

Where Are We Now That The Dust Has Settled?

The New Form of Government

Facilitated by Elder Art Ritter,
First Presbyterian Church, Las Vegas

Just to make sure we are all in the right room -- This workshop is produced for the purpose of teaching, preparing, and informing presbyters about the polity of the Presbyterian Church in the USA (PCUSA) as a context for resolving the near-term and longer-term issues for congregations and Sessions that are related to the new Form of Government in our denomination-- which is new since July. If we are all here to hear about that ...

Good afternoon and welcome to class!

As a PCUSA ruling elder and deacon, **Grace and Peace to each of you!** -- from the congregation and Session of the First Presbyterian Church of Las Vegas, Nevada -- serving the whole Las Vegas valley from the "cross-roads of the valley."

There are 10 Presbyterian churches, new church developments, worshipping fellowships, and specialized ministries in our valley -- all of them open for business this Sunday and one even worshipping Wednesday night. Each week, God is worshipped in this valley in seven of the world's languages -- and you are welcome to worship in any of them and join with them in their ministries to our valley!

And as the Moderator of the Presbytery of Nevada, **God be with you -- and greetings!** -- from the 24 neighboring Presbyterian churches, worshipping fellowships, new church developments, and specialized ministries beyond First Pres. -- and from

the 53 active and retired pastors who together, comprise the Presbytery of Nevada.

And as a Nevada Presbytery Commissioner to the Synod of the Pacific (of which our presbytery is a part), **welcome and enjoy God's Holy love today!** -- from the 397 churches in the other 10 presbyteries of our Synod which also includes Oregon, Idaho, and Northern California ...

I give you these greetings from all three of these councils in our church – and from my heart.

I am Art Ritter, your teacher today.



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

Introductions ...

- **Arthur Ritter**, First Presbyterian Church, Las Vegas
 - Elder and Deacon, Clerk of Session, Treasurer of the Board of Deacons
 - FPC, LV Commissioner to the **Nevada Presbytery**
 - Member, Committee on Preparation for Ministry
 - Member, Equipping Ministries Committee
 - Vice Moderator, now Moderator of the Presbytery of Nevada,
 - Nevada Presbytery Commissioner to the Synod of the Pacific.
 - Member, Synod's Mission Personnel and Nominating Committees.
 - Nevada Presbytery delegate to and Board Member of the Religious Alliance In Nevada – a consortium of five mainline denominations advocating God's will to the state government for social justice in Nevada.
 - Polity (business model) wonk – in real life, too.

Here is my association with the subject of our church's history and its polity.

A life-long Presbyterian, I have experience in two different Presbyterian denominational polities – and at several levels in each.

But enough about me ...

Let's turn to your stories.

Who is in the Room today?

- Who are you?
- Where and how has God called you serve His church?
- Where do you serve today?

...

OK, I'll start ...

"I am Art Ritter.

Today, having retired from the USAF in 1993, I am the owner of a management consulting company specializing in helping folks with good ideas bring them into the for-profit or non-profit marketplace; tune their businesses to greater operating effectiveness and efficiency, and I help owners disengage from their business with the wealth they created in it - when that time comes. I work with organizations in the for-profit sector, the non-profit sector, and in God's sector of our economy.

A life-long Presbyterian, in 1982, I had just been stationed at Nellis AFB, here in Las Vegas – and was searching for a Presbyterian Church in the valley for me and my family to attend when they would follow me here in the summer of 1983. First Presbyterian is the church we found – and we were primarily Pew Christians for a few years - involved only in Sunday Worship and as parents in our children's church experiences. (We were recovering from starting a church in Tucson - and from my session involvement and my wife's business start-up

in Ft Walton Beach FL in our two previous assignments.) At the Friday night prayer vigil following 911, another church member challenged us to join adult Sunday school – and “the rest is ...” – well, you saw it on the previous slide.”

Now – how about you ...

There were 16 participants in our class on Saturday, Nov 5. All but one Deacon and another NCD committee member were Ruling Elders currently sitting – or soon to sit - with their respective Sessions. Three had come specifically to investigate new FOG and what they need to do about it. Their experience included – former membership in the Catholic church, three with former membership in the Methodist Church, but most reported only their Presbyterian experience. Several had served at Presbytery level, two at synod level. One had just been elected as a ruling elder and was not yet seated.

So where do we fit in?



Where do we all fit in?

Well, lets have a look ...

As recounted in Acts 2

¹ And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. ...

⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ⁹ **Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,** ¹⁰ **Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome** ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); **Cretans and Arabs** — we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” ¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?” ...

⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

You remember the birthday of the church – don’t you?

Please read Acts 2 out loud ... yep, all of it.

Go get your Bible (or Google: Acts 2)!

I’d say that Peter, a graduate of the three-year immersion course at the Jesus Seminary, did a pretty good job preaching that day!

Let’s see what happened next ...

... and they all went home.



What did those 3000 do with the message they heard on that day from Peter? Throughout the rest of the New Testament, we see that whenever and wherever the great traveling evangelist, the Apostle Paul, went to synagogues all across the known world to take the message of “Christ and him crucified,” he found Christian churches already existing in them – every where he went! How did these churches beat him to the hinterlands?

Well, those **Parthians, Medes and Elamites**; residents of **Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt** and the parts of **Libya** near **Cyrene**; visitors from **Rome** (both Jews and converts to Judaism); **Cretans** and **Arabs** – who had been in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost – and had been in the crowd when Peter had preached ... all went home

... and told their neighbors about the good news (this ‘Gospel’) they had heard in Jerusalem!

... and the Holy Spirit worked in the hearts of those who heard the good news

... and there were churches wherever the Word was heard.

(Have you shared the Good News you hear from the pulpit of your church each Sunday with your neighbors who weren’t in church with you to hear it?)

... “How a Gentile Becomes a Christian”

- The church resolved disputes with councils – of presbyters:
 - Dispute arose
 - Resolution sought from the elders of the church
 - Atmosphere of welcome
 - Elders met to consider the question
 - Question debated, scripture applied, decision made
 - Decision recorded, transmitted, and accepted

And when 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 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 in public, ‘in the moment,’ as he did in the Galatians account with Peter. People and councils may err – it happens. (See Matthew 18:15-20** for the process that Jesus teaches.)]

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 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.”

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) [a Stated Clerk role - recording the decision and publishing it to the church].”

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 assembly] ... 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 church 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.

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 [Catholics](#) and [Orthodox](#) 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. Some scholars dispute that Galatians 2 is about the *Council of Jerusalem* (notably because Galatians 2 describes a private meeting) while other scholars dispute the [historical reliability of the Acts of the Apostles](#). 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.

* 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.' ¹⁷If 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*]

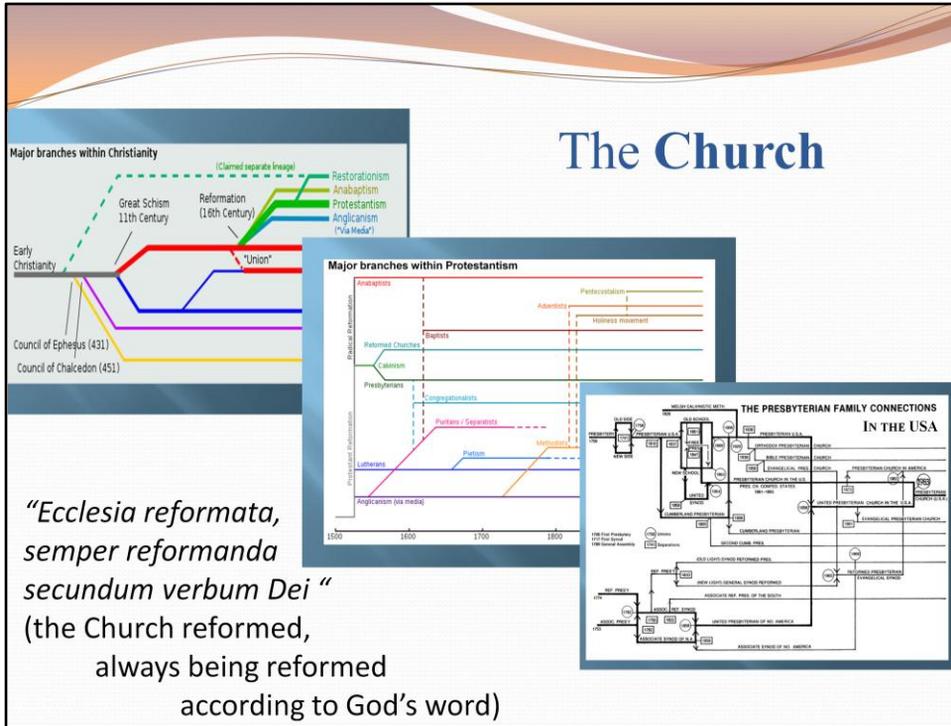
[Deuteronomy 17:6](#)

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**.

The Church



Since then, the Church developed a bit over time, their understanding of the things they had been told in God’s word leading them in several ways ...

(Trace from left to right to “PCUSA – reunited after 1983”)

And so there we are – from the first century’s Apostles, Peter and Paul, and the Jerusalem Council - to Presbyterianism in America today.

Sadly, not all of the issues were resolved as amiably as in the first council as the first two charts show – from Acts 2 to the 1500s and toward today across the world.

In fact, with issues and resolutions – the church saw splits over unresolved issues and (as detailed on the last chart, showing the Presbyterian witness in America) re-joins when they eventually resolved ... or just went away.

Looks like what we American Presbyterians do best is: split and re-join / split and rejoin ...

Some of this might be explained by our heritage:

I remember hearing at a the installation of our new pastor at Macalester

Presbyterian Church – on the edge of the campus of Macalester college in St Paul, Minnesota the moderator of presbytery observe in these surroundings that wherever a Scot landed in America, he started a Presbyterian Church *and a Presbyterian College*.

And when the second Scot arrived, he started another – of each!

Maybe it is some Scottish thing that makes us get along together so well ... kilts – or bagpipes, or exuberant caber-tossing, perhaps ... ah, we Scottish!

Jumping right into the organizational development of American Presbyterianism, see here pretty plainly what we seem to do best – split and join – re-split and re-join!

Lets bring us into relatively modern American Presbyterian History –

In the United States, because of past or current doctrinal differences, Presbyterian churches often overlap, with congregations of many different Presbyterian groups in any one place. The largest Presbyterian denomination in the United States is the [Presbyterian Church \(U.S.A.\)](#) or PC(USA). Other Presbyterian bodies in the United States include the [Presbyterian Church in America](#), the [Orthodox Presbyterian Church](#), the [Evangelical Presbyterian Church](#), the [Reformed Presbyterian Church](#), the [Bible Presbyterian Church](#), the [Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church](#) (ARP Synod), the [Cumberland Presbyterian Church](#), the [Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America](#), the [Westminster Presbyterian Church in the United States](#) (WPCUS), and the [Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States](#) (RPCUS).

The territory within about a 50-mile (80 km) radius of Charlotte, North Carolina, is historically the greatest concentration of Presbyterianism in the Southern United States, while an almost identical geographic area around Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, contains probably the largest number of Presbyterians in the entire nation.

Canada

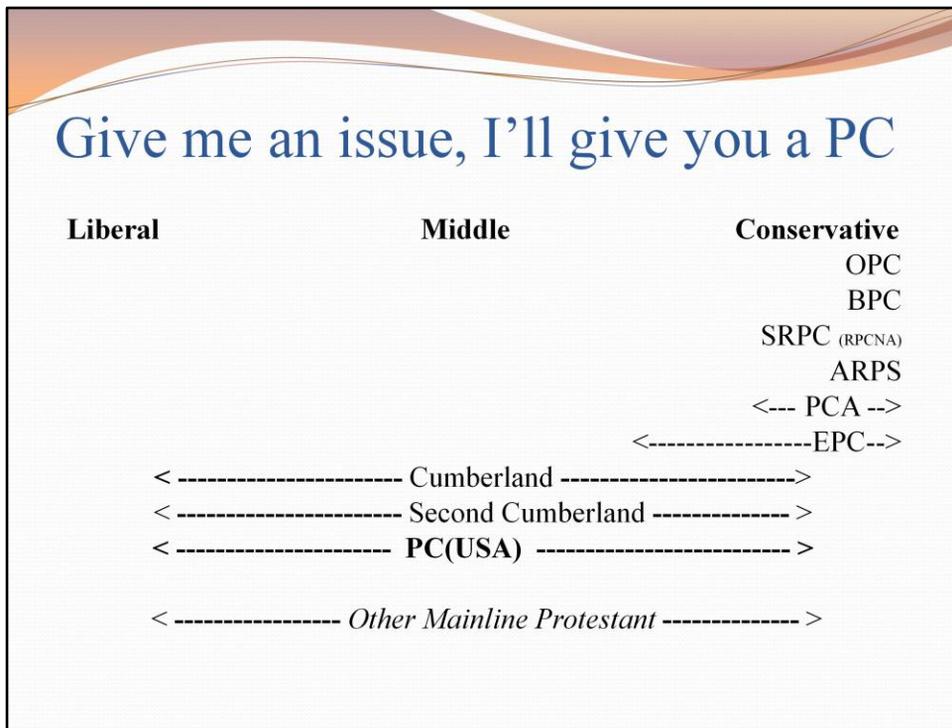
In Canada, the largest Presbyterian denomination – and indeed the largest Protestant denomination – was the [Presbyterian Church in Canada](#), formed in 1875 with the merger of four regional groups. In 1925, the [United Church of Canada](#) was formed with the [Methodist Church](#), Canada, and the [Congregational Union of Canada](#). A sizable minority of Canadian Presbyterians, primarily in southern Ontario but also throughout the entire nation, withdrew, and reconstituted themselves as a non-concurring continuing Presbyterian body. They regained use of the original name in 1939.

Latin America

Presbyterianism arrived in Latin America in the 19th century. The biggest Presbyterian church is the [National Presbyterian Church of Mexico](#) ("Iglesia Nacional Presbiteriana de México"), which has around 2,500,000 members and associates, but there are other small denominations. In Brazil, the [Presbyterian Church of Brazil](#) (*Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil*) totals approximately 788,553 members; other Presbyterian churches (Independents, United, Conservatives, Renovated - Charismatic, Free, Fundamentalist, Evangelical) in this nation have around 350,000 members. There are probably more than four million members of Presbyterian churches in all of Latin America. Presbyterian churches are also present in Peru, Bolivia, Cuba, Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela, Colombia, Chile, Paraguay, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Argentina and others, but with few members. Some Latin Americans in North America are active in the [Presbyterian Cursillo Movement](#) (some of you may know what that means – only a month or so ago we had an organizing meeting of this movement in our church).

We will spend some time this chart – but I will focus us on the parts we are discussing – American Presbyterianism in the USA

Note that there are three heritage strands of American Presbyterian witness beginning in the 1700s on the left side of the last chart (trust me, there were splits and joins among Presbyterians in Europe before they immigrated here) – and nine separate denominations of Presbyterians on the right side of the chart, today. And these are just the ones that the PCUSA recognizes! What a tangled web they ... ah, lets not go there.



Here is where today's Presbyterian denominations hit the liberal / conservative splatter chart – along essentially the “literal interpretation / obedience to scripture” axis:

Practically all U.S. Presbyterian bodies profess some measure of doctrinal Calvinist propositionalism, relatively-literalist hermeneutics, and conservative politics.

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Bible Presbyterian Church both came out of the northern strand of the “1706 presbytery” heritage in the 1930s in protest to its growing liberalism (maybe better understood as its absorption of either German “higher critical” (cultural) interpretation of scripture or of the surrounding “popular cultural influences” interpretation). These are small denominations, focused on the theological positions and issues of their protest – and remain pretty conservative in their beliefs and actions. For example, they do not elect women as Elders.

The Synod Reformed PC (SRPC), or the **Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America** (RPCNA), a [Christian church](#) surviving from the “1774 Reformed and 1754 Associate presbytery” heritage, is a small [Presbyterian](#) denomination with churches throughout the [United States](#), in southeastern [Canada](#), and in a small part of [Japan](#). Its beliefs place it in the conservative wing of the [Reformed](#) family of [Protestant](#) churches. Below the [Bible](#)—which is held as [divinely inspired](#) and [without error](#)—the church is committed to several "subordinate standards", together considered its

constitution: the [Westminster Confession of Faith](#) and [Larger](#) and [Shorter Catechisms](#), along with its *Testimony, Directory for Church Government, Book of Discipline, and Directory for Worship*. All communicant members "believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule for faith and life", according to the first of several [vows](#) required for such membership. The RPCNA has a long history, having been a separate denomination in the United States since colonial days. They do not elect women as Elders.

The **Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church** as it exists today is the remnant of a small [denomination](#), which was formed from the Synod of the South, a division of the [Associate Reformed Church](#) – also surviving from the “1774 Reformed and 1754 Associate presbytery” heritage. The original Associate Reformed Church resulted from a merger of the Associate Presbytery ([from the Seceder tradition of the 18th century](#)) and most of the [Reformed Presbytery \(from the Covenanter tradition of the 17th century\)](#) in Philadelphia in 1782. It is a theologically and socially [conservative](#) denomination and one of the oldest in the United States. Evangelist [Billy Graham](#) attended the Chalmers Memorial ARP Church in [Charlotte, North Carolina](#), as a child; his parents were members of the congregation. Mr. Graham was, however, later ordained as a [Southern Baptist](#) minister. They do not elect women as Elders.

Seeing the reunion coming, the PCA (Presbyterian Church in America) came out of the southern strand of the “1706 presbytery” heritage before the 1983 reunion happened for the same reasons as the other conservative churches had from the northern strand – and because of a strong dose of southern presbyterial decentralization. It was joined by the (smaller) conservative Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod (RPCES) itself a union of churches from the “1774 Reformed and 1754 Associate presbytery” Scottish-seceder and covenanter heritages, and the “1706 presbytery” heritage northern strand. They are the second largest Presbyterian denomination in the US – and as you would expect, are a bit more “liberal” than their smaller brethren just because of their size. They do not elect women as Elders.

The “latest” Evangelical Presbyterian Church – also came out of the “1706 presbytery” heritage northern strand (in the 1980s) – again in protest to the northern strand’s growing liberalism and grabbed this apparently popular conservative brand no longer in use by the earlier escapee which had merged into the RPCES and then joined with the PCA. Another small denomination, its confessions include the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms – and their “Essentials of Our Faith,” a statement of historic evangelicalism. They remain pretty conservative in their beliefs and actions regarding these essentials – but are more liberal than the ones listed above them here - on “non-essential matters.” For example, they believe that electing women as Elders is a matter of the congregation’s

discernment and that church officers may “scruple” (or, “take exception to”) the Westminster Standards (within bounds).

The Cumberland churches came out way back – right after the New side/Old side split in the First Great Awakening (and themselves split along color lines). They place far less emphasis on intellectualism and on the Westminster Confession. It has a socially progressive tradition – the first to train and ordain women to leadership roles in the church. Their constituency and theology resembles that of the United Methodist Church, appealing mainly to long-established families with revivalistic religious tastes and generally conservative cultural dispositions. They do elect women as Elders.

In a nutshell (now there is an apt simile), the northern strand / southern strand merger in 1983 essentially consolidated the moderate-to-liberal American Presbyterians of the “1706 presbytery” heritage into one body (the remaining Cumberland Presbyterian Churches being the other moderate to liberal Presbyterian denominations) .

For the most part, PC(USA) Presbyterians are not unlike similar mainline traditions such as the Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ in their theology – and are fairly (in some instances, strongly) progressive (read: “liberal”) on matters such as social justice, environmental issues, sexual morality, and economic issues. Like other mainline denominations, the PC(USA) holds a broad range of conservative-to-liberal thought, a great deal of demographic aging, congregations with fewer and fewer new members, and a steadily declining membership total.

Interestingly, the recent trend (so far) is that of conservative-minded groups in the PC(USA) (such as the Confessing church movement) remaining in the main body, rather than leaving to form new, break-away groups, as the most theologically conservative churches usually did in the past (i.e., the OPC, BPC, EPC, and PCA). Individual conservative churches and members; however, are leaving the PCUSA for the more conservative and already-established EPC.

So -- What is the Church??

In **organizational terms**, the best short description of any organization is an integrated expression of these most fundamental statements –

“We are (**our values**) sent to (**our market**) to accomplish (**our mission**) *so that* (**God’s vision of the future**) is achieved* by (**His goal**).”

* By the way ... His vision **will** be achieved – this is the Church’s part in it.

So -- What is the Church?? We will be speaking in polity terms now – about the “church visible” - as an organization.

In real life, I tell my clients that ... in **organizational terms**, the best short description of any organization is an integrated expression of these most fundamental statements – Values, Market, Mission, Vision, and Goals – like this:

“We are (**our values**)
sent to (**our market**)
to accomplish (**our mission**)
so that (in our case - **God’s vision of the future**)
is achieved by (**His goal**).”

(Let me assure you ... His vision **will** be achieved – this statement is simply descriptive of the Church’s part in His work.)

I also tell my clients that making these foundational Values, Market, Mission, Vision, and Goals statements is **the singular responsibility of the owner of the organization** – who, after all, is the one who has some purpose, some objectives, something in mind to get out of the organization – by some date or event in the future.

Such a statement could be made for any type of organization (modified a bit to suite

its specific needs).

- Done formally, the organization itself has a far better self-understanding about what its owner wants to get out of its very existence, let alone its operation – and what its members are to do and why.
- Done clearly and accurately, this statement will describe exactly how - and will predict *how well* - the organization works and will work -- in terms of its owner's purpose for it.

Sadly, most churches screw these statements up entirely – mistaking vision for mission, mission for vision, ignoring market entirely or addressing it over-broadly, ignoring values, and over-focusing on time goals rather than event goals. Our results show how badly we fumble this ball -- from the very start.

This last observation might have been a note-taking moment.

Well, so much for the free consultation – lets see how this statement describes the church.

Formally done or not, done well or not, good or bad, clear or unclear, unified or scattered, this statement will diagnose how and whether any organization will produce what the owner wants from it.

In polity terms, lets look at “The Church” ...

We are ...

- Called out of the World
- Saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church
- Transformed by the renewing of our minds
- Conformed to the image of God
- Given gifts - for building up the body *and* for accomplishing its mission
- Witnesses to the love of God for His creation
- Accompanied by God Himself

We are ...

(Read the slide)

Do these elements capture who the church is – and what it dearly values?

Could you add elements to improve this?

... sent to ...

- A lost and dying world
 - ... rebellious against God, their Creator
 - ... imprisoned by their sin
 - ... hungry for salvation - and
 - ... thirsting for reconciliation with their Creator

We are ... **sent to** ...

(Read the slide)

Do these elements capture who the church is sent to serve – its “market?”

Could you add elements to improve this?

... our Mission...

(what we are sent to **do**)

- **Proclaim the gospel** for the salvation of humankind;
- **Provide shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship** of the children of God;
- **Maintain (and practice) divine worship;**
- **Preserve the truth;**
- **Promote social righteousness;** and
- **Exhibit the Kingdom of Heaven** to the world

We are ... sent to ... our market to perform ... our **Mission** (or, what we are sent to **do**) which is to ...

(Read the slide)

Do these elements describe what the church is sent to **do**?

These are the “Six Great Ends of the Church.”

And they are all mission statements - “do” statements.

... God's Vision and Goal

(**why** we do it – **when** we will be finished)

...*so that* at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

-- The Apostle Paul, writing to the Philippian Churches 2:10-11

-- and to the Roman Churches 14:11

-- all the while, quoting God's prophet, Isaiah 45:23

“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”

-- Jesus to his disciples in Mark 13:32

-- Matthew 24:32

-- and Acts 1:7

And here is why this body -

- described-by-its-**values**, is sent to its
- **market**-described-by-its-state, and does
- the things we **do** with them/to them/for them (our **mission**) --

All of this makes sense to us humans (who are created in God's intellectual image and need to have the reason behind our actions – we are hard-wired this way) when we can see ...

God's **Vision and Goal** (**why** we do it – **when** we will be finished)

(Read the slide)

Do these elements capture why the church is sent to do its mission?

Could you add elements to improve this **vision**?

And when will we achieve the **Goal**?

I don't know.

Do you know?

Did Jesus know when He was with His church on this earth?

"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." – Mark 13:32.

-- or --

Matthew 24:36 "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

-- or --

Acts 1:7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority."

“The Church” described in our Constitution:

- *F-1.0301 The Church Is the Body of Christ*
 - ... given ... all the gifts necessary to be his body. ... to demonstrate these gifts in its life
 - ... a community of faith, of hope, of love, of witness
- *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.”
- *F-1.0303 The Notes of the Reformed Church*
 - the Word of God is truly preached and heard,
 - the Sacraments are rightly administered, and
 - ecclesiastical discipline is uprightly ministered.

Here is how our church is described in our Constitution – the “blueprint for mission:”

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.

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.

b. *The **Holiness** of the Church*

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

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

c. *The **Catholicity** of the Church*

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

Because in Christ the Church is catholic, it strives everywhere to testify to Christ's embrace of men, women, and children of all times, places, races, nations, ages, conditions, and stations in life. The catholicity of the Church summons the Church to

a deeper faith, a larger hope, and a more complete love as it bears witness to God's grace.

d. *The **Apostolicity** of the Church*

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

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

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

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

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

F-1.0303 The Notes of the Reformed Church (See The Scots Confession, Ch. XVIII (The Book of Confessions, 3.18)

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

- **the Word of God is truly preached and heard,**

- **the Sacraments are rightly administered, and**
- **ecclesiastical discipline is uprightly ministered.**

“Our Mission” described in our Constitution:

- *F-1.0303 (continued)* ... the Church is faithful to the **mission of Christ** as it:
 - *Proclaims and hears the Word of God,*
 - *Administers and receives the Sacraments, and*
 - *Nurtures a covenant community of disciples of Christ,*
- *F-1.0304 The Great Ends of the Church* The **great ends of the Church** are:
 - the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind;
 - the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God;
 - the maintenance of divine worship;
 - the preservation of the truth;
 - the promotion of social righteousness; and
 - the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

Here is what God does! Will you see these things and join God in doing them?

F-1.01 GOD’S MISSION

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

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

The **Church’s life and mission** are a joyful participation in **Christ’s ongoing life and work**. 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 gives to the Church its faith and life, its unity and mission, its order and discipline. In Christ's name, therefore, **the Church is sent out** to bear witness to the good news of reconciliation with God, with others, and with all creation. In Christ the Church receives its truth and appeal, its holiness, and its unity. -- *F-1.0201 - F-1.0205 (selected)*

F-1.0303 (continued) In our own time, we affirm that, in the power of the Spirit, **the Church is faithful to the mission of Christ** as it:

- **Proclaims and hears the Word of God**, responding to the promise of God's new creation in Christ, and inviting all people to participate in that new creation;
- **Administers and receives the Sacraments**, welcoming those who are being engrafted into Christ, bearing witness to Christ's saving death and resurrection, anticipating the heavenly banquet that is to come, and committing itself in the present to solidarity with the marginalized and the hungry; and
- **Nurtures a covenant community of disciples of Christ**, living in the strength of God's promise and giving itself in service to God's mission.

F-1.0304 The Great Ends of the Church

The great ends of the Church are:

- the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind;
- the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God;
- the maintenance of divine worship;
- the preservation of the truth;
- the promotion of social righteousness; and
- the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

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

Polity

“God works through His people”

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

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

- *accomplish the mission of the Church and*
- *achieve the vision of the Church*

So, how do we organize to do this mission? Well, that is the topic named “polity.”

First off, what is **polity**? -- and --

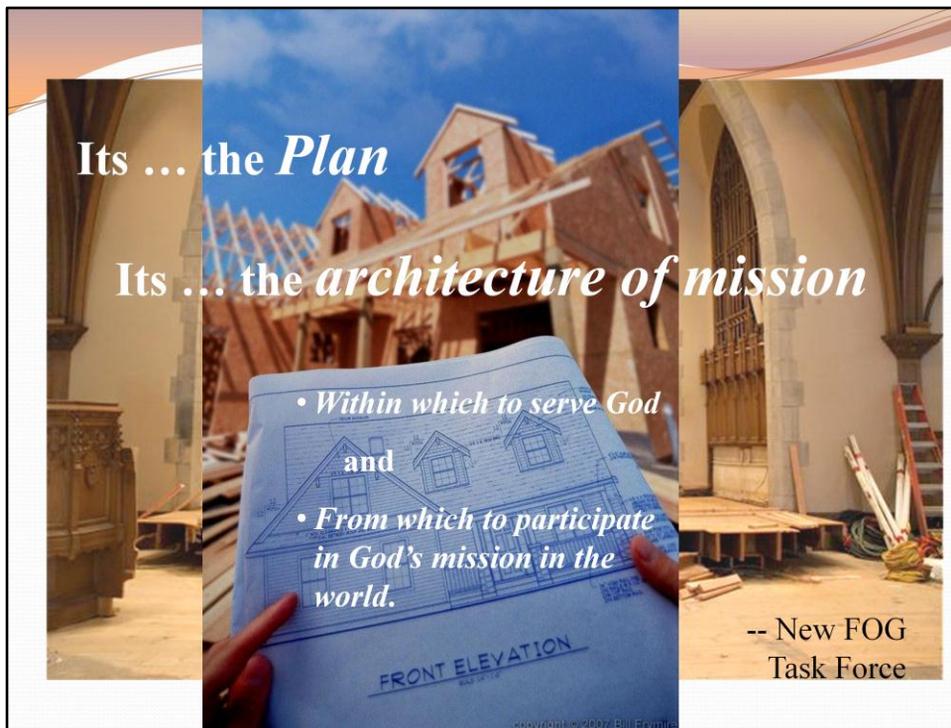
What is the role of polity in the life of the Church?

(Pause to allow the room to read the slide)

Well, **polity** is not the work of the Church;

... participating in the mission of God is the work of the Church.

Here is how The Form of Government Task Force (who proposed the change we will consider in a while) looks at “polity” ...



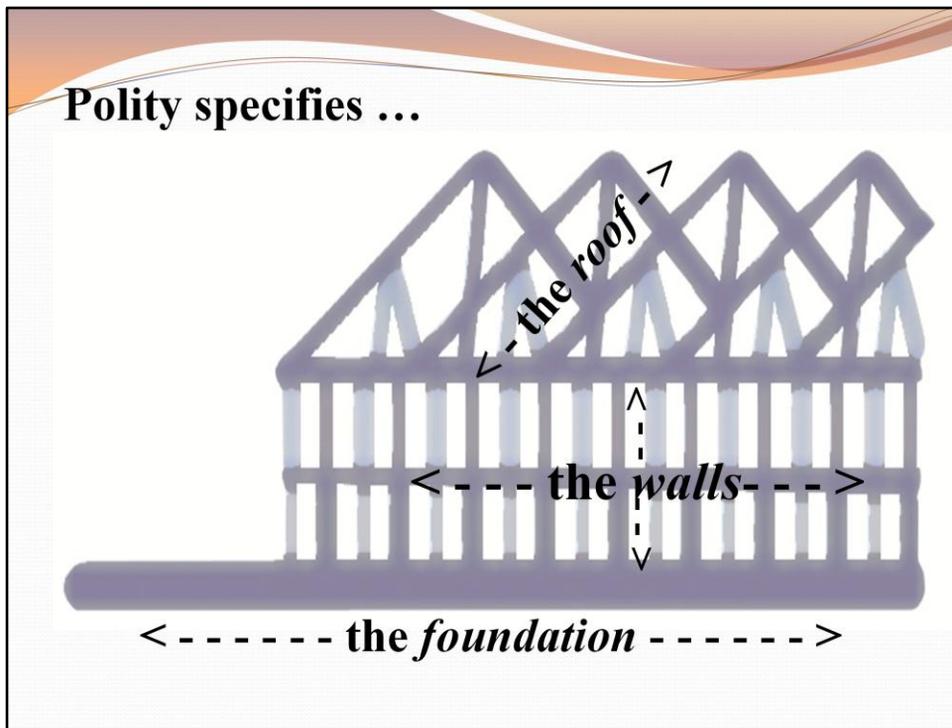
The New Form Of Government Task Force defined **polity** with this analogy:

- **Polity** is a **plan** - for building a **church community** ...
 - *In which to serve God*
 - and
 - *from which to participate in God's mission in the world.*

It is, if you will, a **blueprint** – or the **architecture** – of the church's organization and operation.

Just as a blueprint is a plan for building a house in which to live and work ...

- **Polity** is the *architecture of mission*.

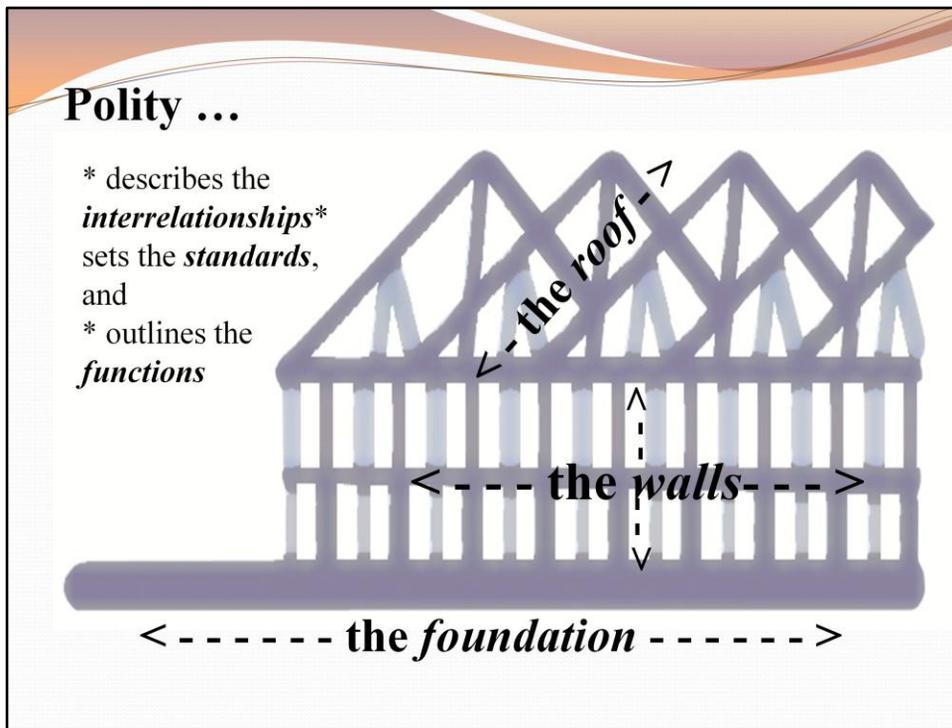


Like any good architecture ... any good blueprint ... **polity specifies --**

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***...



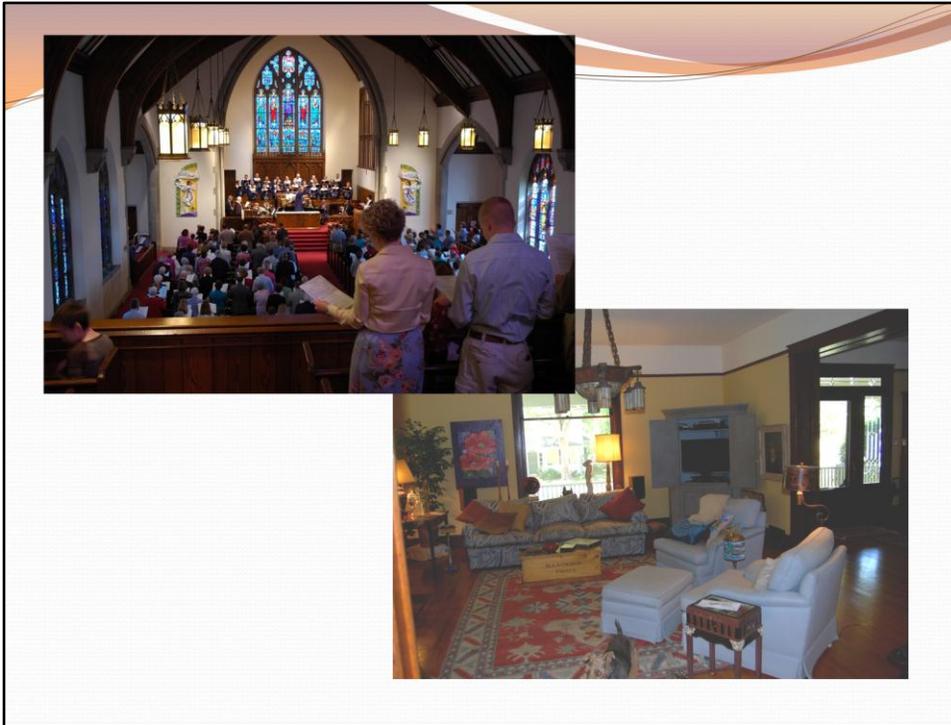
It's the same with the relationship between polity and the practice of the life of the church.

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 in their place,
- what processes best produce ministry outcomes to meet those standards in their neighborhood, and
- what structures best perform those functions with their members and other local resources.



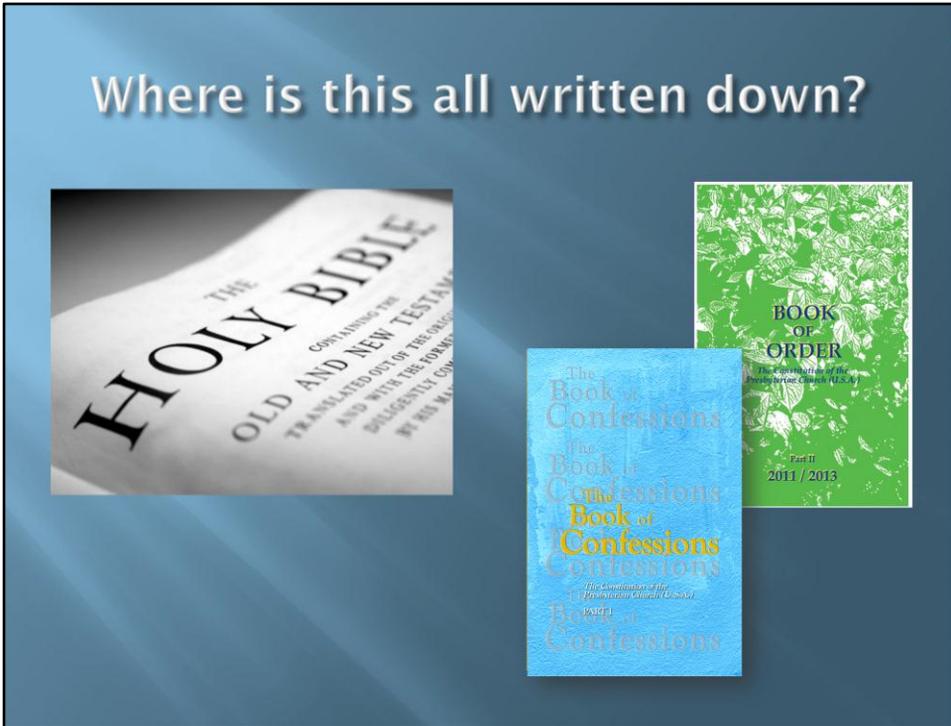
But it doesn't tell us anything about the arrangement of the furniture in the room, or what pictures hang on the walls!

Those decisions are left to the ones who will live in the house – or worship in the sanctuary. Making those decisions is what turns ...

a **house** into a **home**,

a **church organization** into a **faith community**.

Where is this all written down?



So – where is all this written down (... I hear you ask ...)?

(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 what He commands us to do - is the work of our Constitution, which is in two books: *The Book of Confessions* and the *Book of Order*.

Let’s look into our confessed beliefs -- as they are described and worked out into our polity in our Constitution ...



Lets get *personal*

Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church

In the Presbyterian Church (USA) ...

YOU are a member of a
CONGREGATION, which is a member of a
PRESBYTERY, which is organized into a
SYNOD, which is a regional division of the
DENOMINATION – the Presbyterian Church (USA)

-- The **PRESBYTERY** is the center of the PC (USA) --

But first -- let's get personal!

Jesus Christ is the Head of our church (give me an Amen?) – and I hope that you have a direct and personal relationship with Him.

The church does not stand between you and Jesus.

The church does not hold a bucket of Holy Spirit for you to wash in each Sunday.

The Holy Spirit should be dwelling in you – all the time.

The church does not provide the seat for the Father into whose lap we can crawl only on Sunday morning during the prayers of confession in intercession.

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

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

Instead, the church helps you build your relationship with Him – and organize for you

and with others -- your accomplishment of His work.

(Read the slide)

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

Note, too, the last point – this is the fundamental structural power / authority principle in our American Presbyterian church polity.

Lets look at each of these corporate structures in turn and see what our **polity** is and how it is reflected in them – their interrelationships, standards, and functions.

The Congregation

BOO, Form of Government, Chapter 1:

Organized by Presbytery

Six great ends – for neighborhoods

Both congregation and corporation

Elect Elders / Form Session

Call clergy / fix terms

Decide Real Estate matters

Affirm organization for mission

The Deaconate is a *ministry arm*

(Absorb the slide)

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.

G-1.0102 The Fellowship of the Congregation

The polity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) presupposes the fellowship of women, men, and children united in covenant relationship with one another and with God through Jesus Christ. The organization rests on the fellowship and is not designed to work without trust and love.

G-1.0103 Governed by the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

A “congregation,” as used in this Form of Government, refers to a formally organized community chartered and recognized by a presbytery as provided in this Constitution. Each congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall be governed by this Constitution. The members of a congregation put themselves under the leadership of the session and the higher councils (presbytery, synod, and General Assembly). The session is responsible to guide and govern the life of the congregation. The session leads the congregation in fulfilling its responsibilities for the service of all people, for the upbuilding of the whole church, and for the glory of God.

***Mission:** Although each council - the Session, the Presbytery, the Synod, and the General Assembly “shall keep before it the marks of the Church (F-1.0302), the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed communities have identified themselves through history (F-1.0303) and the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304)” **the congregation is where they are primarily done.**

Book of Order - F-1.0304 The great ends of the church are the ***proclamation of the gospel*** for the salvation of humankind; the ***shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship*** of the children of God; the ***maintenance of divine worship***; the ***preservation of the truth***; the ***promotion of social righteousness***; and the ***exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven*** to the world.

Lets see how this works out in an example congregation...

A Christ Centered Family...

- At least two mission attempts from 1905 – about 1912.
- Deliberate planting in 1953 by Nevada Presbytery
- Grew from 47 first meeting to 537 in 1955 to 1620 in 1987
 - *A history of fire and water –*
 - *schools and music –*
 - *service and church-planting.*

www.fpcvegas.org

Let's use the church where I am a member with my family as an example to illustrate.

First Presbyterian Church, Las Vegas is 58 years old and has, today, a membership of about 800 people.

There were at least two mission attempts to begin a Presbyterian church in Las Vegas from as early as 1905 – to about 1912. These were the personal vision of the first moderator of presbytery, the Reverend J. Mortimer Swander – whose personal interest is attributed to having kept the records of this work open as long as it was.

In 1953, the Nevada Presbytery made a deliberate planting effort in Las Vegas – announced on the radio and in the newspapers.

This time it worked!

The church grew from 47 first meeting and was organized in that year. It grew to 537 members in 1955 – and to 1620 by 1987.

The original building, masonry laid by its members, burned in the mid-eighties. The new sanctuary building had just opened and all church functions including Sunday School and the nursery transferred into its narthex ! (and a the few ancillary rooms). Can you imagine that in your church?

Its replacement became the multi-purpose building of today – sized for Sunday school classes of the late 80s. Sadly, the roof leaked and so did the walls – the rain and the grass sprinklers doing as effective a job by the mid-90s as the fire had a decade before. By then, the day school and the pre-school had begun to crowd out the church activities – but with the water damage (and mold toxicity) they were closed or spun off to another church, not to return.

All of the Presbyterian witness in the valley grew out of this mother church – one way or another.

Newly called, the Reverend Jim Houston-Hencken officiated at the 50th Anniversary dinner 2003 -- off-site on the strip because the facility would not hold all who wanted to attend!

At dinner, looking over an audience that included many charter members, he observed: “whenever 2 or 3 Presbyterians are gathered, a chicken dies.”

The Session

BOO Chapter G3.02:

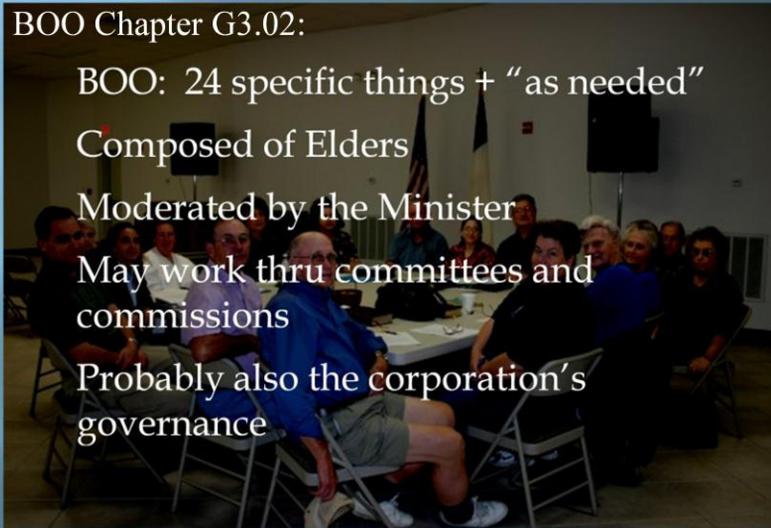
BOO: 24 specific things + “as needed”

Composed of Elders

Moderated by the Minister

May work thru committees and commissions

Probably also the corporation’s governance



Let's turn to the governance of the congregation ...

The lists of councils' responsibilities used to actually be lists – now a bit harder to read, they are in paragraph form – and have some address in the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity, Chapter 3.

G-3.02 THE SESSION

G-3.0201 Composition and Responsibilities

The session is the council for the congregation. It shall be composed of those persons elected by the congregation to active service as ruling elders, together with all installed pastors and associate pastors. All members of the session are entitled to vote. The pastor shall be the moderator of the session, and the session shall not meet without the pastor or designated moderator. If there is no installed pastor, or if the installed pastor is unable to invite another moderator, the presbytery shall make provisions for a moderator. Presbyteries shall provide by rule for moderators when the session is without a moderator for reasons of vacancy or inconvenience.

The session shall have responsibility for governing the congregation and guiding its witness to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that the congregation is and becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness. As it leads and guides the witness of the congregation, the session shall keep before it the marks of the Church (F-1.0302), the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed congregations have

identified themselves throughout history (F-1.0303) and the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304).

The session shall hold stated meetings at least quarterly. FPC session meets on the 4th Monday of each month.

Since 1955 the northern strand churches have been directed by the Book of Order to incorporate as a civil non-profit where state laws permit.

Who does what?

- The pastors – moderate Session, sit with the Deacons
- Clerk of Session – maintains the records of Session, Deacons
- Staff – does the day-to-day

The Corporation / Nominating Committee of the Congregation

Spiritual Growth Commission of Session

Worship Commission of Session

Congregational Life Commission of Session

-- The Board of Deacons

Support Commission of Session

-- Personnel Committee of Session

To illustrate:

The Congregation – and the Corporation - of the First Presbyterian Church here in Las Vegas meets at least annually and had two standing committees for its work – the corporation’s board and the nominating committee, as required by the *Book of Order*. When the congregation calls a pastor, it prepares for the call with another congregation committee - the pastor nominating committee.

Its Session meets monthly and is organized into four commissions – each charged to dispose of the work within its purview. The Session disposes of all work outside these commission’s charters – and all that overlaps two or more of them.

Recall, our book of order defines a commission with the power to dispose – the committee with only the power to propose – its establishing body then reviews and disposes.

We used to govern through 12-16 committees, and session became overwhelmed reviewing and disposing (which means discussion it all over again).

In addition, the Session is supported by a personnel committee which oversees the employees of the church – our administrators, Christian Educators, and custodians.

The PC (USA) Presbytery

- 173 Presbyteries composed of over 10,000 congregations
- BOO Chapter 3:
 - 27 enumerated powers + *all* not enumerated elsewhere.
 - Composed of Minister-members and its Churches (represented by session-elected, Elder-Commissioners)
 - Moderator is an elected member (minister or elder)
 - Stated Clerk is an elected member (minister or elder)
 - Work “as the whole,” thru committees, commissions, etc.
 - Officers: Moderator and Clerk (plus others)
 - May call / hire staff

So, lets turn to the next “higher council” – to the body whose existence and operation, by the way, makes our congregations “Presbyterian.”

G-3.03 THE PRESBYTERY

G-3.0301 Composition and Responsibilities

The presbytery is the council serving as a corporate expression of the church within a certain district and is composed of all the congregations and teaching elders within that district. The presbytery shall adopt and communicate to the sessions a plan for determining how many ruling elders each session should elect as commissioners to presbytery, with a goal of numerical parity of teaching elders and ruling elders. This plan shall require each session to elect at least one commissioner and shall take into consideration the size of congregations as well as a method to fulfill the principles of participation and representation found in F-1.0403 and G-3.0103. Ruling elders elected as officers of the presbytery shall be enrolled as members during the period of their service. A presbytery may provide by its own rule for the enrollment of ruling elders serving as moderators of committees or commissions.

The minimum composition of a presbytery is ten duly constituted sessions and ten teaching elders.

Must meet twice a year, can meet more often – and can meet when specially called.

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.**

Nevada Presbytery meets in the Spring and in the Fall – in the “south” of our state - and in the “north” - respectively.

The Nevada Presbytery



30 Congregations and specialized ministries

1 new church development – Mesquite NV

CA churches – 2 in Bishop, 1 in Lee Vining, 1 in Truckee, and 1 in South Lake Tahoe.

1 NV church in Boise ID Presbytery

Governed by 53 minister members and 53 + 1 elected elder commissioners (at least)

Here is the Nevada Presbytery:

Actually, now 31 Congregations, new church developments, worshipping fellowships, and specialized ministries:

- Amazing Grace – presbytery’s outreach to the homeless in Las Vegas (truth be told one of the larger bodies in our presbytery! – routinely performing weddings and the sacraments for its members),
- Hispanic, Sudanese – two ethnic worshipping fellowships under presbytery’s care and support
- 1 for the last two years; but now 3 new church developments – the one in Mesquite NV, just up the road about an hour away – and the new two here in the valley since last year’s slide, as our Tai-Laotian and Philippine worshipping fellowships have become NCDs by presbytery action this September. We installed one of their pastors a week ago last Sunday.
- 2 Korean-language congregations – and we installed one of their pastors last Sunday!
- 5 Congregations in Eastern California congregations –2 in Bishop, 1 in Lee Vining, 1 in South Lake Tahoe, and 1 federated Presbyterian-Lutheran church in Truckee.

Note: there is 1 Nevada church dismissed to the Boise (ID) Presbytery in 1989, their having tired of their 12 hour drive to presbytery when it met in the south: Owyhee

Presbyterian Church, Owyhee, NV which celebrated its one hundredth anniversary this summer (the church of Rousas Rushdoony, during is missionary days – for those of you in the Dominion Movement) – and a “would be” in Jackpot (if there was a church still there) – which has long been dismissed to Kendal Presbytery.

Most of our churches are not supported well with air travel – it’s a driving presbytery. When presbytery meets (our stated meetings are twice a year) – no matter where we meet -- someone drives eight hours to the meeting and eight hours back home again.



Presbytery of Nevada

775-852-1551

- Pre-organization (1861-1907)
 - 21 churches / 7 societies
- Organized in 1907 Incorporated 1909
 - 18 churches, 11 mission-funded works
- New School ministers / “Northern Strand”
- Various Synod(s) of California
 - Mission Area: Sierra Mission Partnership
- Active in Social Justice Issues
- Active in GA issues

<http://www.nevadapresbytery.org/>

Again, using Nevada Presbytery to illustrate how this works in the local situation:

Nevada is a mining state –

- open pit mining where the minerals lie close to the surface,
- placer mining where there is flowing water,
- hard rock mining where the treasure is found way underground, and
- especially here in Las Vegas, our own, highly-specialized form of strip-mining – where the deep pockets of tourist wallets abound.

Since the early 1800s in Nevada, prospectors searched, miners came, cities sprang up, stores, schools, and churches were established, rich ore veins produced for a time – and then played out. The prospectors moved down the road, the miners and the cities followed – and the cycle repeated.

Today, there are 108 cities and towns in Nevada, with populations from 50 to over a half million . And there are also over 1300 ghost towns – some of which were populated for less than a year.

Over the last 200 years, 28 of these lasted long enough to have a Presbyterian Church established in them – only for it to be dissolved with the changes in their community.

But today, there are another 28 vibrant churches within the bounds of presbytery in

the communities that have survived –

- from one celebrating its 150th anniversary this last June in Carson City – the state’s capitol (the oldest, continuously-operating church in the state, by the way)
- to three new church developments all within Clark County along with three more worshipping fellowships / specialized ministries.

Across our presbytery, in one or another of these, God is worshipped each week in eight of the world’s languages.

Presbytery was organized in 1907 – and incorporated 1909 – with 18 churches and 11 mission-funded works. The pastors who organized these were primarily New School ministers – but from the “Northern Strand.” No surprise there, Nevada was brought into the union as a Northern State in the Civil War. Our Motto: “Battle Born” (although “skirmish borne” might be more appropriate to the actual level of fighting).

Various Synod(s) of California were the movers – we were the mission field from the west! So thinly populated and so few were our churches and their members, we (along with many other presbyteries) were formed into “Mission Area Units” who shared presbytery-level resources. Our’s, the Sierra Mission Partnership, was the last of the four of these to disassemble in our Synod – and we did this at the end of this last year. We are now inventing our presbytery!

Here in Nevada, we have a long, proud history of social witness – stretching from our earliest missionary establishment:

Ministry outside of the church

- Beginning with funerals for well-known prostitutes, vigilantism, and lectures on women’s rights in the precedent of our Virginia City Church (our second-oldest organized church, which survived the Great Fire of 1895 largely due to the saloon keepers, prostitutes and drunks who manned the bucket brigade because they regarded it as their church),
- to capturing nearly all of Pioche’s children in its Sunday school in the 1870s,
- to the 1906 Rhyolite Sunday School children’s collection of toys for “unfortunate children elsewhere”
- and to that church and its pastor’s attitude toward and treatment of prostitutes as “young girls trapped in a pitiful life on Aramogoso street, drawn by the glamor ... and left victim to squalid conditions” (their greater prejudice directed to the “creature in human form who traffics in women’s virtues and lives off the earnings of fallen women”) – a theme played out in the Presbytery wide call to defend against Human Trafficking through our churches and through the legislature today.

Ministry to the world

- As far back as sending a delegate (the Moderator of Presbytery, Reverend JM Swander) to a world ecumenical event in 1913.

Ministry through women of the church

- Beginning with the 1892 formation of the Ladies Aid Society in the Elko church – followed by many others – leading to the Presbytery-wide (1909) and church wide formation of the Presbyterian Women and their care work,
- to women as Sunday School Board presidents and Trustees as early as 1906,
- ... and to supporting an overture to GA on ordination of women as elders in 1921 (not enacted by GA and the presbyteries until 1930) and acting on that freedom shortly after.

Ministry to the civic needs of the community

- Beginning with successfully leading the opposition of water rights grabs by the City of Los Angeles by our Bishop church in 1929 - mid-1930s,
- To formalized schooling and mission works among the Indians within the bounds of Presbytery – resulting in two Indian churches , Valley Bishop and Owyhee (the latter was the missionary and preaching home of Rousas Rushdooney (later in life a Calvinist philosopher, historian, and theologian and is widely credited as the father of Christian Reconstructionism and an inspiration for the modern Christian homeschool movement. His followers and critics have argued that his thought exerts considerable influence on today's Christian right),
- To support for the Anti-saloon league made in the year of Presbytery's incorporation, 1909 and voting support to the 18th Amendment to the US Constitution on Prohibition in 1917, opposing gambling in the 1930s and MX missile basing in Nevada in the 1960s.

Ministry to the Federal and State government

- With direct political intervention as early as 1911 regarding nuns wearing their habits in Indian schools, in 1922 regarding a residential requirement preceding civil divorce, provisions of religious services at Indian schools in 1933, was commended by a district judge for taking important stands on “matters of importance” over the years, passed a Nevada legislative agenda in 1963 (equal rights, opposition to the death penalty,
- addition of chaplains to the prison system – one of our pastors being long in this position, adding a state park system,
- directly lobbied the state legislature to support the Equal Rights

- Amendment to the US Constitution in 1972,
- ... leading to joining with four other mainline denominational judicatories in Nevada to form the Religious Alliance In Nevada as a Christian lobby to the legislature on social concerns in 1996.

Who does what?

- Moderator (plus Past and Vice) – moderates Presbytery
- Stated Clerk – maintains the records of Presbytery

Council - Trustees

Committee on Representation

Nominating Committee / Personnel Committee

Committee on Ministry

Committee on Mission Outreach

Committee on Equipping Ministries

Committee on Preparation for Ministry

Presbytery Permanent Judicial Commission

The Presbytery – and its Corporation meets at least twice, annually, in hosting churches in the north in the fall and south in the spring - on a pre-determined hosting schedule. It is composed of our 28 churches and its 53 pastor-members – but it meets with only the pastors and *commissioners* from its churches. Traditionally, the Presbyterian Women, with chapters throughout our presbytery's churches also meets at the same time/place.

Its officers are as shown – and the Moderators (past, present, and vice) chair several of these committees, the Stated Clerk is the recorder for these several, as well.

The Council and its financial sub-committee, the Trustees, integrate the business aspects of Presbytery. The Trustees are the Corporation's Board.

The Committee on Representation ensures even and ratioed representation in the Presbytery's governance structure (a role specified in the PCUSA Constitution). Please note that several of the 17 items we voted on this summer change the constitutional ratios for committees – to a more practical “as evenly as possible” – rather than a hard goal, never possible to hit in small-number committee populations!

The nominating and personnel committees propose election of members / hire or contract persons to the governance and operating structure.

The mission work of Presbytery is done in the four “**bolded**” committees.

The only permanent commission has little work to do (we hope!).

Note that there is no “staff” or office -- as you might find in other presbyteries. We are still inventing ourselves – and have decided that staff – and an office, per se, may not be so important to our work.

The officers and committee members primarily work from their homes or home churches – and over the phone and internet! If we add a General Presbyter or presbytery executive, it will be simply an inbox/re-router of information to the committee or persons who do the work. When we invent our presbytery pastoral function (required in the constitution) we may distribute that among the pastors - active and Honorably Retired – adding professional counselors and counseling organizations, as needed, for specific problems as may arise.

The PC (USA) Synod

- 16 Synods composed of 173 Presbyteries
- BOO Chapter 3:
 - 19 enumerated powers + as granted by their presbyteries.
 - Composed of Presbytery Commissioners and staff
 - Moderated by an elected member (minister or elder)
 - Stated Clerk is called (minister or elder)
 - Work “as the whole,” thru committees, commissions, etc.
 - Officers: Moderator and Stated Clerk (plus others)
 - May call / hire staff

Lets go up another step, to another “council” – the synod.

G-3.04 THE SYNOD

G-3.0401 Composition and Responsibilities

The synod is the intermediate council serving as a corporate expression of the church throughout its region. It shall consist of not fewer than three presbyteries within a specific geographic region.

When a synod meets, it shall be composed of commissioners elected by the presbyteries. Each presbytery shall elect at least one ruling elder and one teaching elder to serve as commissioners to synod. A synod shall determine a plan for the election of commissioners to the synod, as well as the method to fulfill the principles of participation and representation found in F-1.0403 and G-3.0103; both plans shall be subject to approval by a majority of the presbyteries in the synod. The commissioners from each presbytery shall be divided equally between ruling elders and teaching elders. Each person elected moderator or other officer shall be enrolled as a member of the synod until a successor is elected and installed.

Synod is responsible for the life and mission of the church throughout its region and for supporting the ministry and mission of its presbyteries as they seek to support the witness of congregations, to the end that the church throughout its region becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness. As it leads and guides the witness of the

church throughout its region, it shall keep before it the marks of the Church (F-1.0302), the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed communities have identified themselves through history (F-1.0303) and the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304).

Synods must meet twice a year, can meet more often – and can meet when specially called.

The Synod



11 presbyteries in Oregon, Idaho, Nevada, and northern California

(3 presbyteries in Sierra Mission Partnership)

Governed by fifty two Elder/Minister Commissioners, elected by the eleven presbyteries within its boundaries.

Here is our synod - the Synod of the Pacific: 11 presbyteries in Oregon, Idaho, Nevada, and northern California.

Our Synod is composed of fifty two Commissioners elected by the eleven presbyteries within its boundaries – though at the plea of our smaller presbyteries, we agreed to reduce to 39 commissioners because of their shortage of qualified commissioners.

The Synod of the Pacific extends its personnel and benefits system to many of the member Presbyteries – becoming both the accountable body for these employees who serve the presbyteries – and the administrator of the “human resources” aspects of their employment. These aspects are managed at the policy level by the standing Mission Personnel Committee – of which I am a part.

Synod meets for about two days, semi-annually, as both its ecclesiastical and civil bodies.



A “Mission Support” Synod

- This Synod is structured to provide comprehensive support services for its presbyteries.
- It provides:
 - Administrative and Personnel Services
 - Financial Investment and Loan Opportunities
 - Health & Benefit Opportunities
 - Mission Treasury Services
 - Multi-Presbytery gatherings & workshops
 - Ecclesiastical functions as required by the Book or Order

This Synod is not a programmatic body – at the historic insistence of its Presbyteries.

Rather, it is a supportive body – providing the Presbyteries and their congregations with the resources and services they need to do the Mission of the Church.

The presbyteries are very happy with the synod and its operations – despite the recent and entirely misguided suggestions of the Middle Governing Body Commission of GA this month to merge the 16 synods into five regional commissions of the GA – a move that we will vigorously oppose.



Who does What?

- Moderator (and Vice) – moderates Synod
- Stated Clerk – maintains the records of Synod
- Synod Executive and staff – do the day-to-day

Nominating Committee
Committee on Representation
Coordinating Committee

Mission Finance Committee
Mission Partnership Committee
Mission Personnel Committee
Synod Permanent Judicial Commission

The work of synod is guided by its committees. It is all pretty well detailed in the Synod of the Pacific Administrative Manual (SAM)

Here is our “SAM, SAM, SAM - I AM” introduction to the incoming commissioners ... (apologies to Dr Suess’ Cat in the Hat)

All of the commissioners are a member of one of the three biggies:

Mission Finance:

Part of our work is to run a bank! / This works for all to gain
Interest on investments makes / Good sense, it’s very plain!

Mission Partnership:

Still don’t know what part you’ll play? / There’s yet another group that’s
here to stay
Our Partnership Committee’s fun / And they stick around ‘til the work is
done.

Mission Personnel:

Personnel policies in SAM / Are found in section eight
They help with many situations / And we are told they’re really great

Some commissioners are also members of the “smaller committees” – and here is their introduction ...

Nominating:

Too many women / Or too many men
Then we have to / Start over again!

Representation:

COR stands for Representation / They meet with Nominations
To make sure that representation / Is each groups configuration!

Coordinating :

Finally, we have a Council / To coordinate it all
Reps from Presbys and chair-folk / Step forward and answer the call.

They do the agendas / And plan the day
To keep us timely / 'fore we go away

And a few commissioners are on the *Permanent Judicial Commission:*

Their meetings are infrequent / But long and hard they slave
Three days for a hearing / And unanimity they crave.

But cases come, and cases go / All the while they strive
And sometimes disagreements come / But love, in the end, will thrive!



Synod Staff

Synod of the Pacific
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Rob Brink


Wendy Warner


Ani Lele'a


Ann Butterfield


Kendra Fraser


Melinda Durham


Del Howley


Patrice Alshuth

Of course, the day-to-day work is done by the staff ...

Rob Brink – Synod Executive

I serve our Synod / lots of ways
In committees near / and far away

I have the vision / for the work we do
Evolving, / adapting / and keeping us new!

Wendy Warner – Stated Clerk (1/3 time)

The Clerk’s job varied / across a wide span
With judicial cases / to manage and then

Our Synod Assemblies, / no matter who’s here,
I have the job of / order (to appear)!

Ann Butterfield – Business Services Director

I direct our Business Services / And manage the office, too.
From audits / to budgets / and all the reports -
I give info / that’s true.

Ani Lele’a - Treasurer

When a church has money to invest
I find a good return is best!

I'm just the one you'll want to call
For I'm your Treasurer, after all!

Kendra Frazer -

Loans and our website are an important part
Of our Synod operation.

So I am just the one to call
If your church needs renovation!

Melinda Durham -

I'm new around here, / but I still see
About the health / of each employee.

You should not / hesitate to call
I'd like to an- / swer questions all!

Dell Howley –

Dell assists / part-time each week
Handles all / the jobs we seek
When her help / is sought each day
She's ready, / and willing, / and says OK!

Patrice Alshuth -

Your mission check / to Synod
Will put your mind / at ease.

And if you have some / questions
You should call me / please!

... and that is our Synod! SAM , I AM!

The PC (USA) General Assembly

- Composed of 173 Presbyteries (in 16 Synods)
- BOO Chapter 3:
 - 24 enumerated powers + as granted by the presbyteries.
 - Composed of an equal number of Minister and Elder Commissioners from the Presbyteries
 - Moderated by an elected member (minister or elder)
 - Stated Clerk is elected (minister or elder)
 - Work “as the whole,” thru committees, commissions, etc. – and the GA Council, Office of the GA, four \$\$ corporations
 - Officers: Moderator and Stated Clerk (can have others)
 - May hire staff – and lots of it!

Finally we get to the highest council – the General Assembly of the denomination.

G-3.05 THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

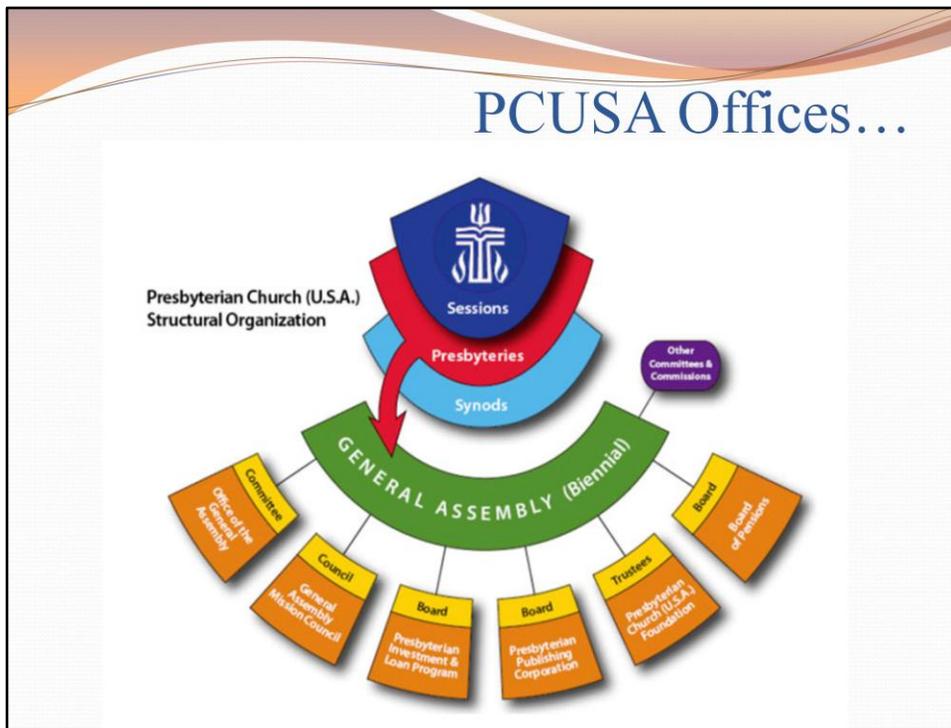
G-3.0501 Composition and Responsibilities

The General Assembly is the council of the whole church and it is representative of the unity of the synods, presbyteries, sessions, and congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). It shall consist of equal numbers of ruling elders and teaching elders elected by the presbyteries and reflective of the diversity within their bounds (F-1.0403 and G-3.0103), to serve as commissioners.

Each person elected Moderator shall be enrolled as a member of the General Assembly until a successor is elected and installed.

The General Assembly constitutes the bond of union, community, and mission among all its congregations and councils, to the end that the whole church becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness. As it leads and guides the witness of the whole church, it shall keep before it the marks of the Church (F-1.0302), the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed communities have identified themselves through history (F-1.0303) and the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304).

Meets every two years (now - to save \$\$), can meet more often – and can meet when specially called.



The day-to-day work of our denomination is coordinated from headquarters in Louisville, KY. (Right next to the newly-built Yum Center for you sports buffs). I toured the headquarters during the moderators conference a year ago, November.

The **GAMC** offices are in the headquarters. All voting members of the GAMC also serve as the board of directors of the **Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), A Corporation** (the principal legal corporation of the denomination), which receives, holds, and transfers property, and facilitates the management of the church's corporate affairs. The GAMC advises and responds to the General Assembly on priorities, programs, and strategies for addressing matters of concern for the Ministries of our church – its primary purpose is to lead and coordinate the total mission program. (<http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/gamc/about-gamc/>)

The **OGA** offices are also in the Louisville headquarters; but some are the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This office serves as the ecclesiastical arm of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). One of the six agencies of the PC(USA), it offers support in the areas of governance and structure. It is directed by the [Stated Clerk of the General Assembly](#), with a 70-member staff. (<http://oga.pcusa.org/whoweare.htm>)

The **Presbyterian Foundation** is charged by the General Assembly with the responsibility and accountability for raising money, and today, through New Covenant

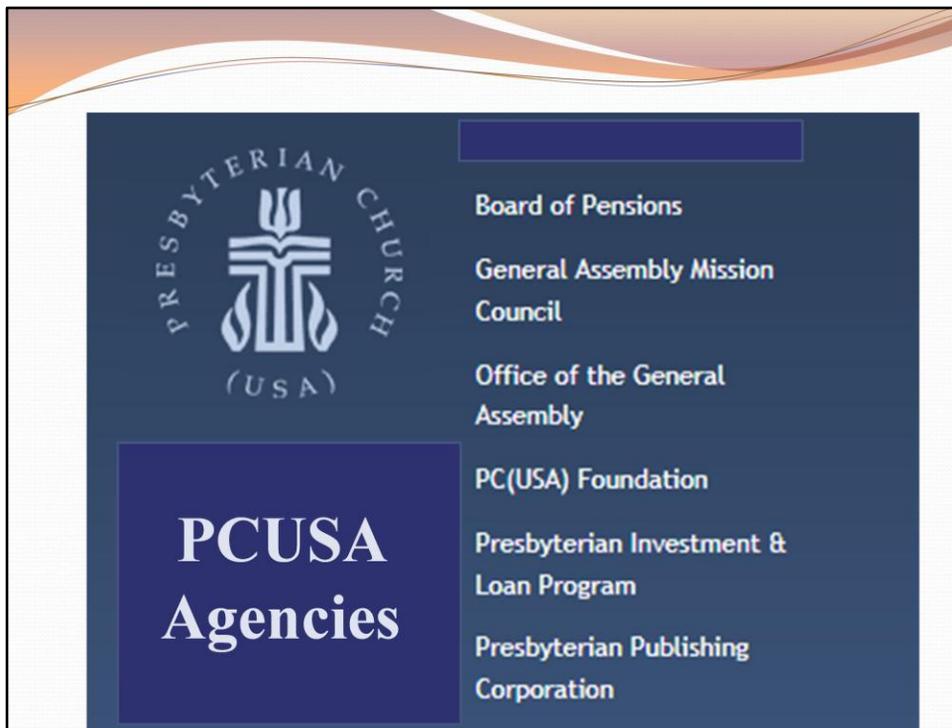
Trust Company, providing trust and investment management services, for the mission of the entire denomination. With assets of \$1.6 billion, the Presbyterian Foundation stands as one of the largest religious foundations in the United States. The Foundation is located in offices just across the river from Louisville – in Jeffersonville, IN. My brother, The Reverend Greg Ritter (you remember “the Voice of the 219th GA”) was the Vice President for Development in the Foundation – and gave them several of their best fund raising years. Although the Foundation is reorganizing itself (“to better serve its clients ...”), you might find yourself interfacing more with a regional representative nearer your office. (http://www.presbyterianfoundation.org/about_us/1/about_us.aspx)

The **Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Investment and Loan Program, Inc.** is a nonprofit corporation of [The Presbyterian Church \(U.S.A.\)](#) that was created to provide low-cost loans to churches, governing bodies and related entities of the denomination for capital projects. Funds for these loans come from two sources – endowment funds of PC(USA) and money invested by Presbyterian members, churches and governing bodies. It is located in the headquarters in Louisville. (<http://pilp.pcusa.org/>)

The **Presbyterian Publishing Corporation (PPC)** is the denominational publisher for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), but the materials it issues under its [Westminster John Knox Press](#) imprint cover the spectrum of modern religious thought and represent the work of scholarly and popular authors of many different religious affiliations. PPC's Geneva Press imprint is for a specifically Presbyterian audience. Again, offices in the Louisville Headquarters. (<http://www.ppcbooks.com/>)

In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), **the Board of Pensions** is the board responsible for benefits. The Board of Pensions is governed by an independent thirty-three member board of directors nominated by the General Assembly Nominating Committee and elected by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Their principal offices are located in Philadelphia, PA where they have been since before the reunion – but you may interface with them, or a regional representative. (<http://www.pensions.org/portal/server.pt>)

So, when you say “Louisville” you are pretty much talking about the denominational headquarters.



The point of this slide really is to show you how to access to the denominational offices – at the bottom of nearly every page on the PCUSA website – click away to the office of your need!



Here are the officers of the 219th General Assembly – (our most recent) held in Minneapolis in early July, 2010.

See slide.

They were joined by 710 commissioners elected by the 173 presbyteries – and evenly divided between Ministers of the Word and Sacrament and Elders (now Teaching and Ruling Elders) – and a host of advisors and observers!

Although 85% of GA commissioners have never been to a GA before – and will never return to a subsequent one, all have served on Session, of course, many will have served their presbytery, and some will have served their synod.

The welcome and announcements for this GA were all expertly and informatively made by my brother, the Reverend Greg Ritter, a member of the hosting, Twin Cities Presbytery.

The commissioners met from the 1st to the 10th in the center of the five-county mosquito-control district, considered many issues and overtures, took a number of actions, and then went home – having sent a package of 17 questions to the presbyteries for their vote:

- Part 1 of the package was a complete revision of the form of our government – removing the procedural stuff leaving the principles of government – which was passed by the majority vote of the presbyteries and is why we are here, today.
- Part 2 – was a proposed new Confession of faith – which was rejected by the presbyteries.
- Part 3 – was a collection of fifteen miscellaneous but specific paragraph revisions to all three parts of the *Book of Order* – of which were all were passed by the presbyteries.

Only one of all of these actions and questions to hit the national news – and because of its misinterpretation by both the news media and both of its “sides” within our own denomination (!) - can you guess which one?

As these councils are composed of *presbyters*,
... who are these presbyters?

- *G-2.0301 Ruling Elder Defined*
 - ... persons with **particular gifts** to share in
 - **discernment** of God's Spirit and
 - **governance** of God's people.
 - ... persons:
 - of **wisdom and maturity of faith**,
 - with **skills in leadership** and
 - with **compassionate in spirit**.

Here is what the Book of Order says about the elected representatives of the people (to session), the congregation (to presbytery), and the presbytery (to synod and to the General Assembly) – we really have to look to the ruling elder definition here to appreciate the full need of this function to which all of these representatives are elected:

G-2.0301 Ruling Elder Defined

As there were in Old Testament times elders for the government of the people, so the New Testament church provided persons with **particular gifts** to share in **discernment** of God's Spirit and **governance** of God's people. Accordingly, congregations (and presbyteries) should elect persons of **wisdom and maturity of faith**, having demonstrated **skills in leadership** and being **compassionate in spirit**.

This definition also applies to the gifts and abilities needed in *teaching* elders who are also elected to represent their presbyteries to their synod and to the General Assembly for the purposes of those councils.

In all of these councils, ... how do all these presbyters decide?

- **Well ... that is the question of the day, isn't it?**
- *F-3.0101 God Is Lord of the Conscience*
 - a. ...“God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men (persons) which are in anything contrary to his Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship.”
- *F-3.0107 Church Power*

... the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners; ... no Church judicatory (council) ought to pretend to ... bind the conscience in virtue of their own authority; and that all their decisions should be founded upon the revealed will of God.
- *G-2.0105 Freedom of Conscience*

... conscience is captive to the Word of God as interpreted in the standards of the church ... ultimately becomes the responsibility of the council

Well, that is the question of today, isn't it? The *Book of Order* says (because scripture says):

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 (persons) which are in anything contrary to his Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship.” (Westminster Confession of Faith)

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 judicatory (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.

G-2.0105 Freedom of Conscience

It is necessary to the integrity and health of the church that the persons who serve it in ordered ministries shall adhere to the essentials of the Reformed faith and polity as expressed in this Constitution. So far as may be possible without serious departure from these standards, without infringing on the rights and views of others, and without obstructing the constitutional governance of the church, freedom of

conscience with respect to the interpretation of Scripture is to be maintained. It is to be recognized, however, that in entering the ordered ministries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), one chooses to exercise freedom of conscience within certain bounds. His or her conscience is captive to the Word of God as interpreted in the standards of the church so long as he or she continues to seek, or serve in, ordered ministry. The decision as to whether a person has departed from essentials of Reformed faith and polity is made initially by the individual concerned but ultimately becomes the responsibility of the council in which he or she is a member.

Very early in the history of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, even before the General Assembly was established, the plan of union of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia contained the following sentences: 'That when any matter is determined by a majority vote, every member shall either actively concur with or passively submit to such determination; or if his conscience permit him to do neither, he shall, after sufficient liberty modestly to reason and remonstrate, peaceably withdraw from our communion without attempting to make any schism. Provided always that this shall be understood to extend only to such determination as the body shall judge indispensable in doctrine or Presbyterian government.' (Hist. Dig. (P) p. 1310.) (Plan of Union of 1758, par. II.)

In all of these councils, ... how do all these presbyters decide?

- Prayerful preparation for personal study
- Prayerful study of the issues
- Prayerful study with knowledgeable, mature Christians
- Know your conscience – and know the reasons why.

My strong recommendation to you, our Presbyters, is to be thoroughly prepared for the purpose of the council to which you have been elected.

That includes your personal and communal study so the council is able to consider the business before it productively.

Lets explore this recommendation and the tools at your disposal:

- Prayerful preparation for personal Study
- Prayerful Study of the materials related to issues before the council
- Prayerful Study with knowledgeable, mature Christians
- Know God's leading for your conscience – and the scriptural reasons why.

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

Whom do I Serve as a Presbyterian?

Whose Church is it anyway?

Do I have to invent my answer?

Have I already been told what to do?

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

Whom do I Serve as a Presbyterian?

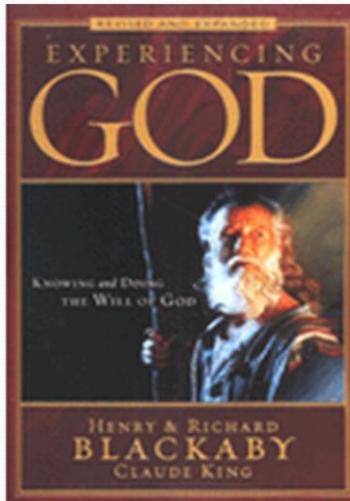
Whose Church is it anyway?

Do I have to invent my answers?

Have I already been told what to do?

It comes down to discerning God's will – not deciding – or - 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 ...



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

Henry notes that:

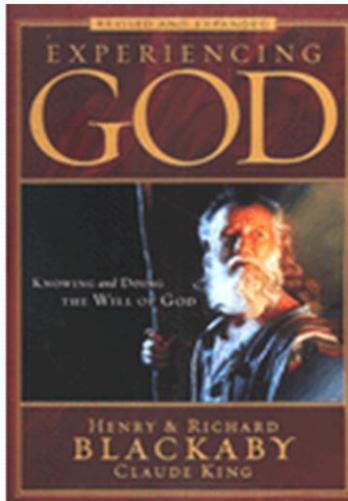
- **God** pursues a continuing love relationship with you – not because you are “good,” or have done anything “good,” or because you are even likable (!) – He does it for His own reasons. Maybe, its just because He made you and He loves you.
- **God** is always at work around you – and He invites you to join Him in what He is doing even though you are not perfect, or willing, 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.

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

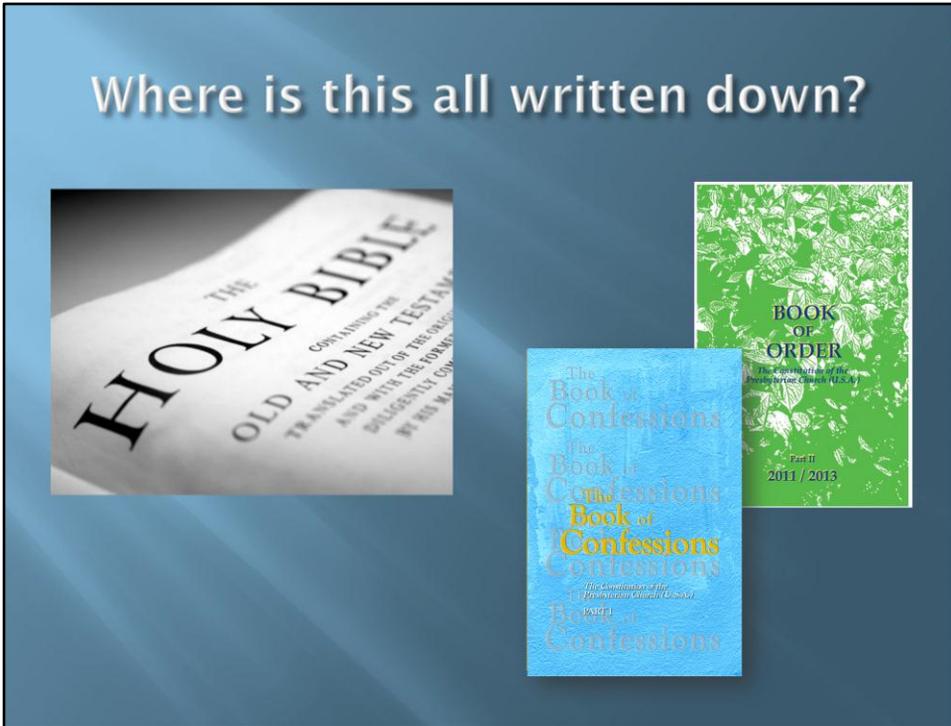
God reveals to you - Himself, His purposes, and His ways (by the Holy Spirit) through:

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

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

Amen!

Where is this all written down?



So – where is all this written down?

(Absorb the screen...)

... well – again -- in the Holy Bible, actually. And again, 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 what He commands us to do - is the work of our Constitution, which is in two books: The *Book of Confessions* and the *Book of Order*.

Let’s look now specifically at our *Book of Order* – the portions of it that replace the old Form of Government with two new sections – the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity and the new Form Of Government.



I can appreciate that there may be some confusion here ...

Remember these characters on Saturday Night Live?

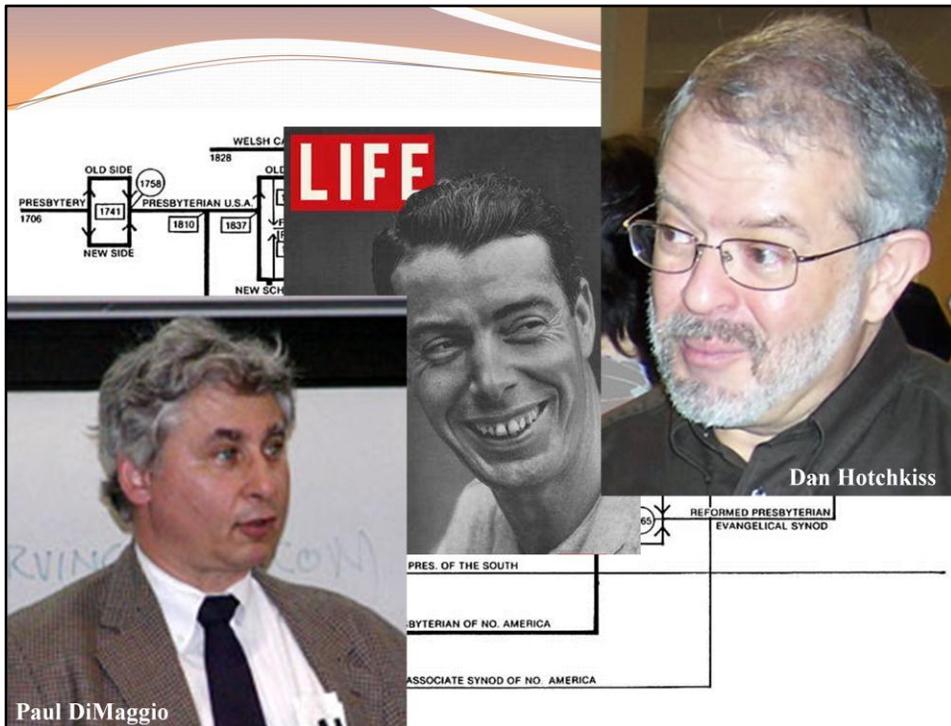
Here is how Emily Litelli would have reacted with EDITORIAL COMMENT to the news of our new FOG ...

Absorb slide

Why new FOG – wasn't the old one foggy enough? What got us into this fine mess?

The answer, of course, is in our history ...

This goes back to the very first days of Presbyterianism in colonial America - we struggled even then to form an identity as a church with legitimizing standards within (and maybe counter to) this new world environment of religious toleration - an environment with church forms everywhere from a monolithic hierarchy -- to association through name only – to no association at all! But, lets not be too harsh on the Presbyterians for this ...



Paul DiMaggio (that is *Paul*, the Princeton sociologist - not *Joe*, perhaps the more famous Yankees centerfielder) observes:

... institutions developed in different fields within a culture [but] in the same period -- will assume *remarkably similar shapes*.

Alban Institute senior consultant, **Dan Hotchkiss** notes that religious institutions borrow organizational forms from the society around them all the time – **often shaped more by cultural influences than biblical influences**. For example, none of these familiar organizational forms is mandated by Scripture:

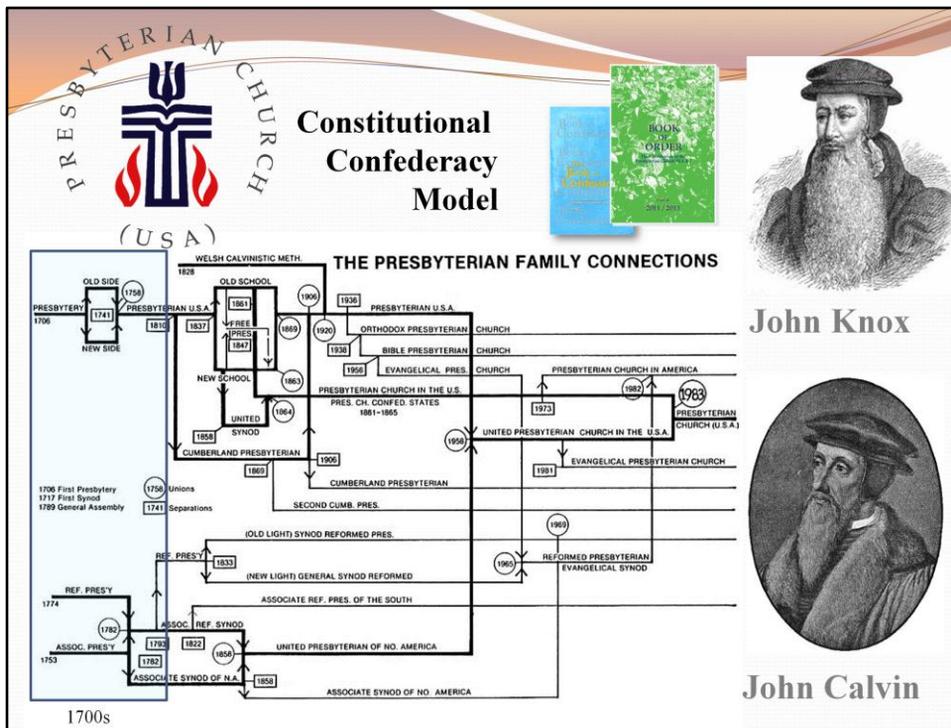
- the early church was organized like a Hellenistic mystery cult,
- the medieval church resembled monarchy,
- New England Puritans cloned the structure of an English town.

The most important influences on the structure of the contemporary American church or synagogue date from the **19th century**, when the **nonprofit corporation** emerged as an all-purpose container for benevolent work.

In fact, Craig Dykstra and James Hudnut-Beumler’s study ([The National Organizational Structures of Protestant Denominations: An Invitation to a Conversation](#)) illuminates

Paul and Dan's observations in even more detail, tracing the evolution of the polity of American protestant denominations from "Constitutional Confederacy" model, to the "Corporation" model, to the "Regulatory Agency" model of the last 40 years.

We Presbyterians are that – on steroids! I am going to "borrow heavily" from this paper, here.



The Constitutional Confederacy Model

The American Revolution produced a new crisis for churches: they could no longer look to their lands of origin for leadership and governance.

Craig and James describe the American denominational organizations from these years forward as “constitutional confederations” because they were formed around constitutions – but of a type quite limited in its scope -- and whose standards were more doctrinal or confessional statements.

For Presbyterians, these were the Westminster Standards, adopted in 1789 (with some new-world modifications).

These “constitutional confederations” were neither bureaucracies nor program agencies. Their motivating issues were primarily “*ministerial succession, guidance, and governance*” and their were no other resource expectations beyond meeting these few practical needs of their congregations through a minimalist structure.

Note that although U.S. Articles of Confederation – and then the constitutional development (happening in this same time period) created the *permission and framework* for broad and strong, central governmental agencies, none were formed (e.g., at that time, no one even imagined a Department of Health, Education & Welfare in the fledgling Federal government – let alone a National Board of Home Missions or Christian Education within the denomination, for that matter).

But, this confederacy model yielded to a two-stage evolution leading to the rise of a corporate model of the robust and programmatic American denomination over the next century.

Presbyterian Church (USA)

The Rise of the Corporation Model

THE PRESBYTERIAN FAMILY CONNECTIONS

1700s 1800s

John Knox

John Calvin

Rise of the Corporation Model

The **first stage** in the evolution toward the corporate model was ***the rise of religious voluntary associations*** in the 19th century, gathered around perceived societal needs that the American Protestant church was not meeting through its *non-programmatic* denominational structures.

- Issues such as: opposition to slavery, prohibition of alcohol, distribution of tracts and Bibles, and the propagation of home and foreign missions.
- These societies crossed both denominational and faith tradition lines.

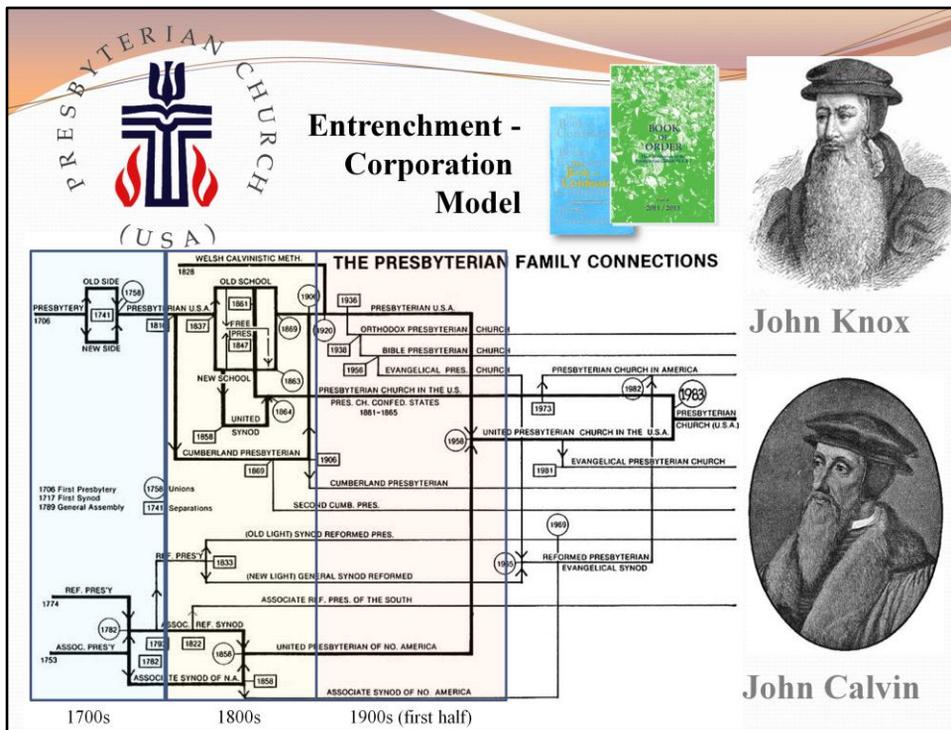
Thus the ecclesiastical form of choice in the antebellum period was a weak central church government with a modest set of responsibilities - coupled with a wide range of independent, loosely-related societies for Christian endeavors.

So, too, in American culture of the period. Note the lack of a nationally embraced central bank system at this time - and even the absence of a nationally standardized time system until the railroads implemented the first one in 1883. (The U.S. Standard Time Act was finally adopted in 1918 – 35 years later!).

By the turn of the century, we see the **second stage** in the evolution toward the corporate model – **technology** -- bringing changes in communication, transportation, and production which, in turn, gave rise to **national systems of centralized production and distribution**. Trusts, collectives, and, above all, vertically integrated corporations began to blossom – as telegraph, telephone, railroad, radio, and mass production were societal shapers whose problem-approach concepts also became available to the church.

Should we be surprised that religious denominations, led by clergy and business elites accustomed to thinking in the organizational forms of their time, should reorganize themselves on lines parallel to the worlds of business and government? After all, they had all gone to the same Ivy-league schools – and American society was increasingly inclined to look for national solutions to the problems of regional inconsistencies like the standardization of time zones across the transcontinental railway system.

The cultural stage was set for the development of religious denominations as corporations.



Entrenchment of the Corporation Model

For both practical and ideological reasons (but not for theological reasons), by 1900 the die had been cast for a corporate-bureaucratic model that would characterize national-level American Protestantism for most of the 20th century.

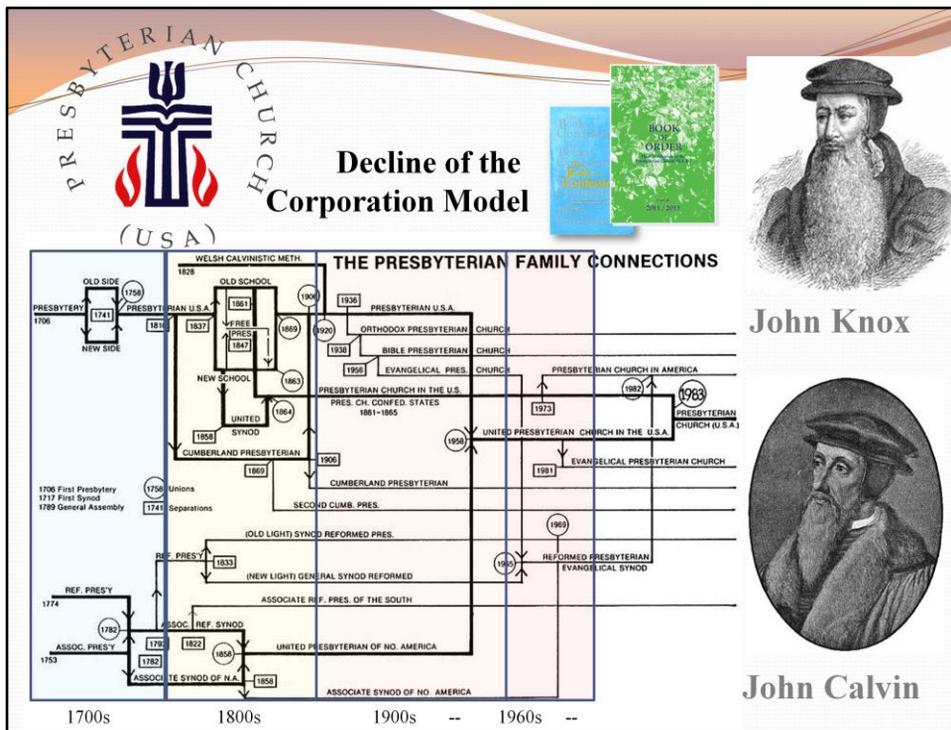
Just as business corporations were now provided goods and services to the secular, *national* consuming community, the modern denomination was no exception, bringing the work of the various independent, voluntary associations under centralized, national, and denominational control: Sunday School curricula, denominational periodicals, and national resources for church architecture, insurance, and pension programs became centralized and administered through national offices. National solutions for local problems.

Management of substantial foreign mission dollars drove centralization of these programs. Just like today, foreign missions funding was easier to raise than domestic program dollars, so centralizing all denominational programs, including foreign missions, provided a consolidated income base to fund the growing spectrum of denominational services.

Early the 20th century, denominational assemblies and national conventions even began to act much like stockholders' meetings where the "stockholders" (or their

“proxy representatives” in the representative systems) would vote on materials already prepared by denominational staff. National boards and councils were served by male pastors and lay leaders primarily of the large and wealthy congregations, very much like the boards of directors of corporations in the business world.

This corporate model was very well received and appreciated by the church across the denominations – as a Presbyterian example, by the mid-50s the paid subscription list of *Presbyterian Life* magazine exceeded one million, surpassing that of *Newsweek*.



Decline of the Corporation Model

But then – enter the 1960s (remember them? – some entered and never came out). The 1960s saw the corporate model’s effectiveness begin to decline – eroded by the major questions and turmoil that were then sweeping American society.

Here are three:

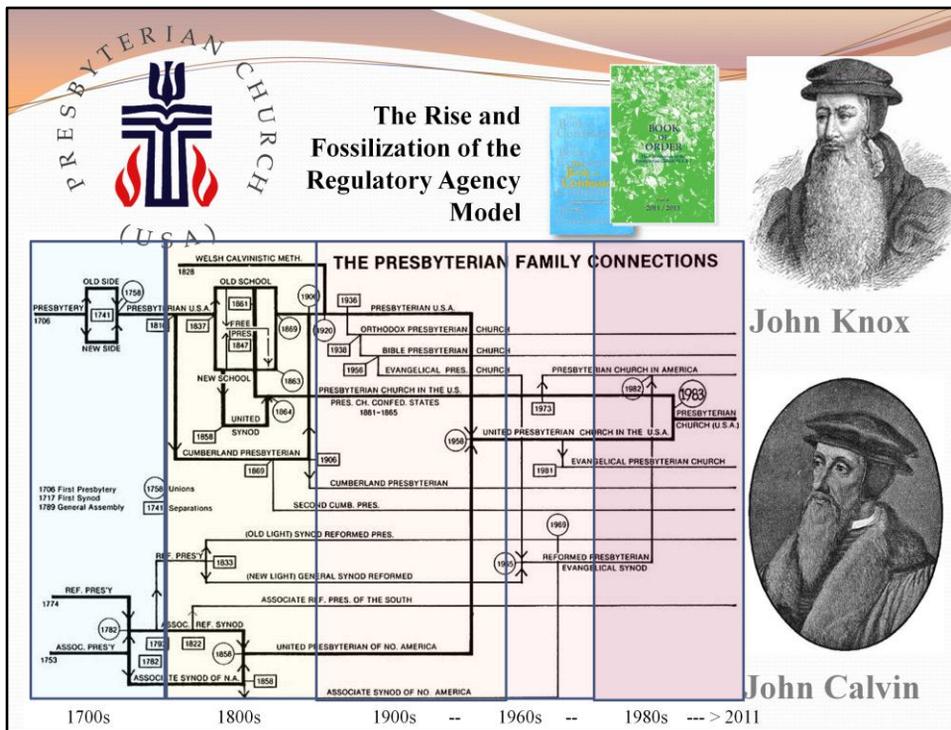
- **The rise of the “I’m entitled” generation** demanding resolutions to the given affinity groups’ issues *by someone else*,
- **Guilt – driving change in global mission activity patterns** as American denominations became increasingly aware of their historic tendency of cultural imperialism in their “missions” to other countries and cultures, and ...
- The mid-60’s **end of the postwar baby boom**. Two impacts manifest from this:
 - Sunday School attendances hit their peaks; but, membership levels soon began a steady - and continuing – decline as the number of families with young children began to decline. And ...
 - In less than a generation, religious giving also began to decrease – right at the time when denominational bureaucracies had swelled in the wake of the robust and enthusiastic growth of the 1950s. This began a vicious cycle of “shrinking-dollar”-driven cuts to popular

services and a resulting growth - in membership dissatisfaction.

The reduction of the services provided by the national denominational offices - and the precipitous fractioning of national consensus over what types of services should be offered - contributed to the rise of special interest consultants and advocacy organizations in this period.

In the face of more open conflict over ideological and theological agendas, post-1960s American society saw a tremendous rise in the number and kinds of affinity and special-interest groups in general. And sure enough - these types of groups also caught on within denominations, too.

Within the Presbyterian Church, some of these groups organized to meet perceived needs not met by the denomination's programming, and others were actually formed to purposely oppose the denomination's programs and positions!



The Rise and Fossilization of the Regulatory Agency Model

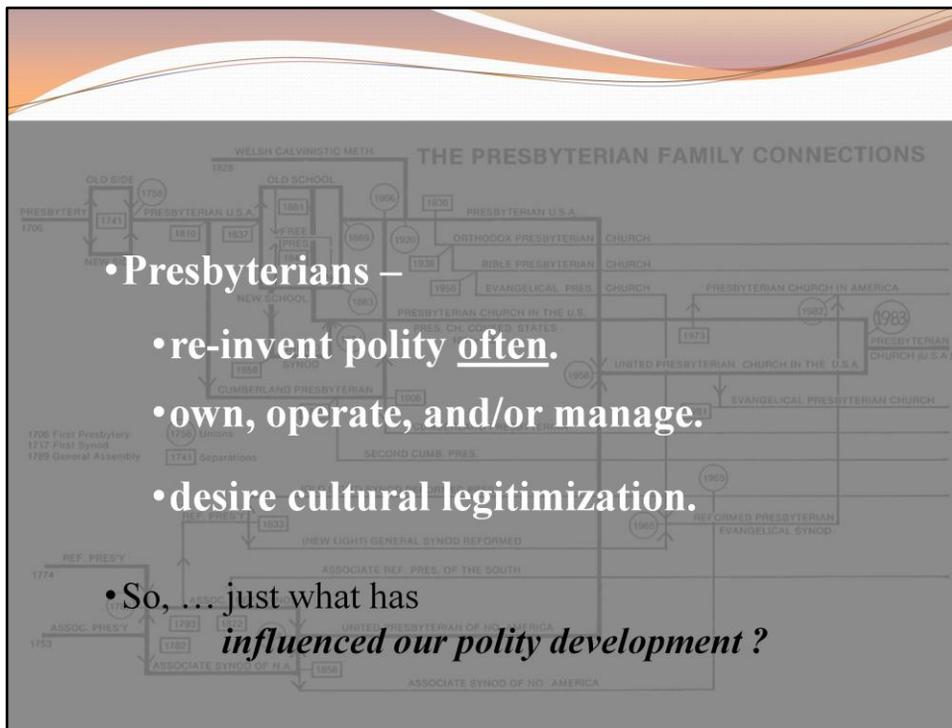
The national denominational structure (overall by then, the largest and most expensive bureaucracy the church had ever known) was competing with these special interest groups for the now- *limited and declining* pool of financial resources. Craig and James observe: *“when denominational leaders find they no longer have adequate educational resources or persuasive powers to influence social and ecclesiastical change, they attempt to mandate it through regulation.”*

Conflict and disappointment bred and flourished when, in an increasingly pluralistic world, denominational policies reflected political and theological agendas that represented the desires and values of some particular segments of the church - *but not the whole church.*

Conflict and frustration bloomed when the regulatory church *mandated practices that neither the denomination nor its grassroots could afford.* (The “unfunded mandate” eventually becomes a sign of the regulatory model - failing.)

These growing , institutional regulatory habits were presided over by bureaucrats in a bureaucracy that took on a life of its own and sought to preserve itself as an institution.

All of these polity changes – large and small, radical and incremental - were institutionalized in the Constitutions of the mainline Presbyterian churches. And change continued. In just the three decades since the 1983 re-join of the *Presbyterian Church in the U.S.* and the *United Presbyterian Church in the USA* - that resulted in our denomination (and its new Constitution), we have seen well over 300 amendments to all of the parts of our *Book of Order*, the addition of our eleventh confession, **A Brief Statement of Faith** (commemorating the 1983 re-join) to our *Book of Confessions*, a proposed re-write of the Heidelberg Confession which failed to get out of the 218th GA, – and the proposed addition of a twelfth confession, which was narrowly rejected in the presbyteries' voting this past summer.



So with these three factors in mind,

- Presbyterians in America have had a great deal of opportunity to re-invent how they govern their church.
- Presbyterians (and especially, Presbyters) in America have always owned, operated, and/or managed American industry.
- The Presbyterian have always had an intense desire for legitimization in the eyes of the ambient culture.

... if we want to understand our polity, the question becomes: what has *influenced the development of the polity of God’s Church On Earth – in America?*

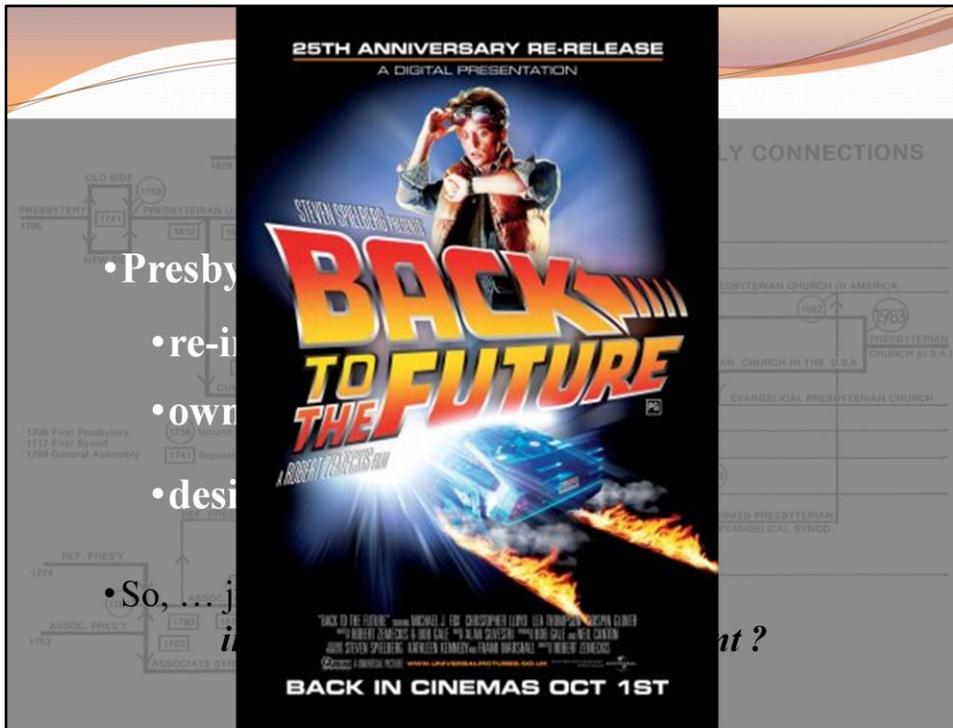
The *Bible?* – or the *surrounding organizational culture?*

With a fully regulatory polity model in its one-size-fits-all processes firmly emplaced, the Book of Order had swollen to 495 pages over its development.

Thus, the stage was set for a radical change to the “practices” part of our constitution: The *Book of Order*.

Time to change! Time to get back to basics. Time to let local counsels determine their own processes for “how” stuff gets done – and retain in the constitution only the standards of “what” needs to be done.

We find both God and the Devil – in the details...



I think that we will find that we are really going ... **Back to the Future!**

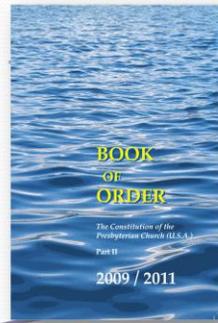
We will cover lots more stuff as we look at our polity, so strap on those seatbelts – and -- Here we go!

The PC(USA) Constitution

Form of
Government

Directory
for Worship

Rules of
Discipline

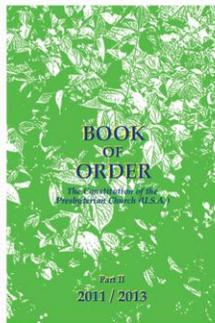


Foundations of
Presbyterian
Polity

Form of
Government

Directory
for Worship

Rules of
Discipline



The old < Part Two > the new

Thus, the stage was set for a radical change to the “practices” part of our constitution: The *Book of Order*.

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

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

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

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

As you know, our previous, 495 page *Book of Order* had three parts:

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

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

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

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

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

pcusa.org/formofgovernment

NEW FORM OF GOVERNMENT

[Home](#) > New Form of Government

New Form of Government becomes effective July 10, 2011

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



PC(USA) Home

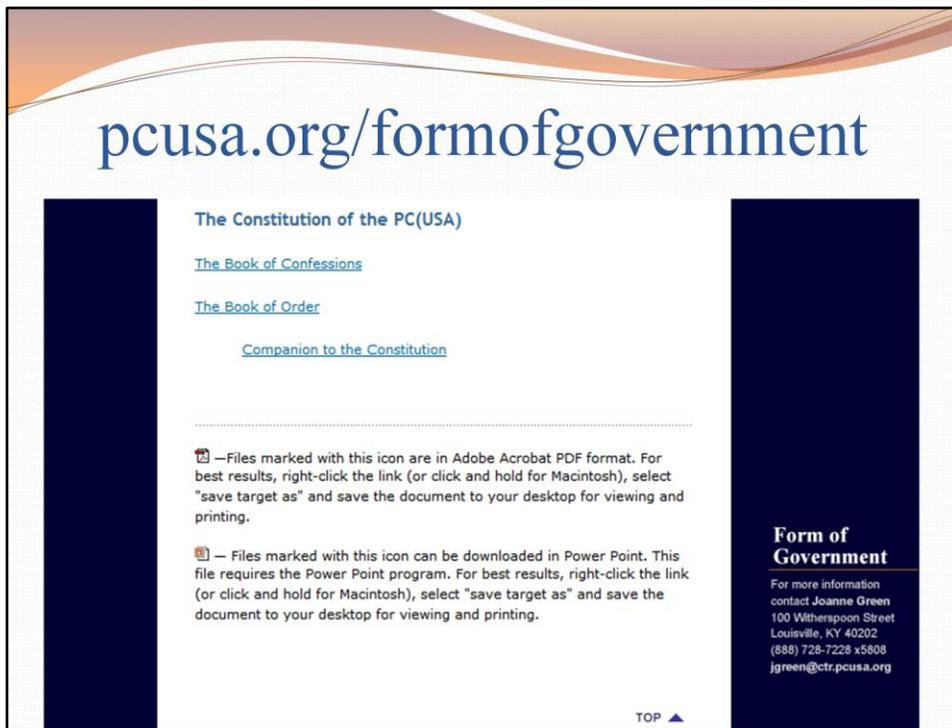
Search PC(USA)

[Task Force blog](#)



But first, please write down this website URL.

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



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

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

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



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

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

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

Again, I have them on my netbook.

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

Well, lets get to those details.

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

Foundations of Presbyterian Polity

The Mission of the Church

- God's mission in Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church
- "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic"
- Marks/Notes of the true, Reformed Church
- Great Ends of the Church
- Commitment to unity in diversity

The **Foundations of Presbyterian Polity** reduces the previous **Form of Government's** first four chapters with a 15% net content reduction, made *primarily* through re-expression of concepts.

The content looks like confessional or theology stuff, because it is the scriptural basis for ecclesiastical polity – an expression of God's direction on how to "church."

Watch the graphic at the bottom of the slide as it shows how the this new book builds the breadth and depth of the theological foundation of our polity. The graphic captures the Task Force's notion that "polity" is the architecture – or blueprint -- of mission, not the mission itself.

Chapter One is about the Mission of the Church, and deals with our core theological commitments. It draws heavily on the *concepts* in Chapters 1, Preliminary Principles, 3, The Church and Its Mission, and 4, The Church and Its Unity, of our previous Form of Government, generally re-writing and re-ordering the *text* of these three chapters.

The chapter – indeed, the entire polity of the church – begins with the confession that the Triune God is engaged through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in a mission of creation, redemption, and transformation of lives, societies, and the whole of creation. The Church, created by God's mission in the world, exists to bear witness to and to participate in that mission. We affirm that Jesus Christ is the only

Lord and head of the Church. This chapter then makes four statements about the Church that echo our values.

The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity understands the Church...

1. to be the **body of Christ**, and a community called to faith, hope, love, and witness
2. to be “**one, holy, catholic, and apostolic**” – the marks of the Church from the Nicene Creed
3. to
 - proclaim to all people the good news through **proclamation of the Word**,
 - sharing with all people the grace of God through **administration of the sacraments**, and
 - calling all people to a **common life of discipleship through ecclesiastical discipline**

(these are the Notes of the true Church from the Scots Confession (Chapter XVIII). [These are important later in the Form of Government Chapter 3, where they provide the framework for discussing the responsibilities of the four councils of the church.]

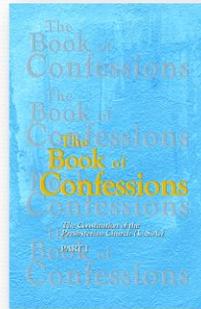
4. to work toward the six "**great ends**" or *purposes of the church* (as they are termed in this chapter).

The final section of this chapter focuses on the Church’s openness to God's Spirit as it seeks constant reformation, broader ecumenicity, and greater commitment to unity and diversity.

Foundations of Presbyterian Polity

The Church and Its Confessions

- **Current G-2.0000, almost verbatim**
- **The confessions in the life of the PC(USA)**



Chapter Two is about the Church and Its Confessions – which underlay all of our practice – as the church faced difficult problems through its age.

It outlines our commitment to Christian, Protestant, and Reformed creeds and confessions, understanding them as efforts by the Church to articulate universal truths of the gospel from within particular historical moments.

It lists the confessions, details the Book, and tells us how to use them. Your worship committee should live in this chapter!

Its contents are almost word-for-word the contents of chapter two, The Church and Its Confessions, in the previous Form of Government.

Foundations of Presbyterian Polity

Principles of Order and Government

- **Historic Principles of Church Order (1789)**
- **Historic Principles of Church Government (1797)**

Chapter Three lays out the Historic Principles of Order and Government, which has been fundamental to our polity since 1789, and gathers the familiar “Historic Principles of Church Government” (previously G-1.0400) and the “Principles of Presbyterian Government” (previously G-4.0301) in a single statement (F-3.02).

Again, though it draws heavily on the *concepts* in the previous Chapters 1, Preliminary Principles, and 4, The Church and Its Unity, of our previous Form of Government – it generally re-writes and re-orders the *text* of these two chapters.

This new chapter also clarifies the relationship between the Foundations and the rest of the *Book of Order*, indicating that provisions of any part of the Constitution are to be interpreted in light of the whole Constitution – an historic and foundational concept of our practice also resident in our previous Form of Government.

Form of Government



Turning to the second book – the **Form of Government**, it takes the remaining 14 chapters of the previous Form of Government (G-5 - G-18), and presents them in 6 chapters – reducing the previous 117 page treatment of the concepts presented in these fourteen chapters of nuts-and-bolts (one size fits all), process guidance by 78% to 26 pages – primarily by removing the “process-detail” stuff to the Advisory Handbooks’ challenge-questions to the councils, so the councils can beef-up their Manuals of Operation to assure that they cover all the bases -- from their local perspective.

What is not removed is also re-ordered and re-expressed in a more “principal” form – rather than as process-details.

Form of Government

Chapter 1: Congregations and Membership



Now, watch the graphic on these slides show how the new **Form of Government** builds the church on the **Foundation of Presbyterian Polity** we just reviewed – how it extends the ecclesiastical walls to their height and width and defines the pitch and coverage of our covenantal roof – but leaves the “finishing touches” on the outside of the building and the “arrangement of the furniture” inside the building to needs of the local situation.

Chapter One of the new **Form of Government** covers material previously found in G-5.0000, The Church and Its Members, and G-7.0000, The Particular Church.

The chapter begins with an affirmation of our Presbyterian form of connectional government. It affirms that although the congregation is the basic unit of mission in the church, and that although a congregation possesses all the gifts necessary to be the church, it asserts that a congregation is of itself an insufficient form of the church. We need the relationships we have through presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly to be the church more fully.

This chapter also includes many practical matters that provide the framework for understanding the life and work of a congregation:

1. How a congregation is organized.
2. The meaning of membership, including a member’s involvement in the church’s ministry.

3. The categories of membership.
4. Matters related to congregational meetings, including business which properly may be conducted.



Chapter Two provides the framework for understanding the call to leadership in the church.

It holds material primarily from three different chapters of the previous book in this new Chapter (G-6.000, The Church and Its Officers, G-11.000, The Presbytery, and G-14.000, Ordination, Certification, and Commissioning – with a smidge from G-15.0202, Recognition Of Ordination).

It recognizes that all members of the church are “ministers” of Jesus Christ – but some are set aside to specific ministries.

“Ordered Ministry” is the term that replaces “office” or “officer.” This change is a way of affirming our commitment to two basic notions in Reformed faith about the Church:

1. that all baptized persons are called to ministry, not merely those who are elected as deacons, elders, and ministers; and
2. that the Church sets aside – or “sets into order” - the ministry of some to equip the whole people of God for the ministry of reconciliation.

The ordered ministries are the ones we are familiar with in the church. Each is described with a phrase summarizing the essence of the specific, ordered ministry:

1. **Deacons**, who exercise the ministry of compassion and service,

2. Ruling elders, who exercise the ministry of discernment and governance,
and

3. Teaching elders, who exercise the ministry of the Word and Sacrament.

The latter two terms – ruling and teaching elders – are used to lift up the essential parity between these two ordered ministries.

The chapter also contains provisions for preparation for all ordered ministry, as well as two additional areas of service: Commissioned Ruling Elders to a limited pastoral service – (we previously called them “commissioned lay pastors”) – and certified church workers, including Certified Christian Educators, Musicians, and Administrators.

Form of Government

Chapter 3: Councils

Proclamation of the Word

Administration of the Sacraments

Ecclesiastical discipline



Chapter Three deals with the Councils of the Church, and covers material previously in G-9.000 through G-13.0000 -- Governing Bodies, The Session, The Presbytery, The Synod, and The General Assembly.

This chapter provides the framework for understanding the role of councils in the life of the church and the specific functions of each council of the church.

“Councils” is the term that replaces “governing body.” ‘Governing’ is only part of what sessions, presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly do; more importantly, each is a gathering of the Church’s theological and spiritual leaders for the purpose of discerning the will of Christ and guiding the church in following that will. Throughout its history, the Church has called such gatherings “councils.”

This chapter begins with a section of general principles common to all councils, such as matters of participation and representation, officers, meetings, administration and funding of mission, administrative review, committees and commissions, and other matters. Then the responsibilities of each council is presented, organized around the *Notes of the Reformed Church* (from the Scots Confession) first presented in F-1.0303 and repeated at the end of G-3.0101:

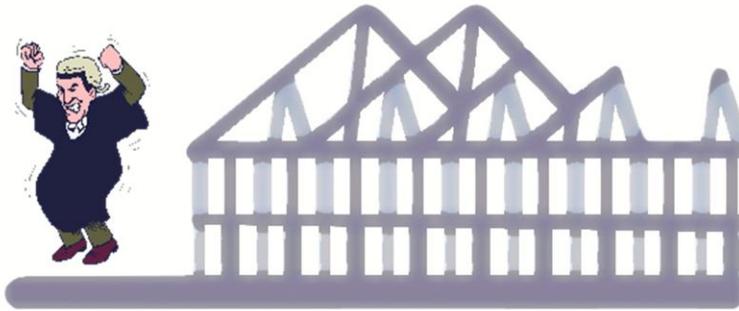
1. the proclamation of the Word,
2. the administration of the sacraments, and
3. the nurture of a covenant community of disciples through ecclesiastical

discipline.

This organization - around the *Notes of the Reformed Church* - is meant to reinforce that we are engaged in the church's mission given by God in all we do as Councils of the church. Instead of the previous long lists of tasks of governing bodies, the work of each Council is described in terms of how it contributes to the whole.

Form of Government

Chapter 4: Church and Civil Authorities



Chapter Four deals with the relationship between the Church and Civil Authority.

Its contents are the same as those of previous G-8.0000, The Church and Its Property – matters related to incorporation and trustees, as well as church property – and the addition of the language about confidentiality and mandatory reporting that is previously in G-6.0000, The Church and Its Officers.

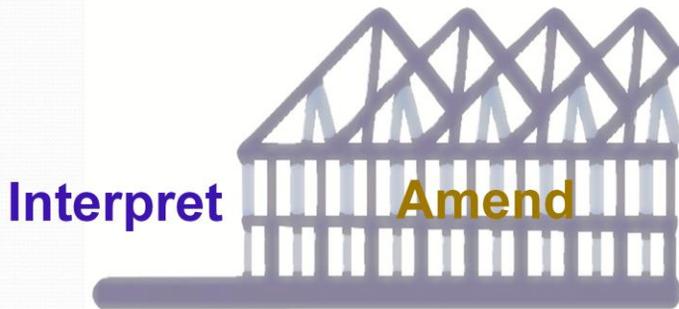


Chapter Five is about Ecumenicity (say that five times, fast) and Church Union, the material covered in Chapters 15, Relationships, 16 Union Churches, and 17, Union Governing Bodies, of the previous Form of Government.

Also included here are the various ways in which the PCUSA relates to other denominations: correspondence, full communion, ecumenical statements; full organic union; union presbyteries; and various forms of joint congregational witness.

Form of Government

Chapter 6: Interpreting and Amending the Constitution



Finally, Chapter Six covers Interpreting and Amending the Constitution, and is the same material as in the previous G-18, Amendments.

Also in this last chapter is the description of the Advisory Committee on the Constitution which has been moved here from its previous location in G-13.0112, Advisory Committee on the Constitution.



- **What Changes for the
the person in the pew...or**

Who cares!

So what do these changes look like to the person in the pew – well, they are likely to say: “who cares” – they will notice very little difference!



What Changes for the Jane Pewsitter

Changes in wording:

1. Elder → “ruling elder”

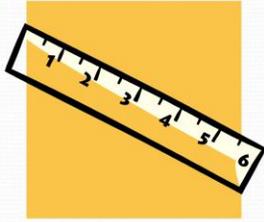
So what changes for us and our work?

You will see and hear some wording changes. “Elders,” those elected to serve on the session of local churches, people like me, will now be described as “Ruling Elders.” This is how they were named in Books of Order long ago in our heritage.

The language in the Form of Government says that “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.”



“Ruling Elder”



← This...

...not this →



In short, this kind of ruler... not this kind of ruler.



What Changes for the Joe Pewsetter

Changes in wording:

1. Elder → “ruling elder”
2. Minister of Word and Sacrament → “teaching elder”
3. MGB → “mid-council”
4. “Stated Clerk” remains

What other wording changes will you see?

Ministers can now be referred to as “teaching elders.” Some may jump on this and you need to recognize that when someone talks about a Teaching Elder, they are someone we would describe as an “Ordained Pastor” or “minister-member” – or just “the Rev.”

So, now -- as “Ruling Elders” are what used to be just “Elders”– and before that were ... “Ruling Elders.”

“Teaching Elders” are what used to be “Ministers of the Word and Sacrament” – and before that were ... “Teaching Elders.”

See where we are going with these?

And, as we discussed earlier, what we used to call “governing bodies,” (the Session, the Presbytery, the Synod, and the General Assembly), are now called “councils,” so “middle governing bodies,” or “MGBs,” are now “mid-councils”.

Finally, “stated clerk” remains as the one position that all councils above the session must have – and it retains its historic name, and on session, the Clerk

of Session remains the Clerk of Session, so the clerks are at least, one constant – from before – and before that.



What Changes for the Presbytery

**Flexibility for the presbyteries may mean
inconsistency across the denomination:**

- **Executive Presbyter**
- **Committee on Ministry (COM)**
- **Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM)**
- **Interim and Associate Pastors may succeed to
become Pastor of a church**

The Reverend Jack Young, the President and CEO of the Texas Foundation (sort of a Presbyterian Foundation and bank for the Synod of the Sun – which covers Texas) – and formerly a long time rep from the Board of Pensions, who spoke at the recent Administrative Professional National Conference with me (and who graciously shared the slides that have the green book in their corner with me) notes:

Several terms the we have used in various places in our work are no longer required to be used. Fewer and fewer presbyteries have “Executive Presbyters” anymore, with newer titles like regional facilitator, general presbyter, and even transitional poet (yes, really, “transitional poet”) this title is being gradually replaced in practice. We cannot assume when someone gives a goofy title that they have misunderstood the question. It used to be that if someone told me that they were a transitional poet, I would ask if they knew about our mental health benefits. Now, they’re probably telling the truth.

We also used to be able to reliably depend on every presbytery having a Committee on Ministry and a Committee on Preparation for ministry. These were places where our work tied into theirs. For example, our original vision of who should come to a Regional Benefits Consultation from a presbytery was the Stated clerk, the Executive Presbyter, the

COM chair, and the CPM chair. What do we do with a presbytery that only has one of those four positions? Another example is us sending out communications. We used to be able to send information to an executive presbyter and trust that that person would disseminate our information to the places where it needed to go. As more presbyteries eliminate professional staff they depend on volunteers, who have less capacity to perform these sorts of functions. And, with my Demographic Study hat on, I can tell you that the number of presbytery staff in the Benefits Plan is down 11% since 2005, so this is a real change happening, not just speculation.

Now, there are many presbyteries that still have executives by some sort of identifiable title and many presbyteries will retain these two committees, at least for now, but they are no longer required.

In order to deal with this new environment, we will have to spot changes, identify trends, and carefully document what we are finding.



What Changes for the Congregation

Flexibility for them means inconsistency for us:

- **Interim and Associate Pastors may succeed to become Pastor of a church**

Another place where inconsistency may reign is in the succession of interim and associate pastors to become the pastor of a church. It is not prohibited by the constitution anymore, so it will be allowed in some places, and, undoubtedly, not in others.



What Didn't Change

- 1. Jesus is still the head of the church**
- 2. Mandated Participation**

Lots of things didn't change. The two most important ones, as far as (Jack is) concerned, are that Jesus is still head of the church and those in installed pastoral positions (pastors and associate pastors) are still mandated to participate in the Benefits Plan. (G-2.0804)

A change of mindset

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

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

OK, these are the denominations slides – but my words.

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

Absorb slide

Decisions Congregations Need to Make

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

Now, here is what your congregation needs to do.

These key organizational determinants are no longer defined in the new Book – so get your house in order with these actions so it can actually hold meetings and do business.

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

Decisions Sessions Need to Make

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

Now, here is what your session needs to do.

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

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

So, where do **we go** from here?

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

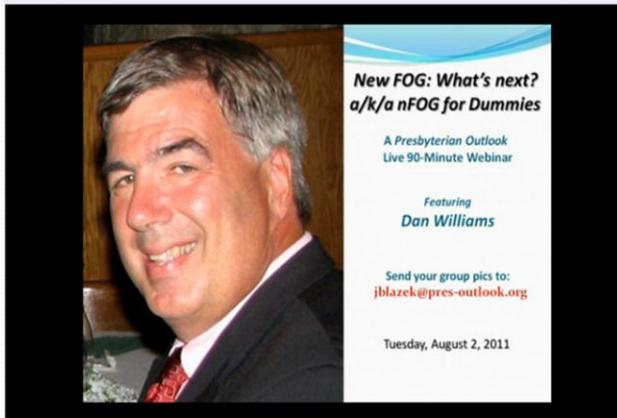
- Fix what we have to so we can continue to do business – now!
- Fix the longer term stuff – later!

Absorb slide

Responses to newFOG ...

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

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



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

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

Here are a few highlights...

The First Thing



▶ Relax!

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

Absorb slide

I agree!

The **BIG** Thing



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



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

It is foundational here.

Top 10 things to do sooner ...

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

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

Top 10 things to do later ...

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

Then do these – later ... but not that much later!

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

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

Spiritual (Ecclesiastical)

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

Civil, Non-profit

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

Brothers and Sisters in Christ –

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

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

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

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

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

clause is included.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

... do your governance documents say ...

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

Here is a test...

Do your governance documents say ...

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

-- or --

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

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

Time to change it.

Here is my suggested process ...

- **Attend to the good order, housekeeping stuff!**
Then ...
- **First**, locate, open, and study the civil governance documents of your congregation
- **Second**, locate, open, and study your state's governing law
- **Third**, locate, open, and study the sections on ecclesiastical governance
- **Fourth**, note every place ...

As a committee of the whole --

Step Zero! Be sure that you can have a meeting at all! Fix the quorum and notice definitions in your governance documents for your congregation, session, and corporation. *Then ...*

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

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

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

Fourth, note every place in your civil and ecclesiastical governance documents where they directly quote or refer to specific paragraphs of the denominational constitution

that was in force when the document were brought into being and/or was filed with the state.

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

Here is my suggested process ...

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

As a committee of the whole --

...

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

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

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

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

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



So, where do **we go** from here?

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

Even in these times of great uncertainty over all of this,

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

... in the words of that great American Astronaut and Theologian, Buzz Lightyear:

“to infinity ... and beyond!”



Thank you for your attention and participation.

If you have any questions or requests, please email me at: Art@AGRitter.com and we can arrange help for you or your church at your convenience.