

Where Were You In '82?

A History of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Part 4 of 4 Parts

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Good Afternoon – and welcome back to our final time together.

APA LEVEL II Certification Course (Required)

PC (USA) HISTORY SINCE REUNION (1983) (5 hours)

- The Structure of the General Assembly, its units and other Entities
- The Structure of Presbyteries and Synods and their duties in the newly constituted church
- The Creeds/Confessions of our new denomination as well as important Policies established since 1983
- Names of current Stated Clerk, Moderator and other leaders of our Church
- Rationale for Reunion. **What has reunion produced that was impossible without Reunion?**
- Negative aspects of Reunion, i.e., losing churches and membership
- Other items as deemed necessary by the instructors
- Leader of this seminar should be “clergy” – sorry, you got me, instead.

We have this nagging last question to deal with today (a question we could have been asking for the last 28 years, I am afraid) ...

I have researched this question for you to see if the APA had something in mind – some secret response that would let them know whether you had paid attention in class or not.

Well, the APA staff came up with nothing – even wondering how it got into the 2011 Certification handbook for this course!

Past presenters were of little help, either – some (those clergy, by the way) were even interested to find that there was a list of suggested topics for the course.

In fact, no one could guess what APA had in mind ... so lets all take a shot at it:

Any suggestions?

Well, lets see if anything pops out of this period, ok?

This is the problems – and directions – block.

(ask the right questions)

What has the Reunion done for us?

- Healed a century-old wound (ok, a path to healing)
- Changed the landscape of American Presbyterianism
- Created the largest American Presbyterian denomination
- Created a “Big Tent” for a broad Presbyterian witness

What has the Reunion done *to* us?

- Created a very expensive, regulatory bureaucracy
- Continuous internal debate
- Continuing decline in membership
- Confusion over who and what we are / what we believe

As with anything, lets be sure to ask the right questions.

We have certainly seen these things today, eh?

Absorb slide.

Overview 4

HIS story – in the Context of YOUR story
How did we get to wherever we are?

Where are we now? -- and -- Who's Who in the Zoo?

- 2:30 p.m. – 3:45 p.m.

Where are we going? -- and -- What does it mean to me?

- What is bugging us now
- What has happened -- could happen
- So – what is to do?
- 3:45 p.m. We are done!

The Final Exam

Recall that our first three blocks we addressed –

- HIS story – in the Context of YOUR story
- How did we get to wherever we are?
- Where are we now? -- and -- Who's Who in the Zoo?

We turn now to:

Where are we going? -- and -- What does it mean to me?

- What is bugging us now
- What has happened -- could happen
- So – what is to do?

And the most important thing ... at 3:45 p.m. We are done

So lets jump right back in ...

Current controversies

GA speaks *to* the denomination – not *for* the denomination

- Scriptural interpretation and authority
- Homosexual ordination
- Property ownership
- Divestment from corporations operating in Israel
- Revision of Interfaith Relations resource on church anti-Jewish bias in materials related to Israeli-Palestinian conflict
- Etc., Etc., Etc.



As a handy guide – to help you keep your sanity when GA is in session – remember, “GA speaks *to* the denomination – not *for* the denomination”

Who speaks for the denomination? The presbyteries.

Here are a few of the modern controversies within our church ...

Underlying the bigger controversies always seems to be the first on the list –

- *fueled by our own nature* (remember Genesis 3 – the part where the snake said: “You will not surely die – you will become like God!”)
- *exacerbated in the seminaries* (higher critical interpretation just puts lipstick on the snake), and
- *it is still not resolved.*

Homosexual ordination

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is currently struggling with the issue of Biblical interpretation and faithfulness, particularly as it relates to homosexuality. Many Presbyterian scholars, pastors, and theologians have been heavily involved in the debate over homosexuality.

- Since 1980, the More Light Churches Network has served many

congregations and individuals within American Presbyterianism who take positions on the supportive side of this issue. 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 and support maintaining the conservatively-interpreted biblical standards of ordination. Remember how this issue heated up in the GA-actions timeline, this morning? Here is a bit more detail

General Assembly 2006

- 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, the Commissioners passed an "authoritative interpretation" of the *Book of Order* (the church constitution) which had been recommended by the Theological Task Force. 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 – but 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. A clear understanding of the effect of what the General Assembly voted upon in 2006 may have to wait until the ecclesiastical courts make decisions on specific cases.

General Assembly 2008

- 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. 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 or practice is sufficient to preclude ordination. 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." 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.

General Assembly 2010

- On July 8, 2010, by a vote of **373 to 323**, the General Assembly voted to propose to the presbyteries a constitutional amendment to remove the restriction against the ordination of partnered homosexuals. This action required ratification by a majority of the 173 presbyteries within 12 months for the proposed amendment to take effect. As noted above, the presbyteries voted to approve the constitutional change.

Property ownership

In the event of a congregational split, dissolution (closing), or disassociation from the PC(USA), 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 their 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 well-publicized General Assembly contribution to the defense fund of imprisoned activist [Angela Davis](#). 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 have been trying to reverse for most of the first decade of the 21st century.

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 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. In most other states, however, courts have generally deferred to the provisions in the Book of Order, permitting presbytery takeovers and/or dissolutions of some dissenting churches.

Divestment from corporations operating in 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 "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." 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, also passed.
- 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,^[44] praised the new resolution, saying that it reflected the church stepping back from a policy that singled out companies working in Israel.^[45] 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.

Revision of Interfaith Relations resource on church anti-Jewish bias in materials related to Israeli-Palestinian conflict

In May 2008, 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. 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 and a similar condemnation in the form of a statement from the denominations and ten other organizations.

So it goes – engaging the world is not so pretty.



Here are some sobering statistics about our church from Jack Marcum, *coordinator of Research Services, GAMC (PCUSA Research Services: [Fewer members = smaller congregations](#))* ...

Both the number of members and the number of congregations in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have decreased over time, but at very different rates:

- In 2009 there were 10,657 congregations, a net drop of 1,005 (9 percent) from the 11,662 in existence at the denomination’s founding in 1983.
- New congregations were added in each of the last 26 years, but in every year more were lost; the annual net loss averages 36.
- In relative terms, the average annual net loss in congregations has been 0.30 percent, with a low of 0.04 percent (1987) and a high of 0.88 percent (2009).
- Over the same period, more members were lost than gained in every year, falling from 3,131,228 to 2,077,158, a decline of more than one million (34 percent).
- The net loss in members averages 40,541 per year.
- In relative terms, membership has dropped an average of 1.5 percent annually, ranging from 0.8 percent (1998) to 3.1 percent (2008).

What the research shows -- The key difference in these trends is not direction but magnitude, Jack notes.

The numbers of both congregations and members have fallen steadily since 1983, but members have dropped at almost four times the rate of congregations. As a result, the typical congregation's size has dropped dramatically, from an average of 268 members and a median of 195 in 1983 to 152 and 97, respectively, in 2009. Over the same period, the share of congregations with 100 or fewer members increased from 36 percent to 51 percent.

Several consequences have ensued:

- Many congregations have larger facilities than they need and fewer resources for upkeep. (To bring it home -- is the situation for FPC?)
- Others can no longer afford a pastoral leader. (Is the situation for Summerlin?)
- More congregations in 2009 had no pastoral leadership of any sort (2,231) than was true just four years before (2,050).

Even so, when net membership losses began *in the 1960s*, no one set out to use this trend to reduce the size of most congregations. It just happened—the result of efforts, presbytery by presbytery and congregation by congregation, to keep the doors open. The unintentional shift to smaller congregations requires an intentional response.

The use of commissioned lay pastors is a major step already in place.

More programs and resources tailored to the circumstances—and budgets—of smaller congregations would be another. After all, as the trend line of membership shows, there will likely be more rather than fewer such congregations in the near future –

Indeed, with these rates projected, there will be no PCUSA in 2041 -- **if we, as churches – and as a denomination -- do not change what we are doing!**



- Replacement capacity of the PC(USA)
- All of the mainline churches are declining in membership – a cultural thing
- Loss related to level of internal controversy
- Loss attribution ratio:
 - Replacement capacity – **17%**
 - Cultural loss – **33%**
 - Controversy – **50%**

From: <http://blog.gajunkie.com/2011/04/18/whither-the-pcusa-wither-the-pcusa.aspx?ref=rss>

8Oct2011

Whither The PC(USA)? Wither The PC(USA)?

Posted by Steve Salyards at [4/18/2011 6:01 PM](#)

What does this mean?

Steve Salyards , the GA Junkie blogger notes recently: ... I have been thinking ... in the larger context of the history of American Presbyterianism and what the church might look like in the near future. So here is a back of the envelope calculation ...[about] ... why the denomination is losing members.

If we look at the [summary of comparative statistics for 2009](#), the most recent year that is available, we can first make a rough estimate of the replacement capacity of the PC(USA).

In 2009 there were 20,501 individuals age 17 and under that joined the church by affirmation of faith. This is effectively the "internal gain," that is the kids that come through the system from member families. This represents a 1.0% membership gain for 2009. This is offset by those that leave the rolls due to their new membership in

the Church Triumphant, that is, those that have died. For 2009 that was 32,827 or a loss of 1.5% of the membership. So the net of -0.5% represents the church's inability to replace its membership internally.

The other thing is that all of the mainline churches are declining in membership. But within this decline there is a difference in the rates of decline relative to the strength of internal controversy in the churches.

For the six traditional "mainline" denominations that make the [National Council of Churches 25 largest](#) list,

- the less contentious United Methodist Church and American Baptist Churches in the USA declined by 1.01% and 1.55% respectively.

The three with more heated internal controversy had larger declines:

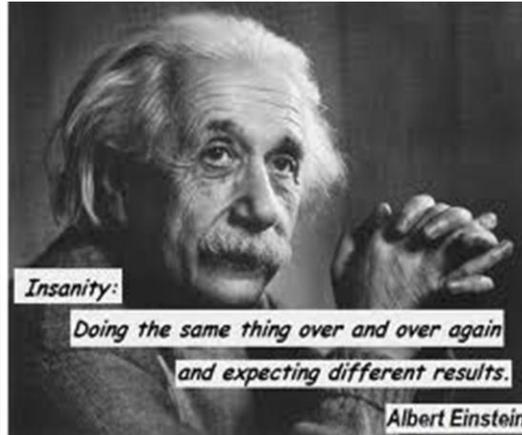
- the PC(USA) declined 2.61%,
- the Episcopal Church declined 2.48%, and
- the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America declined 1.96%.

It would suggest that we could attribute at least 1%, and probably a bit more, of the PC(USA)'s decline to the internal controversy itself. But that is only about half the total decline with the other half broken into about one-third the lack of internal replacement and about two-thirds the general decline in the mainline and the trend towards non-denominationalism.

Now the case can be made that these three factors are nothing more than different facets of the same general problem that the mainline faces -- a younger generation shuns the "institutional" nature of the church with its continuing controversies in a hierarchical setting and their departure for the non-denominational or the "nones" raises the median age and decreases the birthrate. However, the apparent correlation of membership declines with internal controversy is striking but not a complete explanation.

So, where are **we going** from here?

(Let's be sure we ask the right questions ...)



Need we say more than this math class drop-out suggests here?

So, where are we going from here?

I want to define “we” in the question “Where do we go from here?”

For me, “we” means “members of the PCUSA who are deeply concerned about and in disagreement with many of the recent actions of the ... General Assembly, including but not limited [to] votes related to gay ordination.”

For the most part, “we” includes evangelical Presbyterians who are committed to the full authority of Scripture. (There are a few in this category who are not opposed to the GA actions, however.)



Dr **Mark Roberts**, Senior Director and Scholar in Residence for Laity Lodge, noted in his blog back in 2008 (<http://markdroberts.com/?p=552>): (now see: <http://www.patheos.com/community/markdroberts/>)

I want to define “we” in the question “Where do we go from here?”

For me, “we” means “members of the PCUSA who are deeply concerned about and in disagreement with many of the recent actions of the 2008 General Assembly, including but not limited [to] votes related to gay ordination.”

For the most part, “we” includes evangelical Presbyterians who are committed to the full authority of Scripture. (There are a few in this category who are not opposed to the GA actions, however.)

So, I am not asking “Where should the PCUSA go from here?” as if I were a part of the national denominational leadership. I’m speaking from my own perspective within the denomination.

So, then: *Where do we go from here?*

Wherever we go, I believe there's no need to rush. Or, I might better say, we should not rush. It's not as if the PCUSA suddenly, as if out of nowhere, voted to ordain gays and lesbians. This issue, and a host of related theological issues, have been with us for a long time.

Haste is neither required nor wise because ... we are still "free to be faithful." At this very moment, nobody is telling me I have to affirm something I don't believe or do something I think is wrong. If this were to happen, I would promptly leave the PCUSA rather than deny my conscience before the Lord. But at this time I am free to believe and act according to my sense of biblical righteousness and truth. (I'm aware that this time might be coming to an end in the PCUSA, however.)

....

I should qualify my view that there's no need to rush, however. I'm aware that some Presbyterian churches find themselves in presbyteries that are both liberal and hostile. I have heard stories about how some evangelical churches have been harassed and hampered by their presbyteries. Such churches are not "free to be faithful." Thus, for these churches, it may well be the right time to leave the denomination. Yet, even for these, I would recommend against rushing. A careful, thoughtful, prayerful process is always best, and rarely happens quickly.

As an aside, I want to note, once again, that the real substance of a denominational connection is not the relationship of members and churches to the national body, but rather the relationship to the local body, which in the case of the PCUSA is the presbytery.

- The local, tangible, face-to-face relationships are what really matter in practice.
- Larger denominational connections are mostly irrelevant to most churches most of the time.

So, where are **we going** from here?

(Let's be sure we ask the right questions ...)

- So, where is **the PCUSA going** from here?
- So, where **shall I go** from here?

So, it looks like we really have two questions here –

- one about **our denomination**, and
- one focused on **you!**

A Caution, and Two Tests

- **The caution - there's no need to rush.**
- **The first test - “free to be faithful.”**
- **The second test - denominational connection.**

But Mark gave us advice about caution, and two tests of relationship as we consider these questions:

- **The caution--there's no need to rush.** “Or, I might better say, we should not rush. This and its host of related theological issues, have been with us for a long time. Haste is neither required nor wise....”
- **The first test - “free to be faithful.”** “At this very moment, nobody is telling me I have to affirm something I don't believe or do something I think is wrong. If this were to happen, I would promptly leave the PCUSA rather than deny my conscience before the Lord. But at this time I am free to believe and act according to my sense of biblical righteousness and truth.”
- **The second test -- the real substance of a denominational connection.** It “is not the relationship of members and churches to the national body, but rather the relationship to the local body, which in the case of the PCUSA is the presbytery [for teaching elders and congregations – and congregations for their members].
 - The local, tangible, face-to-face relationships are what really matter in practice.
 - Larger denominational connections are mostly irrelevant to most churches most of the time.”

What do we know?

- *What will change?*
- *What might change?*
- *What won't change?*

And we should look at three categories of change – to separate fact from the plethora of hair-on-fire rants in the popular and religious media!

We will spend a bit of time on the first and breeze through the later two ...



“We proclaim that Christ is present with the Church in both Spirit and Word. We believe that the best days of Christ’s church are ahead of us. We encourage all Presbyterians to discern in conversation and prayer where God is calling us as a community of faith.”

Cynthia Bolbach, Moderator of the 219th General Assembly (2010)
Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly
Linda Valentine, Executive Director of the General Assembly Mission Council

Here is how the leaders of our denomination “bottom line” the future of the PCUSA – in their church-wide letter to us, back in February.

(read the slide – the letter’s full text is below for reference)

February 4, 2011
General Assembly Leaders
Cynthia Bolbach
Gradye Parsons
Linda Valentine
LOUISVILLE

This is indeed a rich time of ferment and deep discernment in the Christian Church and denominations like the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Many talk about this era as being like a wilderness experience for the church, from which we can learn the lessons of being the vibrant people God leads from exile into life. At General Assembly we heard from Phyllis Tickle, who talks about “the incrustations of an overly established Christianity” that are being, even as we speak, broken open and reformed. And the good news, Tickle says as she looks back on centuries of Christianity, is that when this happens “the faith has spread – and been spread – dramatically into new geographic and demographic areas, thereby increasing exponentially the range and depth of Christianity’s reach as a result of its time of

unease and distress.”

We hear many voices seeking God's guidance in discerning how to move forward in a rapidly evolving church and culture. A number of pastors recently issued a Letter to the Presbyterian Church, expressing frustration and calling for something new.

Elsewhere, an open invitation has been extended to a conversation about more vital, faithful and connectional congregational ministry in the “next” PC(USA). The 219th General Assembly (2010) empowered a Middle Governing Body Commission, not only to consider the relationships of our middle governing bodies, but to act, upon request, responsively in new expressions of the church. Another task force has been set into motion to consider the whole form and function of our meetings of the general assembly, another is examining what the nature of the church is in the 21st century, and yet another is considering how we can live up to our aspirations for racial and ethnic diversity. Presbyterians everywhere long for vibrant congregations and communities of faith, and relationships built upon trust and our common faith in Jesus Christ.

We are seeing a growing momentum across the church to foment a strategy of leadership, resources and polity which will inspire the transformation of congregations and the creation of new worshiping communities in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

We listen as the debate over a new Form of Government engages elders and pastors in shaping a more responsive polity.

We see presbyteries crafting new identities and fellowships.

We have ourselves been party to many conversations about the future of the church, convinced that it is the Spirit of Christ sparking conversations throughout. For we believe that it is in our places of brokenness that the work of Jesus Christ has always been most miraculous. The parables of our Savior are full of images that bear the hope of grace coming to a people living in hope, humility, faith. We live in the certain faith that this is Christ’s Church, and for that reason, we engage in the re-formation of this church into the church we are being called to be.

We encourage ministers and elders; churches which are large or small; immigrant communities, men, women, and young people; established churches and innovative worship and mission communities to join in prayer and conversation, vision and leadership for the church in this exciting time.

We thank those who put before the church challenges, aspirations and ideas in commitment to God and to the church, for this will contribute to the conversations going on across the church. We appeal to those who do so to participate and engage

with, that ongoing conversation. John Calvin spoke of his commitment to working on the unity of the church:

“So far as I have it in my power, if I am thought to be of any service, I shall not be afraid to cross ten seas for this purpose, if that should be necessary.”

We ask that those who would challenge us also join with all of us across the church as we work together to make that happen.

We proclaim that Christ is present with the Church in both Spirit and Word. We believe that the best days of Christ’s church are ahead of us. We encourage all Presbyterians to discern in conversation and prayer where God is calling us as a community of faith. We invite you to join the discussion below.

[Cynthia Bolbach](#), Moderator of the 219th General Assembly (2010)

[Gradye Parsons](#), Stated Clerk of the General Assembly

[Linda Valentine](#), Executive Director of the General Assembly Mission Council

What will change?

With passage of Part 1 – NewFOG ...

- We still are called to do ...
 - **Proclaim the gospel** for the salvation of humankind;
 - **Provide shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship** of the children of God;
 - **Maintain (and practice) divine worship**;
 - **Preserve the truth**;
 - **Promote social righteousness**; and
 - **Exhibit the Kingdom of Heaven** to the world
- How to do (not what to do) – will be determined locally

As far as the future of the denomination goes, let's look at just two of the controversies – and their associated changes in the PCUSA we know about...

With the passage of newFOG, we do know that some things will change -- and we have talked about those changes already.

These same PCUSA Leaders, see it this way (in their church-wide letter of June 7):

What will change?

Many Presbyterians will see nothing suddenly or dramatically different with a new Form of Government. Worship services will go on as usual, and congregations will continue to teach the faith, serve their communities, reach out to those in need, and work to further God's realm on earth. However, what will be different is that congregations, presbyteries, and synods will have the opportunity to tailor mission and ministry to fit their own particular contexts and challenges.

The new FOG will also usher in changes in terminology. For example, ministers of the Word and Sacrament will be known as teaching elders, partnering in ministry with ruling elders who serve on the congregation's council (session).

In Christ,

Cindy Bolbach

Moderator of the 219th General Assembly (2010)

Gradye Parsons

Stated Clerk of the General Assembly

Linda Valentine

Executive Director, General Assembly Mission Council

Landon Whitsitt

Vice Moderator of the 219th General Assembly (2010)

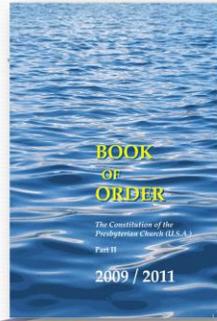
I thought the best comment on this letter was from a reader named “David” a few days later: “Just my luck I am taking polity this summer.”

The PC(USA) Constitution

Form of
Government

Directory
for Worship

Rules of
Discipline

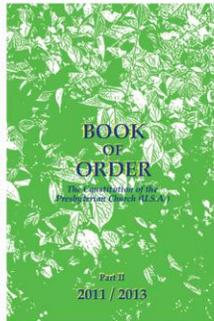


Foundations of
Presbyterian
Polity

Form of
Government

Directory
for Worship

Rules of
Discipline



The old < Part Two > the new

The “newFOG” amendment, passed this summer by the presbyteries, replaced the previous, 18 chapter **Form of Government** in the *Book of Order* - shown on the left, with two books, cutting the previous FOG’s chapter count in half.

So - on the right, the new *Book of Order* now contains:

- A brand new 11 page, three chapter re-statement of the 13 pages that had held the first 4 chapters in our previous FOG, titled the **Foundations of Presbyterian Polity** and
- A much-reduced **Form of Government** – containing the principles of the previous FOG’s chapters 5-18 (on 126 pages) in only six chapters (on 35 pages). These two books account for the net loss of 78 pages from the *Book of Confessions*
- The traditional, **Directory for Worship** - unchanged by newFOG,
- And the traditional, **Rules of Discipline** - unchanged by newFOG, as well.

Please note that the fifteen Part 3 amendments, all of which passed, made paragraph-specific changes in all parts of the *Book of Order* – and they are also incorporated in this new *Book*.

As you know, our previous, 495 page *Book of Order* (on the left) had three parts:

The **Form of Government**, which described the essential tenants of our faith (in the

first four chapters) ... and our church's system of governance: the interrelationships, standards by which we measure our ministries, the processes, and the functions of our church (in the remaining fourteen chapters). All together 162 pages of these 495, all of which are replaced by the 71 pages of the New FOG.

The **Directory for Worship**, which provides required standards and suggested process aspects of our worship life (in its seven Chapters) – the next 78 pages of the 495, none of which were affected by the “New FOG.”

And the **Rules of Discipline**, which outlines the standards and process for resolving disputes within the life of our church (in its fourteen Chapters and seven Appendices) – the next 62 pages of the 495, again, none of which were affected by the “New FOG.”

Leaving 153 pages in the *Book of Order* for its introduction, table of contents, section headings, end notes (i.e., the scriptural references and other notes footnoted in the text of the FOG, the DOW, and the ROD), six topical appendices, and the presbyter's (and seminarian's) best friend – the exhaustive indexes to the *BOO* which are the last 70 pages of the *Book*.

Let's turn our attention to today's *Book of Order* – slimmed down by 78 pages of removed material to a svelte 417.

pcusa.org/formofgovernment

NEW FORM OF GOVERNMENT

[Home](#) > New Form of Government

New Form of Government becomes effective July 10, 2011

The new Form of Government, approved by the 219th General Assembly (2010) and ratified by a majority of presbyteries is available in the 2011/2013 edition of the *Book of Order*.



PC(USA) Home

Search PC(USA)

[Task Force blog](#)



Please write down this website URL.

This page, on our denominational website, pcusa.org, is the location of some very helpful tools for presbyters and councils.

pcusa.org/formofgovernment

The Constitution of the PC(USA)

[The Book of Confessions](#)

[The Book of Order](#)

[Companion to the Constitution](#)

—Files marked with this icon are in Adobe Acrobat PDF format. For best results, right-click the link (or click and hold for Macintosh), select "save target as" and save the document to your desktop for viewing and printing.

— Files marked with this icon can be downloaded in Power Point. This file requires the Power Point program. For best results, right-click the link (or click and hold for Macintosh), select "save target as" and save the document to your desktop for viewing and printing.

Form of Government

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TOP ▲

Scroll to the bottom and find our constitution – both the *Book of Confessions* and the *Book of Order* – in downloadable, PDF formats – which means that you can search them electronically.

I have these both on my netbook computer – and I don't leave home without it!

Also find the companion to the constitution which provides a plethora of sample documents your council may be interested in. Sadly, it has not yet been updated to the current *Book of Order* (it was written to accompany the 2007 version), but it can be very useful if used with care – and with two more documents ...



Scroll back up a bit to find two maps – these downloadable and electronically searchable PDFs “map” the current Book of Order into the previous Book, paragraph by paragraph – and *vice versa*:

[Comparison chart of the previous Form of Government to the current Foundations & Form of Government.](http://www.pcusa.org/resource/comparison-chart-former-form-government-new-founda/) (<http://www.pcusa.org/resource/comparison-chart-former-form-government-new-founda/>)

[Comparison chart of the current Foundations and Form of Government to the previous Form of Government.](http://www.pcusa.org/resource/comparison-chart-new-foundations-and-form-governme/) (<http://www.pcusa.org/resource/comparison-chart-new-foundations-and-form-governme/>)

Again, I have them on my netbook.

All presbyters should have this minimum toolset for their immediate use.

Well, lets get to those details.

Ready? Here we go -- first, with the added **Foundations of Presbyterian Polity**...

The Revised Form of Government

An Introduction



As a quick intro ...

I lifted these slides from the denomination's explanation of the new Form of Government (fog 101) – which we have been quoting in detail about the councils of the church today. We will review them quickly so you have an appreciation for what is where.

The better appreciation is on the PCUSA website:

<http://oga.pcusa.org/constitution.htm>

The third note-taking moment: Write this down - Google "PCUSA constitution," take the top pcusa item entry.

A change of mindset

Can we learn to approach our polity not as a set of rules but as a description of our common life?

Can we change the pattern of creating a rule to address every uncertainty, and learn to apply the broad principles of our polity with creativity and flexibility?

NewFOG takes a new mindset. (an old one actually – back to 1729...?)

The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity

- **Chapter One** - The Mission of the Church
- **Chapter Two** - The Church and Its Confessions
- **Chapter Three** - Principles of Order and Government

Here are the chapter headings of the new book in the *Book of Order*

The Form of Government

- **One:** The Congregation and Its Members (former concerns of chapters 5 and 7)
- **Two:** Ordered Ministry, Commissioning, and Certification (formerly chapters 6 and 14)
- **Three:** The Councils of the Church (formerly chapters 9-13)
- **Four:** The Church and Civil Authority (formerly chapter 8)
- **Five:** Ecumenicity and Church Union (formerly chapters 15-17)
- **Six:** Interpreting and Amending the Constitution (formerly chapter 18)

Here are the chapter headings of the new Form of Government in the new *Book of Order*.

Decisions Congregations Need to Make

- Determine the quorum for congregational meetings. (G-1.0501)
- Determine the period of minimum notice for a congregational meeting (G-1.0502)
- Determine whether the congregation wishes to adopt *Robert's Rules* as parliamentary authority.
- Determine the size and composition of the congregational nominating committee (G-2.0401)

Now, here is what your congregation needs to do.

These are no longer defined or required in the new Book – so get the house in order with these actions so it can do business.

Since much of what the congregation does is defined in its corporation and bylaws, check these documents as well.

Decisions Sessions Need to Make

- Whether to keep a list of inactive members (G-1.04)
- How will you prepare people for active membership? (G-1.0402)
- How will you examine those elected as deacons and ruling elders? (G-2.0104b)
- What term will the session clerk serve? (G-3.0104)
- Develop a manual of operations, including a sexual misconduct policy and a process for financial review. (G-3.0106, 3.0113, and 3.0205)
- Obtain property and liability coverage (G-3.0112)
- Determine the quorum for session meetings. (G-3.0203)

Now, here is what your session needs to do.

These things are no longer defined or required in the new Book, either – so get the session's house in order with these actions so it can do business.

Since some of what the session does is defined in the church's corporation and bylaws, check these documents as well.

Decisions Presbyteries Need to Make

- What titles and terms shall we use for temporary pastoral relationships? (G-2.0504b)
- Shall the presbytery permit interim/ associate succession?(G-2.0504c)
- Who will preside at presbytery in the absence of the moderator? (G-3.0104)
- What term will the stated clerk serve? (G-3.0104)
- What plan will we use to determine how many commissioners each session should elect?(G-3.0301)
- What mechanisms and processes will we use to serve as pastor, advisor, and counselor to teaching elders and congregations? (G-3.0307)
- What mechanisms and processes will we use to guide, nurture, and oversee the process of preparing to become a teaching elder? (G-3.0307)

Now, here is what presbyteries need to do.

These are no longer defined or explicit in the new Book, either – so get the presbytery’s house in order with these actions so it can do business.

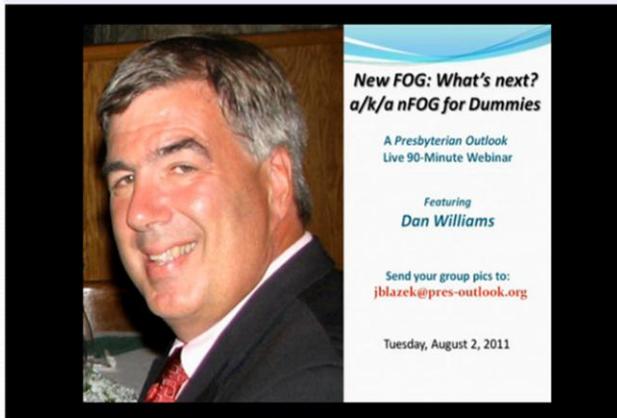
Since some of what the presbyter does is defined in the presbytery’s corporation and bylaws, check these documents as well.

Synods have a similar set of things to look at.

Responses to newFOG ...

New FOG: What's next? a/k/a nFOG for Dummies

Written by The Presbyterian Outlook
Friday, 05 August 2011 18:13



Webinar - New FOG: What's next? a/k/a nFOG for Dummies

Don Williams recently did a webinar – available from The Presbyterian Outlook – on these issues.

Here are a few highlights...



The First Thing



▶ **Relax!**

- ▶ Rome wasn't built in a day
- ▶ 1983 Reunion didn't happen overnight
- ▶ **We have time to live into the new FOG!**

I agree!

The **BIG** Thing

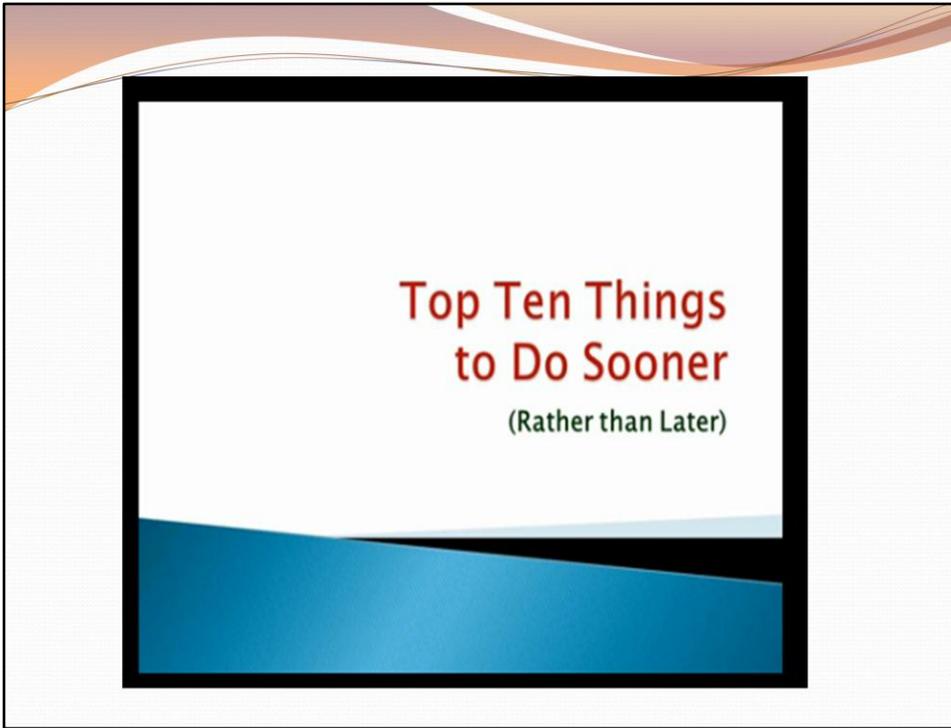


- › Mission determines the forms and structures needed for the church to do its work – G-3.0102
- › Do you have a good sense of what your mission is?
- › **Start that conversation first, before doing any major restructuring!**



Here too – remember my layout of any organization’s description?

It is foundational here.



Any Letterman fans?

Top 10 things to do sooner ...

- 10: Study the Foundations of being a Congregation / Presbytery / Synod
- 9: Fix your quorum size!
- 8: Fix the “Notice” requirement!
- 7: Fix your nomination process!
- 6: Fix the Treasurer’s term!
- 5: Fix the Clerk’s term!
- 4: Decide membership criteria!
- 3: Add a Sexual Misconduct Policy!
- 2: Decide fitness for elected service!
- 1: Develop Manual of Operations!

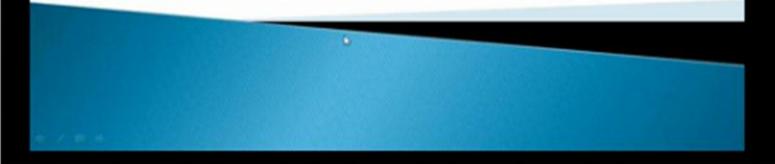
Dan’s list may be numbered wrong – do the ones first that allow you to meet and make decisions!



Top Ten Things to Do Later

(Rather than Sooner)

(But you can do them sooner if you want)



Top 10 things to do later ...

- 1: Review your mission strategy
- 2: Check implementation inclusiveness / representation
- 3: Review budget procedures ...
- 4: Review process for receiving / nurturing new members
- 5: Keep membership rolls current!
- 6: Schedule regular Communion observance
- 7: Schedule regular Session meetings
- 8: Prepare to work in Presbytery
- 9: Attend to the Bylaws
- 10: Develop Manual of Administrative Operations

... but not that much later!

I agree! Relax ... (but not too much)

Our congregations are really two organizations!
(who knew?)

Spiritual (Ecclesiastical)

- Minutes of Session
- Minutes of the Deacons
- Collection of Policies
- ... and now --
- Manual of Operation

Civil, Non-profit

- Articles of Incorporation
- Bylaws of the Corporation
- Minutes of the Corporation
- Collection of Policies
- Etc., etc., etc.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ –

This September, I reviewed with our Presbytery, that our denominational constitution has “always” required our congregations to organize as a non-profit corporation under the laws of the state in which the congregation resides (if the state permits). This gives each of our congregations / worshipping fellowships / specialized ministries two organizations – a spiritual and ecclesiastical organization and a civil, non-profit organization -- each with their own distinct governing body and specific responsibilities: to God and His people (the congregation) and to the state and the civil corporation’s members (also the congregation).

Not only have our congregations done that, so, too, have many of the presbytery’s worshipping fellowships and specialized ministries.

Some have written wholly original incorporation documents (Articles of Incorporation, bylaws).

But, some may have included pertinent and specific paragraphs from our denominational constitution in them by quoting the paragraph in whole or simply by referring to its number in the denominational constitution.

- In the latter case, the paragraph reference is to the denominational constitution effective at the time of incorporation, unless a “successors’

clause is included.

- In both the former and latter cases, the paragraph quoted or included by reference may have been amended and may no longer say what the congregation means or needs it to say for them.

In any event, now that the “old” Book of Order has been replaced by NewFOG, our constitution’s Form of Government is so radically changed as to content and paragraph numbering it may be a good time for you to review the governance documents (**Articles of Incorporation** and **Bylaws**) of your civil non-profit corporation – and the **current corporation law governing non-profit corporations in your state** (the Nevada Revised Statutes Title 82 - <http://www.leg.state.nv.us/NRS/nrs-082.html>, or the several appropriate Titles and Chapters of the California Corporation Code – indexed at: <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/cgi-bin/calawquery?codesection=corp&codebody=&hits=20>) to see if your civil governance documents still meet your needs.

In their June meetings, the Trustees and Council reviewed the civil Articles of Incorporation of the Presbytery of Nevada non-profit corporation in anticipation of the majority of presbyteries affirming the New FOG for our denomination’s constitution. This is my record of the Council’s action:

- On the issue of interpreting the Nevada Presbytery’s 1909 Articles of Incorporation as to which Book of Order the Articles actually refer to now: The Trustees proposed to the Council to take no action. **Council AFFIRMED**
- On the issue of the conflict between the 1909 Articles of Incorporation (which specifies **three** to **five** trustees) and the Council proposal to amend the Manual of Operations to increase the number of Trustees from **five** to **seven** (which has already been read before Presbytery in March): The Trustees proposed to amend the Manual of Operations proposal from the floor of Presbytery in its September meeting to - amend the Articles of Incorporation making size of the Board of Trustees a Standing Rules (Manual of Operations) issue rather than an Articles of Incorporation issue, *and* to increase the number of Trustees to seven. **Council AFFIRMED**
- On the issue of how we ensure that the Nevada Presbytery’s civil and ecclesiastical governance documents are compliant with their governing civil and ecclesiastical law: The Trustees and the Council proposed reviewing our Manual of Operations with counsel of the Nevada Revised Statutes Title 82 (non-profit corporations) the Constitution (New FOG) of the PC(U.S.A) on the schedule prescribed in the Manual of Operations. **Trustees and Council each AFFIRMED**
- On the issue of how Presbytery shall best serve our churches, worshipping

fellowships, and specialized ministries (as necessary) needs for their absorption of the content of the New FOG into their civil and ecclesiastical governance documents, the Trustees and the Council proposed that Presbytery shall alert them to the civil and ecclesiastical issues and let them resolve them on their own – but -- to offer help reviewing and resolving them from Presbytery through Equipping Ministries. **Trustees and Council each AFFIRMED** Elder Arthur Ritter will write a letter to the sessions of our churches and the governing bodies of our worshipping fellowships and specialized ministries alerting them of the issues, outlining a process for review and resolution, and offering his (and others’) volunteer help with their resolution of the issues that may exist in their governance documents - through Equipping Ministries.

The presbyteries’ votes having been taken and reported, the “old” Book of Order has been replaced by NewFOG and our constitution’ governance section is now radically changed as to content and paragraph numbering insofar as the governance section (the Form of Government) goes.

The implication of this change is that your organization’s civil governance – and ecclesiastical governance -- documents may have become difficult to understand with this radical change – and / or (thanks to over 300 amendments to our constitution in the 28 short years of our denominational existence) may no longer meet the needs of your congregation / worshipping fellowship / specialized ministry.

In addition, sessions are now required to maintain Manuals of Operation just as Presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly have been so required by the Book of Order all along.

... do they say ...

- “... shall increase the number of trustees to five ...”
- “... shall elect trustees per G-7.0401.”

Here is a test...

Do your governance documents say ...

“... shall increase the number of trustees to five ...”

-- or --

“... shall elect trustees per G-7.0401.”

If the latter, who knows what that means? (You already know this is an old book reference – the current book has only six chapters!)

Time to change it.

Here is my suggested process ...

- **First**, locate, open, and study the civil governance documents of your congregation
- **Second**, locate, open, and study your state's governing law
- **Third**, locate, open, and study the sections on ecclesiastical governance
- **Fourth**, note every place ...

As a committee of the whole --

First, locate, open, and study the civil governance documents of your congregation, worshipping fellowship, or specialized ministry. Each member of your session and your governance committee should have a copy of these documents.

Second, locate, open, and study your state's governing law on non-profit corporations and determine the options presented in the law for how your civil non-profit corporation can/could be organized and governed.

Third, locate, open, and study the sections on ecclesiastical governance in the new Form of Government in our denominational constitution (<http://oga.pcusa.org/constitution.htm#boo>) – and the questions posed to Sessions in the [Advisory Handbook for Councils](#).

Fourth, note every place in your civil and ecclesiastical governance documents where they directly quote or refer to specific paragraphs of the denominational constitution that was in force when the document were brought into being and/or was filed with the state.

Your organization is legally covered here – by the book in force when your predecessors filed the organizing documents. Do you have a copy of it?

Here is my suggested process ...

- **Fifth**, compile and address the questions in the [Advisory Handbook for Councils](#)
- **Sixth**, compare your civil and ecclesiastical governance documents
- **Seventh**, discern God's will ...
- **Eighth**, resolve any conflicts -- on paper
- **Ninth**, take the necessary adoption and implementing actions

As a committee of the whole --

...

Fifth, compile and address the questions in the [Advisory Handbook for Councils](#) with the policy decisions you have already made and recorded in your session or steering committee minutes.

Sixth, compare what your civil and ecclesiastical governance documents *describe* -- to -- how you *actually* govern your congregation, worshipping fellowship, or specialized ministry in civil issues.

Seventh, discern God's will for your congregation, worshipping fellowship, or specialized ministry in its place -- now and into the future you foresee and determine the form of governance He leads you to for His purpose.

Eighth, resolve on paper any conflicts that may exist between the expression of your civil governance documents (the First through Sixth steps) and God's will (the Seventh step).

Ninth, take the necessary adoption and implementing actions to effect God's will in the governance of your civil and ecclesiastical documents -- *and practices*.

What will change?

With passage of Item 10A (Ordination Standards) ...

- This summer's vote of the presbyteries removed the definition of marriage and chastity from the *Book of Order*.
- The real change --218th GA's *Authoritative Interpretations* that:
 - lifted the UPCUSA and PCUS condemnation of homosexuality as sinful – and
 - restored the right to “scruple” the Constitution.

Although the 219th GA last summer – and the presbyteries (by their vote this summer) have taken the heat on this issue, the ordination standards of the church had already taken a big left turn some time ago.

Dr **Mark Roberts** reports that over the last decade: Churches were calling openly gay pastors, presbyteries were ordaining and installing them, and PJs were condoning these actions.

Several prominent movements have coordinated and supported these actions: **That All May Freely Serve**, the **Covenant Network** and the **More Light** movement. Several have opposed it: **The Layman**, the **Presbyterian Renewal Network**, and others.

The real change; however, was codified in 2008, in a few actions of the 218th GA that didn't get much press, but will have a big effect:

- By a 53% to 47% vote, the assembly adopted a new Authoritative Interpretation (AI) on G-6.0106b: *Interpretive statements concerning ordained service of homosexual church members by the 190th General Assembly (1978) of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, and the 119th General Assembly (1979) of the Presbyterian Church in the United States and all subsequent affirmations thereof, have no further force or effect.*

- By a 54% to 46% vote, the assembly adopted a new AI on G-6.0108 which restores the intent of the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church report (2006) to allow someone who is being considered for ordination or installation as a deacon, elder, or minister to register a conscientious objection to the standards or beliefs of the church and ask the ordaining body to enter into a conversation with them to determine the seriousness of the departure.

Reported by our Stated Clerk in our meeting of the Synod of the Pacific, the week before last, we have a remedial case today in our Synod (Parnell, *et al.* v. The Presbytery of San Francisco) over exactly this ordination issue – and it will resolve within the framework of these interpretations. (See: <http://www.synodpacific.org/home/synod2/ParnellFINAL1.pdf>).

What might change?

- Squabbling continues in the Big Tent
- Greater forbearance in the Big Tent
- The Big Tent splits organizationally
- The Big Tent loses individual members

Ah! But, what might change? Well, here is a list --

Actually, I don't see much change in the squabbling – just in the subject of the squabble.

Greater forbearance – I am hopeful. The Reverend **Margaret J. Thomas*** HR, in ARE WE DEATHLY ILL? - GOVERNANCE IN A TIME OF FERMENT, February 2011 observes:

“Nor is disagreement in our denomination new – as the Synods of Philadelphia and New York united in 1758 they included provision for dissent and mutual forbearance in such times”

This provision survives in our *Book of Order*, today:

“That when any matter is determined by a majority vote, every member shall either actively concur with or passively submit to such determination; or if his conscious permit him to do neither, he shall, after sufficient liberty modestly to reason and remonstrate, peacefully withdraw from our communion without making any attempt to make any schism. Provided always that this shall be understood to extend only to such determination as the body shall judge indispensable in doctrine or Presbyterian government.” (G-2.0105 , footnote)

While *splitting* is a possibility, it does not seem to be the current model – Margaret continues in her article:

Since then, each new presenting, divisive issue – confessional standards, essential tenets, the education of clergy, the dismantling of the vestiges of slavery and segregation, the role of the church in society, civil rights, divorced men as ordained officers, the inclusion of women in ordained offices, and most recently human sexuality – has been bolstered by a rehashing of the same debates regarding biblical authority, Christology, the extent of salvation, the nature of our confessional documents, and what is an essential tenet.

Time and time again the General Assemblies of the church have listened patiently, considered overtures, and appointed committees to counsel with those holding minority views.

Time after time General Assemblies have dismissed particular analyses of the presenting issues, refuted a biblical interpretation, or rejected an interpretation of Reformed theology or polity.

Usually a consensus emerges and our corporate life is reaffirmed.

More recently, however, rather than submitting to the judgments of the church or continuing to reason and remonstrate, those holding minority views have established parallel para-church systems, diverted their funding and leadership to affinity groups or entities outside the structures of the denomination, and at times fermented schism.

Both predecessor denominations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) experienced schism (*aside* -- and we have seen these departures on the worms chart several times) shortly before their 1983 reunion. *But even after these schisms, people holding thought patterns similar to those who left remain in the denomination.*

- Perhaps they are members who had been taught by the schismatics;
- perhaps they are people who entered our membership and leadership unaware of the positions the denomination has taken over the centuries;
- perhaps their seminaries and congregations failed to teach them our Reformed beliefs and polity;
- perhaps they have never engaged in a deliberative process based upon mutual forbearance during times of discernment, as the way we live in the midst of our diversity as believers;
- perhaps they seek to control the denomination and impose their beliefs on

- others; or
- perhaps their values, beliefs, and attitudes have always been more compatible with other expressions of the Christian faith.

Lose members. You remember the downward trends on Jack Marcum's on numbers chart a couple of Sundays ago. Elder **Steve Salyards**,** blogging away in May this year – and discussed earlier.

-
- The Rev. **Margaret J. Thomas** has served the Presbyterian Church in a variety of roles over many years. Now honorably retired and living in Minneapolis, she was the Deputy Executive Director of the UPC/GAMC, and then executive of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies. She then served as executive of the Minnesota Council of Churches, and during that time she became a member and moderator of both the GA Permanent Judicial Commission and the Advisory Committee on the Constitution. Out of this broad and deep experience, she offers some of her insights on the proposed new Form of Government – both describing its positive aspects and pointing to two proposed changes that could undermine the whole distinctive style of governance in the Presbyterian Church (USA).
 - ** The PCUSA's favorite statistician, Elder **Steve Salyards** (a Ruling Elder at La Verne Heights Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) in the Angeles Foothills) of The GA Junkie, has been [tracking and commenting](#) on statistics for the PCUSA as well as the wider church for a number of years.

*What are **my** options?*

- Do nothing – (always an option)
- Ignore the controversies
- Engage the controversies,
 - Stay in the congregation
 - Leave the congregation
 - Leave the denomination

So – on to the second question: “where shall I go?” – the more personal one.

Here is a list of options:

You could do nothing. The “do nothing” option is one which always exists, is usually taken, but is seldom explored before deciding. As you are assured by the denominational leaders – and by our leaders here at FPC, nothing will change much in the foreseeable future, you may not even notice the denominational changes in your personal or church-related life. So this might be the best option.

(Now that you know about them) – You could choose to **ignore the controversies**. Again, they probably won’t touch you or your personal or church life.

Or – you could **engage the controversies** – and

Stay in the congregation,
Leave the congregation for a more comfortable worship experience, or even
Leave the denomination!

(but with no change foreseen, why do either of these?)

So, where are **we going** from here?

(Let's be sure to ask the right questions ...)

- So, where is **the PCUSA going** from here?
- So, where **shall I go** from here?

Even in these times of great uncertainty over all of this, (in the words of that great American Astronaut and Theologian, Buzz Lightyear):

-- we can be certain of one thing -- we are going!

And in his words ...

“to infinity ... and beyond!”



... because -- in any case, we are GOING!

APA LEVEL II Certification Course (Required)

PC (USA) HISTORY SINCE REUNION (1983) (5 hours)

- The Structure of the General Assembly, its units and other Entities
- The Structure of Presbyteries and Synods and their duties in the newly constituted church
- The Creeds/Confessions of our new denomination as well as important Policies established since 1983
- Names of current Stated Clerk, Moderator and other leaders of our Church
- Rationale for Reunion. What has reunion produced that was impossible without Reunion?
- Negative aspects of Reunion, i.e., losing churches and membership
- Other items as deemed necessary by the instructors
- Leader of this seminar should be “clergy” – sorry, you got me, instead.

Well, there – we have at least addressed all of the suggested topics ...

Overview 4

HIS story – in the Context of YOUR story
How did we get to wherever we are?

Where are we now? -- and -- Who's Who in the Zoo?

Where are we going? -- and -- What does it mean to me?

- Where we have we been
- What is bugging us now
- What has happened -- could happen
- So – what is to do?
- **3:45 p.m. We are done!**

The Final Exam

I hope that you have gotten from this class some of what I got out of preparing for it.

Clock says 3:45 – so we are done?

I see only one last thing at the bottom of the agenda ... and you will need your – and my notes!

Overview 4

HIS story – in the Context of YOUR story
How did we get to wherever we are?
Where are we now? -- and -- Who's Who in the Zoo?
Where are we going? -- and -- What does it mean to me?

The Final Exam

– begins as soon as you get home ...

The final exam begins as soon as you get back to your desk.

Thank you again, and good by – until next time.