

February 2, 2011

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

To say the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is deathly ill is not editorializing but acknowledging reality. Over the past year, a group of PC(USA) pastors has become convinced that to remain locked in unending controversy will only continue a slow demise, dishonor our calling, and offer a poor legacy to those we hope will follow us. We recently met in Phoenix, and have grown in number and commitment. We humbly share responsibility for the failure of our common life, and are no better as pastors nor more righteous than anyone on other sides of tough issues.

Our denomination has been in steady decline for 45 years, now literally half the size of a generation ago. Most congregations see far more funerals than infant baptisms because we are an aging denomination. Only 1,500 of our 5,439 smallest churches have an installed pastor, putting their future viability as congregations in doubt. Even many larger congregations, which grew well for decades, have hit a season of plateau or decline. Our governing bodies reflect these trends, losing financial strength, staffing, and viability as presbyteries, synods, and national offices.

How we got to this place is less important than how to move forward. We are determined to get past rancorous, draining internal disputes that paralyze our common life and ministry. We believe the PC(USA) will not survive without drastic intervention, and stand ready to DO something different, to thrive as the Body of Christ. We call others of like mind to envision a new future for congregations that share our Presbyterian, Reformed, Evangelical heritage. If the denomination has the ability and will to move in this new direction, we will rejoice. Regardless, a group of us will change course, forming a new way for our congregations to relate. We hate the appearance of schism – but the PC(USA) is divided already. Our proposal only acknowledges the fractured denomination we have become.

Homosexual ordination has been the flashpoint of controversy for the last 35 years. Yet, that issue — with endless, contentious “yes” and “no” votes — masks deeper, more important divisions within the PC(USA). Our divisions revolve around differing understandings of Scripture, authority, Christology, the extent of salvation amidst creeping universalism, and a broader set of moral issues. Outside of presbytery meetings, we mostly exist in separate worlds, with opposing sides reading different books and journals, attending different conferences, and supporting different causes. There is no longer common understanding of what is meant by being “Reformed.” Indeed, many sense that the only unity we have left is contained in the property clause and the pension plan; some feel like withholding per capita is a club used against them, while others feel locked into institutional captivity by property.

While everyone wearies of battles over ordination, these battles divert us from a host of issues that affect the way our congregations fail to attract either young believers or those outside the faith. Thus, we age, shrink, and become increasingly irrelevant. Is it time to acknowledge that traditional denominations like the PC(USA) have served in their day but now must be radically transformed?

We need something new, characterized by:

1. **A clear, concise theological core** to which we subscribe, within classic biblical, Reformed/Evangelical traditions, and a pledge to live according to those beliefs, regardless of cultural pressures to conform;
2. **A commitment to nurture leadership** in local congregations, which we believe is a primary expression of the Kingdom of God. We will identify, develop, and train a new generation of leaders – clergy and laity;
3. **A passion to share in the larger mission of the people of God** around the world, especially among the least, the lost, and the left behind;
4. **A dream of multiplying healthy, missional communities** throughout North America;
5. **A pattern of fellowship** reflecting the realities of our scattered life and joint mission, with regular gatherings locally, regionally, and nationally to excite our ability to dream together.

Our values include:

1. A **minimalist structure**, replacing bureaucracy and most rules with relational networks of common purpose;
2. **Property and assets under stewardship of the local Session.** Dues/Gifts for common administration should only allow and enable continued affiliation among these congregations;
3. Rather than large institutions, **joint ventures with specialized ministries** as congregations deem helpful [PC(USA) World Mission may be a source of joint support, aspects of the Board of Pensions, Presbyterian Foundation, Presbyterian Global Fellowship, Presbyterians for Renewal conferences, Outreach Foundation, etc.];
4. **An atmosphere of support** for congregations both within and outside of the PC(USA).

We invite like-minded pastors and elders to a **gathering on August 25-27 in Minneapolis** to explore joining this movement and help shape its character. Our purpose is to LIVE INTO new patterns as they are created, modeling a way of faith: the worship, supportive fellowship, sharing of best practices, and accessible theology that brings unity and the Spirit's vitality.

OUR PROPOSAL:

1) A Fellowship: The most immediate change we intend is creating a new way of relating in common faith, a *Fellowship* (name to be determined). The primary purpose of this *Fellowship* will be the encouragement of local congregations to live out the Good News proclaimed by our Savior, increasing the impact of the Kingdom of Heaven. This *Fellowship* will exist within current presbyteries for the time being, but energies and resources will flow in new directions. It is an intermediate tool to bring together like-minded congregations and pastors, to enable us to build a future different than our fractured present.

2) New Synod/Presbyteries: In the near future we will need “middle bodies” that offer freedom to express historical, biblical values amid ordination changes in the PC(USA). More importantly, we long for presbytery-like bodies with theological and missional consensus rather than fundamental disagreement over so many core issues. We need new processes that identify and support the next generation of leadership differently than the current model, which unintentionally weeds out the entrepreneurial persons we so desperately need in our congregations. Many current functions should be removed; some, like curriculum and mission relationships, have become less centralized already. We will work with the Middle Governing Bodies Commission since changes to The Book of Order will be needed to step fully into this reality.

3) Possible New Reformed Body: Congregations and presbyteries that remain in a denomination that fundamentally changes will become an insurmountable problem for many. Some members of the *Fellowship* will need an entity apart from the current PC(USA). It is likely that a new body will need to be created, beyond the boundary of the current PC(USA), while remaining in correspondence with its congregations. The wall between these partner Reformed bodies will be permeable, allowing congregations and pastors to be members in the *Fellowship* regardless of denominational affiliation. All kinds of possibilities exist, and much will depend on how supportive the PC(USA) can be in allowing something new to flourish.

4) Possible Reconfiguration of the PC(USA): We intend to continue conversations within the PC(USA), and have met with both Louisville’s leadership and that of the Covenant Network in the past few months. We believe the denomination no longer provides a viable future and perceive that the Covenant Network also sees a broken system. We hope to work together to see if some new alignment might serve the whole Church.

Any model that includes an entity outside the PC(USA) does mean fewer remaining congregations, pastors, and elders to fight the challenges of the current PC(USA).

Votes will swing in directions that had not been desirable before. For many this outcome simply acknowledges that fighting is not the way we choose to proceed; our goal is not institutional survival but effective faithfulness as full participants in the worldwide Church. We hope to discover and model what a new “Reformed body” looks like in the coming years, and we invite you to join us, stepping faithfully, boldly, and joyfully into the work for which God has called us.

For more information, visit our temporary webpage at www.cpconline.org/fellowship_pcusa or contact us at fellowshippcusa@gmail.com.

Steering Committee:*

Vic Pentz, Peachtree Presbyterian, Atlanta, GA
John Crosby, Christ Presbyterian, Edina, MN
David Peterson, Memorial Drive Presbyterian, Houston, TX
Jim Singleton, First Presbyterian, Colorado Springs, CO
David Swanson, First Presbyterian, Orlando, FL
Rich Kannwischer, St. Andrews, Newport Beach, CA
Mark Toone, Chapel Hill Presbyterian, Gig Harbor, WA

Concurring Pastors:*

G. Christopher Scruggs, Advent Presbyterian, Cordova, TN
Mark Brewer, Bel Air Presbyterian, Los Angeles, CA
Allan Poole, Blacknall Memorial Presbyterian, Durham, NC
Rick Murray, Covenant Presbyterian, Austin, TX
Tim Harrison, Crossroads Presbyterian, Mequon, WI
Bob Burkins, Elmwood United Presbyterian, East Orange, NJ
Doug Pratt, First Presbyterian, Bonita Springs, FL
Mateen Ellass, First Presbyterian, Edmond, OK
Rich McDermott, First Presbyterian, Fort Collins, CO
Richard Gibbons, First Presbyterian, Greenville, SC
Dan Baumgartner, First Presbyterian, Hollywood, CA
Jim Birchfield, First Presbyterian, Houston, TX
Jim Davis, First Presbyterian, Kingwood, TX
Jerry Andrews, First Presbyterian, San Diego, CA
John Sowers, First Presbyterian, Spokane, WA
Jim Miller, First Presbyterian, Tulsa, OK
Jack Peebles, First Presbyterian, Yakima, WA
Don Baird, Fremont Presbyterian, Sacramento, CA
Doug Ferguson, Grace Presbyterian, Houston, TX
Bill Teng, Heritage Presbyterian, Alexandria, VA
Ronald W. Scates, Highland Park Presbyterian, Dallas, TX

David Lenz, Hope Presbyterian, Richfield, MN
Paul A. Cunningham, La Jolla Presbyterian, La Jolla, CA
Bob Sanders, Lake Grove Presbyterian, Lake Oswego, OR
Kevin Pound, Mandarin Presbyterian, Jacksonville, FL
John Ortberg, Menlo Park Presbyterian, Menlo Park, CA
Jeff Ebert, Presbyterian Church at New Providence, New Providence, NJ
Douglas Garrard, Palm Desert Community Presbyterian, Palm Desert, CA
Paul Detterman, Presbyterians for Renewal, Louisville, KY
Mike McClenahan, Solana Beach Presbyterian, Solana Beach, CA
Steve Hartman, Third Presbyterian, Richmond, VA
David Joynt, Presbyterian Church of Toms River, Toms River, NJ
Douglas J. Rumford, Trinity United Presbyterian, Santa Ana, CA
Patrick H. Wisley, University Place Presbyterian, University Place, WA
George Hinman (Senior Pastor) and Tim Snow (Executive Pastor), University
Presbyterian, Seattle, WA
Peter Barnes, Westlake Hills Presbyterian, Austin, TX
Baron Eliason, Westminster Presbyterian, Lubbock, TX

**Signatories represent themselves, not necessarily the Session or congregation of their respective churches.*

The White Paper:

Time for Something New

White Paper

January 7, 2011

Conflict has debilitated the PCUSA. A group of pastors has become convinced that remaining locked in unending controversy will continue a slow demise, dishonoring our calling, offering a poor legacy to those we hope will follow us. We humbly share responsibility for the failure of our storied denomination. We are no better as pastors and no more righteous than anyone on the other side of issues. We have tolerated what we regard as theological error and biblical drift far too long, hoping something would change for the better. How we got to this sad place becomes less important than how to move forward.

We are determined to get past rancorous, draining internal disputes that paralyze a common life. ***We believe we will not survive without drastic intervention. We are ready to do something different, TO THRIVE as the Body of Christ. We call others of like mind to envision a new future for congregations who share our Presbyterian, Reformed, Evangelical heritage. If the denomination has the ability and will to move in this new direction, we will rejoice. Regardless, a group of us will change course, forming a new way for our congregations to relate.*** We are excited about how God wants us to engage in ministry to the world. We hate the thought of being schismatic – but the PCUSA is in a state of division already. This proposal only acknowledges the sadly divided denomination we have become.

THE SITUATION: The PCUSA is in trouble on many fronts. The denomination has been in steady decline for 45 years, and virtually every meaningful statistical category is down. When the numbers are in for 2010, we will certainly have less than 2 million members (2009 – 2,077,138 members). Baptisms of infants are less than half of what they were at reunion – reflecting a dramatic loss of young adults. Most congregations see far more funerals than infant baptisms because we are an aging denomination. Most PCUSA congregations are gradually growing smaller and smaller. Our “Wee Kirks” (less than 100 members) now account for 51% of our congregation. Only 1,500 of those 5,439 small congregations have an installed pastor, and their future viability as congregations is in doubt. We start precious few new congregations, averaging only 20 new congregations over the past 5 years. Even many larger congregations, which grew well for decades, have hit a season of plateau or decline. Presbyterians did well in attracting the “Builder” generation (born prior to 1946), but with each succeeding generation we have struggled to draw them into our congregations. People still join our congregations, but they then disappear. Since reunion we have moved over 2.5 million members to our inactive rolls.

Many Presbyteries and Synods are in financial difficulties. Aid-receiving Presbyteries are soon to lose that aid and likely lose significant staff. The way those courts of the church have functioned is soon to change. The GA has reduced staff steadily for the past 10 years. These reductions seem to signal a loss of trust within most of the PCUSA. It is very hard to measure the future effectiveness of the emerging leadership in the PCUSA, given how few are under 40 years of age, it seems likely that it will be smaller than the generation now retiring.

The issue of homosexual ordination has been the flashpoint of controversy for the last 35 years. Yet, that issue – with its contentious “yes” and “no” votes - masks the more important issues that the PCUSA faces. Those larger, more nuanced issues revolve around differing understanding of scripture, authority, Christology (both the

person and the work of Christ), the extent of salvation (creeping universalism), and a broader set of moral issues around which fracture lines appear. There are deep divisions within the PCUSA; opposing sides read different books and journals, attend different conferences, and support different causes. There is no longer a common understanding of what is meant by being “Reformed.” There is a growing sense that the only unity we have left is contained in the property clause and the pension plan. Some feel like per capita is a club used against them, while others feel locked into institutional captivity by the property clause. Outside of Presbytery meetings, we mostly exist in separate worlds. While everyone wearies of the battles over ordination, these battles divert us from a host of issues that affect the way our denomination fails to attract either young believers or those outside the faith. Thus, we age and shrink and become increasingly irrelevant.

Certainly none of these issues are unique to the PCUSA, but are all part of larger cultural forces. But what is the way forward? Is there a future beyond the decline as yet unseen? Is there a way to avoid endless fights, to regain consensus on the essence of the Christian faith? We see no plan coming from any quarter, leaving a continued drift into obsolescence.

We recognize that there are still islands of hope across the church, but they do not seem to represent a movement. Many faithful groups and organizations have been devoted to the renewal of the PCUSA, and they have offered valuable ministry for many years. Yet it appears they have simply helped slow down a larger story of decline. Is it time to acknowledge that something in the PCUSA system is dying?

We need something new, characterized by **Passions and Values**:

1. A **united theological core** to which we subscribe, aligned with classic biblical, Reformed/ Evangelical tradition, and a pledge to live according to those beliefs, regardless of cultural pressures to conform.
2. A commitment to **nurture leadership** in local congregations, which we believe is the primary locus of the expression of the Kingdom of God. We will identify, develop, and train a new generation of leaders – both clergy and laity.
3. A passion to share in the **larger Mission of the people of God** around the world, especially among the least, the lost, and the left behind.
4. A dream of **multiplying healthy communities** of faith throughout North America
5. A pattern of fellowship reflecting the realities of our scattered life and joint mission, through regular gatherings locally, regionally and nationally, which excite our ability to dream together.

Values:

1. A minimalist governmental structure
2. Clarity on property issues – property and assets to reside under the stewardship of the local Session. Dues/Gifts for common administration should allow and enable continued affiliation among these congregations.
3. Rather than large institutional structures, we propose joint ventures with specialized ministries as congregations deem helpful (current PCUSA Missions may be a source of joint support, aspects of the Board of Pensions, Presbyterian Foundation, PFR conferences, Outreach Foundation, etc).
4. An atmosphere of support for congregations both within and without the PCUSA.

PROPOSAL: We offer three options to consider, and suggest we pursue each concurrently.

1) An Association of Congregations

The most immediate thing we can do is to form an Association of Presbyterian Churches to join together pastors, elders, congregations, and believers, who affirm our historic confessions with integrity. ***The primary purpose of this association will be the encouragement of local churches to live out the good news proclaimed by our Savior, increasing the impact of the Kingdom of Heaven.*** We long for a church where the Bible is seen through a common lens. We yearn for gatherings of Spirit-inspired congregations in common Mission. We must re-engage the culture with the life-giving good news of the Gospel, and long for a church willing to stand for truth despite the cries of the culture to accommodate. We long for a church that is alive to the winds of the Holy Spirit in our midst. We long for relationships with colleagues built upon trust and common vision. We long to support churches of all sizes and focus on leadership development at all levels of the church. We expect to see a denomination that encourages racial-ethnic congregations to express their faith in creative ways within their cultural contexts. We anticipate great connection to our Global Mission partners who have been bewildered at the drift in our current expressions.

An Association will still exist within our current Presbyteries for the time being, but energies and resources will begin to flow in new directions. In many ways this association may resemble some of the voluntary organizations of the past (PGF, PFR, etc.) but it is only a way station to something else. It is an intermediate tool to begin to bring together like minded congregations and pastors to begin the work of another future, different than the current PCUSA.

2) New Synod/Presbyteries

In the near future we will need a place within the PCUSA to exist with freedom to express our values with a freedom from the expected ordination changes that will exist in the PCUSA. More importantly, we long for Presbyteries where we have theological and missional consensus rather than fundamental disagreement over so many core issues of theology. We need COM and CPM functions that express who we are. We recognize that invitation to the next generation of leadership must be structured differently than the current model, which unintentionally weeds out entrepreneurial persons desperately needed for tomorrow's church. Beyond those functions, much of the planning of how the Synod/Presbyteries will depend upon how many congregations join together. Many functions, like curriculum and mission relationships, have become less centralized already. We will begin work with the Middle Governing Bodies Commission, searching for ways to be this new entity within the PCUSA. Likely several changes to *The Book of Order* will be needed to step fully into this reality.

3) Possible New Reformed Body

New Presbyteries that still remain in a denomination which enacts change we strongly oppose may be an insurmountable problem for many. Some members of our Association will feel the need for an entity apart from the current PCUSA. Hence, it is likely that a new body will need to be created which can exist beyond the boundary of the PCUSA, but which could remain in correspondence with the PCUSA.

We believe it may be possible for a New Body outside the bounds of the PCUSA to relate to a new Synod. We want to have strong and historic linkages with any departing congregations. Whatever structure emerges, we will strive to serve congregations which today are in the PCUSA. While a strong confessional stance will connect these "in" and "out" congregations, the wall between will be permeable and allow congregations to be participants in the association and supportive of it even if not a full member. All kinds of possibilities exist, and much will depend on how supportive the PCUSA can be in allowing something new to exist without punitive action.

4) Re-Creation of the PCUSA

While each of the 3 proposals above may prove to be our next steps, we intend to continue conversations with other groups within the PCUSA to consider re-making the whole thing. We think the denomination no longer provides a viable future. We know that the Covenant Network also sees a broken system for different reasons. We will work together on the longer and more difficult project of seeing how something new might serve the whole church.

Short Term Goals:

1. Work with the MGB Commission to explore ways of being in new Synod/Presbyteries.
2. Plan an Event in August 2011 to begin to draw together the like-hearted (August 25-27, 2011?)
3. Work with different constituencies to reverse the Property clause toward the goal of easing exit.
4. Appeal to the Board of Pension to delay their current discussion of the extension of benefits while we remain deeply divided on the issue.
5. Support current standards for ordination, while believing neither short-term victory nor defeat are signs this impasse will be resolved by voting.

Conclusion:

Any model that includes an entity outside the PCUSA does mean fewer remaining congregations, pastors and elders to fight the challenges of the PCUSA. Votes will swing in directions which had not been desirable before. For many this is a simple acknowledgement that fighting is not the way we choose to proceed. We hope to discover and model what a new "Reformed body" might look like in the coming years. Our goal is not institutional survival but effective faithfulness, fully participating in the world-wide church. We invite you to consider joining us, stepping faithfully, boldly and joyfully into the work for which God has called us.

We propose this change with regret, despising division and all it entails in witness to the world, but with excitement at what may emerge. We are not angry, and share responsibility for the rupture of fellowship. We have allowed a "broadening" church for so long that health has left us, and together we must re-discover our calling and identity in Christ. We firmly believe the best days of Christ's church are ahead. We believe that attaining a degree of separation may allow growth to begin again. Each side of the church is hurt by the fighting. In our role as God's ambassadors of reconciliation, may the world see the love of God! May God be glorified, and bless this Church.

2010 Book of Order Amendments
Advice from the Bills and Overtures Committee

Amendment	Argument Supporting	Argument Opposing	Implication of Passing	My Vote
Part One				
10-1 New Form of Government	--this simplifies and grants more flexibility to the church --the new document gives greater freedom to governing bodies to establish policies and procedures for their work, which best suits their needs	--the replacement does not improve functionality of the denomination or its churches --it is not appropriate to make our polity more missional and less restrictive	This would put a less restrictive, more missional polity in place for the Presbyterian Church	
Part Two				
10-2 Confession of Belhar	--this confession faithfully addresses questions of unity confronting the Presbyterian Church --it provides a non-American/European faith statement to the Book of Confessions	--no additional confession of faith is needed by the PCUSA at this time --the confession already plays an instructional role in our church and does not need the status of inclusion in the Book of Confessions	This would add another faith statement to the Book of Confessions which underlines inclusion and justice in our common life.	
10-A Gifts and Requirements On Amending G-6.0106b	--this change eliminates the troublesome fidelity and chastity provision that, among other things, blocks otherwise qualified candidates from ordained office	--this change weakens ordination standards which would open the door of ordination to persons of engaged in unrepentant sinful lifestyles	This would ease the way toward avowed, practicing gay and lesbian persons being ordained in the PCUSA	

Amendment	Argument Supporting	Argument Opposing	Implication of Passing	My Vote
<p>10-B</p> <p>Removing Stated Clerk or Clerk of Session</p> <p>On Amending G-9.0203</p>	<p>--provides recourse to a governing body if an officer, moderator or stated clerk, is alleged to have failed to carry out the duties and responsibilities of their office</p>	<p>--this amendment abridges the primary relationship between a church officer and the electing body</p>	<p>This would make it possible for non-functioning officers to be replaced by people who will perform duties appropriately</p>	
<p>10-C</p> <p>Requiring Sexual Misconduct Policy</p> <p>On Amending G-9.0404e</p>	<p>--strengthens the protections of sexual misconduct policies to all judicatories</p> <p>--brings uniformity of practice to the entire church</p> <p>--emphasizes the importance of responding and eliminating sexual misconduct</p>	<p>--abridges a governing body's prerogative to determine its own needs and establish its own policies</p>	<p>Provides for uniform practice across the church of having a policies that state the prohibited behavior , prevention, reporting, and response procedures for sexual misconduct.</p>	
<p>10-D</p> <p>Nominating Committees</p> <p>On Amending G-9.0801a</p>	<p>--enhances representation in presbytery offices and committees without resort to rigid formula</p>	<p>--the proposal is too general and allows for one group to occupy offices irrespective of its proportion in the body's membership</p>	<p>Allows the Presbyterian church to take the next step in balancing leadership by including all constituencies in the membership</p>	
<p>10-E</p> <p>Presbytery Rolls and Registers</p> <p>On Amending G-11.0407</p>	<p>--assures that presbytery rolls and registers, and hence, the Office of the General Assembly has a complete and accurate accounting of all commissioned lay pastors</p>	<p>--lay pastors and their work need to be kept on the rolls of individual congregations</p>	<p>This is a logical change that accompanies the denomination's efforts to locate and report on the work of all lay pastors laboring in the bounds of each presbytery.</p>	

Amendment	Argument Supporting	Argument Opposing	Implication of Passing	My Vote
<p>10-F Certified Christian Educators On Amending G-11.0407</p>	<p>--clarifies that Christian educators who are granted voice and vote in presbytery meetings are only those who are actively serving in an educational ministry under the jurisdiction of the presbytery</p> <p>--prevents to possibility of Christian Educators who are not members of the Presbyterian Church from having privileges of the floor at Presbytery meetings</p>	<p>--retains the original sweeping freedom for Christian educators to participate in presbytery meetings</p>	<p>This retains more of the historical Presbyterian polity tradition of governance by pastors and elders.</p>	
<p>10-G Synod Function On Amending G-12.0100</p>	<p>--enables synods to decide, with the approval of a two-thirds majority of its presbyteries, to reduce its function</p>	<p>--retains more traditional, uniform synod functioning</p>	<p>This is a move toward a flexible reduction of the role of synods in the denomination</p>	
<p>10-H Nominations Process On Amending G-13.0108, G-13.0111a, G-13.0202b</p>	<p>Similar to 10-D this removes the rigid formula from governing representation on the General Assembly</p> <p>Committee on representation, the General Assembly Nominating Committee, and the General Assembly Mission Council.</p>	<p>--the proposal is too general and allows for one group to occupy offices irrespective of its proportion in the body's membership</p>	<p>Allows the Presbyterian church at the General Assembly level to take the next step in balancing leadership by including all constituencies in the membership</p>	

Amendment	Argument Supporting	Argument Opposing	Implication of Passing	My Vote
10-I Prayer Added to Ordination and Installation Services On Amending W-4.4003, W-4004, and W-4.4006	--corrects the omission of a specific commitment to pray for ordained/installed persons. Nowhere in our services of ordination and/or installation do either members or officers commit to do so.	--the proposal is unnecessary because the importance of prayer by the worshippers for the ordained/installed person is obvious	This provision makes the commitment on the part of worshippers to pray for the person being ordained	
10-J Stay of Enforcement On Amending D-6.0103	--prevents stays of enforcement from having disproportionate role in remedial cases --deprives stated clerks from circumventing will of the Permanent Judicial Commission	--insures that enforcement of judgments in remedial cases are final before enforcement is implemented	provides for challenge to stay of enforcement rulings in remedial cases	
10-K Preliminary Questions On Amending D-6.006, D-8.032, D-13.0302	--retains the capacity of moderators or clerks to dismiss unfounded disciplinary actions	none	This measure makes final the preliminary findings of the clerk or moderator in remedial cases	
10-L Reviewing Work of Investigating Committee On Amending D-10.0202	--prevents harassment of person charged with repeated allegations --brings closure to disciplinary cases upon judgment.		This addition clarifies the role of the investigating committee in preventing repetitive allegations against one person for the purpose of harassment	
10-M Time Limit On Amending D-10.0401				

Amendment	Argument Supporting	Argument Opposing	Implication of Passing	My Vote
10-N Appeal of “Not Guilty” Verdict On Amending D-13.0102 and D-13.0106				
10-O Decision of Permanent Judicial Commission On Amending D-13.0404				

MINNEAPOLIS

With a 50-vote margin (373-323-4), the 219th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approved an overture from the Presbytery of the Western Reserve that would amend the so-called “fidelity and chastity clause” of the Book of Order (G-6.0106b).

The amendment will now go back to presbyteries, where a majority of the 173 presbyteries must approve it for the change to make it into the Book of Order.

Ordaining and installing governing bodies have the responsibility of determining if candidates meet the standards for office. According to the overture, candidates are to be examined based on calling, gifts, preparation and suitability. Governing bodies, guided by Scripture and the confessions, would also determine candidates’ ability and commitment to fulfilling requirements stated in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation.

Speaking in favor of the overture, the Rev. John Vest (Presbytery of Chicago) said the PC(USA) must change its Constitution to move forward. The overture does more than just remove language – it adds language that is just and constitutional, he said. Ordination examinations should be “vigorous and robust.”

The Rev. William Reid Dalton III (Salem Presbytery) opposed the overture. With the GA’s approval of the Belhar Confession and the new Form of Government, presbyteries already have much to discuss, he said.

The assembly rejected a minority report from the Church Orders and Ministry Committee, which considered overtures related to ordination standards. The report called for a pastoral letter to be sent to sessions and for the reversal of authoritative interpretation issued at the 218th GA (2008).

In other business, the assembly approved an overture affirming the role of certified Christian educators. The overture directs presbyteries to give certified Christian educators and certified associate Christian educators voice only, and certified Christian educators who are also ordained elders voice and vote, while they serve under the jurisdiction of the presbytery.

The committee also approved an overture calling for an evaluation of the PC(USA)’s call system to find ways to shorten the amount of time that churches seeking a pastor are without one.

At a press conference following the assembly’s vote, committee moderator elder Theresa Denton said she’d like conversations about ordination standards to be about trust rather than fear or

anxiety. She said she doesn't see the proposed amendment as a move toward lowered standards, but toward increasingly higher ones that look at the totality of a candidate's life.

Elder Cindy Bolbach, Moderator of the 219th GA, said she believes that, for the most part, people are committed to staying in the conversation.

"It's the ties of the heart that bind us together ... even as we deal with this particular issue," she said.

MINNEAPOLIS

A summary of the 219th General Assembly's action to approve the new Form of Government:

What happened? What changed?

The General Assembly voted to recommend a revised Form of Government to the presbyteries by a vote of 468 in favor, 204 against, and 6 abstentions — a 70%-30% margin. The new Form of Government includes:

- Foundations of Presbyterian Polity — the principles that are foundational to government, worship, and discipline for the PC(USA) — preserves the vast majority of the material in the first four chapters of the current Form of Government.
- Form of Government — in six chapters, which spells out the constitutional framework for government of the PC(USA) as it seeks to respond to God's call to life in mission.
- Advisory Handbook for Councils for the Development of Policies and Procedures — required by the Form of Government as an aid to councils (governing bodies) of the church for developing the policies and procedures to carry out their mission.

Nothing has changed until a majority of presbyteries vote to approve this new Form of Government. Voting must be completed by July 10, 2011, and if affirmative, the new Book of Order would take effect the next day.

What does it mean?

The current Form of Government has served the church ably over the past quarter century. The bedrock historic principles of Presbyterian governance will continue to order our lives together today and into the future, just as they have guided those who witnessed before us. At the same time, the world in which we as 21st-century Presbyterians proclaim the gospel is not the world of the 1950s, or even the 1980s. The proposed Foundations of Presbyterian Polity and Form of Government are intended to help the church better meet the needs of mission in the 21st century. The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity gathers together in three succinct chapters the historical and theological provisions that have defined, and continue to define, our church life together. Placing this bedrock material into a separate section of the *Book of Order* provides an excellent teaching tool to explain who and what we are. The current Form of Government has evolved over the years from a Constitution into a regulatory manual that attempts to provide a "one size fits all" answer to every situation faced by congregations and presbyteries. The problem with this regulatory approach is that the diverse, multicultural environment in which we do mission no longer permits a "one size fits all" approach if we are to do mission effectively. The proposed new Form of Government lifts up the constitutional standards that are essential to our life together, while at the same time empowering councils (governing bodies) at all levels to respond more effectively to the ministry and mission needs that each faces.

What's next?

The revised Form of Government must now be considered, and approved by a majority of presbyteries, before July 10, 2011, in order to replace the existing Form of Government.

Where can I learn more?

The document, as amended by the Assembly, is available now at the [PC-Biz website](#). A formatted version will be developed and made available online and in hard copy.