, just as surely as humans are imperfect) we entrust them to the corrective hand of God and we accept our calling to speak words of correction and rebuke as is, and ever has been, our duty as disciples of Christ, who also spoke words of correction and rebuke as he taught God's Word among us while on Earth (see Matt.23:1-36).

in Christ's Love and Grace,

Ron Lavoie

Executive Presbyter/Stated Clerk Kendall Presbytery

GAINING A GOOD PERSPECTIVE AND LIVING GRACE-FULLY

I don't know how he did it, but Claude Monet probably had to do much "stepping back" in producing his mpressionist-style paintings. Though I'm not an art expert, I assume much of the appeal of these works is the trick they play on the eye, forcing the viewer to take a step back, otherwise their senses see only flaws and disorganization.

In some ways, it can be like that in our work settings, making the occasional "outside expert" helpful in that they are often able to see things that those too closely involved have been unable to recognize. It can also be that way in Church life. Often leaders in their local settings can fail to see the larger picture - but everyone can see it if they are willing to "take a step back."

Taking a step back is not difficult ... but convincing someone that there is value in the exercise can be. This is true especially if they are convinced that they have already seen all there is to see, or if they are suspicious of others who are counseling them to do so, or if they have gone on public record boldly exclaiming their position and perspective ... pride will be wounded in ever acknowledging they have spoken out before gathering all the necessary information.

There was a time, not too many years ago, that I thought "correct theology" was the essential ingredient to Church leadership. That was before I began serving as the Stated Clerk for the Synod of Mid-America. From that vantage point, a balcony view so to speak, I began to notice instances of "correct" theology paired up with a poor sense of ecclesiology (a theology of the Church) and a lack of perspective, not noticing the forest because of all the trees.

Just because you are a great mechanic doesn't mean you will be a good and safe driver. In the same way, just because you have a correct theology of salvation, of the role of Scripture, etc. doesn't mean you know how to lead the Church. Many an argumentative, divisive, corrosive zealot comes with those qualifications. Love and humility, however, are often in very short supply.

We are amazed at the defiance of the Pharisees in the New Testament, even conspiring to murder Lazarus ecause he had become an obstacle to their leadership. How did it come to this? In fact, their theology was essentially correct and robust. Their desire to lead in the correct path unquestionable. Love and humility, however, were found lacking.

In contexts of disagreement, whether on the local level or in larger scale forums, the tendency to mischaracterize opponents, their motives as well as their characters, is universal. But, in the Church, things should be different. When we disagree in the same manner as people do in the world, we have ceased to be the Church. Could it be that disagreements are, in God's Providence, a stage for us to demonstrate that there is a real difference between us and the world, where differences always set the stage for division and the script is played out in words of hate and anger?

Are we not called to "exhibit the kingdom of God to the world?" What better stage could we be given? The national press is interested ... the stage is set ... so let's give them something new to talk about. "And they'll know we are Christians by our love."

In Christ's Love and Grace,

Ron Lavoie

Executive Presbyter/Stated Clerk Kendall Presbytery

FRAMING OUR OWN DISCUSSION FOR PC(USA) IN A SEASON OF SCHISM

For the last several years, PC(USA) has been struggling with schism and for the most part hearing the PC(USA) defined as either "apostate" or "unfaithful" by those who are choosing to leave the denomination. These definitions too often place those choosing to remain in positions of defensiveness, sorrow or anger. While grief is a natural response to relationships being disrupted, it also becomes important to have tools to move beyond grief and not get stuck in unhealthy assumptions about what caused the schism. There may be little value in trying to convince those who have made up their minds that the PC(USA) is apostate or unfaithful to the Gospel. However, it may be of great value to find a word to share with the PC(USA). What are talking points that might be shared to help PC(USA) walk in integrity with our ecclesial self-understanding?

- While being rooted in the Protestant Reformation, our modern ecclesiology is not "separatist" in spirit or practice. We understand that the "unity of believers in Christ is reflected in the rich diversity of the church's membership." However, this unity "is hidden and distorted when variant forms are allowed to harden into sectarian divisions, exclusive denominations and rival factions." As PC(USA) we are community of women and men of all ages, races, ethnicities, and worldly conditions, "iii "proclaiming to all people the good news of God's love, offering to all people the grace of God at font and table, and calling all people to discipleship in Christ."
- ❖ We take seriously the understanding that God is always reforming the church and in that process, we seek to discern the mind of Christ in community. "All councils of the church are united by the nature of the church and share with one another responsibilities, rights, and powers..." "As the Church seeks reform and fresh direction, it looks to Jesus Christ who goes ahead of us and calls us to follow him." As PC(USA) we are community that seeks to be open to God's continuing reformation of the Church, in order that we may be more effective in Christ's mission in the world. vii
- Christ called an extremely diverse group of individuals to be his first disciples. While they struggled in their diversity, they were compelled to walk together, study together, pray together, witness together. Because of their response to Christ's call on their lives, they were placed in relationship with people who they otherwise would not have been in relationship and may have even been at serious odds. Being in relationship is hard work. As PC(USA) we are a community of significant difference. We do not walk away from difference, but trust Christ to use our differences for his highest purposes, for we are all one in Christ Jesus.
- We remain mindful that our current process of discernment too often leaves a sense of "winners" and "losers". However, we have been encouraged by the witness of individuals and communities who while often feeling wounded or alienated by the decisions and actions of the church, have remained in community, often at great personal sacrifice and pain. Together we struggle to be faithful witnesses to God's loving and liberating Gospel. We are joined together not by our agreement in all things, but by Christ's calling upon our lives and our commitment to live out our faith in community that is not of our own making or control. As PC(USA) we are a

community that embraces the difficult struggle and are willing to trust Christ to make all things new; to set captives free, to open blind eyes, to heal wounded souls, to transform our struggle into a witness that glorifies God. ix

We have always understood that Jesus Christ is alone the Head of the Church.* Our very existence is rooted in him. We are tempted to long for the days of prosperity and stability. However as the writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us, "For everything there is a season." Through the storms and through the longest of nights, our hope remains in him alone! As we review our history on every continent, we can testify to God's faithfulness to us in every season. Therefore, in this season, we once again place our trust in Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of our faith.* As PC(USA) we are community of hope! We claim the words of Paul to the Romans, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

F-1.0403

[&]quot;The Confession of 1967, 9.34

ⁱⁱⁱ F-1.0404

iv F-1.01

^v F-3.0203

vi F-1.0401

vii See F-1.0404

viii Galatians 3:28

ix See Matthew 11:5

^x See F-1.02

xi Ecclesiastes 3

xii Hebrews 12:2

xiii Romans 15:13

COMING TO TERMS WITH THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS IN THE PC(USA)

First if all, let's remember that General Assembly is not a "them" to be contrasted with "us." General Assembly is not even a certain group of people, per se. General Assembly is a bi-annual meeting of "us" designed primarily to order and direct worldwide mission and also to decide on policies for the larger Church. The actual persons attending and voting at General Assembly changes every time it meets. This accounts for a somewhat un-predictable nature of the meetings, the decisions of which are sometimes reversed by a subsequent General Assembly.

Every year at General Assembly, I've noticed more than a few commissioners opening up their commissioner packets for the first time as they find their places at the tables assigned to them. That they come unprepared to GA has something to do with human frailty exemplified in their own procrastination or perhaps that of their Presbyteries which elect them at a very late date, preventing them from proper preparation. Others attend as late-appointed substitutes for those who have fallen ill or are otherwise prevented from attending. The process is imperfect, to say the least, and that imperfection sometimes shows through in some of the decisions rendered at GA - but these are not examples of a degenerate or unfaithful Church, but of the inevitable imperfections of a democratic process undertaken on a large scale by imperfect, volunteer participants.

Furthermore, the General Assembly is dominated by a "metropolitan" political sensibility, since each Presbytery sends a proportional representation of its membership as commissioners to G.A. In light of the fact that our most populous Presbyteries often come from the metropolitan areas of the nation, their viewpoints (including their views on controversial social issues) often reflect a metropolitan political sensibility. Since it only takes a simple majority to "pass" something at G.A., it has been observed that new ideas often get approved at G.A. when they have little chance of being finally adopted by a majority of our Presbyteries as our constitution requires. Remember, in the final analysis, each Presbytery gets only *one* (yea or nay) vote, regardless of its population size.

What this all means is that we have structured ourselves, as a denomination, to be very open to new ideas nd very cautious about adopting these new ideas until they have attained a near-consensus, since we allot every Presbytery a single yea or nay vote, regardless of its size. Managing the anxiety created by this interval between steps one and two is a difficult task requiring constant polity education in our Churches and maturity on the part of all Presbyterians.

Democracy is not easy, and it is not free. It comes at a significant cost. It means that we will never be able to avoid discussing in the Church the controversial issues of our times, nor is it realistic to expect that we will ever be in complete agreement on things which provoke strong disagreement in our society in general. It means that we will, at least to some degree, fall prey to the failures and shortcomings of our own day and age. But by being democratic, we hope and believe that the Church will never succumb to wholesale corruption (as it nearly did prior to the Reformation) and that our children will be able, by God's grace, to correct the mistakes we make today even as they face their own challenges, yet to be imagined.

In hopes of rising above the peculiar shortcomings of our day and age (and they feel *very* peculiar at times), we commend the historic *Confessions* of the Church for the study of our members as they seek to know God's will and interpret the Word of God. Perhaps among the largely-unnoticed shortcomings of our times are all-too-common words of contempt for the Church, echoing the words of the world, rather than the words of Christ which are filled with overflowing praise: "You are altogether beautiful, my darling; there is no flaw in you." (Song of Solomon 4:7). May we strive to be as gracious in our appraisal of the Church, and may God save us from contradicting His love and mercy.

In Christ's Love and Grace,

Ron Lavoie

Executive Presbyter/Stated Clerk Kendall Presbytery

The 221st General Assembly, Detroit, MI

At this year's General Assembly in Detroit, the following was passed by an overwhelming vote:

"Worship is a central element of the pastoral care of the people of God (W-6.3001, W-6.3010) in which a teaching elder's discernment of the leading of the Holy Spirit is indispensable. The necessity of ensuring the exercise of freedom of conscience in the interpretation of Scripture (G-2.0105) in the planning and leadership of worship has deep roots in our Reformed tradition and theology. Because a service of marriage is one form of such worship, when a couple requests the involvement of the church in solemnizing their marriage as permitted by the laws of the civil jurisdiction in which the marriage is to take place, teaching elders* have the pastoral responsibility to assess the capabilities, intentions, and readiness of the couple to be married (W-4.9002), and the freedom of conscience in the interpretation of Scripture (G-2.0105) to participate in any such marriage they believe the Holy Spirit calls them to perform.

"Exercising such discretion and freedom of conscience under the prayerful guidance of Scripture, teaching elders may conduct a marriage service for any such couple in the place where the community gathers for worship, so long as it is approved by the session; or in such other place as may be suitable for a service of Christian worship. In no case shall any teaching elder's conscience be bound to conduct any marriage service for any couple except by his or her understanding of the Word, and the leading of the Holy Spirit. The authoritative interpretation of this section by the 203rd General Assembly (1991) (Minutes, 1991, Part I, p. 395, paragraphs 21.124—.128), and the subsequent authoritative interpretations of the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission relying upon it, are withdrawn and replaced with this authoritative interpretation."

In reading the above action of this year's General Assembly, one might well ask "What's all the fuss about?" One might also ask, "Where are all the sensational headlines coming from?" These points are well taken.

This action "withdrew and replaced" a previous General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission "Authoritative Interpretation" (decree) which explicitly prohibited same-sex weddings to be performed by either Presbyterian pastors or in Presbyterian churches. This "rule" had been a bone of contention for nearly 25 years, for a variety of reasons, some of which had more to do with polity concerns than the subject matter, per e. Each time this rule was challenged, it was clear that sentiment opposed to it was mounting from year to year, for one reason or another. At the 221st General Assembly in Detroit this year, it was overturned by an overwhelming vote (approximately ¾ margin). However, not all who opposed the ruling did so because of

favorable opinions about same-sex marriage. A significant number of Presbyterians have voiced serious polity concerns in opposition to this ruling. There were basically four reasons cited in floor arguments for overturning his ruling. A significant majority subscribed to at least one of the following points of view and therefore voted in favor of overturning the previous "Authoritative Interpretation" of the GA-PJC (a small panel of judges).

1. The rule constituted an encroachment on the historic rights and freedoms of pastors and sessions and a violation of the core value of our polity, "freedom of conscience," for all pastors and sessions.

F-3.0101 God Is Lord of the Conscience
"God alone is Lord of the conscience," and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men ...

Because of the deep distrust of governing power by our founding reformers, all aspects of our polity were organized with a view toward preserving, at all costs (including the cost of dissention inevitably arising from differing expressions of that freedom), the freedom of individual pastors and sessions. As a result, the Presbyterian Church (USA) is not an organic unity but a connectional network of free and independent congregations gathered together for common witness and the pursuit of mission in the world beyond the scope of what would be possible on their own. The General Assembly, properly understood, is essentially a mission agency and it speaks <u>to</u> the Church, not <u>for</u> the Church.

2. The rule proved nearly-impossible to enforce, owing to its vagaries and the growing lack of consensus. Multiple attempts to enforce the rule proved expensive and unsatisfactory. The main reason for this is that the General Assembly does not have the power to force Presbyterians against their will. The Book of Order, ideally, would contain no controversial provisions. Items which could not be agreed upon by a significant margin would be left to the individual sessions to decide as they sought God's will through prayer. The following item is excerpted from the "Foundations of Presbyterian Polity:"

F-3.0107 Church Power

"All Church power, whether exercised by the body in general or in the way of representation by delegated authority, is only ministerial and declarative; that is to say, that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners; that no Church judicatory ought to pretend to make laws to bind the conscience in virtue of their own authority ..."

3. The incessant arguments over this rule were detrimental to Presbyterian life and mission, provoking an insatiable interest on the part of the press. Increasingly, Presbyterians were convinced that this rule was serving no useful purpose and that we were not running our affairs properly as long as a long line of news vans was parked along the streets at every General Assembly. General Assembly meetings should be more like our Synod meetings where the agenda is focused on the arrangements and provisions for regional mission. I never see news vans parked outside our Synod meetings ... and I rarely see people getting upset - all are focused and engaged in doing the Lord's work. Yet, I am sure that in these meetings there is represented the full spectrum of opinions about the controversial issues.

- We might well ask ourselves, "how do these meetings go so well and are so productive despite these differences?" Because they are an example of how we should operate allowing ourselves freedom conscience on points of disagreement, gathering together to celebrate what we hold in common, and setting our minds and hearts on doing the Lord's work (and <u>not</u> trying to boss each other around).
- 4. Increasingly, many are convinced that the phenomena of homosexuality is an inborn trait for many, if not most, homosexuals. As such, they feel convinced in their conscience that they deserve to be treated with equality and not be discriminated against in Church or society (and marriage is a blend of Church and society like no other institution each informing and affecting the other whether we wish it so or not). While some disagree and assert that homosexuality is most often, if not always, a choice, their point of view does nothing to diminish the fact that those who feel otherwise are following well-established ethical principles. As such, it is an uncharitable stretch to accuse those who feel that way of being anti-Christian. It is to be acknowledged that this change in historic perspective does pose significant challenges to biblical interpretation at several points in Scripture, yet to claim that such a perspective undermines the entire faith is, at a minimum, a gross exaggeration. In the end, this may come down to a disagreement about scientific fact yet to be proven and which will be resolved, no doubt, over time and the needed adjustments to biblical interpretation will surely follow as they have when we were convinced by science that the earth is more than 6,000 years old and that biological evolution is a fact.

In regard to the practical impact of the General Assembly's action, the following items excerpted from a FAQ document just released by the General Assembly are helpful:

Question: Are congregations and/or pastors required to participate in/host such weddings?

Answer: "In no case shall any teaching elder's conscience be bound to conduct any marriage service for any couple except by his or her understanding of the Word and the leading of the Holy Spirit." No pastor is compelled to perform a service of marriage nor a session compelled to use church property for a service of marriage.

Question: Can the session make a categorical prohibition of samegender weddings in its building?

Answer: Yes. Nothing has changed about the authority of the session with regard to the use of the church building.

In His Love,

Ron Lavoie, stated Clerk/Executive Kendall Presbytery

Positions and mischaracterizations in the current debate over homosexuality. by Ron Lavoie, Stated Clerk and Executive of Kendall Presbytery

Position of the "Left":

- 1. There is a very strong probability that (most) gays are born that way, irreversibly hard-wired for same-sex attraction from birth.
- 2. It is therefore unjust, according to longestablished Christian values, to discriminate against them in any way.
- 3. It is highly unlikely (and this is supported by a study of history), that the modern phenomena of quiet, monogamous, committed homosexual relationships were known or ever contemplated by the biblical authors.
- 4. In terms of Biblical interpretation, we acknowledge that the Scriptures condemn homosexuality upon every mention of it, but words mean what people have in mind when they speak or write them, and in most cases the condemnations of homosexual behavior in Scripture apply to those forms of homosexuality with which they were aware: lascivious, promiscuous, licentious, lewd and embarrassing public insults to moral living.
- 5. The modern science of human psychological development, especially in this area, is less than 100 years old. As we adjusted our biblical interpretation in regard to of the age of the earth when we learned through scientific discovery that the earth was much older than 6,000 years old, so we must now adjust our interpretation of the Scripture's condemnation of homosexuality upon discovery that it is a genetically inborn trait for most homosexuals and likely a result of unchosen childhood circumstances for many others.
- 6. Our position still condemns all immoral (self-indulgent, exploitative, abusive) sexual behavior, whether homosexual or heterosexual in nature.

Mischaracterization of the "Left" by the "Right":

1. They are just blindly following corrupt modern society and have no real knowledge of or regard for the teachings of Holy Scripture.

Position of the "Right":

- We are trying to live our lives and conform our minds and our doctrine according to the clear teachings of Holy Scripture. Without exception, the Scriptures condemn homosexual behavior as a very serious sin.
- 2. We do not believe that there is any credible scientific evidence that homosexual attraction is a genetically inborn trait and we do not believe that God would condemn as a sin that which people had no choice in making.
- 3. Those who experience same-sex attraction should seek counseling and prayer to overcome what the Bible condemns. While perfection is not required for salvation (for none of us are perfect), sincere repentance from sin (not acceptance of it) is required of all those who accept God's offer of forgiveness in Jesus Christ. For the sincere in heart, God will supply the strength through the Holy Spirit to overcome sin, or at least fight against it with all one's might, as we seek His salvation. Like the alcoholic who falls many times but is determined to seek God's strength every day, so the homosexual must fight the good fight and carry his cross. We all have crosses to bear and Christ's love and power are sufficient for all who seek Him.

Mischaracterization of the "Right" by the "Left":

- 1. They are anti-intellectual, distrustful of and ignorant of modern science.
- 2. They are bigots in general, and "gay haters" in particular.

EMBRACING THE WIDER CIRCLE OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

Life in this transitory world may be compared to the flight of a stone thrown into a pond. It begins with elements of the earth set in motion, feeling the effects of Wind (pneuma-spirit) and water, affected by each along its flight path but eventually returning to the earth from whence it came. To some, the flight is meaningless - a simple movement from the damp shoreline sand to the mud at the bottom of the pond - without purpose.

Some indeed view the individual human life in this way: "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes..." and some others, those of us who have faith, see much more - a new life that seems to begin fresh journeys in all directions upon entering the water. One must needs be blind indeed to fail to notice the climax of the entire thing as the stillness of the water is set into motion as the stone enters the stillness - causing a growing set of concentric rings which affect everything until the very shores where it all began are lapped with the news that something meaningful has occurred.

So it is with our lives. We begin in isolation - or so it seems - unable to distinguish our own selves from the world about us. But soon, very soon, we notice that some things are under our control (our hands before our eyes, etc.) while other things are stationary. Still others seem to rise and serve at our command - we will soon come to know "Mother." And so, the "self" is born in our minds and almost immediately we find ourselves in a context - within the first ring of concentric waves that radiate outward from our lives and now include a precious other - our own mother. This first foray into the larger world is perhaps the most profound and meaningful outward expansion our minds and hearts will ever experience, enriching our lives beyond comprehension or measure. Yet, with the broadening horizon, comes a measure of challenge and, inevitably, tension. And so, the stage is set for the two-year-old's tantrum and the oft-repeated, defiant mantra "No!" ~ Mother and child are at odds.

As life continues, if we are so blessed, there will be many more expansions filled with enrichment, blessings, and joyful discovery, together with new tensions - whether they be arguments or disagreements, some of which are blessings in disguise because they lead us to new discoveries, the most amazing of which is the realization that we have been wrong, or that our previously-limited experience was insufficient to properly grasp the full nature of what we are now experiencing.

And so it goes ... new circles radiating outward, as our life encompasses father, brother, sister, friends, schoolmates, teachers, the police, colleagues, husband, wife, offspring, grandchildren ... it seems endless - each new circle bringing incredible enrichment together with a new degree of tension, whether it be disagreement, challenge, or opposition.

In our faith journey as Presbyterians, we also experience ever-expanding circles of enrichment, engagement, as well as challenge and controversy. From the church nursery, to the primary Sunday School class, to the youth group - ever growing in experience, understanding, and fellowship: new friends, new joys, together with new conflicts, whether it's fighting over a toy in the nursery, or over a text message circulating among the youth group - new joys, new challenges, new life at every turn. And it would be a sad soul indeed who deemed the ever-expanding circles to be a net loss. On the contrary, in spite of many new challenges and disagreements, each new circle represents an amazing grace-filled new day of God's generosity and love.

As adult Presbyterians, our circle grows to include the Session, the Presbytery, the Synod and the national and international engagement known as General Assembly. As with all previous expansions of our experience and consciousness, new joys, new realizations, new controversies, new demands for tolerance, understanding, and compromise - making room for others with whom we disagree.

At the denominational level, this is even more true of Presbyterians than almost any other Christian organization. In fact, in some ways we are not really a denomination at all - at least not in the way people understand the role of their denomination in other faith traditions. Wherever possible, decisions and policy prescriptions usually handled and defined at the denominational level are, in the Presbyterian Church, delegated to the local Session as they are led by the Holy Spirit, the denomination serving as more of a mission agency than a monolithic emblem of unanimity. Christians of most other denominations never encounter the diversity of opinion and perspective we experience in our own ranks until they interact at the level of the National Council of Churches or the World Council of Churches.

As Presbyterians, we join together to celebrate and explore the faith "common to all Christians." If you can agree to the Apostles' Creed, you can be a Presbyterian. If you want to be more involved, if you can get along with others, if you can agree to the Nicene Creed, you will likely qualify to be a leader among us - an Elder or a Deacon. That potentially includes a wide diversity of people brought together in common purpose and endeavor, each bringing a unique blend of gifts and life experience to the table and together impacting the world in an amazing witness to Jesus Christ.

A wide circle indeed, wide enough to lap the very shores of the kingdom of God, wide enough to envelop incomprehensible, seemingly-endless opportunities for enrichment and joyful service and fellowship, and certainly wide enough to offer many instances for disagreement and tension.

I consider it all a great gift which I invite you to embrace and celebrate with me. I reach out and appeal to those of you who see this glass "half-empty," and I ask you, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, to open your eyes, your minds, and your hearts to the wonder and richness of what God has given us.

In Christ's Love and Grace,

Ron Lavoie

Executive Presbyter/Stated Clerk Kendall Presbytery



Presbyterian Church EPC Roswell, Idaho

Sterry Memorial Presbyterian Church in Roswell, ID transferred from Boise Presbytery to EPC in 2012. Mark Cox has pastored Sterry Memorial for the past nine years. Mark Cox was formerly pastor of Living Waters Presbyterian Church in Wendell, ID.

Sandra Bartles was and is the Clerk of Session for Sterry Memorial. We participated in the Mission Unit Coordinating Committee of the three Presbyterys of Boise, Eastern Oregon and Kendall.

Sandra reports that it is an absolutely wonderful experience to be part of EPC in particular the Presbytery connections. Her previous experience with Boise Presbytery was that every thing was prearranged and local church had very little say particularly her small (183 member) church. Boise Presbytery meetings were dominated by many active and retired pastors.

EPC Presbytery meetings have better representation with required two lay persons and one pastor from every congregation of the Presbytery. Sandra reports that she felt really listened to when she spoke at the EPC Presbytery meeting and she came away from the first meeting impressed by the praying and laughing. She said that every report was begun with prayer.

Sandra has been to an EPC General Assembly meeting where again each church (not Presbytery) is required to be represented by two lay persons and one pastor.

She says that the process for transfer took about 9 months from the time of congregation decision to transfer in 2012. The congregation was assessed about half of the property value and chose to pay rather than go to court as another Boise Presbytery congregation is doing. 97% of the Sterry Memorial congregation has stayed.

Pension fund is the pastors but is not quite as good as the PCUSA pension program

Presbyterian Church EPC Wendell, Idaho

Living Waters Presbyterian Church in Wendell, ID transferred to EPC in 2012. They are now pastored by Keven Anderson a long time member of Kendall Presbytery at his former pastorate of Valley Presbyterian Church in Hazelton, ID. Hazelton transferred to EPC in September 2014.

I spoke by with a long time friend Deb May about Wendell's transfer. Deb is a deacon in the Wendell EPC church.

EPC was a distinct fit for the congregation in Wendell. The congregation established a task force to research all the possibilities. (This full report is in documents collected)

Deb reports that it is going really well but there are not as many members as the church would like. Wendell is now developing different ways of doing things. A lot of people did leave but Deb states that this is for a whole variety of reasons.

Her great joy is the difference in EPC Presbytery meetings compared to Kendall Presbytery meetings. She notes how worshipful the meetings are including frequent stops to pray about reports or concerns.

Presbyterian Church ECO Jerome, ID

The Presbyterian Church in Jerome, ID transferred to the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians about 2011. They have been pastored from before this transfer by Nate Dreesman.

I spoke with Linda Gray an elder leader of this church by phone. Linda is currently serving on the national ECO board.

She reports that the Jerome church is very actively following the mission of ECO to baptize more members than they bury. The Jerome congregation found the ECO vision was appealing. The Confessions and Reformed nature are strong components of ECO. Church planting is a main direction used to acquire new members. With the backing of ECO and PCUSA Jerome is sponsoring a certified church planter in Bend, OR and are looking toward doing a local church planting in the near future.

The Jerome church looked at but did not choose the EPC church primarily due to concerns regarding women in leadership. Yes women leaders were permitted in EPC but were not felt to be partners and the Jerome church felt this would become a divisive issue in the near future. They did not want to go through this change again.

The Jerome church has experienced about a 30% growth in giving and membership. Now have 53 children under the 6th grade compared to 10 to 15 five years ago. They have expanded to a 2 service format with the early service nontraditional and the later service traditional. There are also Saturday evening and Sunday evening lay lead services. This growth in members also is shown in increased giving.

Missional outreach is more evident both locally and internationally Linda reports.

Several times during our conversation Linda favorably compared Jerome with activities and programs that have been ongoing with PCBW like weekly free meal and multiple group activity at church plus the Zambia mission support and work groups.