

Grace and Peace to you from the Presbytery of Nevada, Equipping Ministries Committee – and WELCOME to our time together, today!

I am Art Ritter and I will facilitate this workshop on our responsibilities as presbyters for Godly Decision-making – especially as it relates to the eight proposed Amendments to the our denomination's Constitution and a set of five affirmations to assist Peacemaking Ministry and Social Witness Policy Committee prepare an update to our 1980 and 1988 peace policy statements for approval in the next GA which we will consider as a presbytery in our spring meeting at Green Valley Presbyterian church in Henderson this March 15-18.

I have to begin by saying that I am not the subject matter expert on any of these proposed amendments or affirmations – you must make yourselves, your sessions, and your presbyters the subject matter experts on both the proposed amendments – and the affirmations.

I am; however, the subject matter expert on the processes you should use preparing your presbyters to come to presbytery to consider them as a group – and the processes we will use at presbytery to consider and vote on both the proposed amendments and affirmations and prepare our advice to GA on the content of the affirmations.

So lets talk about how we got these before us for a moment.

To the first task, the 221st General Assembly of our denomination met in Detroit this last summer and referred eight proposed amendments to our denomination's Constitution. You have them before you in a study guide: *Proposed Amendments to the Constitution*. The 172 Presbyteries that compose our denomination now have to consider each of these proposed amendments and vote their affirmation – or rejection.

The Stated Clerk of the General Assembly advises that the **deadline for reporting presbytery votes is June 21, 2015**.

However, in order to make changes and publish the 2015–16 Book of Order in a timely manner, **receipt of votes prior to this deadline would be appreciated (by May 15, 2015, if possible)**.

– deadlines which our Spring Presbytery timing will allow us to meet.

To the second (bonus) task, the 219, 220, and 221st GAs have supported a six year, church-wide study of our existing peace policy statements, and directed the advisory vote on five affirmations which you also have before you in the form of the Stated Clerk's transmittal letter and its attachments. We will consider these after the Proposed Amendments.



Lets begin with prayer ...

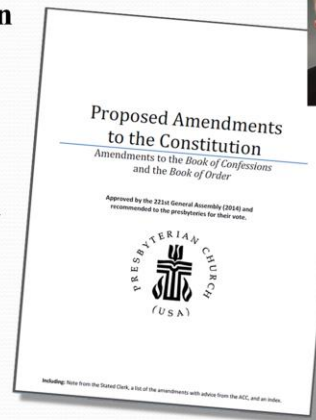
Open our hearts and minds to your
teaching, Lord, that we may learn
your ways and glorify you in
everything we do. Amen

Let's begin our considerations today with prayer ...

Absorb slide

The task before us ...

- 14-1 Confession of Belhar**
- 14-A. Renunciation of Jurisdiction**
- 14-B. Preparation for Ministry:**
 - 14-B.1. Final Assessment**
 - 14-B.2. Accommodations**
- 14-C. Child Protection Policy**
- 14-D. Minimum Composition of a Presbytery**
- 14-E. Interreligious Stance**
- 14-F. Marriage**



These are the eight proposed Amendments to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) which we will vote to affirm or reject at Spring Presbytery.

These are contained in the Study Guide which the Stated Clerk of General Assembly, the Reverend Gradye Parsons sent to our presbytery for distribution to the teaching elder members and congregation commissioners at Fall Presbytery, 2014.

The first is a new confession proposed as an addition to our *Book of Confessions*, Part 1, of our Constitution – the theology part.

The next seven (note item 14-B is a two-for-one) propose to change seven paragraphs on our *Book of Order*, Part 2, of our Constitution – the polity part.

OK, how might this affect us?

If passed, these could/would change the expressed and practiced **theology** and **polity** of our denomination:

- What we confess our faith to be, and
- The working **definition of marriage**, and 6 other things of varying impact on former teaching elders, candidates for professional ministry, risk management for ministries of our congregations, presbyteries, and synods, and other things.

Here is the potential impact of these items -- if they are affirmed by the presbyteries (and, in the case of Item 14-1, if also subsequently approved and enacted by the 222nd GA in 2016).

Absorb the slide

So, is it important that we understand them and their implications for our church?

You bet!

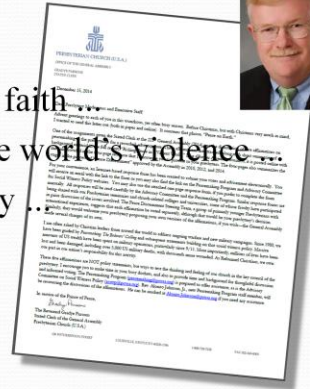
Well, then, let's look at these proposed changes to our statements of theology and to our polity.

... and the bonus task ...

Five Affirmations for advisory vote – and comment – that will lead to a policy update at GA 222.

The five:

1. ... peacemaking is essential to our faith ...
2. ... confess our complicity ... in the world's violence ...
3. ... reclaim the power and authority ...
4. ... seek to understand ...
5. ... commit ourselves ...



This last December, Gradye sent this letter to the presbytery Stated Clerks:

Advent greetings to each of you in this wondrous, yet often busy season. Before Christmas, but with Christmas very much in mind, I wanted to send this letter out (both in paper and online). It concerns that phrase, “Peace on Earth.”

One of the assignments given the Stated Clerk at the 221st General Assembly (2014) was the distribution of five affirmations on peacemaking to the presbyteries for a recorded, advisory vote. These affirmations are attached, along with short summaries of background material in the full report, “Risking Peace in a Violent World.” Like all other Assembly business, it is posted online with the link provided in the four-page resource that I encourage you to provide to your presbyters. The four-pager also summarizes the stages in the process of “Peace Discernment” approved by the Assembly in 2010, 2012, and 2014.

...

As part of the process of the 6-year peace discernment begun by the General Assembly in 2010, then following 9 years of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, the 221st General Assembly (2014) approved five affirmations for discussion, debate, and voting in the presbyteries, the Presbyterian Mission Agency began work with the

Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy to review the existing peace policy of the denomination contained in these two statements:

- *Peacemaking - the Believers' Calling*, the 1980 joint statement of our precedent denominations, the 'northern strand,' the UPCUSA, and the 'southern strand,' the PCUSA – and
- *Christian Obedience In A Nuclear Age*, the 1988 statement updating it within our reunified denomination.

The group formed from these is the Peace Discernment Steering Team – and they have been hard at work updating these statements aiming at a definitive statement for consideration by the 2016 GA.

The Peace Discernment Steering Team now needs our help discerning how the denomination feels about these five affirmations.

As noted above, we will discuss these five affirmations and the process for handling them after we deal with the proposed amendments – toward the end of this briefing.

What is this Workshop about?

8 Amendments and
5 Affirmations!

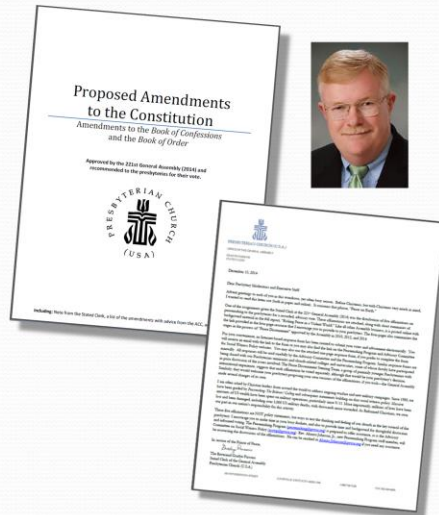
We are all about:

- Teaching
- Informing
- Clarifying
- Preparing
- Encouraging

But not about:

- Debating / **Arguing**

A word about taking notes ...



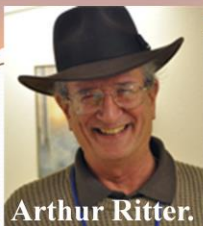
As a bit of polity trivia: The eight amendments proposed for the two parts of our Constitution by the 221st GA for our vote this year are actually fewer than half of the proposals the 220th GA sent us two years ago, (they sent us 19) and fewer than half the 219th GA sent us four years ago (they sent 17 – including one we will see again this year!). Since we have amended our Constitution more than 350 times since we reunited our northern and southern strands to become this denomination in 1983, this year is some sort of a record (!) – and a great trend.

This workshop is produced by the **Nevada Presbytery's Equipping Ministries Committee** for the purposes of:

- *teaching* you about our polity and how we change its formal structure,
- *informing* you about these Amendments to our Constitution and the five affirmations,
- *clarifying* their meaning and impact,
- and for *preparing and encouraging* your personal and our corporate study,
-- *so that*
 - **you** can participate in preparing the conscience of your commissioners and the teaching elders who worship with you to Spring Presbytery and
 - **they** can vote God's will on these proposed amendments in our Spring Presbytery meeting, 'decently and in order.'

It is not a time to *debate, argue, persuade, advise, or tell you how to vote* on any of these – just how to consider them so you can get your commissioners and the presbytery’s teaching elders ready to vote on them in our Spring Presbytery meeting, March 15-18 at Green Valley PC, in Henderson.

A word about taking notes: this entire presentation – in the long version is a fully-scripted PDF on my website: <http://AGRitter.com/a/Equip.htm> . Just scroll to its introductory paragraph, click on it to load, download it to your computer, and enjoy all of the slides (and more) and all of the words I was supposed to say when they were on-screen in the live workshop.



Introductions ...

- **Arthur Ritter.** Ruling Elder, Grace Presbyterian Church, Las Vegas
 - Lifelong Christian , Lifelong Presbyterian
 - Elder and Deacon, Clerk of Session, Treasurer of the Board of Deacons
 - Past Commissioner to the **Nevada Presbytery** and
 - Past Member, Committee on Preparation for Ministry, Equipping Ministries and
 - Vice Moderator, Moderator, and Past Moderator, twice!
 - Nevada Presbytery
 - Co-laborer with Equipping Ministries
 - Member, PJC
 - Nevada Presbytery Delegate to / Board member of RAIN
 - NV Presbytery Commissioner to the Synod of the Pacific.
 - Member, Synod's Mission Partnership Committee, Visioning Task Force
 - Past member, Synod's Personnel and Nominating Committees.
 - Polity (business model) wonk – in real life, too.

And you? ...

This is me -- and my association with the subject of church polity.

A life-long Presbyterian, I have experience at several levels of service to the councils in each of three different Presbyterian polities –

The United Presbyterian Church in the USA – the UPCUSA – the old ‘northern strand’ of mainline Presbyterianism in America,

The Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod – the RPCES – which joined and received with conservative churches from the ‘southern strand’ which had become the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), and

The Presbyterian Church, (U. S. A.) – the re-united mainline Presbyterian church (which happened in 1983).

But, what about you?

Equipping the Presbyters

Invited: Nevada Presbyters

how long a Christian?

how long a Presbyterian?

how long / where
... in an ordered ministry?

Can we take a few minutes to see what experience there is in the room with us today?

(HEY, READER! -- Please “join the group” and introduce yourself to me – by email

– Art@AGRitter.com and note:

how long you have been a Christian,

how long you have been a Presbyterian,

– and how long you have served the greater church – and in which governance positions.

-- And don't forget to tell me which church you attend.)

Well, we see that there is a bit of attachment to polity in this room, too!

As you will soon see, we have a great amount of mature and broad polity experience across our presbytery!

Two years ago, I asked the workshop participants about their association with denominational polity.

Here is what they shared (as best as I remember) about the experience they have had - and then, generously shared in these workshops ...

The Sessions of Wells, Lamoille, and Elko say “Hi!”



Our Wells, Lamoille, and Elko elders greet you from the sanctuary of the Elko church.

The Tonopah and Hawthorne CREs say “Hi!”



Our Tonopah and Hawthorne CREs – and our CRE-in-training greet you from the Hawthorne church.

The Lee Vining and Valley (Bishop) Elders say “Hi!”



Our elders in the Lee Vining and Bishop churches greet you from Valley church in Bishop.

The Gardnerville, Virginia City, So. Lake Tahoe, “Hi!”
St John’s, and Spanish Springs Elders say:



Our elders in the Gardnerville, Virginia City,
So. Lake Tahoe, St John’s, and Spanish Springs
churches greet you from Christ Presbyterian
church in Gardnerville.

Our elders in the Gardnerville, Virginia City, So. Lake Tahoe, St John’s, and Spanish
Springs churches greet you from Christ Presbyterian church in Gardnerville.

The Grace, Green Valley, Westminster, and Henderson PC Teaching Elders say: “Hi!”



Our teaching elders in the Grace, Green Valley, Westminster, and Henderson Presbyterian churches of the Las Vegas Valley greet you from the foreside Room of Grace church's Central Campus.

OK, now, everybody sit up now, wave back and say hi to them – and the next workshops, too!

Equipping the Presbyters

Invited participants (last time – 2 years ago): Nevada Presbyters

Christian: less than 10 years to lifelong (~50-50)

Presbyterian: less than 10 years to lifelong (~50-50)

In ordered ministry: new to 60+ years
Session, Deaconate, PJs, presbytery, synod, GA,

Last two times we prepared for voting on changes to our polity ...

In the **EQUIPPING THE PRESBYTERS** workshop audiences in the winters of 2011 and 2013:

- All were elders (session experience) or ministers (session and presbytery experience) – and some were Commissioned Ruling Elders (CREs) with extensive pastoral experience.
- Many had extensive presbytery / committee experience.
- A few had (presbytery or synod) judicial commission experience.
- Several had been to a General Assembly as an Alternate and then Commissioner.
- One had even been to 9 (!) General Assembly meetings, as an observer / allied ministry member.

So you can see our presbytery is no stranger to our polity!

Let's get personal ...

Recall when we were ordained, we each took 12 vows of ...

- Sensitivity to the Word of God in your life ...
- Obedience to God in your life ...
- Following Christ in your life ...
- Leading and developing His people, and ...
- Exhibiting the Kingdom of God to the world in your life ...
... and as you lead God's Church

Lets begin by remembering who we work for as presbyters in His church –

in our congregations ... and

in our personal lives, as well.

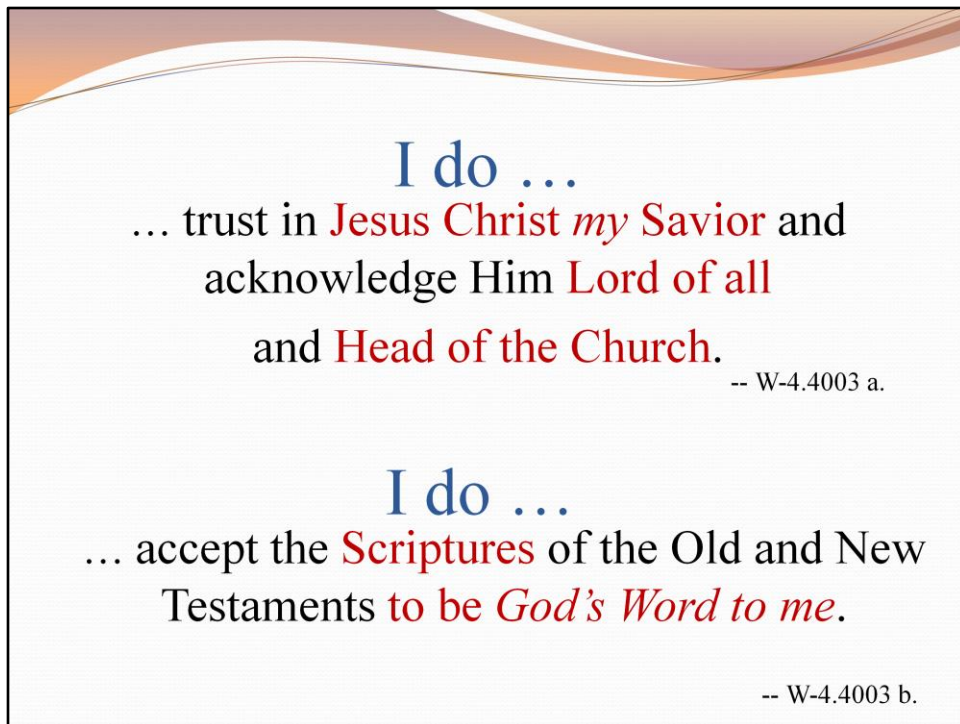
The Constitutional questions you affirmed when you were ordained and installed are the defining statements of your commitment to the office, or 'ordered ministry' you now hold.

These dozen vows represent our agreement on sensitivity, obedience, and on following our Lord

– as we lead His people and His church

– and in our own private and public lives, as well.

It turns out, these vows are the heart of our responsibilities for responding to the challenge that our Form of Government presents to our **presbytery** and to our **sessions** in the PC(USA), today ...



So, let's stand and repeat them again -- in a slightly more personal format than when you took them before your congregation when you were or installed -- noting the red-lettered words as they will impact topics in today's presentation -- and mediating on their content as a reminder of the seriousness of our business today. As you can, please stand ... Let's say these together ...

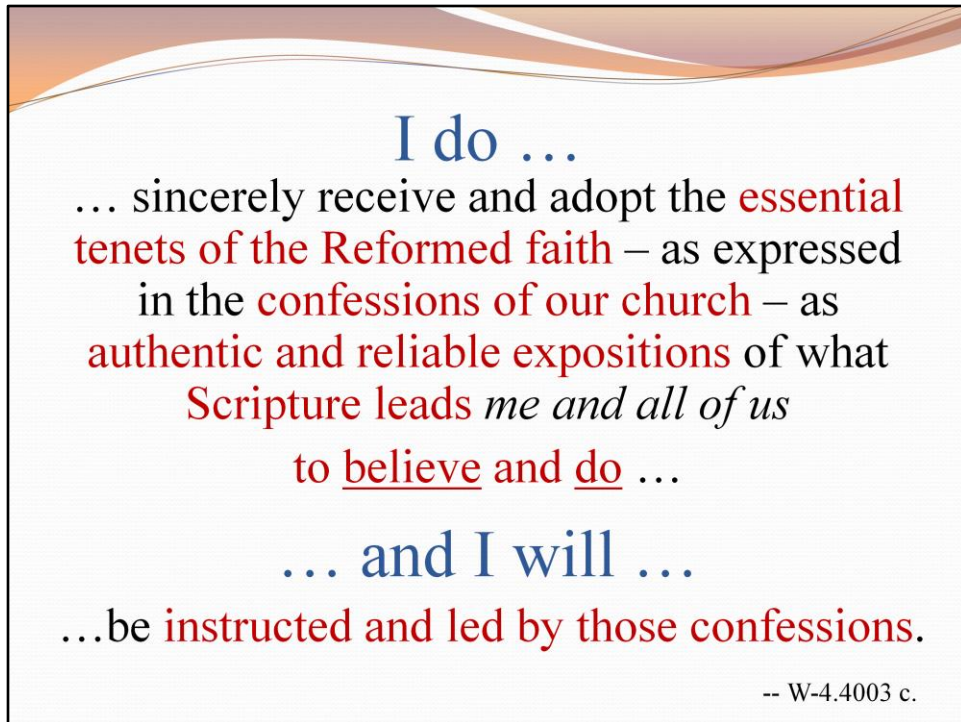
Read slide

References:

W-4.4003 Constitutional Questions to Officers and Commissioned Persons

The moderator of the governing body of those to be ordained, installed, or commissioned shall ask them to stand before the body of membership and to answer the following questions:

- a. Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
- b. Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to be God's Word to you?



... continuing ...

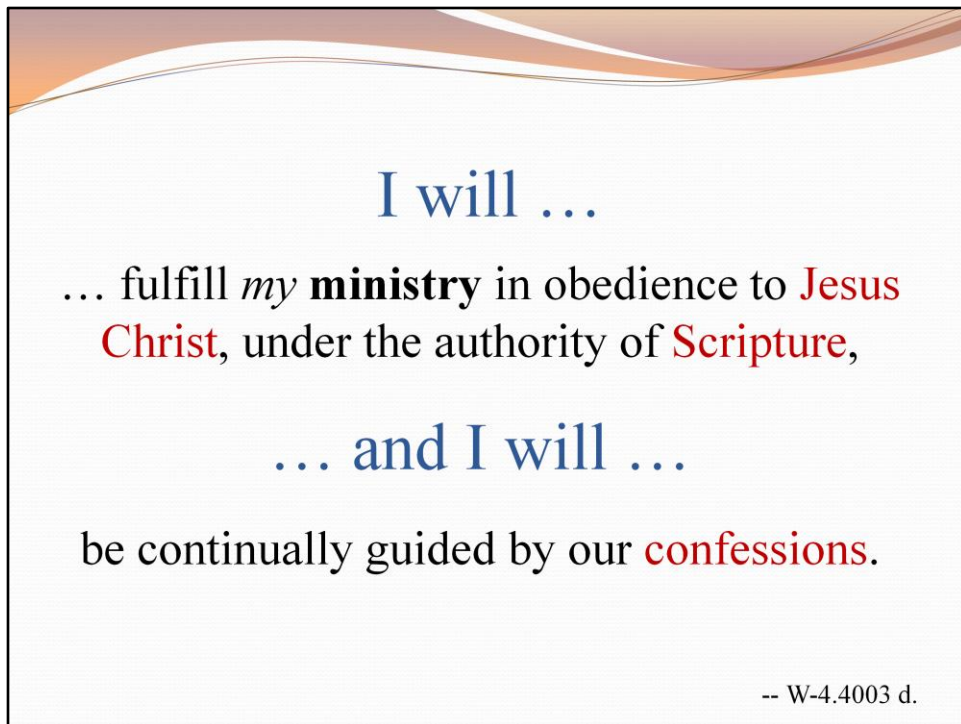
Read slide

References:

W-4.4003 Constitutional Questions to Officers and Commissioned Persons

The moderator of the governing body of those to be ordained, installed, or commissioned shall ask them to stand before the body of membership and to answer the following questions: ...

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



... continuing ...

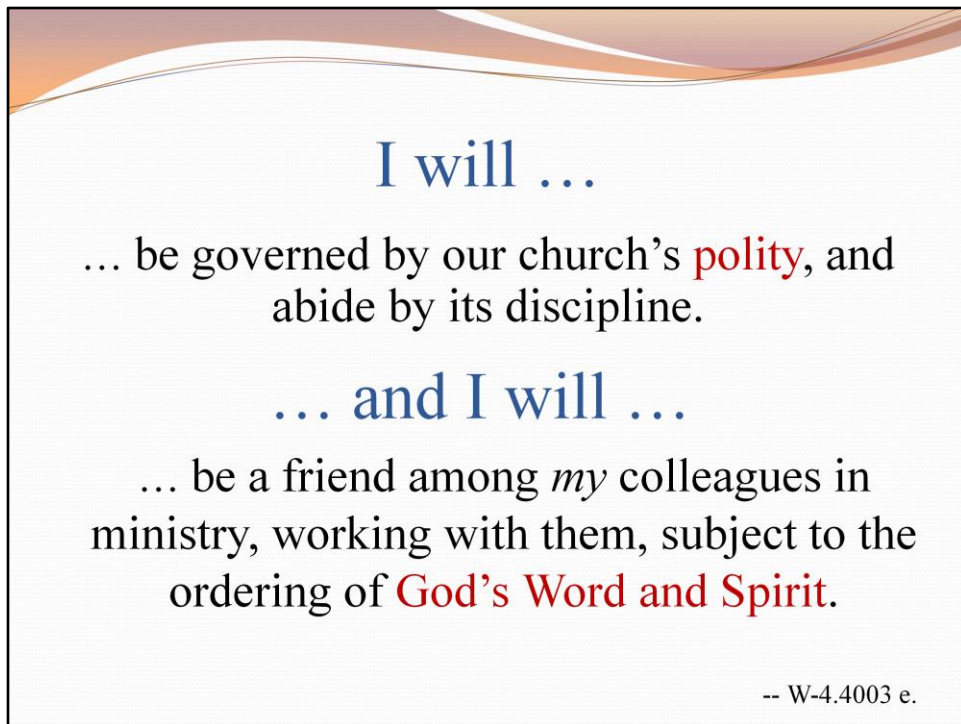
Read slide

References:

W-4.4003 Constitutional Questions to Officers and Commissioned Persons

The moderator of the governing body of those to be ordained, installed, or commissioned shall ask them to stand before the body of membership and to answer the following questions: ...

d. Will you fulfill your office in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?



... continuing ...

Read slide

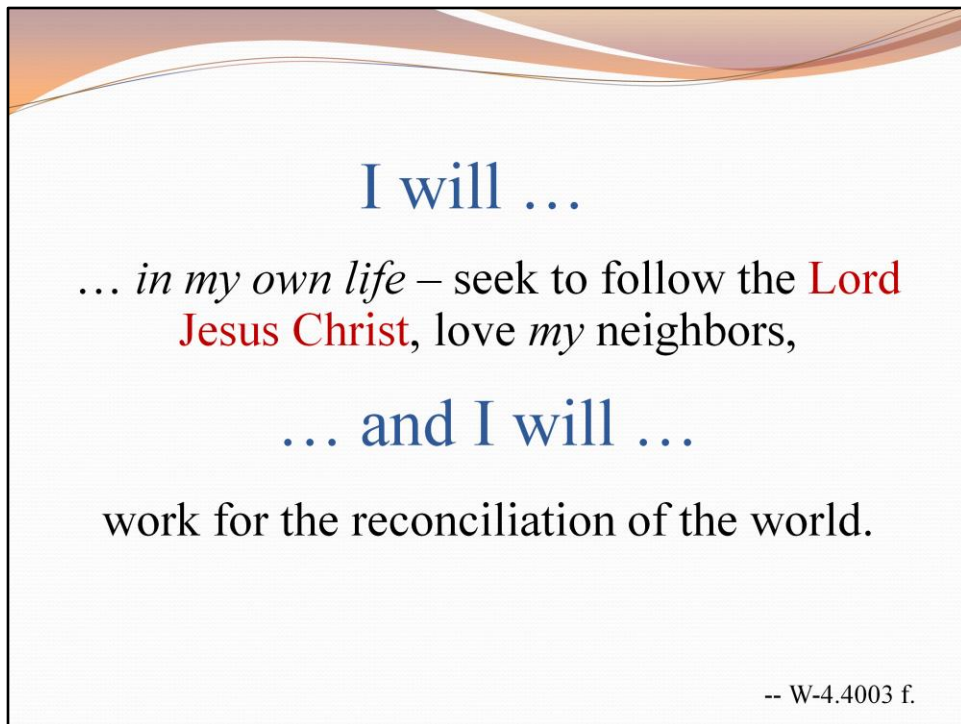
References:

W-4.4003 Constitutional Questions to Officers and Commissioned Persons

The moderator of the governing body of those to be ordained, installed, or commissioned shall ask them to stand before the body of membership and to answer the following questions: ...

e. Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline?

Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit?



... continuing ...

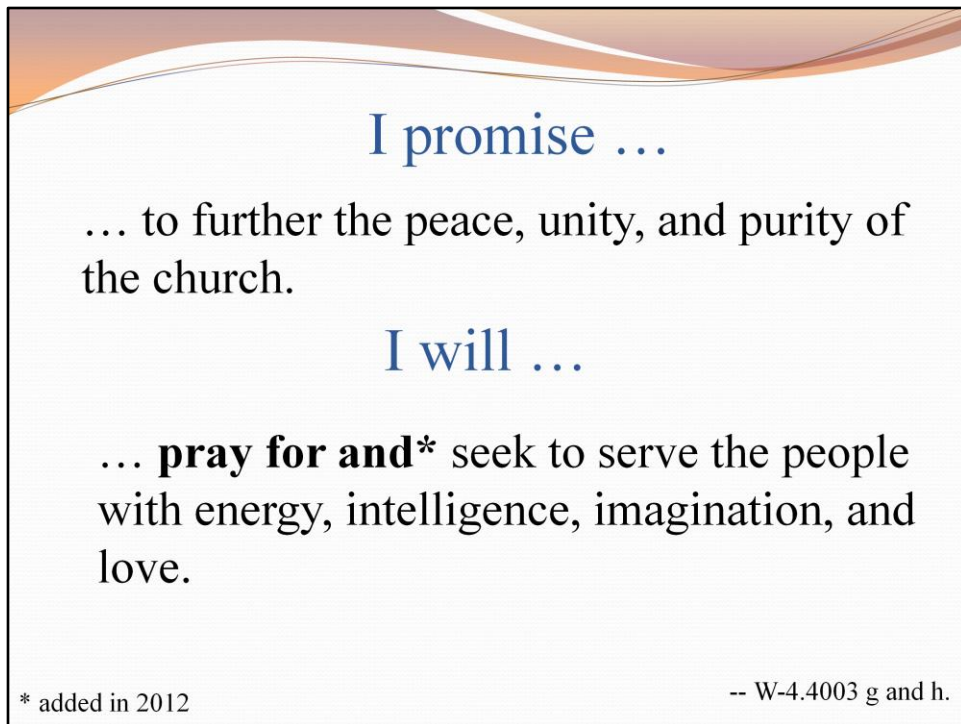
Read slide

References:

W-4.4003 Constitutional Questions to Officers and Commissioned Persons

The moderator of the governing body of those to be ordained, installed, or commissioned shall ask them to stand before the body of membership and to answer the following questions: ...

f. Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?



I promise ...

... to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church.

I will ...

... **pray for and*** seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love.

* added in 2012

-- W-4.4003 g and h.

... continuing ...

Read slide

References:


W-4.4003 Constitutional Questions to Officers and Commissioned Persons

The moderator of the governing body of those to be ordained, installed, or commissioned shall ask them to stand before the body of membership and to answer the following questions: ...

g. Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?

h. Will you **pray for and*** seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?

(* This phrase is a new one – added in 2012, after 300 years as a church in America)



Teaching elders:
I will ...
... be a faithful teaching elder:
proclaiming the **good news in Word and
Sacrament**, teaching faith and caring for
people.

-- W-4.4003 1 (3).
-- W-4.4003 1 (1).

... continuing ...


Read slide

Reference:

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

i. (1) (For ruling elder) Will you be a faithful **ruling elder**, watching over the people, providing for their worship, nurture, and service? Will you share in government and discipline, serving in councils of the church, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

i. (3) (For teaching elder) Will you be a faithful **teaching elder**, proclaiming the good news in Word and Sacrament, teaching faith and caring for people? Will you be active in government and discipline, serving in the councils of the church; and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?



Ruling elders:
I will ...
... be a faithful ruling elder:
watching over the people, **providing** for
their worship, nurture, and service.

-- W-4.4003 1 (3).
-- W-4.4003 1 (1).

... continuing ...

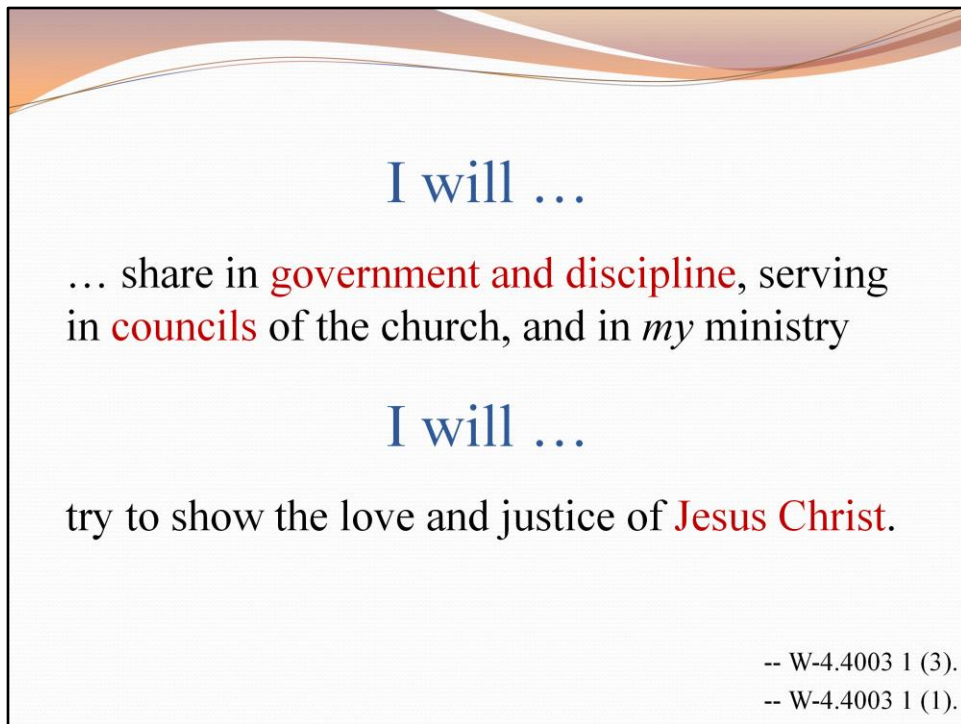
Read slide

Reference:

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

i. (1) (For ruling elder) Will you be a faithful **ruling elder**, watching over the people, providing for their worship, nurture, and service? Will you share in government and discipline, serving in councils of the church, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

i. (3) (For teaching elder) Will you be a faithful **teaching elder**, proclaiming the good news in Word and Sacrament, teaching faith and caring for people? Will you be active in government and discipline, serving in the councils of the church; and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?



... continuing ...

Read slide

Reference:

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

i. (1) (For ruling elder) Will you be a faithful **ruling elder**, watching over the people, providing for their worship, nurture, and service? Will you share in government and discipline, serving in councils of the church, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

i. (3) (For teaching elder) Will you be a faithful **teaching elder**, proclaiming the good news in Word and Sacrament, teaching faith and caring for people? Will you be active in government and discipline, serving in the councils of the church; and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

Ruling elders:

... as ruling elders are installed...

Do *each of us*, as members of the church, accept *these, our brothers and sisters* as *our* ruling elders, chosen by God through the voice of this congregation **to lead you personally and all of us together as a session and as a congregation** in the way of **Jesus Christ?**

I do ...

-- W-4.4006 b. (1)

-- W-4.4004 a. (1)

b. Following the affirmative answers to the questions asked of the person being installed, **a ruling** elder shall face the congregation along with the ruling elder(s)-elect and shall ask them to answer the following questions:

Will the clerk please stand here with ***our ruling elders*** and read the next four questions and will the session members please answer?

(1) Do *each of us*, as members of the church, accept ***these, our brothers and sisters*** as *our* ruling elders, chosen by God through the voice of this congregation to lead *you personally and all of us together as a session and as a congregation* in the way of Jesus Christ?

Reference (for this and the next three slides):

W-4.4006 Installation of Teaching Elder

b. Following the affirmative answers to the questions asked of the person being installed, a ruling elder shall face the congregation along with the pastor-elect (associate pastor-elect) and shall ask them to answer the following questions:

(1) Do we, the members of the church, accept (Name) _____ as our pastor (associate pastor), chosen by God through the voice of this congregation to guide us in the way of Jesus Christ?

(2) Do we agree to pray for him (her), to encourage him (her), to respect his (her) decisions, and to follow as he (she) guides us, serving Jesus Christ, who alone is Head of the Church?

(3) Do we promise to pay him (her) fairly and provide for his (her) welfare as he (she) works among us; to stand by him (her) in trouble and share his (her) joys? Will we listen to the word he (she) preaches, welcome his (her) pastoral care, and honor his (her) authority as he (she) seeks to honor and obey Jesus Christ our Lord?

W-4.4004 Ordination or Installation of Ruling Elders or Deacons

a. The ruling elders and deacons-elect having answered in the affirmative, a ruling elder shall stand with them before the congregation and shall ask the congregation to answer the following questions:

(1) Do we, the members of the church, accept (names) _____ as ruling elders or deacons, chosen by God through the voice of this congregation to lead us in the way of Jesus Christ?

(2) Do we agree to pray for them, to encourage them, to respect their decisions, and to follow as they guide us, serving Jesus Christ, who alone is Head of the Church?

Teaching and Ruling elders: ... as pastors are installed ...

Do *each of us*, as members of the church,
accept *these, our brothers and sisters* as
our pastors, chosen by God through the
voice of this congregation **to guide you**
personally and all of us together as a
session and as a congregation in the way of
Jesus Christ?

I do ...

-- W-4.4006 b. (1)

-- W-4.4004 a. (1)

b. Following the affirmative answers to the questions asked of the person being installed, **a ruling** elder shall face the congregation along with the pastor-elect and shall ask them to answer the following questions:

Will the clerk please stand here with ***our teaching elders*** and read the next four questions and will the teaching elders and session members please answer?

(1) Do *each of us*, as members of the church, accept ***these , our brothers and sisters*** as *our* pastors, chosen by God through the voice of this congregation to guide *you personally and all of us together as a session and as a congregation* in the way of Jesus Christ?

... upon teaching / ruling elders installed ...

Do *each of us* agree to pray for *each other*, to encourage *each other*, to respect *their* decisions, and to follow as *they* **guide** *each and all of us*, serving **Jesus Christ**, who alone is **Head of the Church**?

I do ...

-- W-4.4006 b. (2)

-- W-4.4005 b. (2)

Will the clerk please read the question and all please answer?

(2) Do *each of us* agree **to pray for *each other***, to encourage *each other*, to respect *their* decisions, and to follow as *they* guide *each and all of us*, serving Jesus Christ, who alone is Head of the Church?

Ruling elders:

... upon Pastors being installed ...

Do each of us, as their session promise to pay our Pastors fairly and provide for their welfare as they work among us; to stand by them in trouble and share their joys? Will each of us listen to the word they preach, welcome their pastoral care, and honor their authority as they seek to honor and obey Jesus Christ our Lord?

I do ... and I will.

-- W-4.4006 b. (3)

Will the clerk please read these questions and the session members please answer?

(3) *Do each of us promise to pay them fairly and provide for their welfare as they work among us; to stand by them in trouble and share their joys? Will each of us listen to the word they preach, welcome their pastoral care, and honor their authority as they seek to honor and obey Jesus Christ our Lord?*

... at ordination /installation ...

“Lord God, bless our brothers and sisters here whom you and *our* congregations have called into this **special ministry as teaching / ruling elders** in *our* congregations. Bless each to each other – and to *our* congregations. In Jesus’ holy name, Amen.”

-- W-4.4004 b.

-- W-4.4005 b., W-4.4006 c.

The members of the church having answered these questions in the affirmative, those to be ordained shall kneel, if able, for prayer and the laying on of hands by the session. Those previously ordained ordinarily shall stand, along with the congregation, if able, for the prayer of installation. The session may invite other **ruling elders** and **teaching elders** to participate in the laying on of hands.

Please lay your hands on one another and pray together:

“Lord God, bless our brothers and sisters here whom you and *our* congregations have called into this special ministry as **Ruling Elders** in *our* congregations. Bless each to each other – and to *our* congregations. In Jesus’ holy name, Amen.”

References:

W-4.4005 Ordination of Teaching Elder

W-4.4006 Installation of Teaching Elder

... at ordination /installation ...

You are now a teaching / ruling elder in the **Church of Jesus Christ** and for *your* congregation. Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the **Lord Jesus**, giving thanks to **God the Father** through **Him**. Amen.

-- W-4.4004 b.

Please be seated.

-- W-4.4005 b., W-4.4006 c.

The moderator shall say to those who have thus been ordained and installed:

Moderators will you please read ...

You are now **ruling** elders and deacons in the Church of Jesus Christ and for *your* congregation. Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Amen.

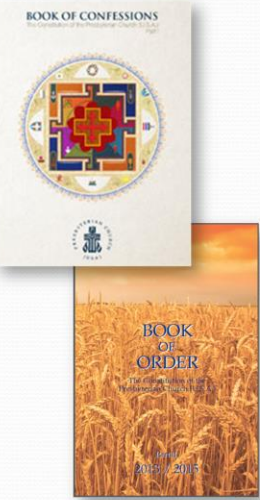
Please be seated.

References:

W-4.4004 Ordination or Installation of **Ruling** Elders or Deacons Questions to Congregation (quoted above).

Now, let's be honest ...

Who among you has a copy
of
**The Constitution of the
Presbyterian Church (U. S.
A.)
2014 – 2015**

The image shows two book covers. The top cover is titled 'BOOK OF CONFESSIONS' and features a colorful, circular geometric design with a central cross-like motif. The bottom cover is titled 'BOOK OF ORDER' and features a photograph of a golden wheat field under a warm, orange-toned sky. Both books are published by the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

Now, let's be honest ...

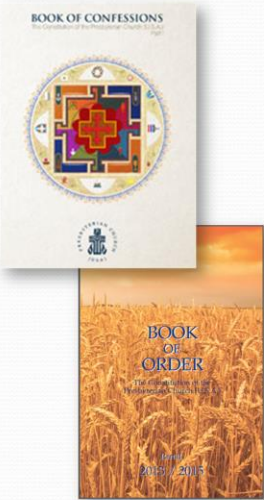
Who among you has a copy of the **2014 – 2015 Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America?**

.. With you?

... At home?

... In the office?

OK ...



The image shows two books from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The top book is the 'Book of Confessions', which has a white cover with a colorful circular emblem in the center. The bottom book is the 'Book of Order', which has a cover with a golden wheat field under a sunset sky. Both books are part of the 'The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U. S. A.) 2014 - 2015'.

Now, let's be honest ...

Who among you has a copy of
**The Constitution of the
Presbyterian Church (U. S. A.)
2014 – 2015**

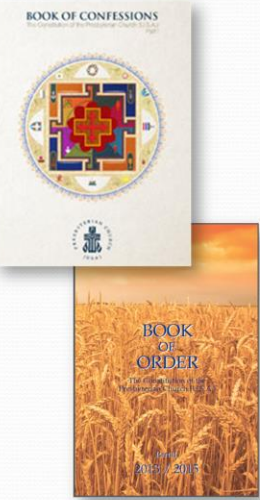
Who among you have read it?

Who among you have read it?

... Completely, cover-to-cover?

... Looked up stuff in it?

... Read the cover and promise to get back to it, someday?



The image shows two book covers. The top cover is the 'BOOK OF CONFESSIONS' with a colorful geometric design. The bottom cover is the 'BOOK OF ORDER' with a golden wheat field background.

Now, let's be honest ...

Who among you has a copy of
**The Constitution of the
Presbyterian Church (U. S. A.)
2014 – 2015**

Who among you have read it?

Who among you are just going to rely
on this class for you **everything you
need** to help prepare our teaching
elders and ruling elder commissioners?

Who among you are just going to rely on this class for you **everything you need** to help prepare our teaching elders and ruling elder commissioners?

Good answer! But, maybe only as a start...

Well, let's look specifically at the topic of polity – and how we got to where we are today ...

Well then, we have some work to do!

Overview:

Concepts

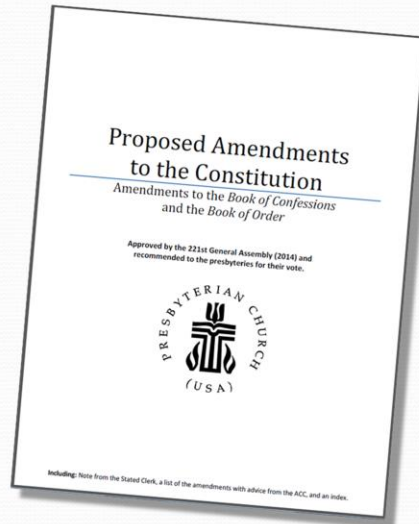
- Polity
- Hallmarks
- Conscience
- Discernment

Processes

- Amending
- Preparation

Content

- Evaluation
- Criteria
- The Amendments



I will leave you to catch up on your constitutional reading outside of this workshop, if you promise to get to that this tonight ... Promise?

These are the points we will discuss here, today – they should lead you to your personal preparation for voting the 8 amendments referred to us by the 221st GA and before us at Spring Presbytery.

To start, the underlying reason you are here -- Polity!

POLITY ...

... brings *order out of chaos*

... it is *how we govern what we do*

... lends an *air of dignity* to what otherwise
would be a *disorganized brawl*

OK, so what is this ***polity*** thing? -- and -- What is the role of polity in the life of the Church?

Well, here are some working definitions of “polity” ...

Pause to read the slide

The first two are pretty good *conceptual* definitions ... for any organization.

The last is what the US Army thinks of its field artillery!

POLITY ...

... it is how we *organize, order, manage, regulate, and lead human effort* to:

- *accomplish the mission* **God gives His Church** and
- *achieve the vision* **God has for His Church.**

“How God works through His people”

These may be more precise definitions of “polity” ... for our church use, today.

Pause to read the slide – and let these words *sink in*

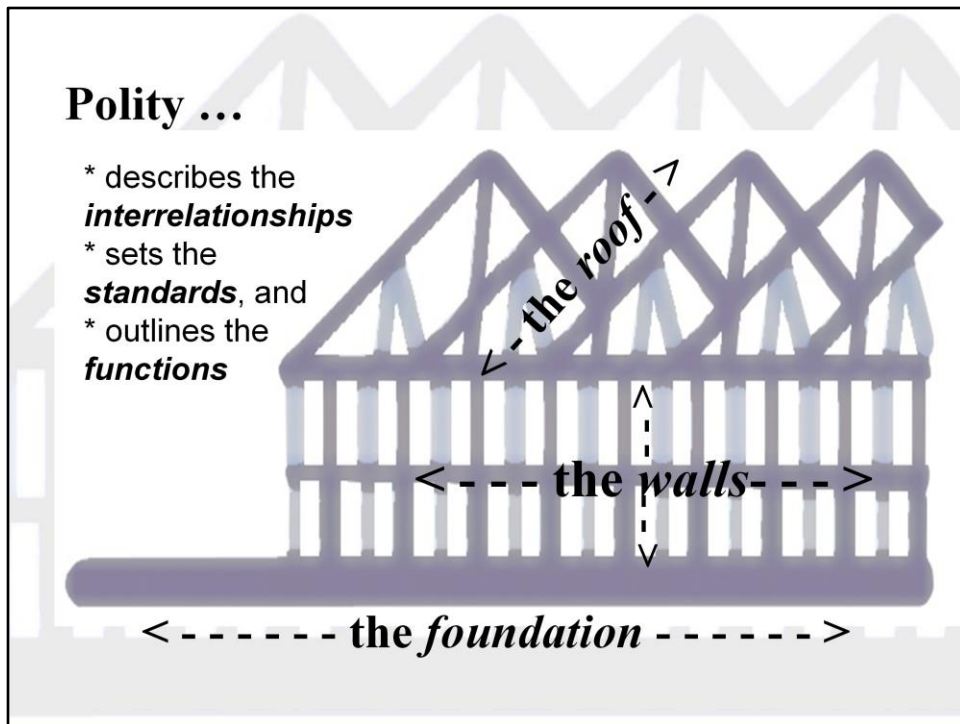
At least you can see here that ***polity*** is not the work of the Church;

... participating in the mission God has for the church is the work of the Church.

Polity ... is how we *govern* our participation in God’s work.

Here is how people who proposed the “big change” for our polity looked at this term

...



Like any good architecture ... any good blueprint ... ***polity specifies --***

- the *dimensions of the theological foundations* upon which our polity rests,
- the *height and width of our ecclesiastical walls*, and
- the *pitch of our covenantal roof*...

It's the same with the relationship between polity and the practice of the life of the church. ***Polity ...***

- * describes the ***interrelationships*** between the parts of the church,
- * sets out the ***standards*** by which the church measures its ministry,
- * and outlines the ***functions*** necessary to being the church.

But, ***Polity*** should leave to individual councils the decisions about

- what practices best serve those interrelationships,
- what processes best produce ministry outcomes to meet those standards, and
- what structures best perform those functions.

*But - leaves the
interior design
- to the occupants*



Polity should mandate:

- **roles, not community,**
- **standards, not activities,**
- **functions not structures,**

... in this analogy, **polity** describes the building we live in – but leaves to us the arrangement of the furniture in our own rooms.

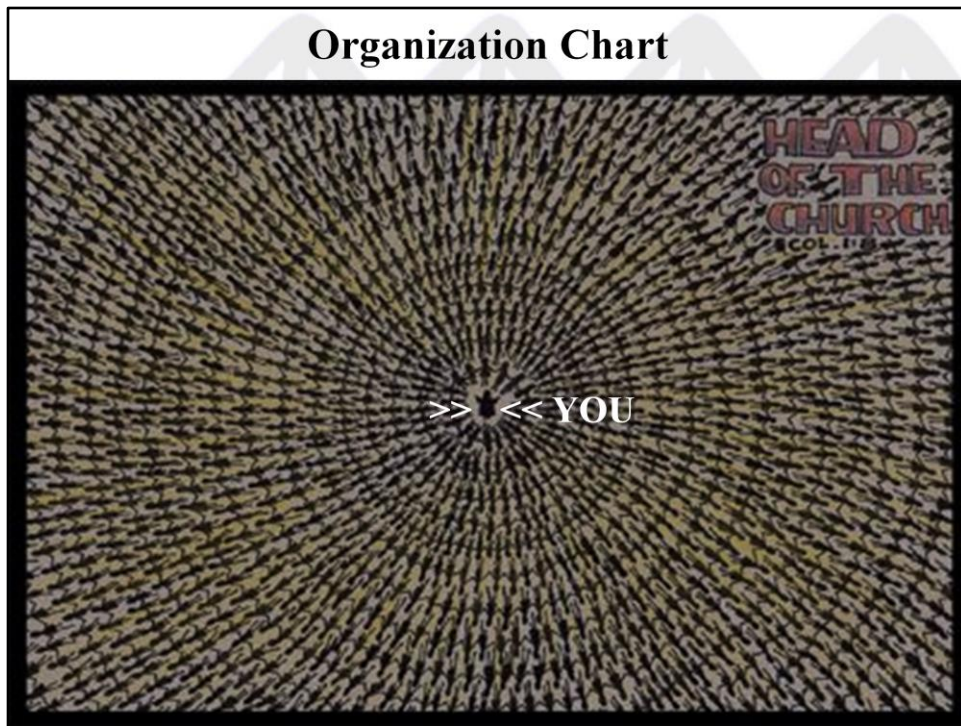
Those decisions are left to the ones who will live in the house – or worship in the sanctuary. **You** making them is what helps turn a house into your home, a church organization into your faith community.

To put it succinctly, polity should mandate –

- The **roles we play** – but, **not** the community of our lives as we fulfill our roles,
- The **standards** by which we measure our ministries – but, **not** the activities we use locally to meet them,
- The **functions** that are necessary to have a church – but, **not** the structures within which we perform locally to make our local church work.

If all of this analogy stuff is too abstract ...

Let's look at the organizational chart!



This is a three-dimensional, “God’s-eye” view of the organization of His church, as viewed by God – looking straight down, directly to you (that’s you, here in the center).

This is how **Jesus** sees and relates to His church – with *each one of us* at the center of His view, simultaneously.

Let’s contemplate the magnitude of this for a moment:

Sociologists estimate there have been about 110 billion in all of human history (with just over 7 billion of us alive now). We didn’t all fit on the chart here, sorry. One hundred ten billion! Do you know how many that is?

If you filled the UNLV’s Thomas and Mack Event Center to capacity (~19,000) once every day until you reached 110 billion, it would take you about 15,800 years! [With UNR’s larger Mackey Stadium, it would only take you 10,000 years.]

And yet, despite that incomprehensible number, **God knows each person**—each individual. He knows all the *villains and the victims; the heroes and the common, ordinary folk; the famous and the unknown, the saints and the sinners*.

God knows them all, and **He loves them all**—each one. *He loves the beautiful and the strong; He loves the broken and the deformed. He loves the intelligent and the ignorant. He loves the powerful and the weak.* God loves each one!

-- Adapted from: <http://www.cloquetchurch.com/2013/02/discovering-gods-call/> 02-17-2013 message by Pastor Rich Doeblen, From ideas presented by Pete Richardson (founder of Convergence Planning; source: Qideas.org/video/calling.aspx)

As far as we are concerned, personally, ... (see the next slide!)

References:

F-1.02 JESUS CHRIST IS HEAD OF THE CHURCH

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

F-1.0201 The Authority of Christ

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

F-1.0202 Christ Calls and Equips the Church

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

F-1.0203 Christ Gives the Church Its Life

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

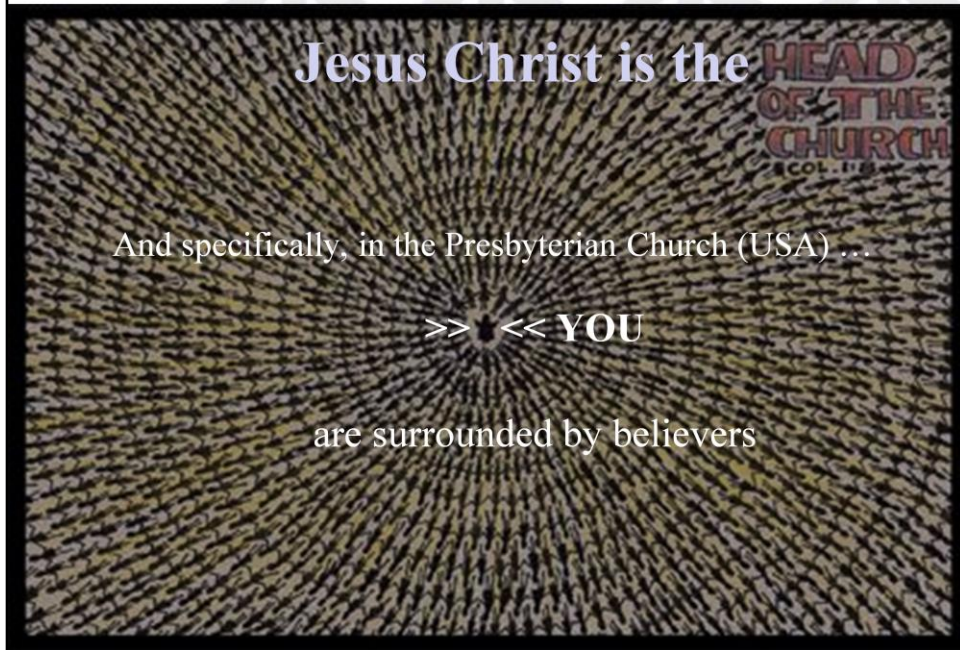
F-1.0204 Christ Is the Church’s Hope

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

F-1.0205 Christ Is the Foundation of the Church

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

We all work directly for the Owner – and CEO!



You and all of the rest of us work directly for the Owner – and the CEO!

And so does everyone else in His church – and so do all of its congregations, organizations, ministries, and agencies.

Jesus Christ is the Head of ALL of our church (give me an **Amen?**) – and I hope that you have a direct, vibrant, and personal relationship with Him – that He “fills your heart and life” and that He “holds you in the palm of His hand.”

‘The church’ does not stand between you and Jesus.

God gives you a direct connection.

‘The church’ does not hold the bucket of Holy Spirit for you to drink from each Sunday.

The Holy Spirit should be dwelling in you – all the time. Like nothing else, it fills that ‘God-shaped hole’ that is part of our created being.

‘The church’ does not provide the throne for the Father whom we can address only on Sunday morning during the corporate prayers of confession and intercession.

Our Father can sit any where He wants (frankly, anywhere you need Him to sit) – after all, He made “all!”

We can each crawl directly into His lap at any time and address Him directly as His beloved child, saying: “Abba, Daddy, Father ... forgive me ... give me this day ... may your kingdom come to me ...”

Instead, ***the church is*** this organization of you and these other believers all around you.

The church ...

Helps you build your relationship with the Triune Him

... and organize collective and individual effort – for your accomplishment of His work –

... with and for others.

References:

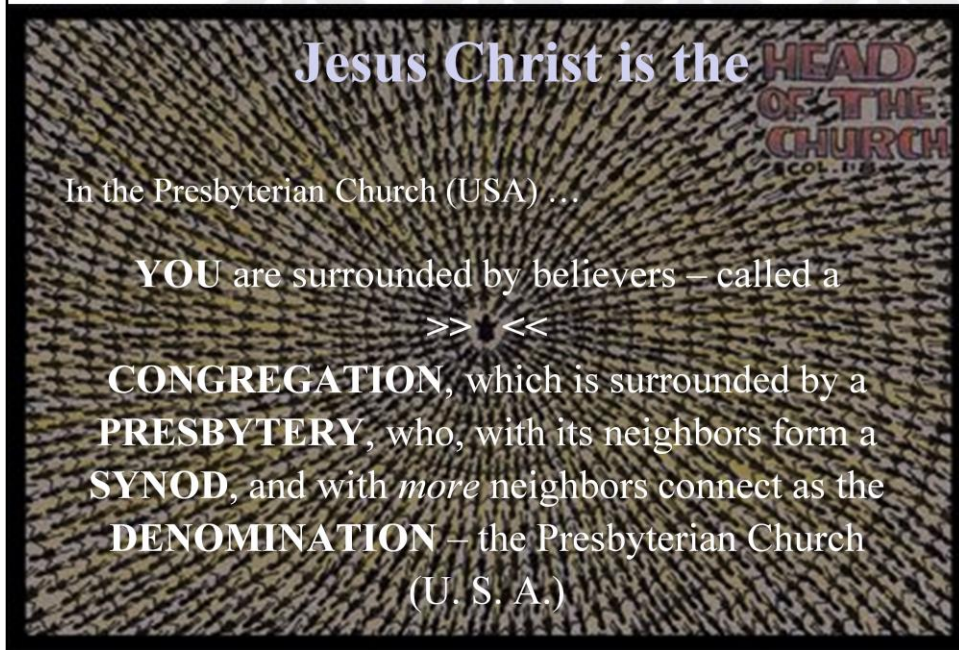
F-1.03 THE CALLING OF THE CHURCH

F-1.0301 The Church Is the Body of Christ

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

- The Church is to be a **community of faith**, entrusting itself to God alone, even at the risk of losing its life.
- The Church is to be a **community of hope**, rejoicing in the sure and certain knowledge that, in Christ, God is making a new creation. This new creation is a new beginning
- for human life and for all things. The Church lives in the present on the strength of that promised new creation.
- The Church is to be a **community of love**, where sin is forgiven, reconciliation is accomplished, and the dividing walls of hostility are torn down.
- The Church is to be a **community of witness**, pointing beyond itself through word and work to the good news of God’s transforming grace in Christ Jesus its Lord.

We all work directly for the Owner – and CEO!



(Read the slide)

Note the relationships between and among these parts of the larger body.

- The **congregation** is a formed body of believers who hold each other up and serve the community they are called to serve.
- The **presbytery** is an association of ten or more neighboring congregations joined for witness and service where called in their collective community area.
- The **synod** is a creature of its constituent presbyteries, linked to serve the needs of congregations in bounds of their presbyteries – and to provide collective service as its presbyteries direct it – in their boundaries and around the world.
- The **denomination** is also a creature of its constituent presbyteries (not of the synods) connected to serve the needs of congregations in the presbyteries – and to provide collective service as these presbyteries direct it – to the nation and around the world.
- The **presbyteries** meet every two years as the **denomination** -- in a representative body called the **General Assembly**.
- All really important policy is decided by the vote of the constituent presbyteries.

By the way, we Presbyterians are not alone. His full church – the Body of Christ – is composed of all Christians, not just the ‘frozen chosen’ expression of it. Embrace your Christian friends as brothers and sisters in His whole church, no matter their denomination.

References:

F-1.02 JESUS CHRIST IS HEAD OF THE CHURCH

F-1.0201 The Authority of Christ

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

F-1.0202 Christ Calls and Equips the Church

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

F-1.03 THE CALLING OF THE CHURCH

F-1.0302 The Marks of the Church

With all Christians of the Church catholic, we affirm that the Church is “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.”

a. The Unity of the Church

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

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

one another and sharing the various gifts God has given to each Christian for the benefit of the whole community. Division into different denominations obscures but does not destroy unity in Christ. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), affirming its historical continuity with the whole Church of Jesus Christ, is committed to the reduction of that obscurity, and is willing to seek and to deepen communion with all other churches within the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

F-3.02 PRINCIPLES OF PRESBYTERIAN GOVERNMENT

[This provision is derived from and intended to restate the Historic Principles of Church Government, which were adopted in 1797 by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, and the Principles of Presbyterian Government. In this quotation, the word “radical” is used in its primary meaning of “fundamental and basic,” and the word “appeals” is used in a general sense rather than with reference to a case involved in judicial process: “The radical principles of Presbyterian church government and discipline are:

‘That the several different congregations of believers, taken collectively, constitute one Church of Christ, called emphatically the Church; that a larger part of the Church, or a representation of it, should govern a smaller, or determine matters of controversy which arise therein; that, in like manner, a representation of the whole should govern and determine in regard to every part, and to all the parts united: that is, that a majority shall govern; and consequently that appeals may be carried from lower to higher governing bodies [councils], till they be finally decided by the collected wisdom and united voice of the whole Church. For these principles and this procedure, the example of the apostles and the practice of the primitive Church are considered as authority.’”]

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

F-3.0201 One Church

The particular congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) wherever they are, taken collectively, constitute one church, called the church.

F-3.0202 Governed by Presbyters

This church shall be governed by presbyters, that is, ruling elders and teaching elders. Ruling elders are so named not because they “lord it over” the congregation (Matt 20:25), but because they are chosen by the congregation to discern and measure its fidelity to the Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture its faith and life. Teaching

elders shall be committed in all their work to equipping the people of God for their ministry and witness.

F-3.0203 Gathered in Councils

These presbyters shall come together in councils in regular gradation. These **councils are sessions, presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly**. All councils of the church

are united by the nature of the church and share with one another responsibilities, rights, and powers as provided in this Constitution. The councils are distinct, but have such mutual

relations that the act of one of them is the act of the whole church performed by it through the appropriate council. The larger part of the church, or a representation thereof, shall govern the smaller.

F-3.0204 Seek and Represent the Will of Christ

Presbyters are not simply to reflect the will of the people, but rather to seek together to find and represent the will of Christ.

F-3.0205 Decision by Majority Vote

Decisions shall be reached in councils by vote, following opportunity for discussion and discernment, and a majority shall govern.

F-3.0206 Review and Control

A higher council shall have the right of review and control over a lower one and shall have power to determine matters of controversy upon reference, complaint, or appeal.

F-3.0207 Ordination by Council

Presbyters (ruling elders and teaching elders) and deacons are ordained only by the authority of a council.

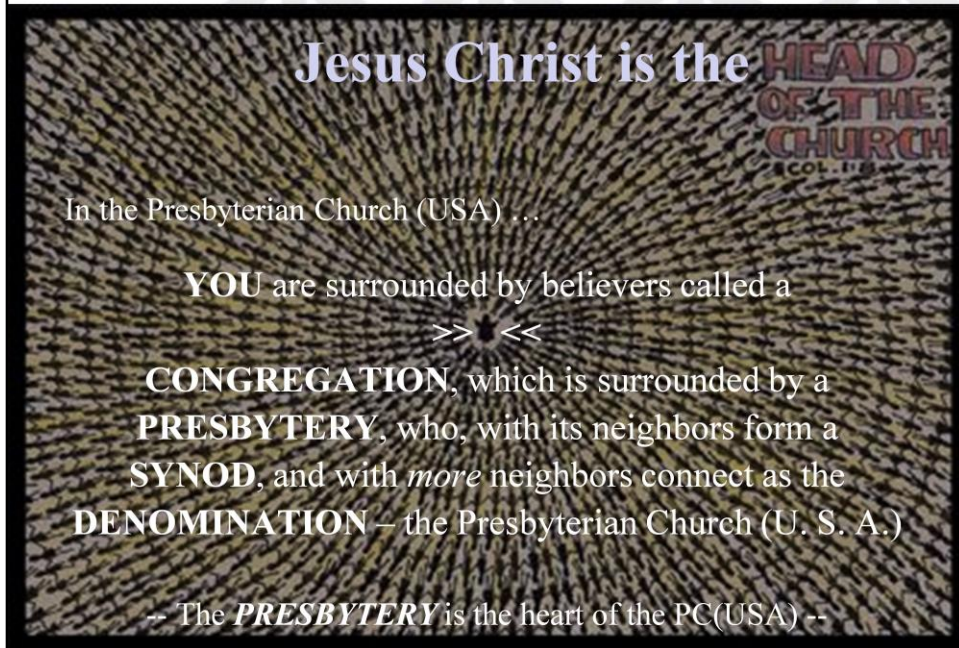
F-3.0208 Shared Power, Exercised Jointly

Ecclesiastical jurisdiction is a shared power, to be exercised jointly by presbyters gathered in councils.

F-3.0209 General Authority of Councils

Councils possess whatever administrative authority is necessary to give effect to duties and powers assigned by the Constitution of the church.

We all work directly for the Owner – and CEO!



Note, especially, this last point – this is the fundamental structural, organizing, and operating power / authority principle in our church polity.

Even though ...

- The **synod** is a creature of its constituent presbyteries,
- The **denomination** is a creature of its constituent presbyteries (not of the synods), and
- The presbyteries meet every two years as the **denomination** -- in a representative body called the **General Assembly**,

All the really important **stuff is done** within the **congregations** – and

All the really important **policy is decided** by the vote of the **presbyteries**.

So, what is all this structure for?

References:

F-3.0209 General Authority of Councils

Councils possess whatever administrative authority is necessary to give effect to duties and powers assigned by the Constitution of the church. **The jurisdiction of**

each council is limited by the express provisions of the Constitution, with powers not mentioned being reserved to the presbyteries.

G-1.01 THE CONGREGATION

G-1.0101 The Mission of the Congregation

The congregation is the church engaged in the mission of God in its particular context. The triune God gives to the congregation all the gifts of the gospel necessary to being the Church. The congregation is the basic form of the church, but it is not of itself a sufficient form of the church. Thus congregations are bound together in communion with one another, united in relationships of accountability and responsibility, contributing their strengths to the benefit of the whole, and are called, collectively, the church.

Through the congregation God's people carry out the ministries of proclamation, sharing the Sacraments, and living in covenant life with God and each other. In the life of the congregation, individual believers are equipped for the ministry of witness to the love and grace of God in and for the world. The congregation reaches out to people, communities, and the world to share the good news of Jesus Christ, to gather for worship, to offer care and nurture to God's children, to speak for social justice and righteousness, to bear witness to the truth and to the reign of God that is coming into the world.



Well, what if a dispute arises that the congregation cannot resolve?

When such a controversy arose in Antioch over the “How a Gentile Becomes a Christian” process -- the crucial issue for the church in Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles – and it became a stumbling block for his ministry, the Antioch congregation sent Paul and Barnabas to the elders of the larger church – who gathered in Jerusalem to resolve the dispute.

Lets look at the polity of what happened:

Please open your Bible (or on the internet in another window) and read
Acts 15 - The Council at Jerusalem

¹ Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” ² This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp **dispute** and debate with them.

Although we would like to assume (though it is not recorded here) that Paul and Barnabas first went privately to these “Judaizers”* to remonstrate and correct them and, failing at that, brought their disagreement before the elders of the congregation of the church at Antioch where this dispute was not resolved either, Galatians 2 indicates

that Paul may have faced these antagonists directly – in public, ‘in the moment,’ as he did in the Galatians account with Peter. People and councils may err – it happens.

Matthew 18:15-20** relates the process that Jesus teaches for resolving disputes (Dealing With Sin in the Church).

* See Galatians 2:14 (Young’s Literal Translation) for this singular word-use reference in scripture and its translation as “Judaize.” The context of this passage, Galatians 2, gives Paul’s account of the broader background for the Acts passage examined here – another aspect of, and the personalities, dynamics, and breadth involved in the original (larger) dispute in Antioch and its underlying theological principle.

**Matthew 18:

Dealing With Sin in the Church

¹⁵ “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. ¹⁶ But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ ¹⁷ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector. ¹⁸ “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

¹⁹ “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

[*Witnesses*]

Deuteronomy 17:6

On the testimony of **two** or three **witnesses** a person is to be put to death, but no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness.

Deuteronomy 19:15

One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offense they may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of **two** or three **witnesses**.



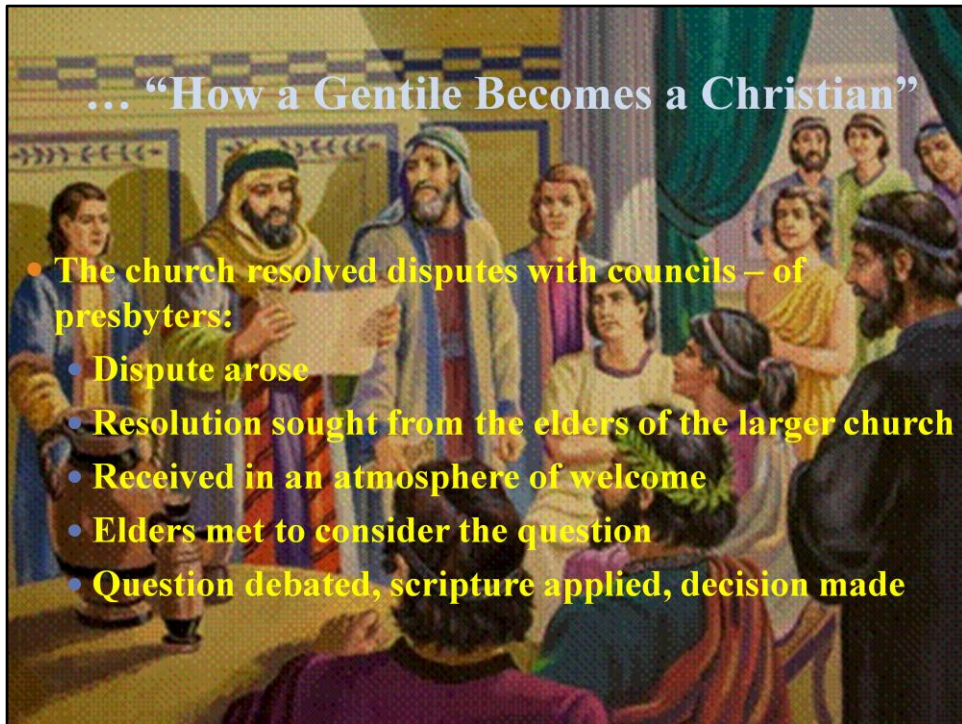
So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. ...

[this is the first ‘overture’ and its ‘managers’ sent to the first ‘council’ – to resolve the dispute.]

⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, **they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders** [note the way these visiting presbyters were treated],

... to whom they reported everything God had done through them. ⁵ Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.”

As Wikipedia notes: The **Council of Jerusalem** (or **Apostolic Conference**) is a name applied by historians to an Early Christian council that was held in Jerusalem and dated to around the year 50. It is considered by Western (Roman) and Orthodox Catholics to be a prototype and forerunner of the later Ecumenical Councils. ... Descriptions of the council are found in Acts of the Apostles chapter 15 (in two different forms, the Alexandrian and Western versions) and also possibly in Paul's letter to the Galatians chapter 2. Paul was likely an eyewitness and a major person in attendance whereas the writer of Luke-Acts probably wrote second-hand about the meeting he described in Acts 15.



⁶ The apostles and elders met to consider this question

[note who heard the dispute – the assembled presbyters (apostles and elders)].

⁷ After much discussion, ...

[note that the issue was thoroughly aired and examined – and that the apostles apparently acted in parity with the elders and did not unduly assert their uniquely authoritative office in flow of the discussion]

¹² The whole assembly became silent as they listened ...

[done ‘decently and in order’]



¹³ **When they finished**, ... **James** [the moderator of the assembly] spoke up. ¹⁵ “The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: ... ¹⁹ “It is my judgment, therefore [the moderator summarized the consensus of the assembly], ²⁰ ... we should write to them, telling them ... (our decision).” [here we see the ‘Stated Clerk’ role addressed: recording the decision and publishing it to the church]

BTW: the Quakers have been using this ‘Spirit-led discussion / Leader summary’ choice-making model (of verse 6-13) for over 300 years. It works very well in session-sized groups and committees. Not so efficiently in in larger groups like the full presbytery plenary.

²² Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, **decided to choose some of their own men** [Judas and Silas] **and send them** [the first administrative commission of the council] ... and ²³ With them they sent the (the letter that recorded the specific decision) ...

[Here are the commission activities with the church who had the original dispute:]

³⁰ **So the men were sent off and went down to Antioch**, where they **gathered the church together and delivered the letter**. ³¹ The **people read it and were glad** for its **encouraging message** [the commission dealt in love with the congregation so that this was their response].

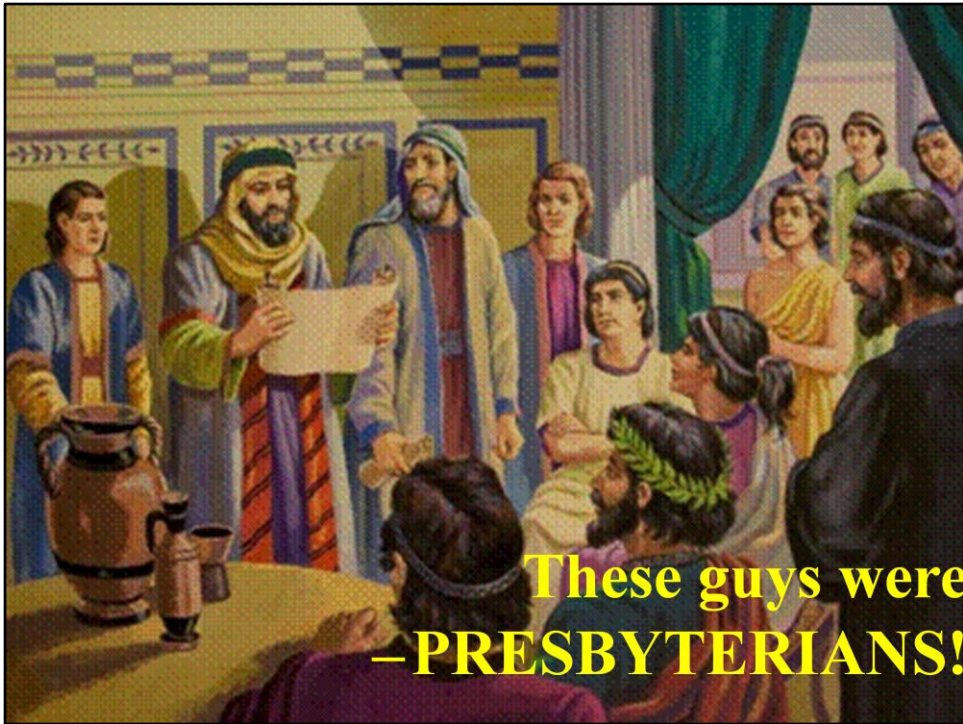
³² Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, **said much to encourage and strengthen the believers**. ³³ After spending some time there, **they were sent off by the believers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them**.



What do we see here?

1. A congregation with an issue they cannot resolve within themselves asking for help in its resolution from its neighboring congregations' leaders.
2. The council of these leaders welcoming both the representatives of that congregation and the issue for resolution.
3. The council with certain leaders performing roles that our denomination uses today.
4. A well discussed and biblically based resolution, recorded, and published to the whole church.
5. A commission of the larger church going to the congregation with the original issue and counseling them as to the wider body's resolution – *in so loving a manner* that they were received with joy.

So, what can we conclude from this?



What else could I say!

Hallmarks of Presbyterian Decision-making

- ... **governed by representative bodies** composed of presbyters ... jurisdiction ... **limited** by the express provisions of the Constitution
- **Decisions by vote, ... a majority shall govern ... final decisions by the collected wisdom and united voice of the whole Church**
- ... men of good characters and principles may differ. ... the **duty** of Christians ... **to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other**
- ... **“God alone is Lord of the conscience”**
- ... **Holy Scriptures are the only rule** of faith and manners ... **no Church governing body ... to bind the conscience**

These are the hallmarks of decision-making in our polity – drawn from scripture.

(I know that this looks a lot like your 5th grade civics class – because America borrowed most of its civics from the Christian church – Presbyterians in particular) ...

Absorb the slide

The Presbyterian Church is governed by representatives who exercise a limited authority and who vote their individual consciences, rightfully prepared, discerning the will of God and that the will of God is in the majority (*scripturally prepared and expressed*). We seek to maintain peace, unity, and purity – and forbear differences among us, for we know that God alone is the Lord of conscience. His Word is the only rule of faith and practice – so who could we be to bind another’s conscience?

References:

F-3.0105 Mutual Forbearance

That, while under the conviction of the above principle we think it necessary to make effectual provision that all who are admitted as teachers be sound in the faith, we also believe that there are truths and forms with respect to which men of good characters and principles may differ. And in all these we think it the **duty** both of private

Christians and societies **to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other.**

F-3.0101 God Is Lord of the Conscience

a. That “**God alone is Lord of the conscience**, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship.”

F-3.0107 Church Power

That **all Church power**, whether exercised by the body in general or in the way of representation by delegated authority, **is only ministerial and declarative**; that is to say, that **the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners**; that no Church council ought to pretend to make laws to bind the conscience in virtue of their own authority; and **that all their decisions should be founded upon the revealed will of God. ...**

F-3.0202 Governed by Presbyters

This church shall be governed by presbyters, that is, ruling elders and teaching elders. ...

F-3.0203 Gathered in Councils

These presbyters shall come together in councils in regular gradation. **These councils are sessions, presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly.** All councils of the church are united by the nature of the church and share with one another responsibilities, rights, and powers as provided in this Constitution. The councils are distinct, but have such mutual relations that the act of one of them is the act of the whole church performed by it through the appropriate council. **The larger part of the church, or a representation thereof, shall govern the smaller.**

F-3.0206 Review and Control

A higher council shall have the right of review and control over a lower one and shall have **power to determine matters of controversy upon reference, complaint, or appeal.**

F-3.0205 Decision by Majority Vote

Decisions shall be reached in councils by vote, following opportunity for discussion and discernment, and **a majority shall govern.**

G-9.0101 Definition The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall be **governed by representative bodies** composed of presbyters, both elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament. These governing bodies shall be called: session, presbytery, synod, General Assembly.

G-9.0103 Unity of Governing Bodies All governing bodies of the church are united by the nature of the church and share with one another responsibilities, rights, and powers as provided in this Constitution. The governing bodies are separate and independent, but have such mutual relations that the act of one of them is the act of the whole church performed by it through the appropriate governing body. The jurisdiction of each governing body is limited by the express provisions of the Constitution, **with powers not mentioned being reserved to the presbyteries**, and with the acts of each subject to review by the next higher governing body.

G-1.0301 Right of Judgment

(1) (a) That “**God alone is Lord of the conscience**, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship.” (Westminster Confession Ch XX or XXII, par 2)

G-1.0307 Church Power


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

G-1.0400 4. The Historic Principles of Church Government The radical principles of Presbyterian church government and discipline are:

That the several different congregations of believers, taken collectively, constitute one Church of Christ, called emphatically the Church; that a larger part of the Church, or a representation of it, should govern a smaller, or determine matters of controversy which arise therein; that, in like manner, a representation of the whole should govern and determine in regard to every part, and to all the parts united: that is, that a **majority shall govern**; and consequently that appeals may be carried from lower to higher governing bodies, till they be finally decided by the **collected wisdom and united voice of the whole Church**. For these principles and this procedure, the example of the apostles and the practice of the primitive Church are considered as authority.

Where is this all written down?

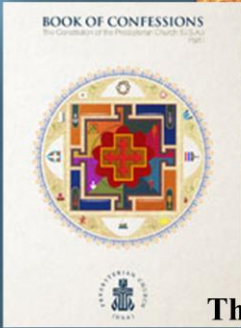
God-gave ...




... as His infallible rule of faith and practice

We derived ...

Polity
Guidelines





Theology
Guidelines

So – where is all this written down?

(Absorb the screen...)

... well – in the Holy Bible, actually. Not very systematically, though.

Being systematic (or “topical”) about what the Bible tells us about God and His relationship to us – and how we should do and organize to do what He commands us to do – is the work of our Constitution, which is in two books:

- The *Book of Confessions* – “topical” about what scripture says about certain matters of faith and practice where the church has been challenged by the world – and
- The *Book of Order* – “topical” about what scripture says about how we govern ourselves as God’s organization of His believers on earth (‘wise as serpents, gentle as doves’ -- ‘in the world; but, not of the world’).

Put another way: Our PC(USA) Constitution defines / describes our denomination’s current theology-driven **polity**. In our denominational Constitution,

Part One is The *Book of Confessions*, the applied theology part – describing what God says and what the church believes and stands for regarding

particular and specifically-crucial issues.

Part Two is the *Book of Order* is the **practical governance** part – describing the theology, interrelationships, standards, and functions of ...

how we govern,

how we worship, and

how we enforce our *polity*.

But we Presbyterians love to write this stuff down, so our Constitution also specifies that *procedural* Manuals of Operation be written for the denomination (the GA and its offices and committees), the Synods (and their offices and committees), the presbyteries (and their offices and committees), and for local congregations and their sessions (and their offices and committees) to further explain how we ‘council’ at these places within the framework of our polity – in these respective locations.

Our GA, Synod, Presbytery, and your local governance documents (the ecclesiastical Manuals of Operation of your Session and perhaps, your Diaconate – and the civil Operating Principles and Established practices of your Congregation and – and the civil Articles of Incorporation and the Bylaws of your congregation’s non-profit corporation – i.e., your local *polity*) reflect the content of the two Books of our denomination’s Constitution extensively – with paraphrase, direct quotes, and/or by reference.

These two books – *and their practice by our denomination* -- are what may be changed by the vote of the presbyteries over this year of consideration and voting on the 8 proposed amendments.

Let’s take a look at how this consideration and voting happens ...

What's all this about
... my conscience?

Well ... What's all this about ... my conscience?

Whose Church is it anyway?

Whom do I Serve as a Presbyterian?

Do I have to invent my vote?

-- or --

Should I find what to do?

First ... What's all this about ... my conscience?

Note that conscience has come up several times today. What have we learned about it as Presbyters so far?

Discuss

Whose Church is it anyway? Whom do I Serve as a Presbyterian?

BTW: “**Represent**” means: trusted by the electing body to let God speak through *your informed and prepared perspective* as it would **represent** *His speaking through the informed and prepared perspective of the others* (i.e., the whole of the electing body) *with whom you have shared in common a collective Christian life experience.*

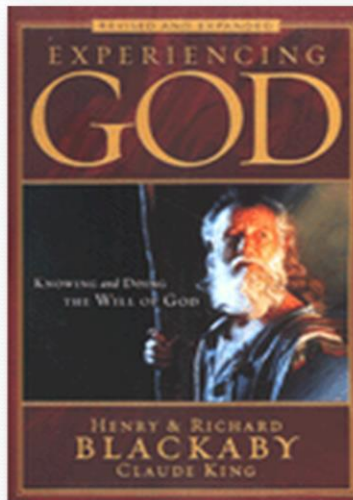
Do I have to *invent* my answers?

Or do I *listen to God* for His answers?

Should I find what to do?

It comes down to discerning God's will – not inventing some answer on any other basis.

Tools for ... DISCERNING



- **God** pursues a continuing love relationship with you
- **God** is always at work around you – and He invites you to join Him in what He is doing
- **You** must make adjustments in your life to join God in what He is doing ... a “holy indifference” to your stuff and deferring to God’s will

I am not here to sell you on Henry and Richard Blackaby’s great study on discerning God’s will – and we won’t debate its merits here; but, *Experiencing God* is probably the best example and summary of the many great biblical studies and courses out there on finding God’s will in your life – both personally and communally.

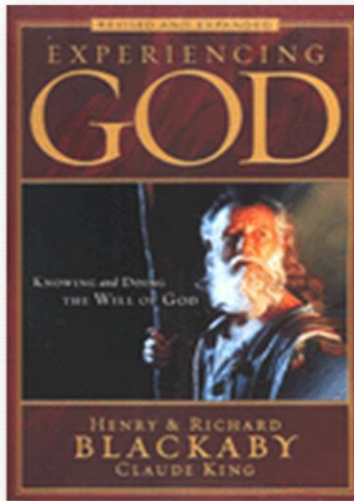
In it, the Blackabys note that:

- **God** pursues a continuing love relationship with you – not because you are “good,” or have done anything “good,” or because you are even likable (!) – He does it for His own reasons. (Maybe, its just because He made you and He loves you.)
- **God** is always at work around you – and He invites you to join Him in what He is doing even though you are not perfect, or willing, or even “ready.” (He takes care of all of those things, by the way.)
- But **you** must make adjustments in your life to join God in what He is doing. Others call this developing a “holy indifference” to God’s will – laying aside your pet projects, personal desires, and so forth – to do what God wants.

You didn’t really think that this would be easy, or require *nothing different* in your life, did you? “Make adjustment” – indeed!

Thankfully, God doesn’t just leave it at that! We can know Him, know His direction for each of us, and with that, follow Him and do His work!

Tools for ... DISCERNING



God reveals Himself, His purposes,
His ways – *by the Holy Spirit* –
through:

...prayer
...circumstances
...counsel of mature* Christians
...the Church
and ...**the Bible**

You come to know God
– through experience

You develop a “Holy Indifference”
-- to the outcome.



* “mature” -- a dependable pattern of Godly thinking and living

Thankfully, God reveals to you - Himself, His purposes, and His ways (by the Holy Spirit) through:

... prayer
... circumstances
... counsel of mature* Christians (“Mature Christian” are those who show in their daily life a long and dependable pattern of Godly thought, decision making, and life-choices.)
... the Church
 – in the Presbyterians’ general case – the *Book of Confessions*
 – in the Presbyterians’ governance case – the *Book of Order: Fundamentals of Presbyterian Polity*
and
... **the Bible**

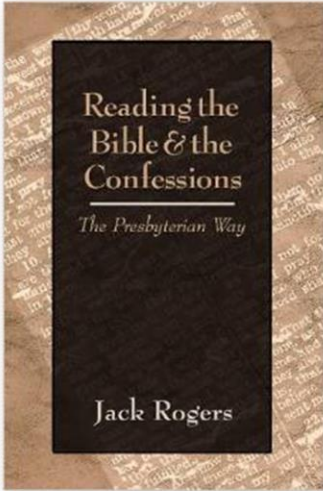
You will come to know God by experiencing Him – as you obey Him – and He accomplishes His work through ... well, you!

Your biggest hurdle may be to develop a “Holy Indifference” to the outcome. This means putting aside your pet projects and personal likes – and submitting yourself to God’s will and plan for your life – and His church.

In the civil world this “Holy Indifference” to the outcome is called the Board Members’ individual (and legal) Duties of Care, Loyalty, and Fidelity to Purpose.

This is real, hard, **WORK**.

No, there is no Easy Button here!



Tools for ... Interpreting the Bible

1. Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, is the center of Scripture
2. Focus – on the *plain text* of Scripture
3. Holy Spirit guides interpretation and application
4. Be guided by “Rule of Faith” (doctrine / the whole story)
5. Interpret through “Rule of Love”
6. Interpretation requires earnest study
7. A given verse is subject to the “whole counsel” of Scripture

So, how do we interpret God’s will for us in **the Bible**?

Well, here is another book – again one of many on interpretation; but, this one from our denomination’s perspective: *Reading the Bible and the Confessions: The Presbyterian Way*, written by Jack Bartlett Rogers, a Presbyterian minister, seminary professor emeritus, and author. He taught at Westminster College, Pennsylvania, at Fuller Theological Seminary, and at San Francisco Theological Seminary. A self-described straight, uptight, conservative Christian whose life situations led him to ‘a new sense of freedom and openness,’ he also served as Moderator of the 213th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in 2001.

In this book, Jack:

- Reports the tools that the PC(USA) uses to interpret scripture and
- Proposes parallel tools for interpreting the confessions and what makes for a confession of this denomination.

In its Chapter 3, he notes that the denomination goes back to the view of the Westminster Divines and of John Calvin (past John Calvin’s students’ later views with their misrepresentations, misstatements, and errors!) to these seven tools for interpreting the bible.

He presents each of them in by examining:

- The tool itself,
- Its confessional confirmation, and
- Its practical consequences in the life and practice of the church.

And he notes that all seven tools are to be applied together – no picking and choosing to make it come out to your liking, we are seeking God's message in scripture, not your message in it!

Here are the seven tools for interpreting scripture within today's context that Jack proposes:

1. Redemption in Jesus Christ is the center of Scripture –

Guideline #1: Recognize that Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, is the center of Scripture. The redemptive activity of God is central to the entire Scripture. The Old Testament themes of the covenant and the messiah testify to this activity. In the center of the New Testament is Jesus Christ: the Word made flesh, the fulfillment of Israel's messianic hope, and the promise of the Kingdom. It is to Christ that the church witnesses. When interpreting Scripture, keeping Christ in the center aids in evaluating the significance of the problems and the controversies that always persist in the vigorous, historical life of the church.

The central story of the Bible is that “A good God created a good world. A tragic fall into sin by the world's people alienated them from God. But God would not leave these people alone. God came into the world in the person of Jesus Christ, whose life and teaching, whose death and resurrection, overcame alienation and renewed the relationship between God and God's people.” When we see Christ as the center of scripture, it enables us to focus on the heart of the gospel message: love God and love your neighbor.

2. Focus – on the *plain text* of Scripture

... in its grammatical and historical context ... This principle warns us against reading into Scripture what we want I to say. ... We must deal with the given text as it is. “More Holy Indifference!”

3. Holy Spirit guides interpretation and application

The same God who persuaded us of the authority of Scripture, by what Calvin called the “inner testimony of the Holy spirit,” will also aid us in interpreting scripture. Note carefully: The Holy Spirit does not give us new information. ... Rather, the Spirit gives us something different;

but, all important – a receptive attitude – that enables us rightly to understand and apply the message that is there in the plain text.

1. Be guided by “Rule of Faith” (doctrine / the whole story)

The amazing thing is the clear continuity of the Christian message over time. That is what is meant by the “Rule of Faith.”

2. Interpret through “Rule of Love” –

The “rule of love” comes from Augustine and can be found in two of our Reformation era Confessions. Its roots lie in Jesus’ twofold commandment to love God and to love our neighbor. When we find that someone is interpreting Scripture in a way that is demeaning to God or hurtful to people, we can and should question the validity of that interpretation.

3. Interpretation requires earnest study

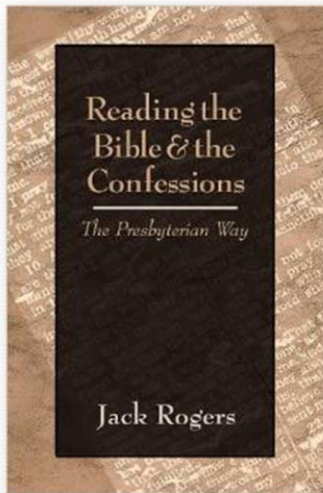
Biblical translation has gone on so long and is based on so large a number of manuscripts that we can feel very confident of the accuracy of the text in our contemporary Bibles. ... We must work to understand better the context from which the controversial passage has come. And to understand, we must study.

4. A given verse is subject to the “whole counsel” of scripture

We are always to interpret the parts by the whole, the complex by the simple, the peripheral by the central. ... This assumes that there is a central unifying theme in scripture – Creation, and Redemption in Jesus Christ.

Chapter 3 of Jack’s book then displays Confessional confirmation and the practical consequences of each of these statements – which are beyond the scope of this presentation.

Tools for ... Interpreting and amending the Confessions



1. Redemption in Jesus Christ is the center of the confessions
2. Focus – their *plain text* in the confession's setting
3. The Holy Spirit leads us to their truth
4. Be guided by “Rule of Faith” (doctrine / over-arching themes)
5. Reject oppressive interpretation through the “Rule of Love”
6. Interpretation requires earnest study
7. The whole *Book of Confessions* is instructive as to its parts

When Jack turns to the Confessions in this book's Part 2, he finds himself led in chapter 6 to propose these seven tools for their interpretation – and amendment (look familiar?).

In Part 2, he notes that we must expect the content of the *Book of Confessions* to change – with the changes that occur in our cultural and social context and the new challenges these changes present to the church – of the church would lose its relevance to its members and to the problems of, or challenges from, the world and thus, its ability to offer salvation to the world in a meaningful way.

And he treats each of the tools in by examining:

- A relatively-modern example of institutional mis-interpretation and mis-application in this area – within our denominational heritage,
- How the church changed its mind regarding how it had mis-read God's Word for this area, and
- The General Assembly's Policy on this tool's use, today.

And again, he notes that all seven tools are to be applied together – no picking and choosing to make it come out to your liking, we are seeking God's guidance from the confessions, not your guidance in them!

Here are the seven tools for interpreting the confessions within today's context that

Jack proposes:

1. Redemption in Jesus Christ is the center of the confessions

The confessional statements are subordinate standards in the church, subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to Him. While confessional standards are subordinate to the Scriptures, they are, nonetheless, standards. They are not lightly drawn up or subscribed to, nor may they be ignored or dismissed. (*BOO*, F-2.02) Although the Confessions give us an orientation toward Scripture, they are themselves to be interpreted by the perspective of Jesus Christ. The redemptive gospel of Jesus Christ is the central theme of the Book of Confessions, as it is of Scripture.

2. Focus – their *plain text* in the confession’s setting

The creeds and confessions of this church arose in response to particular circumstances within the history of God’s people. (*BOO*, F-2.01) ... The plain text of each confession must be interpreted in its own historical and cultural context to understand its original meaning. Then, under the leadership of the Spirit of Christ, we can discern what is applicable to us today.

3. The Holy Spirit leads us to their truth

Moreover, the process for changing the confessions of the church is deliberately demanding, requiring a high degree of consensus across the church. (*BOO*, F-2.02) If the Presbyterian church never changed its interpretation of the Bible and its doctrinal standards, it would not be able to cope with new situations. ... The Holy Spirit, as Jesus promised, leads us to clearer and more complete understandings of the truth of the bible; thus we are better able to understand the central teachings of the *Book of Confessions*.

4. Be guided by “Rule of Faith” (doctrine / over-arching themes)

[The confessions] guide the church in its study and interpretation of the Scriptures; they summarize the essence of Reformed Christian tradition; they direct the church in maintaining sound doctrines; they equip the church for its work of proclamation. (*BOO*, F-2.01) We can embrace both common confessional standards for the community and freedom of individual conscience. We can embrace both conviction and civility when we understand that the overarching themes that run through the Book of confessions, from the ancient creeds to the most contemporary statements of faith, are the rule of faith.

5. Reject oppressive interpretation through the “Rule of Love”

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) states its faith and bears witness to God’s grace in Jesus Christ in the creeds and confessions in *The Book of Confessions*. In these statements the church declares to its members and to the world who and what it is, what it believes, and what it resolves to do. These statements identify the church as a community of people known by its convictions as well as by its actions. (*BOO*, F-2.01) Both interpretations of past confessions and new confessional affirmations can serve the church in rejecting cultural norms that have been used to oppress people in the name of confessional conformity.

6. Interpretation requires earnest study

Yet the church, in obedience to Jesus Christ, is open to the reform of its standards of doctrine as well as of governance. The church affirms *Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda secundum verbum Dei*, that is, “The church reformed, always to be reformed according to the Word of God” in the power of the Spirit. (*BOO*, F-2.02) Presbyterians have continued to be reforming by carefully distinguishing between the appropriate theological application and the cultural context of their confessional statements. When necessary, Presbyterians have reinterpreted their biblical and confessional tradition and produced new and more centrally biblical confessions of faith.

7. The whole *Book of Confessions* is instructive as to its parts

In its confessions, the PC(USA): witnesses to the faith of the Church catholic (*BOO*, F-2.03), upholds the affirmations of the Protestant Reformation (*BOO*, F-2.04), and expresses the faith of the Reformed tradition (*BOO*, F-2.05). Any confession in the Book of Confessions should be compatible with these great traditions.

These concepts and resources then, can help you in your earnest study of the amendments – so you can meaningfully participate in helping your commissioners and the member teaching elders who will attend Spring presbytery prepare their consciences to vote on them.

Well then, lets get to it!

Overview:

Concepts

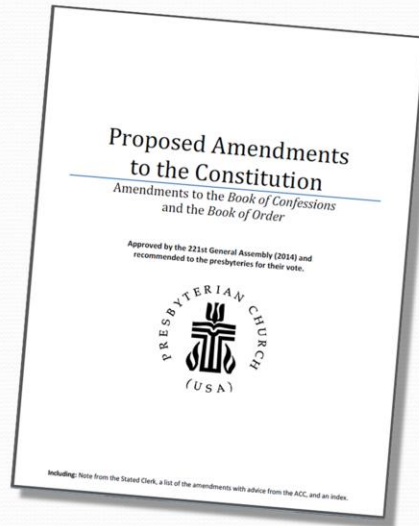
- Polity
- Hallmarks
- Conscience
- Discernment

Processes

- Amending
- Preparation

Content

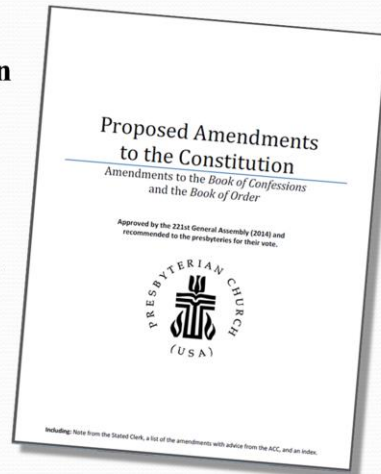
- Evaluation
- Criteria
- The Amendments



Lets turn from the underlying concepts, now, to the processes we will see in action – and participate in from here to Spring Presbytery – as our denomination decides the issues distilled in the proposed amendments.

The first task before us ...

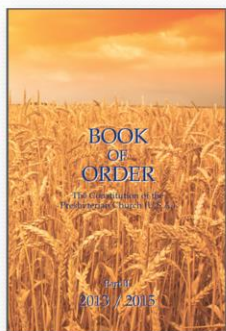
- 14-1 Confession of Belhar**
- 14-A. Renunciation of Jurisdiction**
- 14-B. Preparation for Ministry:**
 - 14-B.1. Final Assessment**
 - 14-B.2. Accommodations**
- 14-C. Child Protection Policy**
- 14-D. Minimum Composition of a Presbytery**
- 14-E. Interreligious Stance**
- 14-F. Marriage**



Again, these are the eight items we will vote at Spring Presbytery.

Note that Item 14-B is really two items and these will be voted separately. For these two proposals in this single area, I urge you to consider each one as though the other does not exist – they are not a linked pair for our voting purposes.

How will the PC(USA) decide these?



Chapter 6 of our *Book of Order* ...

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) seeks to be “the church reformed, always to be reformed, according to the Word of God” in the power of the Spirit of God.

In light of this commitment, ...
interpretation and amendment ... are understood as a means to faithfulness.

Chapter 6 in the new FOG of our *Book of Order* directs how we amend our Constitution.

It opens with these principles :

G-6.01 REFORM

- The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) seeks to be “the church reformed, always to be reformed, according to the Word of God” in the power of the Spirit (F-2.02.)
- In light of this commitment, the following interpretation and amendment procedures are understood as a means to faithfulness.

Amendments to our *Constitution* are not:

- light things,
- secular civil or legal things,
- popularly politically correct things, and they are not
- cultural things.

They are *theological* things, *matters of our faith* -- as our faith matures in the light of God’s Word.

G-6.03 Amendments ... to Confessional Documents

... made only in the following manner:

Step One: The proposal to amend *The Book of Confessions* is approved by GA1 for study in the church.

Step Two: GA1 appoints a committee which studies and reports its findings to the *next* GA.

Step Three: GA2 approves the proposed amendment and recommends it to the Presbyteries for vote.

Step Four: The Presbyteries vote -- **two thirds** must affirm.

Step Five: Approved and enacted by GA3!

Successful amendments to the *Book of Confessions* go all the way through a five step process.

They are made only in the following manner – which is at least a 3-GA, or 6-year pipeline – if **everything** goes well:

G-6.03 AMENDING THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS

Amendments to the confessional documents of this church may be made only if all the following steps are completed:

Step One: The proposal to amend *The Book of Confessions* is **approved by the General Assembly for study in the church**.

Step Two: The General Assembly appoints a committee of ruling elders and teaching elders, numbering not fewer than fifteen, of whom not more than two shall be from any one synod, to consider the proposal. This committee shall consult with the committee or council from which the proposal originated. It shall **report its findings to the next General Assembly**.

Step Three: The next ensuing General Assembly considers the report of the study committee and **approves the proposed amendment and recommends it to the**

presbyteries for vote.

Step Four: The proposed amendment receives the approval in writing of **two thirds of the presbyteries.**

Step Five: The **proposed amendment is approved and enacted** by the next ensuing General Assembly following the amendment's receipt of the necessary two-thirds approval of the presbyteries.

(Frankly the office of the GA doesn't know what would happen if Step Five doesn't occur – it has never happened before!)

G-6.04 Amendments ... to the *Book of Order*

... made only in the following manner:

Step One: All proposals ...in writing ...120 days before GA1.

Step Two: To ACC for clarity, consistency, and compatibility.

Step Three: **GA1** approves the proposed amendment and recommends it to the Presbyteries for vote.

Step Four: The Presbyteries vote -- **majority** must affirm.

Step Five: The Stated Clerk receives the Presbyteries' votes.

If affirmed, becomes effective
on the anniversary of **GA1**'s last day.

Successful amendments to the *Book of Order*, on the other hand, must survive a ***different*** five step process.

They are made only in the following manner – but, this could be as fast as a single-GA, or 16 month (the Presbyterian speed of light) pipeline – if **everything** goes well:

G-6.04 AMENDING THE *BOOK OF ORDER*

Amendments to the *Book of Order* shall be made only if all the following steps are completed:

Step One: All proposals requesting amendment of the *Book of Order* are communicated in writing to the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly no later than 120 days prior to the convening of the next session of the General Assembly.

Step Two: The Stated Clerk shall refer all such proposals to amend the *Book of Order* to the Advisory Committee on the Constitution (G-6.02), which shall examine the proposed amendment for clarity and consistency of language and for compatibility with other provisions of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). At least sixty days prior to the meeting of the General Assembly, the advisory committee shall report its findings to the General Assembly along with its recommendations, which may include an amended version of any proposed constitutional changes as well as

advice to accept or decline the proposals referred to the committee. The General Assembly shall not consider any amendment until it has considered the report and any recommendations from the Advisory Committee on the Constitution.

Step Three: The same General Assembly approves the proposal to amend and transmits the proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their vote.

Step Four: The Presbyteries shall transmit their votes to the Stated Clerk no later than one year following the adjournment of the assembly transmitting the proposed amendments.

Step Five: The Stated Clerk receives written advice that a proposed amendment to the *Book of Order* has received the affirmative votes of a majority of all the presbyteries.

The proposed amendment so approved shall become effective one year following the adjournment of the assembly transmitting the proposed amendment.

The 8 proposed amendments before the presbyteries this year are in one or the other of these two processes.

How will Nevada Presbytery decide these?

- Past study of complex issues urged using ***Communal Discernment processes***
- Nevada Presbytery's recent history suggests:
 - a time for personal preparation,
 - a time for communal discussion, and
 - a time for corporate choice.

Last two times we went through all of this, we found that GA proposed a time of Communal Discernment on the docket in the Presbyteries' consideration of these amendments. We did it a little differently.

I have proposed to our Moderator and Stated Clerk the same concepts and actions we used last time - based on the process we used successfully two and four years ago with the last two batches of proposed Constitutional Amendments (each of which included proposed change to the *Book of Confessions* and multiple changes to the parts of the *Book of Order* of our *Constitution*).

Spring Presbytery @ Green Valley PC

Tuesday morning (Mar 17) informational session

- Time devoted to the proposed amendments (all 8 items)
- A moderated, informal communal discussion
- No motions, no decisions.

At our March Presbytery meeting (March 15-18, 2015 at Green Valley Presbyterian Church, Henderson, NV), here is how that will look schedule-wise, *with you all coming to Presbytery having thoroughly studied the amendments and preparing to vote your conscience* - of course!

Equipping Ministries will provide a time – 10 to 11 am - of informal; but, orderly, discussion before Presbytery's plenary session actually begins -- to air the proposed amendments, share information regarding their declared intent and probable effect, and share the attending Presbyters' arguments for and against.

Spring Presbytery @ Green Valley PC

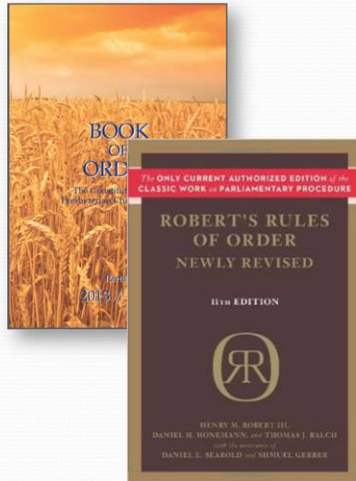
Tuesday afternoon plenary -- as an Agenda Item:

- Equipping Ministries brings the 8 Items to the floor for consideration, one after another, beginning with the Confession of Belhar
- The Moderator allows formal and constrained floor debate and decision (vote by ballot) on each of these items -- under Robert's Rules of Order

And in the afternoon, once Presbytery is in session:

- **Equipping Ministries**, will bring the eight items to the floor of Presbytery as part of its report for consideration and vote, one after another.
- **Our Moderator**, will enforce a constrained discussion (*i.e.*, an equal number of pro and con arguments in alternating order) of each item – in sequence.
- When an equal number of the floor's pro and con arguments on an item are exhausted, **Presbytery will vote to affirm or reject that item by ballot**. This process repeats until the list of items are all brought, considered, and voted.

... with guidance from *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*



- **Equipping** brings each item to the floor as a “Main Motion” - no second required.
- Each item is a “perfected motion” – no amendments allowed.
- Each item is debated and voted separately – only a **simple majority is required for approval** of any item (*BOC* or *BOO*).
- Results are reported to GA by our Stated Clerk.

Meetings of Presbytery are governed by *Robert's Rules*.

Lets see how they order the process on the floor of presbytery (at least procedurally)

...

- Equipping Ministries brings each item to the floor of Presbytery as a part of their report - no “second” to any of these items is necessary because it is brought as part of a report.
- These items come as “perfected motions” – that is, **they can neither be amended nor revised** – they must be voted exactly as they have been referred to the presbyteries by the GA.
- Once on the floor, the item may be debated -- if there are opinions on it to be expressed by the members of Presbytery who “have voice” at Presbytery.
 - This debate may be constrained in the interests of time and fairness by the Moderator (*i.e.*, an equal number of pro and con arguments in alternating order, as discussed above).
 - The Moderator may speak *neither for nor against the motion on the floor* while moderating – but, may yield the gavel or the Moderator’s cross – to

the Vice Moderator, who then presides until the Moderator is done advocating.

- When the body is ready (*i.e.*, the roughly equal number of “pro” and “con” non-repetitive speeches is exhausted), it shall vote.
- This process will repeat for each item until all eight items have all been voted.
- A **simple majority will prevail on every item** brought before the body – whether the item would amend the *Book of Confessions* or the *Book of Order*.
- Without any further direction from the body, the Stated Clerk of Presbytery will record the vote on each of the 8 items and report these votes in writing to the Stated Clerk of General Assembly as quickly as possible / practical, and mindful of the deadline for reporting these votes.

And that is how our Presbytery will decide these proposed amendment items.

References:

F-3.0205 Decision by Majority Vote

Decisions shall be reached in councils by vote, following opportunity for discussion and discernment, and a majority shall govern.

G-3.0105 Meetings

Meetings of councils shall be opened and closed with prayer. Meetings shall be conducted

in accordance with the most recent edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, except when it is in contradiction to this Constitution. Councils may also make use of processes of discernment in their deliberations prior to a vote as agreed upon by the body.

OK, how does this affect me?

Recall your dozen vows as church officers of ...

- Sensitivity to the Word of God *in your life* ...
- Obedience to God *in your life* ...
- Following Christ *in your life* ...
- Leading and developing His people, and ...
- Exhibiting the Kingdom of God to the world *in your life* ...

... and *all of these* -- **as you lead God's Church**

So, how does this affect me? Well -- recall your vows as Presbyters of the church ...

Absorb the slide

So ... 'How will I decide how to vote on each of these amendments?' (...you may be asking...)

References:

W-4.4003 Constitutional Questions to Officers and Commissioned Persons –

- a. Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
- b. Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?
- c. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?

d. Will you fulfill your ministry in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?

e. Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit?

f. Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?

g. Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?

h. Will you pray for and seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?

i. (1) (For ruling elder) Will you be a faithful ruling elder, watching over the people, providing for their worship, nurture, and service? Will you share in government and discipline, serving in councils of the church, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

(3) (For teaching elder) Will you be a faithful teaching elder, proclaiming the good news in Word and Sacrament, teaching faith and caring for people? Will you be active in government and discipline, serving in the councils of the church; and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

(4) (For ruling elder commissioned to particular pastoral service) Will you be a faithful ruling elder in this commission, serving the people by proclaiming the good news, teaching faith and caring for the people, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

How will I decide Discern God's Will on these?

I recommend:

- Prayerful preparation for personal study
- Prayerful study of the materials – and helps
- Prayerful discussion with knowledgeable, mature Christians – thorough discussion in your Session *with invitees*
- Know your conscience – and know the reasons why.

Well, that is the question of today, isn't it?

My strong recommendation to you, as teaching elders and ruling elder commissioners, is to be thoroughly prepared for the consideration of these proposed amendments – well before you come to Presbytery in March.

Know your conscience – and know the reasons why.

That includes conducting both your personal and communal study between the end of this workshop and our March Presbytery meeting so we are prepared to consider them productively together when we get to Presbytery.

In the rest of the workshop, we will explore these study recommendations and their tools to support your:

- Prayerful preparation for personal Study
- Prayerful study of the materials
- Prayerful study with knowledgeable, mature Christians – to include a thorough discussion in Session – perhaps including in that discussion
 - The **non-pulpit and honorably retired teaching elders** who

worship regularly with your congregation (they are members of Presbytery and they need to be prepared to vote, too!),

- The **NCD governance committees and their organizing pastors** nested in your churches,
 - The **specialized ministries' governance committees** that are sponsored by your congregation, and/or
 - The **commissioners, alternate commissioners, and the YAAD delegate** our presbytery sent to the 221st GA (Jim and Peter Houston-Hencken, Bob Kelley, Marshall Hansen, and Andrew Krater – please raise your hands), as available.
- Know God's leading for your conscience – and the scriptural reasons why.

Remember: “Mature Christians” are those who shows in their daily life a long and dependable pattern of Godly thought, decision making, and life-choices.

Before you begin study ...

- Attend this workshop! ... (and stay awake/engaged)
- Have / Get / Download the Study Guide and the helps
- Pray for an open mind ... clarity of purpose ... active engagement throughout your study process
- Set aside a comfortable study place and enough un-interrupted study time. You have 20 pages of proposed change to study.

So, here is what else I recommend:

Before you begin your study ...

Attend this workshop! (in person or online – or download and read it)

Have / Get / Download the Study Guide and the helps I mentioned at the beginning of this presentation.

Pray for an open mind ... clarity of purpose ... active engagement throughout your study process

Set aside a comfortable study place and enough un-interrupted study time. This will probably be a couple of hours for your first study period – at least.

Here is what to address in your first study period:

In the study book on these 8 proposed amendments provided by GA, **you have 20 pages of GA-provided material to study.**

Your study of this amendment material affects both:

- the *Book of Confessions* – another **10 pages or so** of introductory material

- on this Book to study – and
- the *Book of Order* – as the proposed amendments touch two of its four parts:
 - six paragraphs in the Form of Government, and
 - one paragraph in the Directory of Worship,
- another **10 or so pages** to study in the *BOO*.

Again, get your copy of the Constitution (and other PC(USA) references from The Office of the General Assembly, Constitutional Services:

You can download Part One:

The Book of Confessions in [English](#)

Libro de Confesiones en [Español](#) (PDF)

The Book of Confessions in [Korean](#) (PDF)

O Livro de Confissões in [Portuguese](#) (PDF)

You can download Part Two:

The Book of Order in [English](#)

The annotated *Book of Order* in [English](#) (PDF)

The Book of Order en [Español](#) (PDF)

The Book of Order in [Korean](#) (PDF)

The Book of Order in [Portuguese](#) (PDF)

You can download the Proposed Amendments Study Guide from the PCUSA website:

[221st General Assembly \(2014\)](#) in English as a PDF – and

[Korean version- 헌법 개정안](#) (PDF)

So ... set aside a couple of hours, brew a pot of tea, and get to it!

Get into your study place and ...

- **Pray** for God's guidance as you read the presented material
- **Read the proposed amendments** – and then read their explanatory material - in *and suggested in* their Study Guides – **then stop for the day!**
- *I suggest (over three separate days):*
 - First, read/study **Items 14-A – 14-E**, the proposed amendments to the *Form of Government*, comparing it to the current language of the *BOO*,
 - Then, read/study **Item 14-F**, the proposed amendment to the *Directory for Worship*, comparing it to the current language of the *BOO*,
 - Finally, read/study **Item 14-1**, The proposed **Confession of Belhar**, comparing it to the other modern confessions in the *BOC*.

Pray for God's guidance as you read the presented material.

Read the proposed amendments – and then their explanatory material in / and the material suggested in -- the Study Guide.

I suggest that you do this in this order (which is **not the order** the proposed amendments are presented in the Study Guide!):

- first Read/Study the relatively routine items proposed for amending the *Form of Government* in the *Book of Order* (Item 14-A through Item 14-E) to get you familiar with the format of and access to the information presented for study.
- then Read/Study the admittedly hot Item 14-F proposed for the *Directory for Worship*.
- and finally, Read/Study the first item in the book – Item 14-1, proposed for addition to the *Book of Confessions*.

This will start you with single amendments at the smallest level of change – the paragraph or even sentence level - and to get you ready to go with the more controversial amendment that addresses the long-held definition of marriage in the

Directory for Worship. Finally, you can address the issue of adding a whole new confession.

When you do your initial study of additional material on the proposed Confession of Belhar, I think it is best to start in the Book of Confessions, itself – specifically, the introductory material therein.

When you do your initial study of the *Book of Order* proposals:

Read the language of each amendment, read the full context of their target paragraph(s) in the *BOO* – and then read the proposals' accompanying explanation and the help material in the pamphlet and in the electronically available material (this is why I recommend the downloadable version of this stuff – and reading it on your computer (but please, not on your smart phone!).

Read the proposed amendments with a pen in hand – mark the Study Guide or keep notes somewhere else on the questions or objections that arise - as you encounter them. You will forget them, for sure, if you don't get them down at the moment they occur. Cross them out if / when you find their answer.

If you still have questions or objections remaining after you have read the accompanying explanation material **or have even more questions or objections (!)**, you have some more searching to do -- later.

But, stop here, think and sleep on what you have read. Trust me, by now, your brains will be fried.

Today, though, we will review them in the order presented for vote and I think that you will see why it is best to get the detail part of your study out of the way first.

If I am a member or am elected to be a commissioner to Presbytery ...

- **How will I decide my vote on these?**
- **Well ... that is the question of today, isn't it?**

Well ... that is the question of today, isn't it?

Let's get into it ...

Definitions and Helps

The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) :

Part One is *The Book of Confessions*, eleven confessions and

Part Two, *The Book of Order*, consisting of the –
Foundations of Presbyterian Polity or FPP,
Form of Government, or FOG,
Directory for Worship, or DFW, and
Rules of Discipline or ROD.

Please download them ...

The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) consists of two parts:

- Part One is *The Book of Confessions*, a collection of eleven documents both shared across Christendom and specific to our denomination and
- Part Two, *The Book of Order*, consisting of the –
 - Foundations of Presbyterian Polity or FPP,
 - Form of Government, or FOG,
 - Directory for Worship, or DFW, and
 - Rules of Discipline or ROD.

You can download Part One:

The Book of Confessions in [English](#)

Libro de Confesiones en [Español](#) (PDF)

The Book of Confessions in [Korean](#) (PDF)

O Livro de Confissões in [Portuguese](#) (PDF)

You can download Part Two:

The Book of Order in [English](#)

The annotated *Book of Order* in [English](#) (PDF)

The *Book of Order* en [Español](#) (PDF)

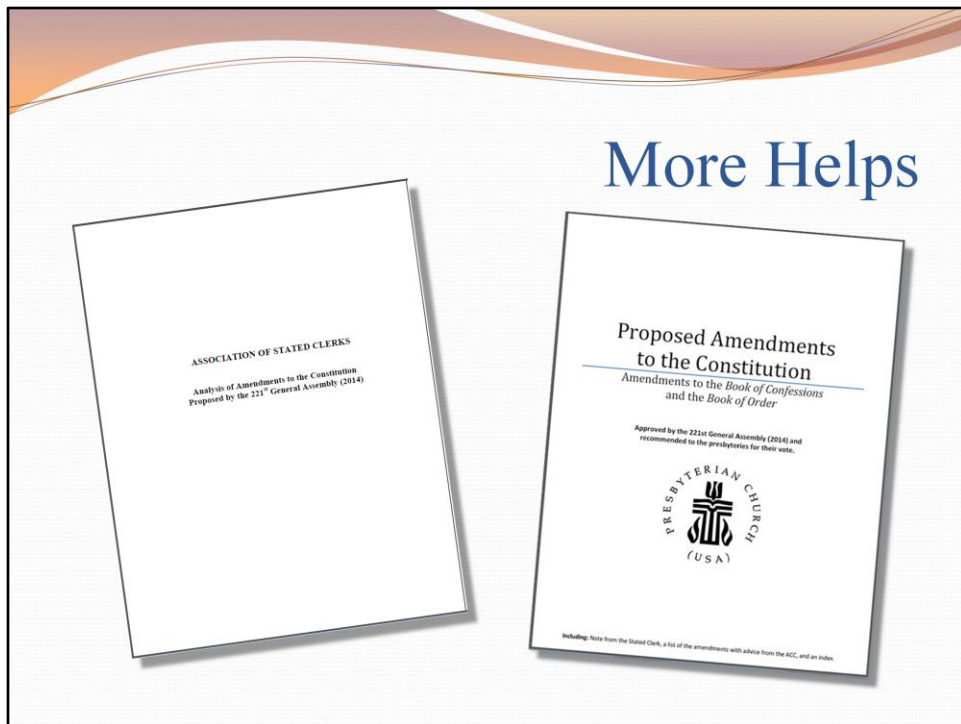
The *Book of Order* in [Korean](#) (PDF)

The *Book of Order* in [Portuguese](#) (PDF)

You can download the Proposed Amendments study guide from the PCUSA website:

[221st General Assembly \(2014\)](#) in English as a PDF – and
[Korean version- 헌법 개정안](#) (PDF)

I encourage each of you to have all of these documents in your possession for your study of the proposed amendments and as you sit together in your congregation's session.



BTW: On the right of the slide is the Proposed Amendments Study Guide – which came to your clerk of session in printed form having been picked up for you by someone at the Fall Presbytery meeting in South Lake Tahoe – or that you have downloaded from:

Proposed Amendments to the Constitution:

[http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/2014-proposed-bo-electronic-version\[1\].pdf](http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/2014-proposed-bo-electronic-version[1].pdf)

Another document you may find helpful in your personal and session study is the Association of Stated Clerks' *Analysis of Amendments to the Constitution* – on the left. The Association notes:

Our purpose has been to present arguments made in favor of and against each amendment both in meetings of the assembly committee that considered the overture leading to the amendment and on the floor of the General Assembly. It is not the role of the Association to make a recommendation either in support of or against any amendment. This analysis is best used in conjunction with the Proposed Amendments to the Constitution published by Office of the General Assembly.

Many presbyteries provide copies of this booklet to their committees

responsible for making a recommendation on presbytery action, and we understand that this has assisted those committees as they have done their work. We are glad that these materials are used in that way.

You can download this resource from: <http://media.presbyphl.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Analysis-of-Amendments-to-the-Constitution-GA-2014.pdf>

And, of course, there is always ... Google! But, remember to limit your sources to 'mature Christians' as we defined earlier, or you will get uninformed foolishness.

... find even more helps

- There are good helps in accompanying material – online versions give click-on references.
- The *Proposed Amendments Study Guides* suggest the committee material for further study.
- The specific committee report URL for each Item is located at the end of the treatment of each Item
- And – there is always Google!

For the full report of Item **07-02**, including the adopted policy The Interreligious Stance of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), go to <http://pc-iz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=4673>

The Study Guide material gives a pretty good list of helps to clarify the amendments and their explanations and recommendations.

In it, see at the bottom of each Proposed Amendment discussion (or example, **14-E. Interreligious Stance On Amending G-5.0102 (07-02, Recommendation 2)**) the “first two numbers” are **07**, which is the committee number – this “specific item” is 07-02).

In the Study Guide’s transmittal letter (inside its front cover), the Reverend Grayde Parsons, the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, recommends that you ... review all the information for each proposed amendment, found on PC-Biz (<http://www.pc-biz.org/>) [and] ... to review “the General Assembly committee report and action related to each proposed amendment [and directions] to find other background information from various entities that was available electronically to the General Assembly commissioners.” ... and to do this:

Click on the “Committees” tab, then click on a specific committee by using the first two numbers of the item number associated with each proposed amendment. From the list of committee business, click on the specific item you wish to review.

So, how do we view these proposals?

Overview:

Concepts

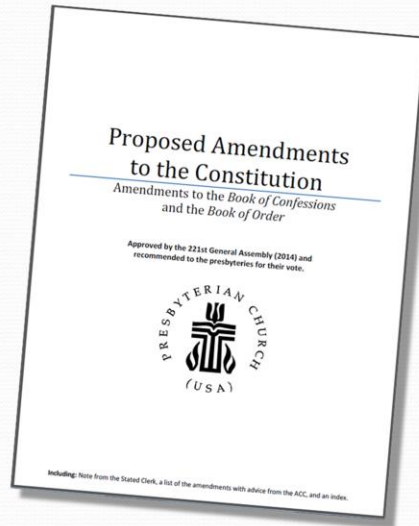
- Polity
- Hallmarks
- Conscience
- Discernment

Processes

- Amending
- Preparation

Content

- The Proposals
- Their Evaluation
- Consideration Criteria



So, let's begin with the proposed amendments ...

(this is the workbook part of this story!)

OK, what do we have to decide?

221st GA referred eight items to the Presbyteries for their vote:

- Item 14-1: Add the Confession of Belhar to the *Book of Confessions*.
- Items 14-A to F: Approve 7 content Amendments to the *Book of Order*

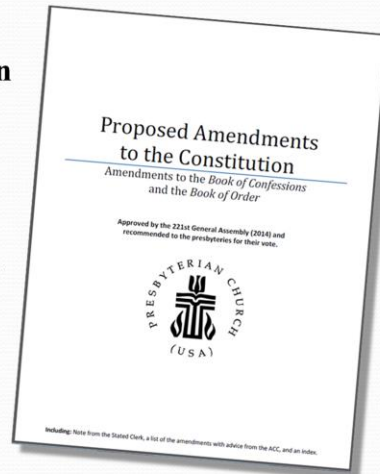
OK, with that as background, what do we have to decide in our next Presbytery meeting?

Well, the 221st GA voted to refer these items to the Presbyteries for our vote (recall those two, five-step pipelines?).

Absorb the slide

The task before us ...

- 14-1 Confession of Belhar**
- 14-A. Renunciation of Jurisdiction**
- 14-B. Preparation for Ministry:**
 - 14-B.1. Final Assessment**
 - 14-B.2. Accommodations**
- 14-C. Child Protection Policy**
- 14-D. Minimum Composition of a Presbytery**
- 14-E. Interreligious Stance**
- 14-F. Marriage**

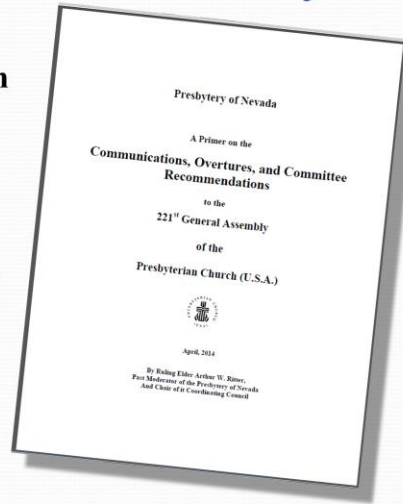


These are the 8 items we will vote to affirm or reject at Spring Presbytery.

Note that Item 14-B is really two items and these will be voted separately. For these two, I urge you to consider each one as though the other does not exist – they are not a linked pair for our voting purposes.

The task started last January...

- 14-1 Confession of Belhar**
- 14-A. Renunciation of Jurisdiction**
- 14-B. Preparation for Ministry:**
 - 14-B.1. Final Assessment**
 - 14-B.2. Accommodations**
- 14-C. Child Protection Policy**
- 14-D. Minimum Composition of a Presbytery**
- 14-E. Interreligious Stance**
- 14-F. Marriage**



For the 221st GA, the **Nevada Presbytery's coordinating Council** began reviewing the business items headed for their June meeting back in 2014 – January through April – in three review cycles, as the business items became viewable on the PC(USA) website and as GA's deadline for overture submission and concurrence approached, so it could:

- Concur on certain overtures, where it was in the presbytery's interest that the overture be heard by GA – since, for the first time, an overture needed at least one concurrence to be heard by GA at all (a new rule)
- and, with our reviewing sessions
- Help our commissioners to GA prepare their consciences for vote as the business items came to the floor having been worked over by their commissioner committees.

(At GA, soon after the week-long assembly began with its first plenary session, the commissioners would split into 15 issue-focused, commissioner committees that would meet and consider the overtures from the presbyteries, reports from GA committees, communications from other entities, and advisory input from the standing GA advisory committees to decide which of their assigned business items to reject and which to bring to the floor of GA – and then, they would prepare the survivors for their floor hearing.)

Our Council's three-cycle, business item review was limited to the **116**

communications (COM), overtures (OVT), and report recommendations (REC) made viewable, as available, on the PC(USA) website. Five of these, shown in **Bold Face**, are before us for vote. The other three listed here were not reviewed as they came to the GA from GA committees.

The product of the Council's business item review was the 94-page report shown here, which captured the Council's business item vote results and its members' review comments on each of the business items reviewed, as they occurred.

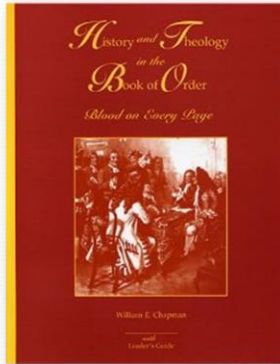
This report:

- Was provided to the Pastors and clerks of sessions in May for a quick turn, asking them to –
“Please review this GA Business Items list with your session and email your mature Christian advice to [our GA commissioners, alternates, and YAAD] that they may prepare their conscience to vote God's will on these matters”
- Was provided to our GA commissioners, their alternates, and our Young Adult Advisory Delegate (YAAD) for their GA work preparation
- And parts of it are now included in this presentation – for these 6 of the referred 8 items shown left that had been made available to Council and had been so reviewed by Council.

Of this myriad of overtures and reports that the Council reviewed (and the plethora of communications that were not made available on the website for Council review), much business was concluded in the plenary sessions and only these 8 items made it through the 221st GA's processes to be referred to the presbyteries for vote.

From a gross numbers point of view, that was pretty good filtering by our GA this last year!

Threats to ... the integrity of witness



- from *internal confusion* about core matters of faith,
- from *the culture's rival accounts of truth and morals*,
- or from *threats to the church's freedom*.

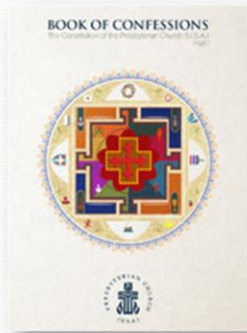
Please appreciate that any view of the Confessions is a view of a battlefield – both in the church and in the world surrounding it. Academics who have studied the histories of these confessions have observed that churches typically make a confession out of necessity, not simply because they think it would be a fun thing to do. Indeed, the historical commentary shown on the slide is sub-titled: ***Blood on Every Page***. Necessity comes in many forms; but most often, the church is compelled to express its faith when it experiences threats to the integrity of its witness coming from:

- *internal confusion* about core matters of faith,
- from *the culture's rival accounts of truth and morals*,
- or from *threats to the church's freedom*.

The shape of the confessions has been determined not only by the historical situation in which they were written; but, also by the uses for which they have been intended (or to which they have been put), including: ***Defense of orthodoxy, Instruction, Rallying-point in times of danger and persecution, Church order and discipline***, and even ***Worship*** (!).

Reform of the church – whether in the fourth century, the sixteenth century, or the twenty-first century – grows from response to the gracious action of God. The church is always ready *to be reformed* – by God.

The PC(USA) Constitution



Part One – The Book of Confessions

The Nicene Creed – 325
The Apostles' Creed – 1st - 8th Cent

The Scots Confession –1560
The Heidelberg Catechism –1563
The Second Helvetic Confession –1566

The Westminster Confession of Faith – 1643-8
The Larger Catechism
The Shorter Catechism

The Theological Declaration of Barmen – 1934
The Confession of 1967
A Brief Statement of Faith—Presbyterian
Church (USA) – 1983

We start with Item 14-1, the proposed addition to our Book of Confessions – which, while containing some of the oldest statements about being Christian, protestant, reformed, and Presbyterian, is actually among the newest content formalized in our Constitutional heritage.

In 1967 (within your memory?), we Presbyterians arrived at a pivotal year in our theological history, according to Carmen Fowler LaBerge, writing in *The Layman*, Feb 16, 2012 (http://www.layman.org/carmensblog/12-02-16/The_PCUSA_2012_How_we_got_here_.aspx).

Carmen noted ...

Before 1967, there was a constitutional basis to call the church to reform. With other reformed and Presbyterian denominations, until that year we still had ordination vows that required officers to subscribe to the Bible as the Word of God and to the 1640s' Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as containing the system of doctrine taught in Scripture.

But in 1967 a *Book of Confessions* was adopted, and a clear shared confessional standard gave way to a [unique] catalogue of confessions including a new one, The Confession of 1967, written in the tenor of the times. (Remember the '60s? -- AWR)

Various Wikipedia articles and the *Book of Confessions*, itself, show that –

Adopted first by the northern thread of mainline Presbyterianism, the UPCUSA (the old ‘Northern church’), and reaffirmed and retained in the Constitution of the reunited PC(USA), *The Book of Confessions* (the general “beliefs” part of our constitution) is a collection of eleven creeds, confessions, and statements and their accompanying explanations and notes, which together define our theological heritage as Reformed and Presbyterian Christians.

These confessions stretch from:

The earliest ones, the Nicene Creed of 325 and the Apostles Creed (actually developed beginning in the first century and evolving in its content through the eighth century -- to the form we have today) ...

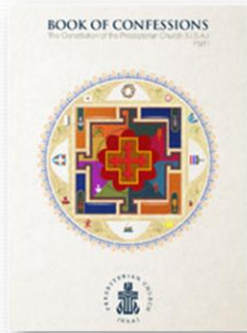
Through the three Reformation-era confessions of the mid-1500s ... and the great Westminster Confession and its companion catechisms of a century later.

To the three confessional statements made within living memory – including the last which marks the creation of our denomination from its “Northern Strand” and “Southern Strand” predecessors in 1983.

By the way, most of these confessions are *named for the place or town* in which they were written – not by, or for whom, or in whose interests, they might have been written -- a trivia fact that may greatly disappoint your expectations about the content of the 1934 Declaration, if you haven’t yet read it.

Review the slide

The PC(USA) Constitution



Part One – The Book of Confessions

The Nicene Creed – 325
The Apostles' Creed – 1st - 8th Cent

The Scots Confession –1560
The Heidelberg Catechism –1563
The Second Helvetic Confession –1566

The Westminster Confession of Faith – 1643-8
The Larger Catechism
The Shorter Catechism

The Theological Declaration of Barmen – 1934
The Confession of 1967
A Brief Statement of Faith—Presbyterian
Church (USA) – 1983
The Confession of Belhar – 2016?

If Item 14-1 is affirmed by more than 2/3 of the presbyteries and approved by the next GA, it would add the three pages of **The Confession of Belhar's** confessional content and the original Accompanying Letter from Belhar (a non-confessional explanation of the confession's context) to our relatively new; but, carefully-selected and uniquely-focused confessional history.

Do we recall that at the denominational level *Book of Order* amendments require affirmative votes from 86 presbyteries to pass -- a simple majority of our 172 presbyteries?

Well - **unlike** the *Book of Order* amendments, recall that approval of change to the *Book of Confessions* ...

- Requires affirmative votes from **114** presbyteries -- **a two-thirds majority of the 172 presbyteries**,
- At the Presbytery level, they again only require the same **simple majority of the attending and voting Presbyters** to form the Presbytery's vote (and once again, at presbytery, an abstention has no effect on the result – only affirmative and negatives votes define the outcome),
- And if approved by two thirds of the presbyteries, they **go to the next GA for**

approval and enactment – and that would be in the summer of 2016.

Based on the voting to date, the Confession of Belhar could be approved – but, with its longer approval action timeline, we will have some time to internalize its content.

A point of order: From Robert’s Rules FAQ
(<http://www.robertsrules.com/faq.html#6>):

Question 6:

Do abstention votes count?

Answer:

The phrase “abstention votes” is an oxymoron, an abstention being a refusal to vote. To abstain means to refrain from voting, and, as a consequence, there can be no such thing as an “abstention vote.”

In the usual situation, where either a majority vote or a two-thirds vote is required, abstentions have absolutely no effect on the outcome of the vote since what is required is either a majority or two thirds of the votes cast. On the other hand, if the vote required is a majority or two thirds of the members *present*, or a majority or two thirds of the entire membership, an abstention will have the same effect as a “no” vote. Even in such a case, however, an abstention is not a vote and is not counted as a vote. [RONR (11th ed.), p. 400, ll. 7-12; p. 401, ll. 8-11; p. 403, ll. 13-24; see also p. 66 of RONRIB.]

Part 2 of 3

Studying The Confession of Belhar

The Proposal to be voted by the Presbyteries before July 2011:

The 219th General Assembly (2010) directed the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Shall *The Book of Confessions* be amended by adding the **Confession of Belhar** following **A Brief Statement of Faith—Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)** and its accompanying documents? The “Accompanying Letter” and scriptural references to the confession should be printed with it without confessional status if this proposal is adopted.

This is how the question came to us at our March Presbytery meeting four years ago – when the presbyteries were first referred the Confession of Belhar for inclusion in our *Book of Confessions*. Its preparation committee had worked for 4 years on the proposal to refer that was adopted by the 219th GA. The vote of the Committee on the proposed amendment was 43/11/1. The 219th General Assembly (2010) approved the committee’s recommendation by a vote of 525/150/3.

The Nevada Presbytery considered this confession and its study material in much the same way we are considering it now and we rejected it at that time, the majority of commissioners voting to reject this question.

The rest of the presbyteries considered it at the same time and together, they also rejected it in their vote which failed by 8 votes to convince the required 2/3 of the presbyteries to affirm the question for it to pass.

The presbyteries’ vote terminated the 219th GA’s process for amending our *Book of Confessions* by adding to it the Confession of Belhar.

14-1 Confession of Belhar

On Amending the *Book of Confessions* (Item 13-01)

The 221st General Assembly (2014) directed the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Shall the Confession of Belhar be included in the *Book of Confessions*?

Explanatory notes:

- (a) Text for the Confession of Belhar can be found on page 1
- (b) Biblical citations should be listed in the margins by the relevant text as is shown, and
- (c) While not of constitutional character, whenever the Confession of Belhar is printed in the *Book of Confessions*, it should be accompanied by the original Accompanying Letter from Belhar to explain the context of the confession. This letter is on page 4

Seeing the result as the voting drew to a close; however, the 220th GA began the process all over again, forming another study committee – and the 221st GA, last summer, approved this committee’s report and referred the question as you see it to the Presbyteries for our vote this year.

This is how the question will come to you for your vote at our March Presbytery meeting this spring.

The 221st GA’s committee offers this Background and Rationale for affirming the question:

The 220th General Assembly (2012) approved the action to begin the process of amending the *Book of Confessions* to include the Confession of Belhar, as provided in G-6.03, and approved the authorization of a budget for education across the church about the confession, in addition to its committee budget for direct expenses (*Minutes*, 2012, Part I, p. 1527). ...

The committee held one face-to-face meeting in October 2012, and monthly conference calls between December 2012 and January 2014. Much of the committee’s work was focused on developing educational resources for churchwide use.

These can be accessed through the committee's website, <http://oga.pcusa.org/section/ga/ga221/ga221-belhar/> [-- which I urge you to do, if you haven't, already]. They consulted with several different constituency groups within the PC(USA) as well as consulting with ecumenical partners in the U.S. and South Africa. They gave significant consideration to the implications of the Confession of Belhar for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at this moment in the church's history. The sub-themes of Justice, Unity, and Reconciliation framed their approach to the Confession of Belhar and the development of interpretative materials.

The Special Committee on the Confession of Belhar reached a unanimous decision to recommend inclusion of the Confession of Belhar into the *Book of Confessions*. The 221st General Assembly (2014) approved the committee's recommendation 551/87/0.

Note that proposed to be added to the *BOC* is – the Confession itself - and its original accompanying letter. The Confession would have confessional status and the letter would not – it would simply be explanatory material.

The vote of the Assembly Committee on Theological Issues and Institutions and CE (13) to approve the proposed amendment was 46/6/0. The 221st General Assembly (2014) approved the committee's recommendation 551/87/0. (See *Minutes*, 2014, Part I, pp. 24, 947ff.)

For the full report of Item 14-1. (Committee Item 13-01) go to <http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=4695&promoID=327>

Studying Belhar...


- Study is best done in groups with diverse perspectives.
 - **Participants** - Read the material before meeting to study
 - **Sessions** – Allow significant discussion time in session – with your Worship Commission / Committee - to prepare your commissioners to “vote their conscience” at Presbytery
 - **Presbyteries** - Allow **two docket hours** for study, then vote

Often, multiple motivations are present in churches' declarations of faith, but confessions that endure are more than bland restatements of Christian verities.


Please understand that even though its treatment here is brief, it must be seriously considered.

I encourage all participants, sessions, and the presbytery itself to be rigorous in their preparatory review of this confession.

What is Belhar?






SA Gestig, where the Belhar Confession was adopted in September 1986



Reformed delegation at the Belhar Monument, S.A

- **Key themes:**
 - Unity,
 - Reconciliation,
 - Justice.

Structured like the Theological Declaration of Barmen.

After reviewing the history that led to the Confession in his paper commended for study to the denomination, Jack Rogers characterizes the Confession as:

The Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa traditionally had Three Standards of Unity: The Belgic Confession (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) and The Canons of Dort (1618-1619). In their original European context these documents asserted that Protestant Christians were not anarchists, but were good citizens, willing to obey the government of the land. These confessions from the 16th and 17th centuries were used in the 19th and 20th centuries in South Africa to justify obedience to a government that imposed strict separation of the races and domination by members of the white race. The system was called by its Afrikaans name, “Apartheid.”

...

The Confession of Belhar was written as a protest against a heretical theological stance by the white Dutch Reformed Church that used the Bible and the Confessions to justify the harsh and unjust system of Apartheid. Apartheid is the human context for the Confession of Belhar, yet it is never mentioned in the confession. Rather, Belhar lifts up the heart of the Gospel as a bringer of hope for the human condition. Belhar presents a Christian view of racism, separation, and suffering by those who had experienced the realities of these evils. It demonstrates that confessional affirmations can arise from

social ethics.

Belhar has three central points: Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice. It is structured like the Theological Declaration of Barmen. There is a biblical affirmation followed by a rejection of false [but popular] teaching. ”

According to Wikipedia, (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belhar_Confession)

The **Belhar Confession** is a Christian statement of belief originally written in Afrikaans in 1982. It was adopted (after a slight adjustment) as a confession of faith by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) in South Africa in 1986.

According to the Belhar Confession, unity is both a gift and an obligation for the church.^[1] This unity originally referred to non-segregation between Christians of different races, but after the formation of the URCSA in 1994, the word "unity" came to refer to administrative unity within the managerial structures of the URCSA.

Another key theme of the Belhar Confession is the dichotomy of reconciliation and the justice of God. According to the confession, God is the God of the destitute, the poor, and the wronged, and for this reason the church should stand by people in any form of suffering. It claims that individual, racial and social segregation is sin, and that all forms of segregation always lead to enmity and hatred.

Some key helps for studying this Confession are contained in a letter to you from the Co-Chairs of the Special Committee on the Confession of Belhar, Matilde Moros and Clifton Kirkpatrick, please see the Special Committee on the Confession of Belhar, at: <http://agritter.com/a/equip.htm>

It became known as the Confession of Belhar, for the suburb of Cape Town

Confessional History

where the Synod was meeting.

- 1978 Professor's challenge to students at Calvin Theological Seminary, Cape Town SA - class conclusion was adopted by DRMC Synod meeting
- 1982 DRMC statement adopted by WARC
- 1982 DRMC drafted/adopted the Confession of Belhar
- 1997 ERCA adopted the Confession
- 1998 UPC Belgium adopted the Confession
- 2007-2010 RCA adopted the Confession
- 2012 CRCNA adopted the Confession as a "Declaration"

Jack continues:

In Cape Town, in the second semester of 1978, two years after the tragic events on the streets of Soweto (see: <http://www.aworldatschool.org/news/entry/soweto-tragedy-led-to-day-of-african-child>), students in the DRMC's Calvin Theological Seminary were struggling to make theological sense of the resistance to the apartheid regime. The professor of systematic theology, Jaap Durand, challenged them: "You have been quite explicit about the legal, sociological, and political science reasons for your judgment on apartheid. I want to challenge you to find the theological essence of the judgment on apartheid."

One day in the spring of 1978, the class came to a conclusion. Apartheid is grounded in the irreconcilability of people of different racial groups. It is thus against the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is grounded in the doctrine of reconciliation. In October of that year, the Synod of the DRMC, with Allan Boesak and others in the leadership, considered this theological conclusion. The Theological Commission of the Synod affirmed this judgment and took it to the Synod. The conclusion was that "Apartheid was anti-evangelical." Racism was a structural and institutional sin.

Allan Boesak was a minister in the DRMC. He was a liberation theologian, a vigorous critic of the Apartheid government, and well known in North America and Europe through his writing and speaking at conferences. In 1982, in Ottawa, Canada,

Boesak was elected the president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC). At that time WARC represented some 200 denominations and 75 million Christians with roots in the Calvinistic reformation. Boesak asked this international organization to declare apartheid a heresy. The WARC Assembly did so, and then suspended from membership, the white, South African DRC and another smaller white denomination for supporting apartheid with biblical and confessional arguments. For WARC, this was a “*Status Confessionis*.” If this theological justification of apartheid was not abandoned then the DRC ceased to be a true church. The 1.2 million member white Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa was stung by this exclusion.

The Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) had its next General Synod in the spring of 1982. The theological judgment of the DRMC Synod in 1978 had now been confirmed by an international theological body. The judgment that support of apartheid was idolatry and heresy was no longer just the opinion of a colored Reformed church on the southern-most tip of the Cape of Good Hope. For many at the DRMC Synod, the action of WARC had affirmed their identity of being both colored and authentically Reformed.

The DRMC Synod appointed a committee led by Russel Botman and Dirkie Smit to draft an appropriate expression of their judgment on apartheid. Within a few days, the committee presented a draft confession. It became known as the Confession of Belhar, for the suburb of Cape Town where the Synod was meeting.

Again, according to Wikipedia, (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belhar_Confession):

The Evangelical Reformed Church in Africa in Namibia (ERCA) adopted the Belhar Confession in 1997 and in so doing became the first non-South African Church which adopted the Belhar Confession. Apart from the URCSA, the Belhar Confession was also adopted by the United Protestant Church in Belgium in 1998.^[2]

The Reformed Church in America (RCA) adopted the Belhar Confession as a fourth Standard of Unity (or confession; alongside the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort) at its 2010 meeting of the General Synod, having adopted it provisionally in 2007.^[3]

The 2009 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRCNA) proposed to the 2012 Synod that the Belhar Confession be adopted as their fourth confession of faith.^[4] Instead, the CRCNA created a new, less-binding category for the Belhar, and adopted it as an "Ecumenical Faith Declaration"^[5]

The confession was also instrumental in the RCA's efforts to found the Reformed

Church in the Dominican Republic.^[6]

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) considered adopting the Belhar Confession. In 2008 a Committee from the 218th General Assembly requested that a committee begin the formal process of including the Belhar in its Book of Confessions.^[7] That committee recommended adoption of the Belhar Confession to the 219th General Assembly in 2010.^[8] The General Assembly approved the recommendation and referred adoption to a vote of the Presbyteries.^[9] The Belhar Confession fell 8 votes short of the 116 necessary for adoption.^[10] In 2012, the 220th General Assembly began this process anew,^[11] and in 2014, the 221st General Assembly approved the new committee's recommendation to refer adoption to a new vote by the Presbyteries.^[12]

So, our vote – and the vote of the other presbyteries, no matter its result this spring, will at least change ... Wikipedia!

Jack's study of the Belhar then summarizes these three points of the Confession ...

Hallmarks of the Confession

UNITY

We believe

... that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the Church of Jesus Christ;

...that this unity must become visible

...that this unity can be established only in freedom

Therefore, we reject any doctrine

...which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people

...which denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin ...

UNITY

We believe

... that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the Church of Jesus Christ;
...that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the Church and must be resisted;

...that this unity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God;
... That true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this Church;

Therefore, we reject any doctrine

which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation;

...which denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin;

which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.

Hallmarks of the Confession

RECONCILIATION:

We believe

that God has entrusted to his Church the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ;

...that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when ...

... that any [such] teaching ...must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

Therefore, we reject any doctrine

which, ...obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.

He continues:

RECONCILIATION:

We believe

that God has entrusted to his Church the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ;

...that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity;

that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

Therefore, we reject any doctrine

which, in such a situation sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and color and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.

Hallmarks of the Confession

JUSTICE

We believe

that God has revealed himself as the One who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people;

...that God ...is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged;

that God calls the Church to follow him in this; for God brings justice ...

Therefore, we reject any ideology

which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel. ...

And he concludes:

JUSTICE

We believe

that God has revealed himself as the One who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people;

...that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged;

that God calls the Church to follow him in this; for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry;

...that the Church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the Church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

Therefore, we reject any ideology

which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.

We believe that in obedience to Jesus Christ, its only head, the church is called to confess and to do all these things, even though the authorities and human laws might forbid them and punishment and suffering be the consequence. Jesus is Lord. To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. be the honor and the glory for ever and ever.

14-1 Confession of Belhar

Pros ... And Cons

- Major reasons for:
 - We need to have a confession which addresses reconciliation and racism
 - We need a confession from the Global South
- Major reasons against:
 - Why do we need another confession?

You may have other concerns.

The Presbytery of Nevada rejected a similar proposal, as did a sufficient number of other presbyteries, so that it was not added to the *Book of Confessions* the last time it was presented for vote 4 years ago.

Getting our delegation ready for the 221st GA beginning a year ago, **The Nevada Presbytery Council** considered and did not support this overture going into the 221st GA and so advised our commissioners.

The Association of Stated Clerks compiled these points from the GA's floor minutes:

Arguments Supporting an Affirmative Vote

- We need to have a confession which addresses reconciliation and racism
- We need a confession from the Global South

Arguments Supporting a Negative Vote

- Why do we need another confession?

You may have other concerns.

Evaluating The Confession of Belhar...

The 2011 Workshops' concerns:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Is this biblical ? – or is it just | Will it position the church to |
| political correctness ? | do the mission better? |
| Will changes make it better? | Do the other confessions |
| Is God honored more with this? | already speak to this issue? |
| Will the church benefit? | Can we trust its words? |
| Does it preserve <u>our</u> distinctives? | Is there an enduring |
| ... support Peace, Unity, Purity? | controversy needing our |
| Is this relevant to the PC(USA)? | witness here? |
| Can we build the church on this? | Will it bring hate speech |
| | persecution? |

Here are the combined concerns of the 2011 workshop participants when we considered this confession last time.

Study the slide

Evaluating Belhar...

Your key evaluation criteria?...

...prayer

...circumstances

...counsel of knowledgeable, mature Christians

...the Church

...**the Bible**

and ... Jack's "double-7"

Your Big Questions –

- What does scripture say about the issues raised here?

It is now your turn ...

What can you add to your evaluation criteria?

Do you have any Big Questions that will require further study before you counsel your teaching elders and ruling elder commissioners as they prepare their consciences for their vote?

Just to get you started – here are a couple you might ask:

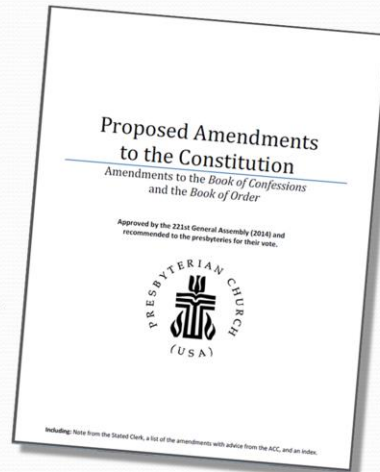
- Are we, beginning with Belhar, attempting to use the content of the *Book of Confessions* to form political solidarity alliances with other denominations who so confess?
- Do we face the same or similar histories that led to Belhar and do we need to make this confession to resolve them? ... Or should we make our own confession if one is needed?

Discuss

Lets turn to the 7 content amendments to our Book of Order.

The task before us ...

- 14-1 Confession of Belhar**
- 14-A. Renunciation of Jurisdiction**
- 14-B. Preparation for Ministry:**
 - 14-B.1. Final Assessment**
 - 14-B.2. Accommodations**
- 14-C. Child Protection Policy**
- 14-D. Minimum Composition of a Presbytery**
- 14-E. Interreligious Stance**
- 14-F. Marriage**



And we now go on to the proposed *Book of Order* Amendments.

Remember, these are where I suggest you begin your personal study.

Remember these characters from vintage
Saturday Night Live?



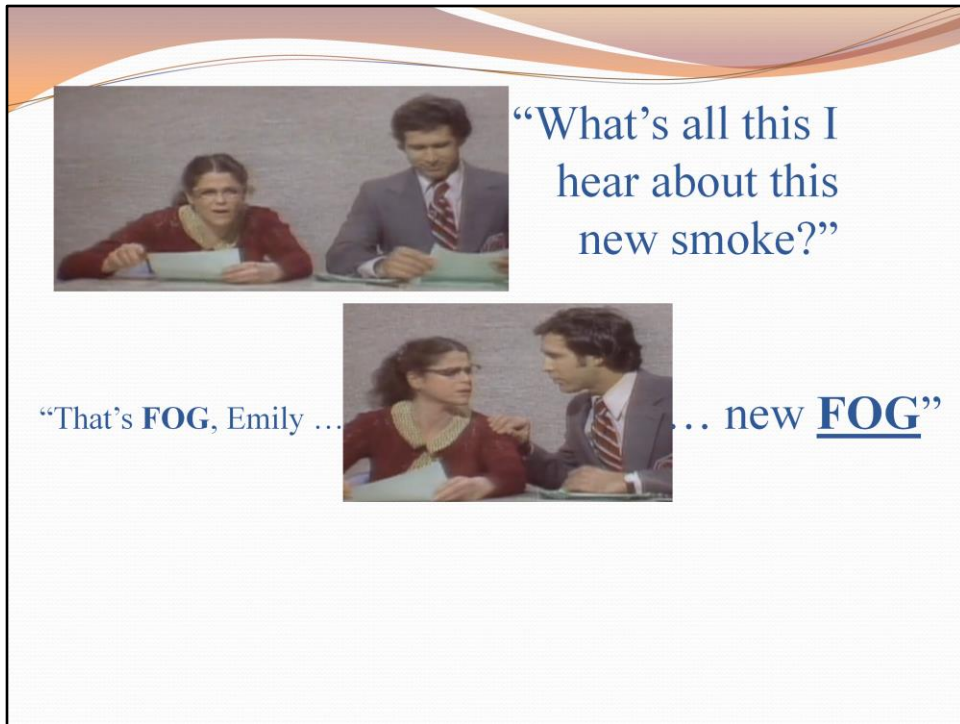
I can suppose that there may still be some confusion with my use of the term, 'newFOG' – passed only four years ago as a re-arrangement of the Book of Order ... perhaps as illustrated by these characters from vintage Saturday Night Live?

Here is how Emily Litelli would have reacted to it with her famous EDITORIAL CONCERN to the news of our new FOG ...



“What’s all this I
hear about this
new smoke?”

Absorb slide



“What’s all this I
hear about this
new smoke?”

“That’s **FOG**, Emily ...

... new **FOG**”

Absorb slide



“What’s all this I hear about this new smoke?”

“That’s **FOG**, Emily ... new **FOG**”

“Oh ... that’s different.
Never mind.”

Absorb slide

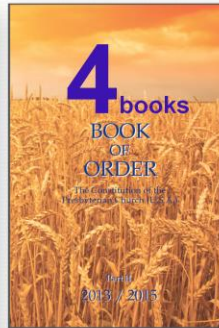
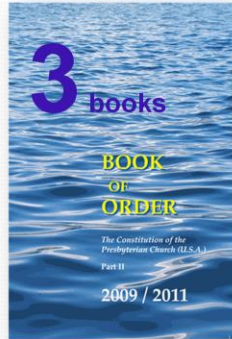
After all -- Why new FOG? – wasn’t the old one foggy enough? Well, let’s see ...

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 Book of Order

With the passage of the new FOG amendment forwarded by the 219th GA to the presbyteries for their affirmation or rejection and approval by a majority of the presbyteries in 2011, the Form of Government in the *Book of Order* has been significantly reorganized and re-linguaged.

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

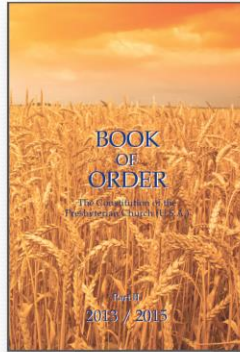
- An almost 4-year-old book – an 11 page, three chapter re-statement of the 13 pages that had formed the first 4 chapters of our previous FOG -- titled the **Foundations of Presbyterian Polity** and
- A much-reduced **Form of Government** – containing the principles of the previous FOG's chapters 5-18 (on 126 pages) in only six chapters (on 35 pages). These two books account for the net loss of 78 pages from the 2009-2011 *Book of Order*. Besides arrangement, these books' content was also changed as a result of referrals from the 219th GA four years ago and, again two years ago, as a result of referrals from the 220th GA.
- The traditional, **Directory for Worship** – though not re-arranged by newFOG, it was modified by the language update and by some specific, paragraph amendments proposed and referred by the 219th and 220th GAs and affirmed by the presbyteries,
- And the traditional, **Rules of Discipline** – again, though not re-arranged by newFOG, it, too, was modified by the language update and by some specific, paragraph amendments proposed and referred by the 219th and

220th GAs and affirmed by the presbyteries.

So, our previous (2009-2011 edition), 495 page *Book of Order* was slimmed down by 78 pages of removed material to a svelte 417 pages, a much livelier and quicker, night-time read.

Six of our remaining proposed amendments would make changes to the content of the FOG – and one to the DFW.

The PC(USA) Constitution



Part Two The Book of Order

7 Amendments in ...

Foundations of Presbyterian
Polity

Form of Government (6)

Directory for Worship (1)

Rules of Discipline

The proposed amendments this year only (!) affect two of these four parts of the *BOO*.

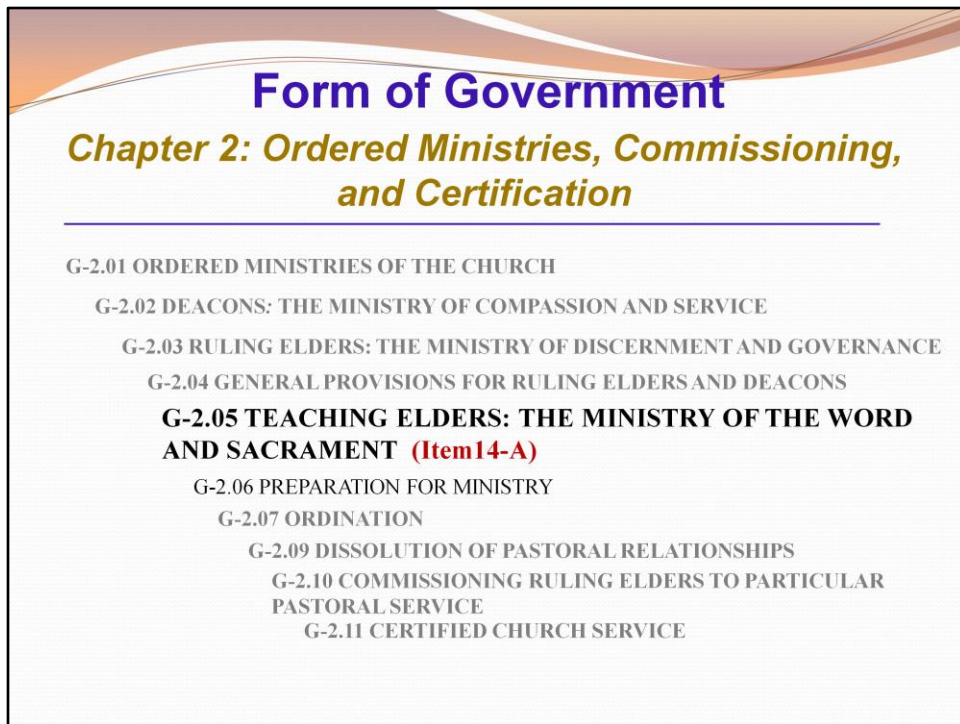
The Form of Government – whose paragraphs are numbered G-x.xxxx, and

The Director for Worship – whose paragraphs are numbered W-x.xxxx,

(Paragraphs in the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity are numbered F-x.xxxx, and the paragraphs in the Rules of Discipline are numbered D-x.xxxx.)

Ok, let's turn to the remaining seven proposed amendments –

(back to the workbook part of this story!)



Here is where **Item 14-A. Renunciation of Jurisdiction**, the first proposed amendment to the *Book of Order*, falls in the *BOO* – in Chapter 2 of the Form of Government.

Note the other parts of this chapter on **Ordered Ministries, Commissioning, and Certification**.

The other two proposed amendments addressed to this chapter attach to the heading below this one.

Item 14-A. Renunciation of Jurisdiction On Amending G-2.0509 (Item 06-05)

The 221st General Assembly (2014) directed the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Shall G-2.0509 of the Form of Government be amended by adding the following new paragraph at the end of that section? [Text to be added or inserted is shown in italic.]

“Whenever a former teaching elder has renounced jurisdiction in the midst of a disciplinary proceeding as the accused, that former teaching elder shall not be permitted to perform any work, paid or volunteer, in any congregation or entity under the jurisdiction of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).”

Brief Description (Stated Clerks Analysis)

The amendment seeks to prevent a teaching elder who is in the midst of a formal judicial process from renouncing jurisdiction and then continuing to work or volunteer in the church. There was concern that the church may remain vulnerable due to a lack of information regarding the circumstances and facts of the case.

Background and Rationale (GA Study Guide)

This amendment originated from the Presbytery of Western Reserve as Item 06-05 (*Minutes*, 2014, Part I, pp. 27, 72, 73, 360). Presbyteries of Greater Atlanta and Santa Barbara concurred, with Greater Atlanta also proposing a similar overture (Item 06-03), which was answered by the action taken on this item. The Presbytery of Western Reserve provided the following rationale:

As stated in the Rules of Church Discipline, Preamble, “the purpose of discipline is to honor God by making clear the significance of membership in the body of Christ” (*Book of Order*, D-1.0101, Church Discipline). The principles also state in D-1.0102: “The power that Jesus Christ has vested in his Church ... is one for building up the body of Christ, not for destroying it.”

When a teaching elder renounces the jurisdiction of the church in the midst of formal judicial process, there is no resolution for either party, particularly for the complainant. Because there has been no acquittal or determination of guilt, the

teaching elder has, by virtue of renunciation, removed himself/herself from leadership and office within the church. It could be argued that the church remains vulnerable due to lack of information regarding the circumstances and facts uncovered in the investigative process that might have come to light in the judicial proceeding. Renunciation to stop judicial process should not be an alternative vehicle to continue to work or volunteer in the church when facts and circumstances have not come to light.

The 221st General Assembly (2014) Assembly Committee on Church Polity and Ordered Ministry

(06) voted to disapprove the proposed amendment 48/7/2. The 221st General Assembly (2014) amended the original overture and approved 309/207/0.

For the full report of Item 14-A (06-05) go to <http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=4695&promoID=327>.

Pros ... And Cons

- Major reasons for:
 - If renouncing avoids discipline by the body, what does that say to the victim?
 - If the accused just leaves, discipline is not possible.
 - Renunciation is abandonment – not employment-protection.
- Major reasons against:
 - An attempt to extend jurisdiction.
 - Could punish the innocent.
 - Enforcement an administrative nightmare.
 - Re-states existing authority.
 - ... (+ five more reasons)

You may have other concerns.

The Nevada Presbytery Council considered and was split on this overture going into the 221st GA and so advised our commissioners. As it had a concurrence, Council took no additional concurrence action as this was not necessary just to get this overture heard by GA.

The Association of Stated Clerks compiled these points from the GA's floor minutes:

Arguments Supporting an Affirmative Vote

- When a teaching elder avoids the disciplinary process by renouncing jurisdiction and then is allowed to serve the church, what does that say to his or her victim? Where is the justice, the opportunity for the victim to heal? The church has an obligation to help the victim to heal.
- The disciplinary process is designed to protect all parties involved as it seeks to serve justice and bring the body of Christ back to health. When the accused leaves the process by renouncing jurisdiction, the process cannot work.
- Renunciation is the abandonment of the church. Someone who has abandoned the church should not be able to work for it.

Arguments Supporting a Negative Vote

- When a teaching elder renounces jurisdiction, he or she is no longer a

member of the PC(USA) and therefore is not under its jurisdiction. The proposed amendment attempts to extend the church's jurisdiction over someone who is not under its jurisdiction.

- The proposed amendment would inappropriately place a provision of the disciplinary process in the Form of Government instead of the Rules of Discipline where it would more appropriately belong.
- There are times when the accused renounces jurisdiction not because he or she is guilty but because he or she does not want to subject himself, herself, or others to a trial. This proposed amendment has the potential for punishing someone who is not guilty.
- It would be difficult to enforce the proposed amendment, particularly if the former teaching elder relocates.
- The church's Constitution is about the "what" not the "who" or the "how" of process. Policies such as the one described in this proposed amendment should be in a council's manual of operation or personnel policies, not in the church's constitution.
- Councils already have the authority to act as this proposed amendment suggests. Indeed they have the responsibility to take due diligence through background checks of those who work for the congregation whether paid or not.
- The basis for this proposed amendment assumes that the accused is likely to repeat the alleged misbehavior. It may have been a one-time offence.
- The action committed by the accused may after a period of time no longer be contrary to the Constitution.
- This proposed amendment too narrowly and unfairly focuses on teaching elders. What about ruling elders or deacons who renounce jurisdiction during the disciplinary process?

You may have other concerns.

Evaluating Item 14-A.

Your key evaluation criteria?...

...prayer

...circumstances

...counsel of knowledgeable, mature Christians

...the Church

...**the Bible**

and ... Jack's "double-7"

Your Big Questions –

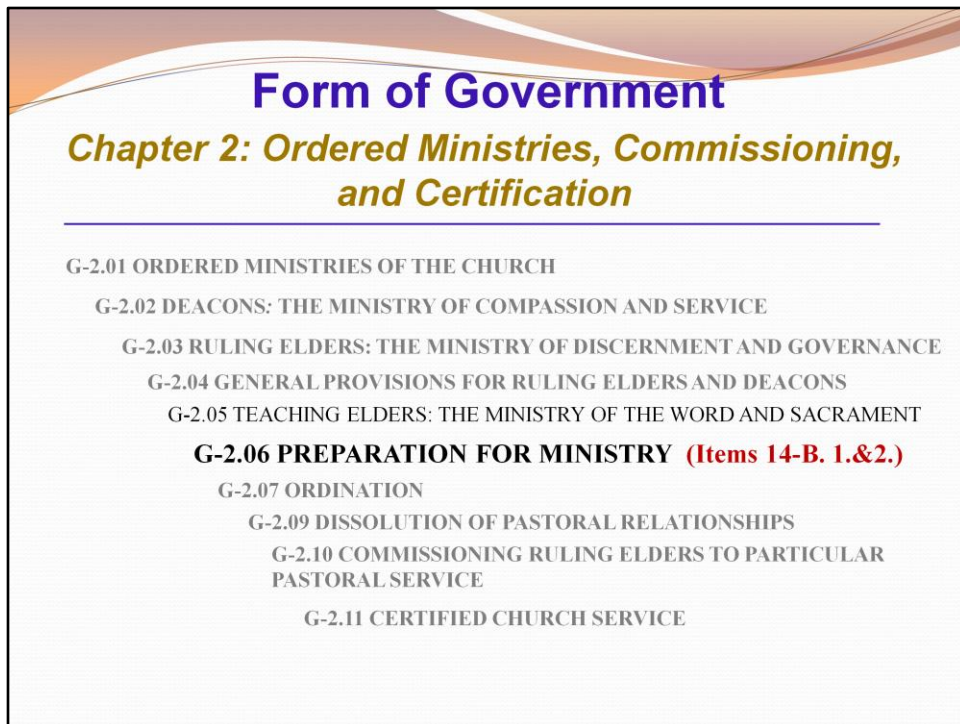
- What does scripture say about the issues raised here?

Again, it is now your turn ...

What can you add to your evaluation criteria?

Do you have any Big Questions that will require further study before you counsel your teaching elders and ruling elder commissioners as they prepare their consciences for their vote?

Discuss



Here is where **Item 14-B.1. Final Assessment** and **Item 14-B.2. Accommodations**, the second and third proposed amendments to the *Book of Order*, fall in the *BOO* – in Chapter 2 of the Form of Government.

Note the other parts of this chapter on **Ordered Ministries, Commissioning, and Certification**



14-B. Special Committee to Review the
Preparation for Ministry Process and Standard Ordination Exams
(Item 06-12)

Two proposed amendments:

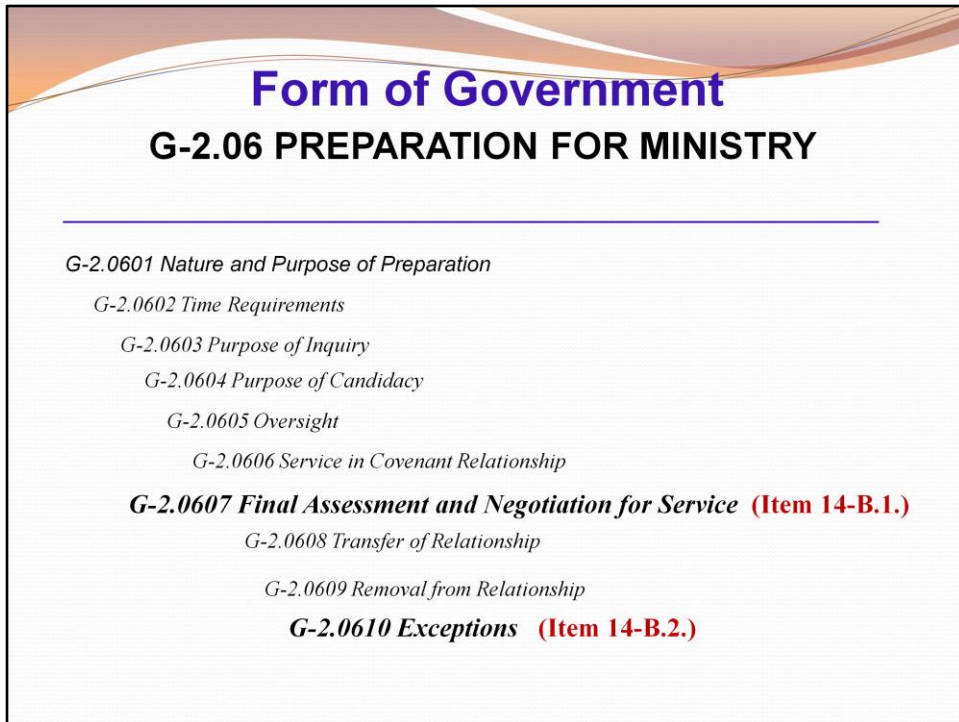
- **14-B.1. Final Assessment**
- **14-B.2. Accommodations**

Brief Description (Stated Clerks Analysis)

The 220th (2012) General Assembly referral: *On Reevaluating the Process by Which Ordination Exams Are Written, Administered, and Graded*, resulted in the formation of a Special Committee. From that Special Committee came these two proposed amendments (Item 06-12, recommendations 11 and 12).

Background (GA Study Guide)

These two proposed amendments (Item 06-12, recommendations 11 and 12) are part of the recommendations of the Report of the Special Committee to Review the Preparation for Ministry Process and Standard Ordination Exams. The Special Committee was formed in response to the referral from the 220th General Assembly (2012): *On Reevaluating the Process by Which Ordination Exams Are Written, Administered, and Graded* (*Minutes*, 2012, Part I, p. 682).



The image shows a document titled "Form of Government" with a subtitle "G-2.06 PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY". The title is in a large, bold, purple font, and the subtitle is in a bold, black font. Below the subtitle, there is a horizontal line. Underneath the line, several sub-sections are listed in a smaller, italicized font. The sub-sections are: "G-2.0601 Nature and Purpose of Preparation", "G-2.0602 Time Requirements", "G-2.0603 Purpose of Inquiry", "G-2.0604 Purpose of Candidacy", "G-2.0605 Oversight", "G-2.0606 Service in Covenant Relationship", "G-2.0607 Final Assessment and Negotiation for Service (Item 14-B.1.)", "G-2.0608 Transfer of Relationship", "G-2.0609 Removal from Relationship", and "G-2.0610 Exceptions (Item 14-B.2.)". The sub-section "G-2.0607 Final Assessment and Negotiation for Service (Item 14-B.1.)" is highlighted in red.

Form of Government

G-2.06 PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY

G-2.0601 Nature and Purpose of Preparation

G-2.0602 Time Requirements

G-2.0603 Purpose of Inquiry

G-2.0604 Purpose of Candidacy

G-2.0605 Oversight

G-2.0606 Service in Covenant Relationship

G-2.0607 Final Assessment and Negotiation for Service (Item 14-B.1.)

G-2.0608 Transfer of Relationship

G-2.0609 Removal from Relationship

G-2.0610 Exceptions (Item 14-B.2.)

... And here is where **Item 14-B.1. Final Assessment** and **Item 14-B.2. Accommodation** fall, respectively, within the paragraphs on **PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY**.

Item 14-B.1. Final Assessment On Amending G-2.0607 (Item 06-12, Recommendation 11)

The 221st General Assembly (2014) directed the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Shall G-2.0607 be amended as follows?

“A candidate may not enter into negotiation for his or her service as a teaching elder without approval of the presbytery *of care*. The presbytery shall record when it has certified a candidate ready for examination *by a presbytery* for ordination, pending a call. Evidence of readiness to begin ordered ministry as a teaching elder shall include:

“a. [Text in a.–c. remains unchanged.]

“d. ~~satisfactory grades, together with the examination papers~~ *examination materials, together with evaluations that declare those materials satisfactory* in the areas covered by any standard ordination examination approved by the General Assembly. Such examinations shall be prepared and administered by a body created by the presbyteries.”

Brief Description (Stated Clerks Analysis)

The Special Committee Report Recommendation 11 (Item 14-B.1.) seeks to distinguish the standard ordination examinations from examination by presbyteries for ordination, as well making it clear that candidates are accountable to their presbytery of care. It also makes clear that standard exams are evaluated by written comments; but, are not graded.

Rationale (GA Study Guide)

The Special Committee gave the following rationale for the approval of Recommendation 11:

This change in language seeks to distinguish the standard ordination examinations from examination by presbyteries for ordination as well as to reiterate that candidates are accountable to their presbytery of care. It also makes specific that the standard exams are evaluated by way of written comments; but, are not “graded” and would allow for the introduction of exams for which the “work product” of the exams may be other than written responses to essay questions.

The Assembly Committee on Church Polity and Ordered Ministry (06) voted to approve the proposed amendment was 54/0/0. The 221st General Assembly (2014) approved the committee’s recommendation 578/41/0.

For the full report of Item 14-B.1. (06-12), including the report of the special committee, go to <http://pcbiz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=4773&promoID=331>.

Pros ... And Cons

- Major reasons for:
 - The proposal eliminates any specific reference to seminary grades as a consideration ...
 - Clarifies that the approving presbytery must be the presbytery of care, not the calling or some other presbytery.
- Major reasons against:
 - None were noted.

You may have other concerns.

The Nevada Presbytery Council was not given an opportunity to consider or support this overture going into the 221st GA – as it came to the GA directly from a GA Special Committee report.

The Association of Stated Clerks compiled these points from the GA's floor minutes:

Arguments in Support of an Affirmative Vote

- This proposal eliminates any specific reference to seminary grades as a consideration for a Committee for the Preparation for Ministry to certify a candidate ready to receive a call.
- It also clarifies that the presbytery approving a candidate's readiness must be the presbytery of care, not the calling presbytery or some other presbytery.

Arguments in Support of a Negative Vote

- None were noted in GA Floor discussions.

You may have other concerns.

Evaluating Item 14-B.1.

Your key evaluation criteria?...

...prayer

...circumstances

...counsel of knowledgeable, mature Christians

...the Church

...the Bible

and ... Jack's "double-7"

Your Big Questions –

- What does scripture say about the issues raised here?

Again, it is now your turn ...

What can you add to your evaluation criteria?

Do you have any Big Questions that will require further study before you counsel your teaching elders and ruling elder commissioners as they prepare their consciences for their vote?

Discuss

Item 14-B.2. Accommodations On Amending G-2.0610 (Item 06-12, Recommendation 12)

The 221st General Assembly (2014) directed the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Shall G-2.0610 be amended as follows?

“G-2.0610 ~~Exceptions~~ *Accommodations to Particular Circumstances*

~~“By a three-fourths vote, a presbytery~~ *When a presbytery concludes there are good and sufficient reasons for accommodations to the particular circumstances of an individual seeking ordination, it may, by a three-fourths vote, waive any of the requirements for ordination in G-2.06, except for those of G-2.0607d. If a presbytery judges that there are good and sufficient reasons why a candidate should not be required to satisfy the requirements of G-2.0607d, it shall approve by three-quarters vote some alternate means by which to ascertain the readiness of the candidate for ministry in the areas covered by the standard ordination examinations. A full account of the reasons for* ~~exception any waiver or alternate means to ascertain readiness~~ *shall be included in the minutes of the presbytery and communicated to the presbytery to which an inquirer or candidate may be transferred.”*

Brief Description (Stated Clerks Analysis)

The Special Committee Report Recommendation 12 (Item 14-B.2.) changes the title of the paragraph to address the perception of some that being an exception is prejudicial in and of itself. The changes intend to clarify that presbytery minutes should include reasons for both waivers and for alternate means of assessment.

Rationale (GA Study Guide)

The Special Committee gave the following rationale for the approval of recommendation 12:

The new phrasing proposed in G-2.0610 first changes the title of the paragraph to address the perception of some that being an exception is prejudicial in and of itself. The changes proposed in the paragraph are intended to clarify that presbytery minutes should include reasons for both waivers and for alternate means of assessment. The sequence of sentences in the current paragraph could be construed to mean that a presbytery may “waive” everything but G-2.0607d without “good and sufficient reasons” or explanation in the minutes so long as the three-fourths vote threshold was met.

The Assembly Committee on Church Polity and Ordered Ministry (06) voted to approve the proposed amendment 57/1/1. The 221st General Assembly (2014) approved the committee’s recommendation with amendment by voice vote.

For the full report of Item 14-B.2. (Committee Item 06-12), including the report of the Special Committee, go to <http://pcbiz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=4773&promoID=331>.

Pros ... And Cons

- Major reasons for:
 - The proposal is mostly ‘word-smithing.’
- Major reasons against:
 - None

You may have other concerns.

Again, **The Nevada Presbytery** Council was not given an opportunity to consider or support this overture going into the 221st GA – as it came to the GA directly from a GA Special Committee report.

Arguments in Support of an Affirmative Vote

- The reporter commented that this proposal, as tweaked by the committee, is mostly word-smithing.

Arguments in Support of a Negative Vote

- None

You may have other concerns.

Evaluating Item 14-B.2.

Your key evaluation criteria?...

...prayer

...circumstances

...counsel of knowledgeable, mature Christians

...the Church

...**the Bible**

and ... Jack's "double-7"

Your Big Questions –

- What does scripture say about the issues raised here?

Again, it is now your turn ...

What can you add to your evaluation criteria?

Do you have any Big Questions that will require further study before you counsel your teaching elders and ruling elder commissioners as they prepare their consciences for their vote?

Discuss

Form of Government

Chapter 3: Councils

G-3.01 GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF COUNCILS (Item 14-C.)

G-3.02 THE SESSION

G-3.03 THE PRESBYTERY (Item 14-D.)

G-3.04 THE SYNOD

G-3.05 THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Here is where **Items 14-C. Child Protection Policy** and **14-D. Minimum Composition of a Presbytery**, the fourth and fifth proposed amendments to the *Book of Order*, fall in the *BOO* – in Chapter 3 of the form of Government.

Note the other parts of this chapter on **Councils**. See any you should be particularly familiar with?

Form of Government

G-3.01 GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF COUNCILS

G-3.0101 Councils as an Expression of Unity of the Church

G-3.0102 Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction

G-3.0103 Participation and Representation

G-3.0104 Officers

G-3.0105 Meetings

G-3.0106 Administration of Mission (Item 14-C.)

G-3.0107 Records

G-3.0108 Administrative Review

G-3.0109 Committees and Commissions

G-3.0110 Administrative Staff

G-3.0111 Nominating Process

G-3.0112 Insurance

G-3.0113 Finances

... And here is where **Item 14-C. Child Protection Policy** falls within the paragraphs on **GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF COUNCILS**.

**Item 14-C. Child Protection Policy
On Amending G-3.0106 (Item 08-14)**

The 221st General Assembly (2014) directed the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Amend the fourth paragraph of G-3.0106 as follows:

“All councils shall adopt and implement a sexual misconduct policy *and a child protection policy.*”

Brief Description (Stated Clerks Analysis)

The proposed amendment originated from the Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns and would require that all councils of the church adopt and implement a child protection policy.

Background and Rationale (GA Study Guide)

This proposed amendment originated from the Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns (ACWC) requesting that the Stated Clerk be directed, “to send proposed amendments to the *Book of Order* regarding the requirement of all councils of the PC(USA) to adopt and implement a child/youth protection policy...” ACWC provided the following rationale:

Currently the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA) and Child Advocacy Office of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has provided some extremely helpful resources regarding Child/Youth Protection measures and policies, which are available online. One such resource can be found under Creating Safe Ministries through pcusa.org. [1] However, many of these resources are focused primarily on sexual harassment policies and procedures and not adequately on the broad scope of child/youth protection. The Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns (ACWC) asks that the Presbyterian Mission Agency direct that new/updated resources be created for synods, presbyteries, and particular church use that are from the PC(USA) and address child youth

protection measures and policies – including and expanding beyond the focus of sexual harassment. There are many issues that have evolved with working with children/youth which need to be addressed in the work of the church.

The focus of child/youth protection policies is to ensure a safe, thriving, and nurturing environment for children and youth in our churches and church-sponsored events. These policies address screening child and youth workers and volunteers, how to implement mandatory training, simple rules involving transportation, adult/youth/child ratios, minimum age requirement of volunteers, facility security and safety, *etc.* *It is important to understand in developing these policies that these policies and procedures are completely separate from sexual misconduct policies*, and there is a need to differentiate between these resources and policies. That is why we request an amendment in the *Book of Order* to require all councils of the PC(USA) to make this differentiation and adopt and implement a child/youth protection policy alongside a separate sexual harassment policy.

It is the church's responsibility to provide a safe, thriving, and nurturing environment for children and youth, and we must take seriously how our faith informs this responsibility. Our theology of the child is reflected in how we care and nurture children and youth who are under the care of the church. This theology must reflect the love, care, and high regard for the humanity and dignity of the child reflected in the Gospels.

[1]“Create Policies,” *Creating Safe Ministries*,
<http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/creating-safe-ministries/create-policies/> (16 January 2014).

The Assembly Committee on Mission Coordination (08) voted to approve the OGA proposed language to amend the *Book of Order* 69/0/0. The 221st General Assembly (2014) approved the committee's recommendation 554/18/0. (See *Minutes*, 2014, Part I, pp. 40, 43, 531–32.)

For the full report of Item 14-C. (Committee Item 08-14) go to <http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=4763>.

Pros ... And Cons

- Major reasons for:
 - There was an impassioned speech by an overture advocate and then a sharing by one of the committee members of his own sexual abuse.
- Major reasons against:
 - None

You may have other concerns.

Although I am not a lawyer – and I do not play one on TV – I might add that the denomination’s excellent sexual misconduct policy goes far beyond regarding simply young adults as a group vulnerable to victimization by sexual predators – to address sexual misconduct (but not other forms of abuse) that may arise where vulnerable persons of any age *or vulnerable circumstance* may be the at risk (*e.g.*, the elderly, mentally or physically disabled, custody care, homebound/bed-ridden, *et al.*).

From a governance perspective, we might see a similar overture addressing a similar broadening of such abuse concerns for other vulnerable person age / circumstance groups in later GA considerations – as the church shoulders its care responsibilities to these groups (or even as your congregation may be doing home visitation, and like ministries).

From a management perspective, policies similar to these, addressing all of the potentially vulnerable populations your congregation may serve, can be simply good-sense protection to consider for your congregations’ ministry activity participant screening and training, ministry practices, and overall risk management. Considering them is a part of your session’s legal duty of care.

The Nevada Presbytery Council was not given an opportunity to consider or support this overture going into the 221st GA – as it came from a GA Committee report.

The Association of Stated Clerks compiled these points from the GA's floor minutes:

Arguments Supporting an Affirmative Vote

- There was an impassioned speech by an overture advocate and then a sharing by one of the committee members of his own sexual abuse.

Arguments in Support of a Negative Vote

- None

You may have other concerns.

Evaluating Item 14-C.

Your key evaluation criteria?...

...prayer

...circumstances

...counsel of knowledgeable, mature Christians

...the Church

...**the Bible**

and ... Jack's "double-7"

Your Big Questions –

- What does scripture say about the issues raised here?

Again, it is now your turn ...

What can you add to your evaluation criteria?

Do you have any Big Questions that will require further study before you counsel your teaching elders and ruling elder commissioners as they prepare their consciences for their vote?

Discuss

Form of Government

G-3.03 THE PRESBYTERY

G-3.0301 Composition and Responsibilities (Item 14-D.

G-3.0302 Relations with Synod and General Assembly

G-3.0303 Relations with Sessions

G-3.0304 Meetings and Quorum

G-3.0305 Minutes and Records

G-3.0306 Membership of Presbytery

*G-3.0307 Pastor, Counselor, and Advisor to Teaching Elders
and Congregations*

... And here is where **Item 14-D. Minimum Composition of a Presbytery**, falls within the paragraphs on **THE PRESBYTERY**.

Item 14-D. Minimum Composition of a Presbytery On Amending G-3.0301 (Item 06-06)

The 221st General Assembly (2014) directed the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Shall the second paragraph of G-3.0301 of the Form of Government be amended as follows?

“The minimum composition of a presbytery is ten duly constituted sessions and ten teaching elders, unless an exception is approved by its synod and the General Assembly giving consideration to the responsibilities assigned to presbyteries in G-3-01 and G-3.03.”

Brief Description (Stated Clerks Analysis)

The amendment would allow presbyteries comprised of less than ten duly constituted sessions and ten teaching elders to continue to exist upon approval by their synod and the General Assembly. The background and rationale provided by the Presbytery of Eastern Oregon (a member of our Synod of the Pacific) emphasized that the PCUSA is a denomination of small churches which continue to do good work within their respective communities despite their size. Mission is not dependent upon size.

Background and Rationale (GA Study Guide)

This amendment originated from the Presbytery of Eastern Oregon as Item 06-06. The Presbyteries of Boise and San Joaquin (both also in the Synod of the Pacific) and Northumberland concurred. The Presbytery of Eastern Oregon provided the following rationale:

1. Of the 173 presbyteries in the PC(USA), 30 presbyteries have 30 or fewer churches. Of those, 3 are racial ethnic and 3 are east of the Mississippi River, leaving 24 of the smallest presbyteries in the PC(USA) in the western United States where the distances between churches is often measured in hours and presbytery boundaries include entire states. (The Presbytery of Nevada is one of these small western presbyteries.. How far will you travel to Spring Presbytery? ... to Fall Presbytery?)

The Comparative Statistics 2012 of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shows 67 percent of

our congregations have fewer than 150 members and 75 percent have fewer than 200 members. We are a denomination of small churches and vital ministries in the locations where we are planted; where history and connectionalism meet in faithful congregations as they have for hundreds of years.

2. The representation of small churches and presbyteries is vital to the direction and sustainability of the PC(USA) now and into the future. Small presbyteries pay per capita to participate in the life of the denomination, to support the task forces of the denomination, and to have access to the PJC's of the synods and General Assembly. Small presbyteries also pay mission, joining our contributions together with those of the larger presbyteries to support Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) and World Missions. We are faithful in providing leadership at all levels of the denomination. The leadership and modeling of small presbyteries provides a path for others to follow as we remain faithful to Christ in local settings. The representation of small presbyteries at the synod and General Assembly level is a necessary and responsible voice to and with the denomination.

3. Mission is not dependent upon size. In small presbyteries the local PC(USA) congregation is often the only Protestant witness within their community. As such these congregations are responsible for the food pantries, schools, social gathering places, and many other creative ministries. These are more than buildings where people meet on Sunday; this is Christ at work in the midst of the people. These congregations are supported monetarily and spiritually by the presbytery and sustained by the connections with other congregations within the presbytery.

4. Matthew 18:20 states, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." Neither the exact number of congregations nor teaching elders determine the validity of a presbytery. Rather, the validity and vitality of the presbytery lies in its ability to support the ministry of its congregations, synod, and General Assembly as it is the body gathered in Christ's name, doing His work with the resources at hand and through the congregations being the body of Christ in the world.

The Assembly Committee on Church Polity and Ordered Ministry (06) voted to approve the proposed amendment 57/0/2. The 221st General Assembly (2014) approved the committee's recommendation 510/9/0.

For the full report of Item 14-D. (Committee Item 06-06) go to <http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=4589>.

Pros ... And Cons

- Major reasons for:
 - Where congregations are few and the area is large, this present an unrealistic challenge.
 - Even where there are more than ten sessions, it is often difficult for there to be ten teaching elders.
- Major reasons against:
 - None

You may have other concerns.

The Nevada Presbytery Council considered and supported this overture going into the 221st GA and so advised our commissioners. As it had a concurrence, Council took no additional concurrence action.

The Association of Stated Clerks compiled these points from the GA's floor minutes:

Arguments in Support of an Affirmative Vote

- There are places in the United States where there are few PCUSA congregations in a large geographic area (e.g., Alaska, Eastern Oregon, Idaho). Distances and remoteness present such a challenge that attempting to configure presbyteries with ten or more sessions and ten or more teaching elders is unrealistic.
- Even in those places where there are more than ten sessions, it is often difficult for there to be ten teaching elders.

Arguments in Support of a Negative Vote

- Once the original recommendation was amended to include the phrase "giving consideration to the responsibilities assigned to presbyteries in G-3.01 and G-3.03", no arguments against the proposed amendment were voiced.

You may have other concerns.

Evaluating Item 14-D.

Your key evaluation criteria?...

...prayer

...circumstances

...counsel of knowledgeable, mature Christians

...the Church

...**the Bible**

and ... Jack's "double-7"

Your Big Questions –

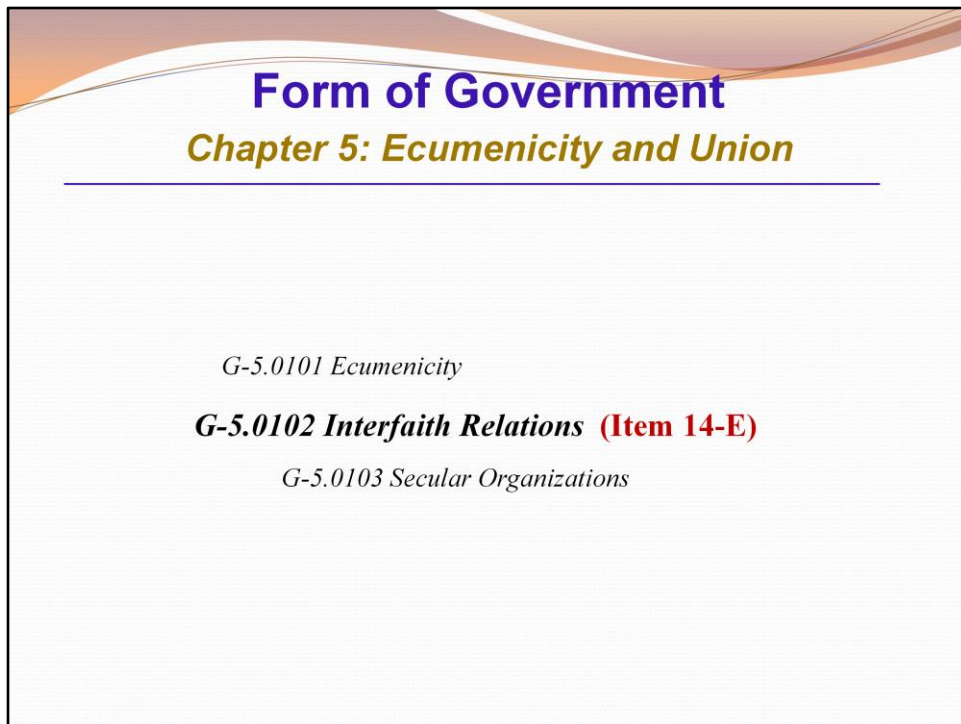
- What does scripture say about the issues raised here?

Again, it is now your turn ...

What can you add to your evaluation criteria?

Do you have any Big Questions that will require further study before you counsel your teaching elders and ruling elder commissioners as they prepare their consciences for their vote?

Discuss



Here is where **Item 14-E. Interreligious Stance**, the sixth proposed amendment to the *Book of Order*, falls in the *BOO* – in the chapter on Ecumenicity and Union. This chapter isn't very large – but it underlies our joint witness congregation, the **Truckee Lutheran/Presbyterian Church**.

Note the other parts of this chapter on *Ecumenicity and Union*.

Item 14-E. Interreligious Stance On Amending G-5.0102 (07-02, Recommendation 2)

The 221st General Assembly (2014) directed the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Shall G-5.0102 be amended as follows:

“The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at all levels seeks new will be open to and will seek opportunities for ~~conversation and understanding~~ respectful dialogue and mutual relationships with non-Christian entities and persons from other religious [entities] traditions. It does this in the faith that the church of Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is a sign and means of God’s intention for the wholeness of all humankind and all creation.”

Brief Description (Stated Clerks Analysis)

The proposed amendment originated from The General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations as part of their recommendation to approve the policy statement, *The Interreligious Stance of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*. The amendment updates the language in the current section and adds a sentence regarding the interreligious stance of the PC (USA).

Background and Rationale (GA Study Guide)

This proposed amendment originated from The General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations (GACEIR) as part of their recommendation to the 221st General Assembly (2014) to approve the policy statement, *The Interreligious Stance of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*.

The Assembly Committee on Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations (07) voted to approve the proposed amendment 59/4/0. The 221st General Assembly (2014) approved the committee’s recommendation by a hand vote.

For the full report of Item 14-E. (Committee Item 07-02), including the adopted policy *The Interreligious Stance of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*, go to <http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=4673>.

Pros ... And Cons

- Major reasons for:
 - “To be Presbyterian is to be ecumenical”
 - We’ve been at the forefront of local, regional, national, and global ecumenism.
 - This updates our existing statements
 - Offers how-to guidance.
- Major reasons against:
 - None

You may have other concerns.

Again, **The Nevada Presbytery** Council was not given an opportunity to consider or support this overture going into the 221st GA – as it came to the GA directly from a GA Special Committee report. It would continue to encourage dialog across the Christian denominations with the purpose of unifying the witness of the whole Church-Visible to the world.

The Association of Stated Clerks compiled these points from the GA’s floor minutes:

Arguments in Support of an Affirmative Vote

- A well known quote of PCUSA: “To be Presbyterian is to be ecumenical”
- The PCUSA and its antecedent churches have been at the forefront of local, regional, national, and global ecumenism.
- This is a new statement for the PCUSA – updating statements from prior ecumenical consultations in the UPCUSA (1981) and the PCUS (1975)
- The statement offers “guidance for how we relate to people of other religious traditions.”

Arguments in Support of a Negative Vote

- None

You may have other concerns.

Evaluating Item 14-E.

Your key evaluation criteria?...

...prayer

...circumstances

...counsel of knowledgeable, mature Christians

...the Church

...**the Bible**

and ... Jack's "double-7"

Your Big Questions –

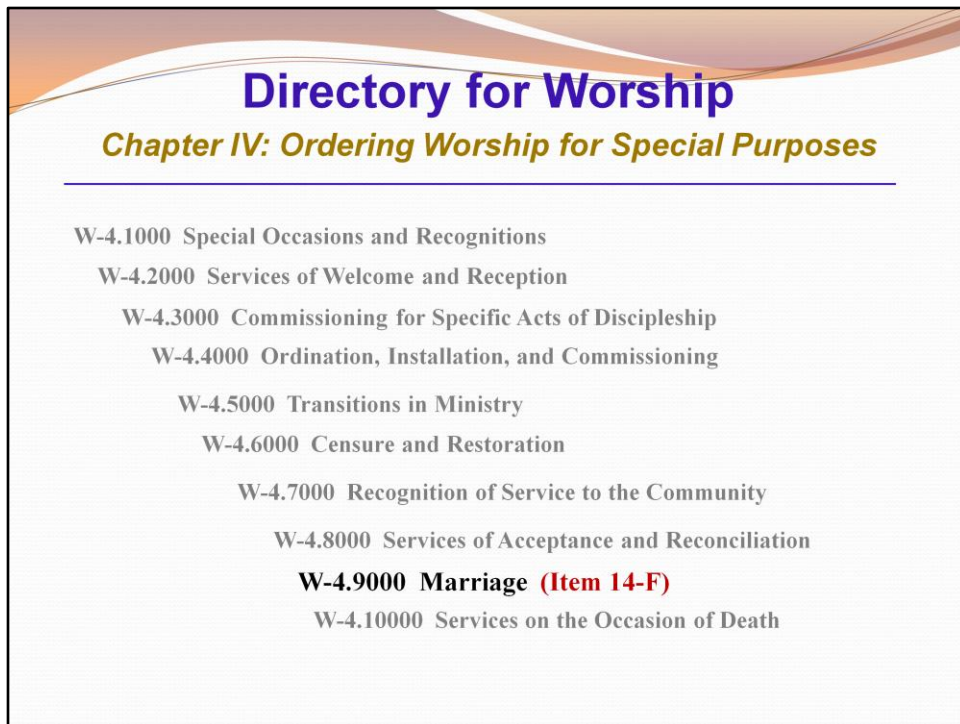
- What does scripture say about the issues raised here?

Again, it is now your turn ...

What can you add to your evaluation criteria?

Do you have any Big Questions that will require further study before you counsel your teaching elders and ruling elder commissioners as they prepare their consciences for their vote?

Discuss



Here is where **Item 14-F. Marriage**, the seventh proposed amendment to the *Book of Order*, falls in the *DFW* – in the chapter on Ordering Worship for Special Purposes.

Note the other parts of this chapter on **Ordering Worship for Special Purposes**.

Do you see other chapter titles here that your worship committee may not be fully exploiting for your congregation or its members' corporate, family/home, or personal worship use?

Item 14-F. Marriage On Amending W-4.9000 (Item 10-02)

The 221st General Assembly (2014) directed the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Amend W-4.9000 by striking the current text and replacing it with the following:

- ... *Marriage involves a unique commitment between two people, traditionally a man and a woman, to love and support each other for the rest of their lives. ...*
- *If they meet the requirements of the civil jurisdiction in which they intend to marry, a couple may request that a service of Christian marriage...*
- *... shall be conducted in a manner appropriate to this covenant ...*
- *A service of worship recognizing a civil marriage and confirming it in the community of faith may be appropriate ...*
- *Nothing herein shall compel a teaching elder to perform nor compel a session to authorize the use of church property ...*

Brief Description (Stated Clerks Analysis)

This overture came from the Presbytery of the Cascades (a member of the Synod of the Pacific) with sixteen other presbyteries concurring. The proposed changes to W-4.9000 sets forth the circumstances and conditions under which a teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) would be authorized, though not required, to act as an agent of the civil jurisdiction in recording of the marriage contract if the couple wishing to marry meet the requirements of the civil jurisdiction. The session has the authority to permit or deny the use of the church property for a marriage service.

The Layman notes: While same-sex marriage is now permitted by PCUSA pastors in PCUSA churches in states where it is legal as a result of the 221st General Assembly's approval of an Authoritative Interpretation (371/238/0), amendment 14F seeks to change the related language found in the *Book of Order's* Directory of Worship. See business item 10-03: [http://pc-biz.org/PC-Biz.WebApp_deploy/\(S\(q2nwb14zsxvpvzml14w1rptd\)\)/Explorer.aspx?id=4599](http://pc-biz.org/PC-Biz.WebApp_deploy/(S(q2nwb14zsxvpvzml14w1rptd))/Explorer.aspx?id=4599)

Background and Rationale (GA Study Guide)

This amendment originated from the Presbytery of the Cascades as Item 10-02. Presbyteries of Albany, Baltimore, Boston, Cayuga-Syracuse, Chicago, East Iowa, Genesee Valley, Heartland, Hudson River, National Capital, New York City, San Francisco, Southern New England, The Redwoods, Twin Cities, and Transylvania concurred, many with additional rationale. Presbytery of the Cascades provided the

following rationale:

The PC(USA) has a long history of working for social justice and equal rights for all people.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) churches throughout the denomination are seeking to be inclusive, welcoming communities of Christian faith and are committed to honoring diversity and promoting peace, health, and justice in personal relationship, church, community, and the world.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) churches throughout the denomination also have a long history of struggling with issues of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) equality; working within the structure and standards of the PC(USA) and also taking actions of ecclesiastical defiance when their conscience leads them to believe the teachings of Jesus require such actions.

As requested by the 220th General Assembly (2012), many churches have been studying the issue of marriage equality both in the pulpit and through adult education classes.

The Presbytery of the Cascades stands with those in the PC(USA) who believe that the teachings of Jesus call for radical inclusion of all people and that the actions of Jesus, passed down in Scripture, showed unconditional love and equality for all people. We believe that God created each of us with many differences, including sexual preferences, and that those differences are to be celebrated as part of the creative plan of God.

Support of marriage equality is consistent with our faith tradition. The covenant of marriage requires love and commitment; qualities that are in no way gender specific.

Failing to allow for marriage equality continues to have negative consequences for the Body of Christ, the Church, in that it gives some of our members fewer rights than others, treating them as second-class members. This is inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus. Valuing the worth, health, and happiness of our children and youth, requires that they are allowed to grow wholly and holy in a church that embraces them and their visions of their future loving relationships. To deny marriage to the GLBT community will continue the discrimination they already experience and increase the level of stress and mental health issues that make this community more susceptible to substance abuse, depression, and suicide.

Marriage equality, on the other hand, will reduce the numbers of young people who find banning gay marriage to be hypocritical, unfair, and not the act of a caring

Christian congregation.

The *Book of Order* of the PC(USA) should be amended to allow marriage between “two people” rather than limiting marriage to “between one man and one woman” and to allow PC(USA) church officials to perform marriage ceremonies between same-sex couples.

The Assembly Committee on Civil Union and Marriage Issues (10) voted to approve the proposed amendment 49/18/0. The 221st General Assembly (2014) amended and approved the committee’s recommendation 429/175/0.

For the full report of Item 14-F (Committee Item 10-02) go to <http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=4593>.

Pros ... And Cons

- Major reasons for:
 - The current *Book of Order* stance is not in line with the current policy on marriage.
 - Young people are accepting
 - Gives options
 - Gives members full rights
- Major reasons against:
 - The state does what it does; the church only what God blesses
 - Scripture clear on marriage definition
 - ... not sure the time is right ...
 - ... will cause major crisis .

You may have other concerns.

The Nevada Presbytery Council considered, but, did not support this OVT (nor any of the other 6 overtures along the same lines) going into the 221st GA and so advised our commissioners.

The Association of Stated Clerks compiled these points from the GA's floor minutes:

Arguments in Support of an Affirmative Vote

- The rationale provided by the Presbytery of the Cascades was reiterated in committee
- The current non-discrimination stance in the Book of Order is not in line with the current policy on marriage
- Young people are accepting
- It gives presbyteries and churches options
- Members of the church are not full members by denying the right to marry

Arguments in Support of a Negative Vote

- The state does what it does; the church only what God blesses
- Scripture above all is firm on marriage between a man and a woman
- In favor, but not sure the time is right to amend the Book of Order
- The change will cause major crisis

You may have other concerns.

Evaluating Item 14-F.

Your key evaluation criteria?...

...prayer

...circumstances

...counsel of knowledgeable, mature Christians

...the Church

...the Bible

and ... Jack's "double-7"

Your Big Questions –

- What does scripture say about the issues raised here?

Again, it is now your turn ...

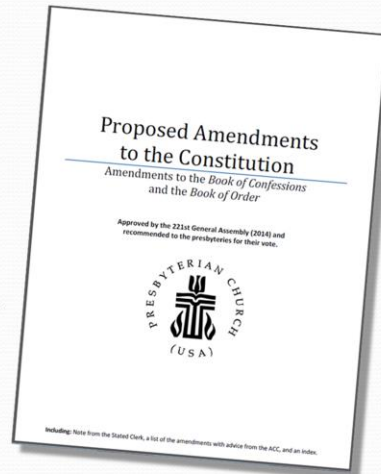
What can you add to your evaluation criteria?

Do you have any Big Questions that will require further study before you counsel your teaching elders and ruling elder commissioners as they prepare their consciences for their vote?

Discuss

The Proposed Amendment task ...

- 14-1 Confession of Belhar**
- 14-A. Renunciation of Jurisdiction**
- 14-B. Preparation for Ministry:**
 - 14-B.1. Final Assessment**
 - 14-B.2. Accommodations**
- 14-C. Child Protection Policy**
- 14-D. Minimum Composition of a Presbytery**
- 14-E. Interreligious Stance**
- 14-F. Marriage**



And with that introduction, let's look now at what remains for us before Spring Presbytery ...

What do we need to do?

At home:

- Appoint a facilitator for your congregation/cluster
- Plan discussion format
- Invite discussion participation – *e.g.*, non-pulpit TEs, CREs, other ministry governance committees, *et al.*
- Get / distribute discussion materials
- Conduct / record discussion / provide to Presbyters

At Spring Presbytery – Presbyters:

- Bring your prepared consciences
- Level information & understanding – vote the Proposals

Here is what I propose we do to prepare the consciences of our presbyters for their exercise of a vote on the 8 Proposed Amendments.

When you get home:

- Appoint a facilitator for your congregation/cluster. This person will have to make all the arrangements for your background information, personal preparations, and your discussions as mature Christians with your teaching elders and commissioners (as they may be elected), run the communal discussions, and record the results (but you might also appoint a scribe for this last point).
- Plan the discussion format for your group discussions – in session or however you decide to do it.
- Invite discussion participation – *e.g.*, non-pulpit TEs, CREs, other ministry governance committees, *et al.* – so each voting member of presbytery has the chance to participate in these communal preparations of conscience.
- Get / distribute discussion materials out to the teaching elders who worship with your congregation and to your commissioners – and other who wish to participate in this preparation.
- Conduct / record discussion / provide to Presbyters so they all have a record of the communal discussion.

Then, when we get back together at Spring Presbytery – Presbyters:

- Bring your prepared consciences

We will have

- An information & understanding leveling period on Tuesday morning, 10-noon, before plenary starts, to ensure that we all understand what we will be voting on in the plenary session
 - and then – we will
- vote the Proposals during the Equipping Ministries Report Tuesday afternoon in plenary.

Resource Material

- *Proposed Amendments to the Constitution* – 2014
- *Analysis-of-Amendments-to-the-Constitution* – 2014
- *The Belhar Confession* – Jack Rogers - 2013
- *A Study of The Belhar Confession and its Accompanying Letter* – 2014
- *Frequently Asked Questions: Civil Union and Marriage* and *Frequently Asked Questions: Same-Gender Marriage* – 2014
- Children's Ministry Leader Professional Pack I: Child Protection - 2015
- Other online material for each proposed amendment

Beyond the reference material on the Confession of Belhar in the 'Letter to Councils' from the Co-Moderators of the Special Committee on the Confession of Belhar, that I shared with you above, here is the resource material I strongly recommend that you all use in your personal preparation time and to prepare for your communal discussions of the eight Proposed amendments.

It can be found online at:

- *Proposed Amendments to the Constitution* – 2014. Available at: <http://www.pcusa.org/resource/ga221-proposed-amendments-constitution/>
- *Analysis-of-Amendments-to-the-Constitution* – 2014. Available at: <http://www.pcusa.org/resource/analysis-of-amendments-to-the-constitution/>
- *The Belhar Confession* – Jack Rogers – 2013. Available at: <http://www.pcusa.org/resource/belhar-rogers/>
- *A Study of The Belhar Confession and its Accompanying Letter* – 2014. Available at: <https://www.pcusa.org/resource/belhar-confession-study-guide/>
- *Frequently Asked Questions: Civil Union and Marriage* and *Frequently Asked Questions: Same-Gender Marriage* – 2014. Available at: <http://www.pcusa.org/resource/frequently-asked-questions-civil-union-and-marriage/>

http://oga.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/ga221-civil-union-marriage-faq.pdf and

<http://www.secondpresbyterianchurch.org/images/FAQSameGenderMarriage.pdf>

- Children's Ministry Leader Professional Pack I: Child Protection – 2015
Available from Christianity Today's store at:
<http://store.churchlawtodaystore.com/chmileprpaic.html>
- Other online material for each proposed amendment. Available at:
www.Google.com – or in the material listed above.



Next Steps:

January 2015 – Session Members, Commissioners, and Teaching Elders introduced to the GA-referred proposals for study

January/February/March– Personal and group **study continues**

March 15-18, 2015 – Spring Presbytery @ Green Valley PC – an information-leveling discussion Tuesday am and vote on the proposals in plenary

And finally, here is the preparation roadmap for the Nevada Presbytery Teaching Elder members and Ruling Elder Commissioners to Presbytery for voting on the Proposed Amendments at Spring Presbytery.

Let's turn now to the bonus task ...

... and now, the bonus task...

Five Affirmations for advisory vote – and comment – that will lead to a policy update at GA 222.

The five:

1. ... peacemaking is essential to our faith ...
2. ... confess our complicity ... in the world's violence ...
3. ... reclaim the power and authority ...
4. ... seek to understand ...
5. ... commit ourselves ...



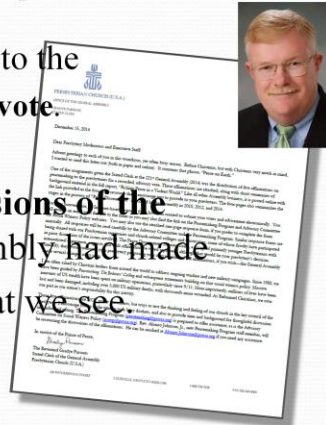
The Bonus Task – the five affirmations we are being asked to consider and advise the Peace Discernment Steering Team on.

We will look at the wording of each of these affirmations in just a minute ...

... we are being asked for ...

Five Affirmations –leading to a policy update at GA 222.

- ... five affirmations on peacemaking to the presbyteries for a **recorded, advisory vote** – and
- ... welcome our **presbytery's versions of the affirmations**—the General Assembly had made several changes of its own in what we see.



We are being asked for a recorded, advisory vote on each of the five affirmations – and any other advice we may give from simple wording changes to completely new affirmations as we discern where God leading us on the issue of Peace on Earth.

Gradye promises in his December transmittal:

All responses will be read carefully by the [Social Witness Policy] Advisory Committee and the Peacemaking Program. Similar response forms are being shared with our Presbyterian seminaries and church-related colleges and universities, some of whose faculty have participated in prior discussion of the issues involved.

The Peace Discernment Steering Team, a group of primarily younger Presbyterians with international experience, suggests that each affirmation be voted separately, although that would be your presbytery's decision.

Similarly, they would welcome your presbytery proposing your own versions of the affirmations, if you wish—the General Assembly made several changes of its own.

He goes on:

I am often asked by Christian leaders from around the world to address ongoing warfare and new military campaigns. Since 1980, we have been guided by *Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling* and subsequent statements building on that social witness policy. Massive amounts of US wealth have been spent on military operations, particularly since 9/11. More importantly, millions of lives have been lost and been damaged, including over 5,000 US military deaths, with thousands more wounded. As Reformed Christians, we own our part in our nation's responsibility for this activity.

How will Nevada Presbytery form its advice on these affirmations?

- Past study of complex issues urged using ***Communal Discernment processes***
- Nevada Presbytery's recent history suggests:
 - a time for personal preparation,
 - a time for communal discussion, and
 - a time for corporate choice.

Last two times we went through a discussion of complex issues (two changes to the *Book of Confessions* and the re-arrangement of the *Book of Order*, leading to newFOG), we found that GA proposed a time of Communal Discernment on the docket in the Presbyteries' consideration of these amendments. We did it a little differently.

I have proposed to our Moderator and Stated Clerk the same concepts and actions we used last time - based on the process we used successfully two and four years ago.

How will we decide *these*? Spring Presbytery @ Green Valley PC

Tuesday morning (Mar 17) discernment session

- Time devoted to the five affirmations.
- A moderated, informal communal discussion, consideration, and discernment.
- Discussion will be harmonized by the staff for presentation and agreement in the afternoon plenary.

At our March Presbytery meeting (March 15-18, 2015 at Green Valley Presbyterian Church, Henderson, NV), here is how that will look schedule-wise, *with you all coming to Presbytery having thoroughly studied the affirmations and preparing to vote and offer your advice.*

Equipping Ministries will provide a time – 11 am to noon - of informal; but, orderly, discussion, consideration, and discernment of the presented wording modifications and other advice from the churches and teaching elder participants before Presbytery's plenary session actually begins.

In it we will air the proposed affirmations, share information regarding their declared intent and probable effect, and share the attending Presbyters' arguments for and against.

We will then take the prepared advice and re-wording suggestions from the churches brought by those who participated in their local discernment activities regarding the affirmations.

And we will discern where God is leading us on the matters contained in the affirmations – and re-word or replace as necessary.

These inputs will be recorded without attribution and harmonized by staff for

presentation in the plenary for presbytery's consideration, modification, and agreement – and forwarding to the Peace Discernment Steering team.

Spring Presbytery @ Green Valley PC

Tuesday afternoon plenary – as an Agenda Item:

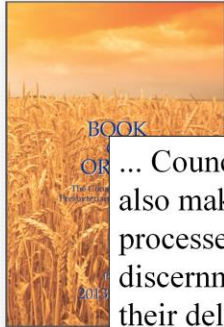
- Equipping Ministries brings the five affirmations to the floor for consideration
- The Moderator allows formal and constrained floor debate and decision (vote by hand - counted) on each of these affirmations and the presbytery's harmonized advice – under the *Book of Order*

And in the afternoon, during the Equipping Ministries report – while the votes on the eight proposed amendments to the Constitution are being counted :

- **Equipping Ministries**, will bring the five affirmations to the floor of Presbytery as part of its report for consideration and vote, one after another.
- **Our Moderator**, will enforce a constrained discussion (*i.e.*, an equal number of pro and con arguments in alternating order) of each item – in sequence.
- When an equal number of the floor's pro and con arguments on an item are exhausted, **Presbytery will vote the affirmation** –

but here is where the process departs from that used for the amendments

How do we decide? ... with guidance from *The Book of Order, G-3.0105*



... Councils may also make use of processes of discernment in their deliberations prior to a vote as agreed upon by the body.

- **Equipping** brings each affirmation to the floor as a “Main Motion” - no second required.
- Each affirmation is a “perfected motion” – no amendments allowed.
- Each item is debated and voted.
- Alternate wording and other advice from the morning meeting is considered, debated, amended (if needed), and voted.
- Results are reported to GA by our Stated Clerk.

Our *Book of Order*, paragraph G-3.0105, *Meetings*, reads in part: ... Meetings shall be conducted in accordance with the most recent edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, except when it is in contradiction to this Constitution. Councils may also make use of processes of discernment in their deliberations prior to a vote as agreed upon by the body.

Madam Moderator will be asked to please ascertain such agreement.

Lets see how this paragraph orders the process for us ...

- Equipping Ministries will bring each affirmation to the floor of Presbytery as a part of their report - no “second” to any of these affirmations is necessary because it is brought as part of a report.
- These affirmations come initially as “perfected motions” – that is, **they can neither be amended nor revised** – they must be voted exactly as they have been referred to the presbyteries by the GA.
- Once on the floor, the item may be debated -- if there are opinions on it to be expressed by the members of Presbytery who “have voice” at Presbytery. Again:

- This debate may be constrained in the interests of time and fairness by the Moderator (*i.e.*, an equal number of pro and con arguments in alternating order).
- The Moderator may speak *neither for nor against the motion on the floor* while moderating – but, may yield the gavel or the Moderator’s cross – to the Vice Moderator, who then presides until the Moderator is done advocating.
- When the body is ready (*i.e.*, the roughly equal number of “pro” and “con” non-repetitive speeches is exhausted), it shall vote.
- After the vote on the affirmation as referred, a harmonized record of the morning’s discernment and consideration, based on the input from the congregations and teaching elders not-in-a-pulpit as they assembled and considered these affirmations and offered their advice – to represent a trial statement of the advice of presbytery to the Peace Discernment Steering Team. We may debate, consider, discern, and amend as necessary, but we must agree on the final advisory statement, by vote.
- This process will repeat for each affirmation and its advisory information until all five have all been voted.
- A **simple majority will prevail in the voting.**
- **A counted hand vote has been requested by GA to preserve the feeling of the presbytery.**
- Without any further direction from the body, the Stated Clerk of Presbytery will record the vote on each of the affirmations and its considered advice statement and report these votes in writing to the Peace Discernment Steering Team, as quickly as possible / practical, and mindful of its submission request.

And that is how our Presbytery will decide and advise on these five affirmation items.

References:

F-3.0205 Decision by Majority Vote

Decisions shall be reached in councils by vote, following opportunity for discussion and discernment, and a majority shall govern.

G-3.0105 Meetings

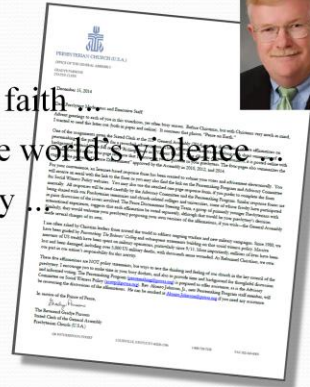
Meetings of councils shall be opened and closed with prayer. Meetings shall be conducted in accordance with the most recent edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, except when it is in contradiction to this Constitution. Councils may also make use of processes of discernment in their deliberations prior to a vote as agreed upon by the body.

... and now, the bonus task...

Five Affirmations for advisory vote – and comment – that will lead to a policy update at GA 222.

The five:

1. ... peacemaking is essential to our faith ...
2. ... confess our complicity ... in the world's violence ...
3. ... reclaim the power and authority ...
4. ... seek to understand ...
5. ... commit ourselves ...



So lets turn to our Bonus Task– the five affirmations ...

(This is where the workbook part begins – again ...)



**"The affirmations for church-wide
discussion and advisory vote:**

"1. We affirm that peacemaking is essential to our faith in God's reconciling work in Jesus Christ, whose love and justice challenge hatred and conflict, and whose call gives our church a mission to present alternatives to violence, fear, and misused power.

Here is the first ...

1. Summary of Rationale for First Affirmation:

This affirmation would support the understanding in *Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling*, that working for peace is not only an individual matter (such as conscientious objection) but a call of the whole Christian community, including those opposed to all war and violence and those who use categories of the "Just War" or justifiable war tradition. Former chief of chaplains, Kermit Johnson, in opposing nuclear warfare, writes,

"Like pacifism, it [Just War] is rooted in the commandment: 'Thou shalt not kill.' It is a presumption against violence, 'the presumption in favor of peace and against war.'"

Thus faithful Presbyterians may differ on whether there can be justified force, whether war is inevitable, and what the range from policing to maintain social peace to organized military campaigns may be. The point is: it is our responsibility to deal with these questions. Further, it is not enough to repeat old answers, but it is important to know what they have been.

For example, strong majorities of the PCUSA presbyteries in 1936 and 1938 voted to

remove Just War language from the Westminster Confession, though not attaining the supermajority necessary for constitutional change. This voting process recalls those votes prior to the adoption of *The Book of Confessions*. The full rationale section itself summarizes alternatives to violence and war in General Assembly social witness policy, particularly since WWII, and notes the support of more than 50% of PCUSA congregations for The Commitment to Peacemaking and the Peacemaking Offering at some point since 1980.

Evaluating 1. ... peacemaking is essential to our faith ...

Your key evaluation criteria?...

...prayer

...circumstances

...counsel of knowledgeable, mature Christians

...the Church

...the Bible

and ... Jack's "double-7"

Your Big Questions –

- What does scripture say about the issues raised here?

So, here we are again, it is now your turn ...

What can you add to your evaluation criteria?

Do you have any Big Questions that will require further study before you counsel your teaching elders and ruling elder commissioners as they prepare their consciences for their vote?

Discuss



**"The affirmations for church-wide
discussion and advisory vote:**

"2. We confess our complicity in the world's violence even as we pray for the Spirit's courage to "unmask idolatries," to speak truth about war and oppression, to stand with those who suffer, and to respond to acts and threats of violence with ministries of justice, healing, and reconciliation.

2. Summary of Rationale for Second Affirmation:

This affirmation asks us to be "honest patriots," owning our responsibility for the horrific consequences of the Afghan and Iraq wars, while recognizing the ways that structural and cultural violence permeate our society and those of others. The emphasis here is on honestly counting the costs of what we have done, and in the spirit of the *Brief Statement of Faith*, to consider whether we have succumbed to idolatries in our efforts for security and justice.

The final clause of this affirmation, which speaks of how to respond to violence, was added by the General Assembly and is given support in the background to affirmations four and five.

The word, "complicity," has both conscious and unconscious dimensions, and recognizes how embedded we all are in social structures that include unjust relationships.

Prophetic self-criticism, apology, and repentance are basic parts of Christian life.

This affirmation applies those principles not only to the large scale and deliberate violence of war, but to the roots of war.

Members of presbyteries may want to look at the definitions of violence and of “structural violence,” or forms of oppression that can prompt violence or self-destructiveness.

- As a church in the United States, how do we stand before not only the peoples of the countries that have suffered so much more than we, but before the Lord of history?
- Does this affirmation help us so stand?

Evaluating 2. ... confess our complicity . .. in the world's violence...

Your key evaluation criteria?...

...prayer

...circumstances

...counsel of knowledgeable, mature Christians

...the Church

...**the Bible**

and ... Jack's "double-7"

Your Big Questions –

- What does scripture say about the issues raised here?

So, here we are again, it is now your turn ...

What can you add to your evaluation criteria?

Do you have any Big Questions that will require further study before you counsel your teaching elders and ruling elder commissioners as they prepare their consciences for their vote?

Discuss



**"The affirmations for church-wide
discussion and advisory vote:**

"3. We reclaim the power and authority of Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace and Reconciler, who proclaims God's reign, who inspires the prophetic church, [by] forgiving, healing, and undoing violence, and who overcomes evil through the cross and resurrection.

3. Summary of Rationale for Third Affirmation:

This affirmation focuses on Jesus Christ in relation to war and violence and proposes a new emphasis for Reformed Christians, without denying our traditional linkage of the New Testament witness with Old (and some New) Testament justifications of force. This affirmation says it is essential to look at how the words and example of Jesus cohere with the rest of the "Gospel of Peace," and suggests more attention to the earliest centuries of the church when Christians had no public power and largely chose nonviolence. Stating clearly that our faith is not based on scholarly reconstructions of Jesus' life—of which there are many—nonetheless the preponderance of scholarship supporting a nonviolent interpretation of Jesus' ministry bears attention. This affirmation does not answer the specific question of how much peace or nonviolence were the goal or method of Jesus' ministry, and does not try to fit Jesus into a programmatic script. Yet it would urge the church not to get too far away from his example, lest we be coopted too easily into war for reasons of state or economic interest.

Evaluating 3. ...reclaim the power and authority ...

Your key evaluation criteria?...

...prayer

...circumstances

...counsel of knowledgeable, mature Christians

...the Church

...**the Bible**

and ... Jack's "double-7"

Your Big Questions –

- What does scripture say about the issues raised here?

So, here we are again, it is now your turn ...

What can you add to your evaluation criteria?

Do you have any Big Questions that will require further study before you counsel your teaching elders and ruling elder commissioners as they prepare their consciences for their vote?

Discuss

"The affirmations for church-wide discussion and advisory vote:

"4. We seek to understand the nonviolent revolutions and armed struggles of our time by drawing on the traditions of Christian pacifism, just war, just peacemaking and active nonviolence, and by cultivating moral imagination through prayer, study, and engagement with friends and enemies. Even as we actively engage in a peace discernment process, we affirm our responsibility of continuing the long tradition of support by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for our sisters and brothers who serve in the U.S. military, veterans, and their families.

4. Summary of Rationale for Fourth Affirmation:

This affirmation proposes that our church's social and ethical teaching give more attention to the nonviolent techniques of social change that have been more productive than violence in a surprising number of cases. That list would include the fall of the Berlin wall and other nonviolent transitions in Eastern Europe, the nonviolent revolution in the Philippines, the painstaking achievement of peace in Northern Ireland, the dramatic transformation of South Africa, and the initial successes of the Arab Awakening. In these cases many non-pacifists chose nonviolent tactics for their effectiveness in mobilizing people. Clearly there have also been incredibly savage wars and instigated religious/ethnic tensions, with some countries funding forces in other countries as "proxies" for their interests. These point to the weakness of international diplomatic structures and difficulties of protecting minorities within countries, many of whom have become refugees. The General Assembly added a sentence that could apply to all five affirmations, expressing concern for those in the military and veterans, and also added the category of "Christian pacifism" as well as nonviolence as a force for social change. The import of this affirmation is to diversify further the alternatives to force available for the church.

Evaluating 4. ... seek to understand ...

Your key evaluation criteria?...

...prayer

...circumstances

...counsel of knowledgeable, mature Christians

...the Church

...the Bible

and ... Jack's "double-7"

Your Big Questions –

- What does scripture say about the issues raised here?

So, here we are again, it is now your turn ...

What can you add to your evaluation criteria?

Do you have any Big Questions that will require further study before you counsel your teaching elders and ruling elder commissioners as they prepare their consciences for their vote?

Discuss

"The affirmations for church-wide discussion and advisory vote:

"5. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we commit ourselves earnestly to seek and promote loving, nonviolent responses to conflict in our daily lives, in our communities, and in our world, to risk calling our nation back from the practices of empire to the highest ideals of our heritage, and to practice boldly the things that make for peace."

5. Summary of Rationale for Fifth Affirmation:

As amended by the General Assembly, this affirmation emphasizes that nonviolent methods should be chosen first in our personal and corporate efforts to resolve or transform conflict, and that on the national level our country should pursue international relations based less on military superiority and unilateral force. The background rationale here looks at the differences between national interests and principles (such as respect for universal human rights); it challenges the practices of "empire" on practical and even "realist" grounds, emphasizing the "soft power" of ideals and example, particularly in facing new kinds of global crisis (such as environmental disaster). The rationale also provides a range of "things that make for peace:" truth and reconciliation commissions, interfaith cooperation, accompaniment and nonviolent intervention, increased teaching of peacemaking.

Three illustrative examples are given in conclusion:

- the Reformed village of Le Chambon sheltering Jews during WWII,
- a personal witness that prevented a mass shooting, and
- an international agreement to remove chemical weapons from Syria in 2013.

This affirmation, then, would seek alternatives to military violence at every level.

Evaluating 5. ... commit ourselves ...

Your key evaluation criteria?...

...prayer

...circumstances

...counsel of knowledgeable, mature Christians

...the Church

...the Bible

and ... Jack's "double-7"

Your Big Questions –

- What does scripture say about the issues raised here?

So, here we are again, it is now your turn ...

What can you add to your evaluation criteria?

Do you have any Big Questions that will require further study before you counsel your teaching elders and ruling elder commissioners as they prepare their consciences for their vote?

Discuss

The bonus round task ...

Five Affirmations for advisory vote – and comment – that will lead to a policy update at GA 222.

The five:

1. ... peacemaking is essential to our faith ...
2. ... confess our complicity ... in the world's violence ...
3. ... reclaim the power and authority ...
4. ... seek to understand ...
5. ... commit ourselves ...



And with that introduction, we now turn to what work remains for us before we get our presbyters to Spring Presbytery.

What do we need to do?

At home:

- Appoint a facilitator for your congregation/cluster
- Plan discussion format
- Invite discussion participation – *e.g.*, non-pulpit TEs, CREs, other ministry governance committees, *et al.*
- Get / distribute discussion materials
- Conduct / record discussion

At Spring Presbytery – Presbyters:

- Bring discussion results
- Form Presbytery response

Here is what I propose we do to prepare the consciences of our presbyters for their exercise of a vote on the five affirmations.

When you get home:

- Appoint a (different) facilitator for your congregation/cluster. This person will have to make all the arrangements for your background information, personal preparations, and your discussions as mature Christians with your teaching elders and commissioners (as they may be elected).
- Plan the discussion format for your group discussions – in session or however you decide to do it.
- Invite broad; but, specifically interested discussion participation – beyond the non-pulpit TEs, CREs, other ministry governance committees, *et al.* – so each voting member of presbytery has the chance to participate in these communal preparations of conscience – also invite members of your congregation/cluster with particular interest and background in Peacemaking ministries and their aims to get a broad; but, focused perspective.
- Get / distribute discussion materials out to the teaching elders who worship with your congregation and to your commissioners – and other who wish to participate in this preparation.
- Conduct / record discussion / provide to Presbyters so they all have a record of the communal discussion.

Please email me your recorded discussion, too – so we will have the slides ready for our informal time when we all get there.

Again, that's to: Art@AGRitter.com Thanks!

Then, when we get back together at Spring Presbytery – **Presbyters**:

- Bring your prepared consciences – and discussion results.

We will have

- An information & understanding leveling period on Tuesday morning, 11-noon, before plenary starts, to ensure that we all understand what we will be voting on in the plenary session and to harmonize your local discussions' inputs – plus your perspective for full presbytery consideration – and then – we will
- vote the affirmations and on your harmonized inputs during the Equipping Ministries Report Tuesday afternoon in plenary.

Resource Material

- *Peace Discernment Process Facilitator's Guide* - 2012
- *Christian Obedience In A Nuclear Age* - 1988
- *Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling* - 1980
- *Peace Discernment Interim Report* – 2010
- *Biblical Basis for Peacemaking* - 2014
- *Five Peacemaking Affirmations For Presbytery Deliberation* - 2014
- Facilitator/Scribe Report Form – 2012
- Five Peacemaking Affirmations - Response Form – 2014
- Other online material for the five affirmations

Here is the resource material I strongly recommend that you all use in your personal preparation time and to prepare for your communal discussions of these five affirmations.

It can be found online at:

- *Peace Discernment Process Facilitator's Guide* – 2012. Available at:
<https://www.pcusa.org/resource/peace-discernment-process-facilitators-guide/>
- *Christian Obedience In A Nuclear Age* – 1988. Available at:
<https://www.pcusa.org/resource/christian-obedience-nuclear/>
- *Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling* - 1980. Available at:
<https://www.pcusa.org/resource/peacemaking-believers-calling-text/>
- *Peace Discernment Interim Report* – 2010. Available at:
<https://www.pcusa.org/resource/peace-discernment-interim-report-encountering-gosp/>
- *Biblical Basis for Peacemaking* – 2014. Available at:
<http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/peacemaking/biblical-basis->

peacemaking/

- *Five Peacemaking Affirmations For Presbytery Deliberation* – 2014. Available at: <http://www.pcusa.org/resource/5-peacemaking-affirmations-presbytery-deliberation/>
- Facilitator/Scribe Report Form – 2012. Available on page 17 of the Facilitator's Guide – find the Guide at: <https://www.pcusa.org/resource/peace-discernment-process-facilitators-guide/>
- Five Peacemaking Affirmations - Response Form – 2014. Available at: http://oga.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/five_affirmations_-_manual_form.pdf
- Other online material for the five affirmations. Available at: www.Google.com – or in the material listed above.



Next Steps:

January 2015 – Session Members, Commissioners, and Teaching Elders introduced to the GA-referred affirmations for study

January/February/March– Personal and group study of the five affirmations continues

March 15-18, 2015 – Spring Presbytery @ Green Valley PC – a discerning session Tue am and an advisory vote on the affirmations / comments in plenary

And finally, here is the preparation roadmap for the Nevada Presbytery Teaching Elder members and Ruling Elder Commissioners to Presbytery as they get ready for their advisory to the Peace Discernment Steering team on the five affirmations.

Any last questions?

- Do we all know what needs to be done between now and Spring Presbytery?
- Any Questions?
- Please call me for advice – or Skype presentation as you may need.



Art@AGRitter.com or by phone 702 236 2637

Are there any questions on the tasks before us – preparing teaching elder member and congregation commissioner consciences to vote on the eight Proposed Amendments to the Constitution and preparing the presbytery advisory on the five affirmations?

I am prepared to give this over the internet/phone/Skype for any of your fellow Presbyters who missed it today and would like to see it – or simply ask questions! Please contact to me at: Art@AGRitter.com or by phone 702 236 2637.

Thank you – and God bless our effort to conform everything we do to glorify Him.

Go with His guidance and rest in His peace.