

INTRODUCING



Evangelical
Covenant
Order
OF PRESBYTERIANS

ECO is committed
to growing and planting
flourishing churches
that make disciples
of Jesus Christ.

The Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians



The session of First Presbyterian Church of Dunellen is requesting that the Presbytery of Elizabeth dismiss our congregation to the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians (ECO). We believe that ECO is not simply a safe harbor that First Presbyterian can escape to from the unresolvable theological controversies in the PC(USA), but a new and vital denomination that is closely aligned with our theology, vision, and culture as a church.

I. THE PROCESS OF REACHING THIS RECOMMENDATION

In the process of seeking a new denominational home for our congregation, the session started with a series of requirements for our new denominational home. Among these are:

- The denomination must be solidly evangelical in theology, upholding the inspiration of scripture as the written Word of God, authoritative in all matters of faith and life.
- The denomination must have a clear understanding that God’s plan is for all people to live in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness.
- The denomination must uphold the sanctity of human life from conception until natural death.
- The denomination must have a reformed theological foundation, and preferably a Presbyterian form of government.
- The denomination must be forward looking and missional in its priorities for ministry.
- The denomination must fit not only the theology but the “culture” of our congregation, meaning it will celebrate women in leadership, cultural and ethnic diversity, a variety of worship styles, and recognize the full range of spiritual gifts alive in the church today.

Three denominations were considered:

- The Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC)
- The Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC)
- The Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians (ECO)

The Evangelical Covenant Church:

The ECC caught our interest because it has evangelical theology, a twenty-year history of growth, and a commitment to multicultural ministry. Nevertheless, it is neither reformed in theology nor Presbyterian in government. As a result, even if it desired to do so, the Presbytery of Elizabeth would be unable to dismiss us to the ECC because presbyteries may only dismiss to a “reformed body.”

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church:

The EPC has several factors that weighed in its favor. It is clearly reformed, and is even a member of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. It is Presbyterian. And, over the past five

years many churches from the PC(USA) have transferred their membership into the EPC. However, the EPC also has some liabilities for our congregation:

- a) While the EPC allows women to serve as elders and pastors, it has repeatedly affirmed that this is not an essential. In practice the EPC is ambivalent about women in leadership, and we fear that leaving the PC(USA) which has decided to allow local discretion regarding sexuality, to go into the EPC which approaches gender in the same way, could be trading one controversy for another.
- b) Theologically, the EPC holds strict adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. The Westminster documents, written in the early 1600s, are reformed confessions in a strict Calvinist tradition, and have much to teach Presbyterians today. However, the recurring theme of double predestination (God has predestined some people to eternal damnation in Hell), and that suggestion that salvation is not a necessary consequence of faith, is likely to be problematic for many of our leaders, both of our pastors included.
- c) Culturally, the EPC is in the midst of a major redefinition of itself as a result of an influx of congregations and pastors from the PC(USA) over the past five years. Nevertheless, there is a sense that it was born by defining what it was against, and is only now trying to come to a fuller vision of its future.

II. The Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians

ECO is a brand new denomination, established in January 2012 as an outgrowth of the Fellowship of Presbyterians. While ECO is closely aligned with the Fellowship, it is a distinct and separate denomination. It was born out of a group of pastors who came to the conclusion that that evangelicals within the PC(USA) needed to find a new way of being the church together (Appendix 1 – The Fellowship of Presbyterians “White Paper”). They envisioned a denomination that:

- understands that the ministry of the church occurs primarily at the congregational level and sees the denomination existing to serve the congregation,
- has a clearly stated and mutually accepted theological center so that congregations and pastors can work together in an atmosphere of trust, encouragement, transparency, and accountability,
- is focused on the advancement of the gospel rather than the preservation of the institution.

ECO is both reformed and evangelical in its theology, as can be seen in its theological position paper and essentials (Appendix 2). It upholds the sanctity of life from conception until natural death, and upholds biblical sexual purity.

Vision Statement: *ECO is committed to growing and planting flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ.*

The name “Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians” and the acronym “ECO” reflect this theological and relational commitment:



ECO seeks to serve the ministry and mission of Christ’s Church. Our name represents a three-fold commitment to make disciples of Jesus Christ (Evangelical), connect leaders through accountable biblical relationships founded in God’s grace (Covenant), and committed to a shared way of life together (Order). The acronym ECO also speaks to our commitment to strengthen the “ecosystems” of local churches, providing the resources needed to grow, thrive, and reproduce. Just as earthly ecosystems draw richness from the right kind of diversity, ECO is committed to unleashing the ministry gifts of women, men, young leaders, and every ethnicity. ECO’s name also draws from the Greek term *oikos*, meaning ‘household,’ used in the Bible to reference the network of relationships that nurture an individual.

The current leaders are quick to describe ECO as a movement, and stress that ECO is not a safe harbor in which to continue church as usual but in a more theologically pure environment. Rather, it is an emerging, dynamic fellowship of churches seeking to encourage one another and hold one another accountable to fulfilling the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

ECO is beginning its life with a new Form of Government (Appendix 3), while retaining the entire Book of Confessions of the PC(USA). This should make it clear that ECO is truly a “reformed body” into which churches can be dismissed from the PC(USA). The Book of Confessions informs our faith by allowing us to have a “conversation” with believers past as we seek to understand God’s will and relate God’s Word to emerging issues in our lives and world.

The Book of Confessions stands beside the “Essential Tenets” which are a contemporary statement of what ECO believes and to which all ordained leaders must agree. The current version of the “Essential Tenets” is a work in progress, and the theology team is expected to bring a more concise version to ECO’s first national Synod in August 2012 to be ratified by the churches that have already joined the body. The fundamental theology that is expressed will not change, but the way that it is presented should be clearer. (Remember that all of the structure for ECO, including Form of Government, theology paper, benefits and retirement plan have been put together in just six months, and almost exclusively by volunteers.)

ECO has also applied for membership in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

Some differences from the PC(USA) include:

- Small presbyteries of between 10 and 25 churches, where the focus is on mutual worship, encouragement, accountability, and cooperation in ministry, and relationships rather than on politics, bureaucratic process, and procedure
- Minimal structure and government in order to foster flexibility based on trust and mutually agreed upon core beliefs
- Clearly stated essential tenets to which all those seeking ordained office must agree
- While all clergy will have voice at presbytery meetings, only those serving local churches will have vote, along with elder commissioners
- Only two levels of church government above the session – presbyteries and a national synod

Despite its young age, ECO has a full benefits and retirement plan for church staff (Appendix 4 & 5). Highlights include a set premium for medical insurance rather than a premium based on salary. The retirement plan requires each church to invest an amount equal to 10% of the pastor’s salary into a 403b or other defined-contribution retirement savings plan.

ECO requires a simple assessment of 1% of a congregation’s budget for denominational administration, rather than a per capita.

CORE VALUES

The Fellowship of Presbyterians and ECO share a statement of core values, which include:

- Jesus-Shaped Identity
- Biblical Integrity
- Thoughtful Theology
- Accountable Community
- Egalitarian Ministry
- Missional Centrality
- Center-Focused Spirituality
- Leadership Velocity
- Kingdom Vitality

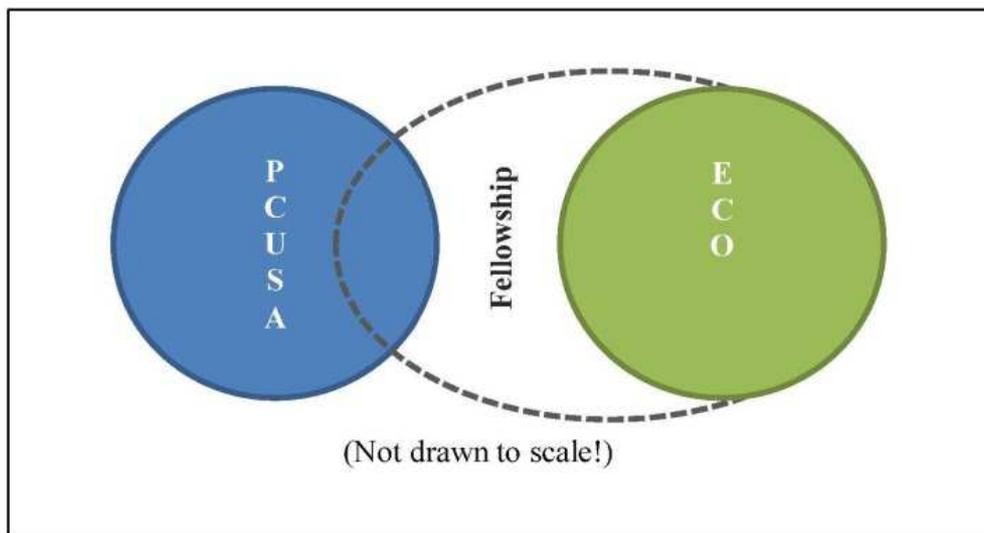
These are expanded on the back cover of both the theology and polity documents.

RELATIONSHIP OF ECO WITH THE FELLOWSHIP AND THE PC(USA)

The Fellowship of Presbyterians is a group of pastors, elders, and churches who are in a covenantal relationship with one another for accountability and encouragement in ministry. The Fellowship is both evangelical and reformed. Membership is available to anyone or any church in any denomination that share its core beliefs and purpose, and who sign the Fellowship Covenant (Appendix 6).

ECO is a new denomination that was officially launched on January 19 in Orlando. It was born out of The Fellowship of Presbyterians, and has a symbiotic relationship with The Fellowship. In other words, all churches and individuals who are part of ECO are part of The Fellowship. But, The Fellowship also includes churches and individuals who are part of the PC(USA) but not a part of ECO.

At the moment, ECO is being led by an interim board of directors drawn from the Fellowship of Presbyterians. ECO will elect its own board at the next gathering, August 22-24, 2012.



SUMMARY:

Although ECO is a new denomination, the covenanting conference in Orlando in January felt like the reunion gathering of a long-time group of friends. The five worship services moved from the very traditional to the very contemporary, and all were vibrant, Christ-centered, Spirit-filled, and transforming. The opening sermon by John Ortberg provided a powerful, biblically anchored start to this new body. It is well worth watching, and is available on the ECO website. There was an overwhelming sense of optimism and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The forward looking nature of ECO was repeatedly emphasized. Many speakers made a point of saying that “we are not angry” at the PC(USA), despite believing that it is “deathly ill.” Any movement born out of anger and bitterness will bear the fruit of anger and bitterness. As evangelical believers, we were called to repentance for our part in the sickness and disintegration of the PC(USA), and for the ways we have sometimes treated those with whom we disagree. No disparaging comments were heard about any other group of Christians – not overtly and not even in jest. An attitude of graciousness permeated the meetings.

Throughout this process, the session has been committed to moving no faster, and no slower than God. We believe that the birth of this new denomination is an answer to prayer, and the time to move is now. The framework of ECO is strong, and together with the other like-minded congregations joining this movement we prayerfully hope to build a new community of churches that serves Jesus Christ faithfully and effectively in the 21st century. We believe that we see God is moving, and with eyes-wide-open faith, are eager to dive in where the living waters flow!

Time for Something New

White Paper

January 7, 2011

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

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

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

Many Presbyteries and Synods are in financial difficulties. Aid-receiving Presbyteries are soon to lose that aid and likely lose significant staff. The way those courts of the church have functioned is soon to change. The GA has reduced staff steadily for the past 10 years. These reductions seem to signal a loss of trust within most of the PCUSA. It is very hard to measure the future effectiveness of the emerging leadership in the PCUSA,

given how few are under 40 years of age, it seems likely that it will be smaller than the generation now retiring.

The issue of homosexual ordination has been the flashpoint of controversy for the last 35 years. Yet, that issue – with its contentious “yes” and “no” votes - masks the more important issues that the PCUSA faces. Those larger, more nuanced issues revolve around differing understanding of scripture, authority, Christology (both the person and the work of Christ), the extent of salvation (creeping universalism), and a broader set of moral issues around which fracture lines appear. There are deep divisions within the PCUSA; opposing sides read different books and journals, attend different conferences, and support different causes. There is no longer a common understanding of what is meant by being “Reformed.” There is a growing sense that the only unity we have left is contained in the property clause and the pension plan. Some feel like per capita is a club used against them, while others feel locked into institutional captivity by the property clause. Outside of Presbytery meetings, we mostly exist in separate worlds. While everyone wearies of the battles over ordination, these battles divert us from a host of issues that affect the way our denomination fails to attract either young believers or those outside the faith. Thus, we age and shrink and become increasingly irrelevant.

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

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

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

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

Values:

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

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

1) An Association of Congregations

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

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

2) New Synod/Presbyteries

In the near future we will need a place within the PCUSA to exist with freedom to express our values with a freedom from the expected ordination changes that will exist in the PCUSA. More importantly, we long for Presbyteries where we have theological and missional consensus rather than fundamental disagreement over so many core issues of theology. We need COM and CPM functions that express who we are. We recognize that invitation to the next generation of leadership must be structured differently than the current model, which unintentionally weeds out entrepreneurial persons desperately needed for tomorrow's church. Beyond those functions, much of the planning of how the

Synod/Presbyteries will depend upon how many congregations join together. Many functions, like curriculum and mission relationships, have become less centralized already. We will begin work with the Middle Governing Bodies Commission, searching for ways to be this new entity within the PCUSA. Likely several changes to *The Book of Order* will be needed to step fully into this reality.

3) Possible New Reformed Body

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

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

4) Re-Creation of the PCUSA

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

Short Term Goals:

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

Conclusion:

Any model that includes an entity outside the PCUSA does mean fewer remaining congregations, pastors and elders to fight the challenges of the PCUSA. Votes will swing in directions which had not been desirable before. For many this is a simple

acknowledgement that fighting is not the way we choose to proceed. We hope to discover and model what a new “Reformed body” might look like in the coming years. Our goal is not institutional survival but effective faithfulness, fully participating in the world-wide church. We invite you to consider joining us, stepping faithfully, boldly and joyfully into the work for which God has called us.

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

THE FELLOWSHIP
Theology
PROJECT



THE
Fellowship
OF PRESBYTERIANS

Foreward

As the theological work group considered our charge to help the Fellowship and the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians (ECO) clarify theological identity, we discovered three tasks. The first task requires looking to the past. The second task requires a new statement. The third task requires commitment for the future. Each of the three tasks requires us to re-covenant.

The first task is to identify the statements of our confessional heritage that will connect us with the one holy catholic apostolic church and express our distinctively Reformed convictions within that church. We propose the collection of confessional documents in the *Book of Confessions* as the appropriate theological expression at this moment in our life together. These creeds, confessions, and catechisms have much needed wisdom of proven worth for us, and can uniquely serve as the central documents for a new Fellowship that strives to retain meaningful connections among congregations, some of whom will be within the PC(USA), some of whom will be in the ECO.

Critical to this first task is clear commitment to our confessional heritage in fresh and robust ways that announces what **we** mean when **we** say **we** adopt these documents, and defined accountability for keeping that covenant. The documents that compose the *Book of Confessions* are not seen in our rear view mirrors as road markers of where the church has been; they are seen through our windshield as faithful and sure guides for our perilous road ahead.

Casual affirmation of our theological heritage by our generation has severely weakened our worship and witness. We are squandering the gifts our confessional heritage could give us. We confess we have not been good stewards of the Faith. We must now reengage the Faith of the Church in ways that are more deeply committed to its truth and thus its value in ordering our life toward faithfulness. We have a strong conviction that our current theological failures are not the failures of the bishops at Nicea, the divines at Westminster, or the

confessors at Barmen; the failures are our own. Now is the time to confess it and strengthen our theological covenant.

We recognize that the Fellowship and/or the ECO may, after a time of building and testing theological consensus among us, alter this judgment. But it is our opinion that the theological consensus among evangelicals has not been tested and, further, that to presume a consensus where one does not exist is to repeat one of the most significant theological failures of our generation. As members of the ordered ministries of the Church, we have agreed to the *Book of Confessions*. Let us keep that covenant that we may be found faithful to any new theological covenant we will make.

The first paper invites us to see the wisdom in reaffirming the creeds, confessions, and catechisms of the *Book of Confessions*, and invites us to say and live our confessions in ways that are profoundly faithful.

The second task is to identify and articulate the essentials of the Reformed Faith as expressed in these documents. To this end, we offer a new naming and explication of those essentials. This task helps us keep the renewed covenant we make in the first task.

While the value and role of the essentials have long been debated; the essentials themselves have not been identified for debate. Recent generations have acknowledged their presence – this is stated clearly in every officer’s ordination questions – and yet simultaneously we have not bothered to locate them. We are impoverished for their absence.

We are also too broad. A collection of confessions lends itself to the wisdom of identifying what is essential within them. Our theological ideas and inclinations as a church are far too diffuse to unite us. We reject the proposition that theology divides. Instead, we affirm the proposition that truth tends toward unity, yet we are the first generation of Presbyterian officers who do not have in the same ordination question

the words truth and unity. Identifying essentials necessarily and rightly focuses our theological conversation and our life together.

This paper's depth may be challenging for some. We acknowledge this and we encourage you to read it more than once, and to read it together with others. This is a teaching moment. Let us use this to deepen our knowledge of the Reformed Faith.

The second paper invites us to discuss, debate, deliberate, and finally to decide what truths reside in the heart of our Faith and what is the proper Reformed expressions of those truths.

The third task is to identify the theological practices that will sustain us for the next generation and which we must, therefore, commit to and sustain. This will help us preserve and advance the work of the first two tasks.

Structures for doing theological work and for keeping theological integrity need to be established. Theology is not only to be established in our minds and become formative for our hearts, it is to be embodied in our manner of life and in the structures of the church. Companies of Pastors and Orders of Elders need to be formed. Teaching and Ruling Elders must relearn

how to fulfill their missional callings in light of the Faith of the Church. Our faithfulness depends on it. We strongly propose that new structures be formed for the purpose of making a contribution to the theological well-being of the church so that our Faith can make its full contribution to the mission of the Church.

We propose the establishment of theological friendships in communities of mutual encouragement and accountability. This is an invitation for all ruling and teaching elders to commit to disciplined ways of life together.

Three things are necessary for the theological work of the church to flourish and in return for theology to help the church to flourish – adoption of theological confession with utmost sincerity, articulation of the confession with great clarity, and forming structures that sustain those convictions.

These three papers propose these three necessary tasks and invite us to covenant toward those ends. We offer them in the emerging work of The Fellowship of Presbyterians and the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians.

God help us.

Theology Taskforce

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Confessional Standards

The appropriate confessional standards for the Fellowship/the ECO are the creeds, confessions, and catechisms in the *Book of Confessions* – The Nicene Creed, the Apostles’ Creed, the Scots Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Second Helvetic Confession, the Westminster Confession, the Westminster Shorter Catechism and the Westminster Larger Catechism, the Theological Declaration of Barmen, the Confession of 1967, and A Brief Statement of Faith. This collection is theologically faithful, ecclesially appropriate, and organizationally suitable. The *Book of Confessions* contains the confessions that we have taken vows to receive. It also embodies the Reformed understanding of the way confessions function in the life of the church, an understanding that differs from two common approaches:

Doctrinal Progressives understand the church’s confessional and theological tradition as an evolutionary development of doctrine in which the church’s expression of the gospel becomes richer in each succeeding age. In this view, contemporary theology and new confessions of faith are more developed, better expressed, fuller apprehensions of truth than the faith of previous centuries. *Our way is the way.*

Doctrinal Restorationists understand the church’s theological and confessional tradition as a series of missteps leading to imperfect understanding and inadequate articulation of the gospel. In this view, a particular moment in the church’s confessional and theological tradition, such as the sixteenth century Augsburg Confession or the seventeenth century Westminster standards, is the pure faith of a theological golden age. *Their way is the way.*

The Reformed understanding of the church’s confessional and theological tradition sees contemporary Christians as participants in an enduring theological and doctrinal conversation that shapes the patterns of the church’s faith and life. Communities of believers from every time and place engage in a continuous discussion about the shape of Christian faith and life, an exchange that is maintained through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Today’s church brings its insights into an ongoing dialogue with those who have lived and died the Faith before us. Voices from throughout the church’s life contribute to the interchange – ancient voices that articulate the enduring rule of faith, sixteenth and seventeenth century voices that shape the Reformed tradition, and twentieth century voices that proclaim the church’s faith in challenging contexts. The confessions in the *Book of Confessions* were not arbitrarily included, but were selected to give faithful voice to the whole communion of saints.

The *Book of Confessions* is an appropriate expression of the Reformed commitment to honor our fathers and mothers in the Faith. It begins with two foundational creeds, shared throughout the whole Church. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is the decisive dogmatic articulation of Trinitarian faith. It establishes the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax of Christian theology. The Apostles’ Creed is the baptismal creed that expresses the shared belief of the faithful as persons are incorporated into the body of Christ. Two Reformation confessions, Scots and Second Helvetic, and one Reformation catechism, Heidelberg, give voice to the dawning of the Reformed tradition. The seventeenth century Westminster standards powerfully express God’s sovereignty over all of life. The Theological Declaration of Barmen, the Confession of 1967, and A Brief Statement of Faith articulate the church’s fidelity to the gospel in the midst of uncongenial and sometimes hazardous cultures. These confessions, from widely different contexts, are complementary. They do not sing in unison, but in a rich harmony that glorifies God and deepens our enjoyment of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Are these the only voices that could be included in the church’s theological conversation? No, but they are faithful witnesses to the gospel and appropriate expressions of the Reformed perspective on Christian faith and life. Participating in their colloquy frees us from the narrow prison cell of our own time and place by listening to the voices of our brothers and sisters who struggled to be faithful in diverse circumstances. Through their confessions of faith we are privileged to hear their wisdom in the midst of our own struggle to be faithful. We overhear conversations among our forebears that expand and enrich our apprehension of the gospel. Sometimes we simply listen in on their discussion, at other times we pay particular attention to one of their voices, and many times we find ourselves participating actively in lively instruction.

The questions of our parents in the faith may not be identical to ours, but their different approaches enable us to understand our own questions better. Their answers may not be identical to ours, yet their answers startle us into new apprehensions of the truth. We may sometimes be puzzled by their particular questions or answers, but even that perplexity serves to clarify our own thinking and the shape of our faithfulness. Throughout the conversation we are aware that all councils may err, yet because we are not doctrinal progressives we acknowledge the confessions have a particular authority over us: we are answerable to them before they are answerable to us.

The confessions call the church to account. Because we are not traditionalists, we can be utterly honest about the church's past failings – crusades and inquisitions, easy acceptance of Christendom and easy dismissal of the leadership of women, neglect of evangelistic mission and excess of missionary zeal. Because we are not idealists we can be utterly honest about the church's current failings – marginalization of the sacraments, indifference to theological labor, easy acceptance of cultural morality, neglect of evangelism, and inadequate mission. If we listen to our forebears in the Faith we will hear their hard questions addressed to us. Perhaps then we can be utterly honest about our own accommodations to the culture, our indifference to the proclamation of the gospel, our abandonment of shared conviction and committed community in easy acquiescence to the individualism and localism of our time.

The confessions are not final authorities; Scripture is the authority that measures all doctrinal, confessional, and theological expression. The Reformed tradition has always understood that while confessional standards are subordinate to the Scriptures, they are, nonetheless, standards. They are not lightly drawn up or subscribed to, nor may they be ignored or dismissed. Being questioned by the confessions is not an exercise in servitude, but liberation from the tyranny of the present that enables us to live freely and faithfully within God's will.

As subordinate standards, the confessions are not free-standing authorities. They are subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, who is known through Scripture, the word of God. Subordination to the Lord and to Scripture's witness serves to locate confessional authority, however, not diminish it. The confessions provide reliable guidance to our reading and reception of Scripture, protecting us from self-absorbed interpretation, and opening us to Christ's way, Christ's truth, and Christ's life.

The *Book of Confessions* itself is not problematic. The problem with the *Book of Confessions* is the church's – the *whole* church's – neglect and misuse of its theological treasure. Too often, we have treated the confessions of the church as museum pieces, historical artifacts of what people used to believe long ago and far away. Too many of us have imagined that our own thoughts are sufficient for faithful proclamation of the gospel. We have been guilty of what C.S. Lewis called "chronological snobbery, the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited." We have also been guilty of reducing the confessions to theological and moral law books, selecting disembodied affirmations as elements in a logical proof. Our task is to put misuse of the confessions behind us, engaging in bold, faithful appropriations of the doctrinal and theological wisdom of the *Book of Confessions*, allowing them to enrich our faith and faithfulness.

The church's confessions are not marginal details in the

church's life. The ordination vows made by most deacons, ruling elders, and teaching elders commit us to receive and adopt their essential tenets, and to be instructed, led, and guided by them. Our task is to be faithful to our vows, reading and studying the confessions, learning from them, teaching them, and living out their wisdom. Shared confession of faith shapes any serious community of faith, and the community's ordered ministries bear a particular obligation to order their confession around the church's creeds, confessions, and catechisms. Because confessional seriousness includes mutual responsibility and accountability, the church must be prepared to instruct, counsel with, or even discipline one ordained who rejects the faith expressed in the confessions.

The Fellowship/the ECO cannot imagine that it should or could disavow the Reformed confessional heritage. Whatever the church's confessional and theological failings may be, they are the failings of all of us. The task now is to embody faithful ways of being Presbyterian. The most appropriate footing for a new venture is the faithful doctrinal and theological foundation provided by the creeds, confessions, and catechisms of the *Book of Confessions*.

Essential Tenets

Presbyterians have been of two minds about essential tenets. We recognize that just as there are some central and foundational truths of the gospel affirmed by Christians everywhere, so too there are particular understandings of the gospel that define the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition. All Christians must affirm the central mysteries of the faith, and all those who are called to ordered ministries in a Presbyterian church must also affirm the essential tenets of the Reformed tradition. Recognizing the danger in reducing the truth of the gospel to propositions that demand assent, we also recognize that when the essentials become a matter primarily of individual discernment and local affirmation, they lose all power to unite us in common mission and ministry.

Essential tenets are tied to the teaching of the confessions as reliable expositions of Scripture. The essential tenets call out for explication, not as another confession, but as indispensable indicators of confessional convictions about what Scripture leads us to believe and do. Essential tenets do not replace the confessions, but rather witness to the confessions' common core. This document is thus intended not as a new confession but as a guide to the corporate exploration of and commitment to the great themes of Scripture and to the historic Reformed confessions that set forth those themes.

The great purpose toward which each human life is drawn is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Each member of the church glorifies God by recognizing and naming His glory, which is the manifestation and revelation of His own nature. Each member of the church enjoys God by being so united with Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit as to become a participant in that divine nature, transformed from one degree of glory to another and escorted by Christ into the loving communion of the Trinity. So we confess our faith not as a matter of dispassionate intellectual assent, but rather as an act by which we give God glory and announce our membership in the body of Christ. We trust that when God's glory is so lifted up and when His nature is thus made manifest in the life of the body, the church will be a light that draws people from every tribe and tongue and nation to be reconciled to God.

I. God's Word: The Authority for Our Confession

The clearest declaration of God's glory is found in His Word, both incarnate and written. The Son eternally proceeds from the Father as His Word, the full expression of the Father's nature, and since in the incarnation the Word became flesh all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are offered to His dis-

ciples. The written Word grants us those treasures, proclaims the saving gospel of Jesus Christ, and graciously teaches all that is necessary for faith and life. **We glorify God by recognizing and receiving His authoritative self-revelation, both in the infallible Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and also in the incarnation of God the Son.** We affirm that the same Holy Spirit who overshadowed the virgin Mary also inspired the writing and preservation of the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit testifies to the authority of God's Word and illumines our hearts and minds so that we might receive both the Scriptures and Christ Himself aright.

We confess that God alone is Lord of the conscience, but this freedom is for the purpose of allowing us to be subject always and primarily to God's Word. The Spirit will never prompt our conscience to conclusions that are at odds with the Scriptures that He has inspired. The revelation of the incarnate Word does not minimize, qualify, or set aside the authority of the written Word. We are happy to confess ourselves captive to the Word of God, not just individually, but also as members of a community of faith, extending through time and around the globe. In particular, we join with other members of the Presbyterian and Reformed community to affirm the secondary authority of the *Book of Confessions* as a faithful exposition of the Word of God.

II. Trinity and Incarnation: The Two Central Christian Mysteries

A. Trinity

The triune nature of God is the first great mystery of the Christian faith. **With Christians everywhere, we worship the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - who is both one essence and three persons.** God is infinite, eternal, immutable, impassible, and ineffable. He cannot be divided against Himself, nor is He becoming more than He has been, since there is no potential or becoming in Him. He is the source of all goodness, all truth and all beauty, of all love and all life, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. The three persons are consubstantial with one another, being both coeternal, and coequal, such that there are not three gods, nor are there three parts of God, but rather three persons within the one Godhead. The Son is eternally begotten from the Father, and the Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son. All three persons are worthy of worship and praise.

God has no need of anyone or anything beyond Himself. Yet in grace this Triune God is the one Creator of all things. The ongoing act of creation is further manifested in God's gracious

sovereignty and providence, maintaining the existence of the world and all living creatures for the sake of His own glory. He is the Holy One, the ground of all being, whose glory is so great that for us to see Him is to die. Yet He has made the creation to reflect His glory, and He has made human beings in His own image, with a unique desire to know Him and a capacity for relationship with Him. Since our God is a consuming fire whom we in our sin cannot safely approach, He has approached us by entering into our humanity in Jesus Christ.

B. Incarnation

This is the second great mystery of the Christian faith, affirmed by all Christians everywhere: that **Jesus Christ is both truly God and truly human**. As to His divinity, He is the Son, the second person of the Trinity, being of one substance with the Father; as to His humanity, He is like us in every way but sin, of one substance with us, like us in having both a human soul and a human body. As to His divinity, He is eternally begotten of the Father; as to His humanity, He is born of the virgin Mary, conceived by the Holy Spirit. As to His divinity, His glory fills heaven and earth; as to His humanity, His glory is shown in the form of a suffering servant, most clearly when He is lifted up on the cross in our place.

We confess the mystery of His two natures, divine and human, in one person. We reject any understanding of the communication of attributes that must result in a blending of the two natures such that Jesus Christ is neither truly God nor truly human. We insist upon sufficient distinction between the two natures to preserve the truth of the incarnation, that Jesus Christ is indeed Immanuel, God-with-us, not one who used to be God, nor one who has merely been sent from God. Rather, in His coming we have seen God's glory, for Jesus is the exact imprint of God's very being and in Him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. **The divinity of the Son is in no way impaired, limited, or changed by His gracious act of assuming a human nature, and that His true humanity is in no way undermined by His continued divinity.** This is a mystery that we cannot explain, but we affirm it with joy and confidence.

This mystery of the incarnation is ongoing, for **the risen Jesus, who was sent from the Father, has now ascended to the Father in His resurrected body and remains truly human**. He is bodily present at the right hand of the Father. When we are promised that one day we will see Him face to face, we acknowledge that it is the face of Jesus of Nazareth we will someday see. The one who, for us and for our salvation, was born of Mary, died at Calvary, and walked with disciples to Emmaus is **the same Jesus Christ who is now ascended and who will one day return visibly in the body to judge the living and the dead**.

Jesus promised His disciples that He would not leave them comfortless when He ascended into heaven, but would ask the Father to send them the Holy Spirit as a comforter and

advocate. **We are able to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and God only through the work of the Holy Spirit.** He comes to us as He came to the gathered disciples at Pentecost: to kindle our faith, to embolden our witness, and to accompany us in mission.

III. Essentials of the Reformed Tradition

A. God's grace in Christ

God declared that the world He created was good and that human beings, made in His own image, were very good. **The present disordered state of the world, in which we and all things are subject to misery and to evil, is not God's doing, but is rather a result of humanity's free, sinful rebellion against God's will.** God created human beings from the dust of the earth and His own breath, to be His images and representatives, conduits of God's grace to the creation. Since the fall our natural tendency is to abuse and exploit the creation, preferring evil to goodness. God also created human beings to speak His grace and truth to one another, to be helpers who are fit for one another, so that our social relationships would strengthen our ability to serve and obey Him. Since the fall, our natural tendency is to engage in relationships of tyranny and injustice with one another, in which power is used not to protect and serve but to demean. God further created human beings with the capacity for relationship with Him, with His law written on our hearts so that we had the ability to worship Him in love and obey Him by living holy lives. Since the fall, our natural tendency is to hate God and our neighbor, to worship idols of our own devising rather than the one true God.

As a result of sin, human life is poisoned by everlasting death. **No part of human life is untouched by sin. Our desires are no longer trustworthy guides to goodness, and what seems natural to us no longer corresponds to God's design.** We are not merely wounded in our sin; we are dead, unable to save ourselves. Apart from God's initiative, salvation is not possible for us. Our only hope is God's grace. We discover in Scripture that this is a great hope, for our God is the One whose mercy is from everlasting to everlasting.

This grace does not end when we turn to sin. Although we are each deserving of God's eternal condemnation, the eternal Son assumed our human nature, joining us in our misery and offering Himself on the cross in order to free us from slavery to death and sin. Jesus takes our place both in bearing the weight of condemnation against our sin on the cross and in offering to God the perfect obedience that humanity owes to Him but is no longer able to give. All humanity participates in the fall into sin. Those who are united through faith with Jesus Christ are fully forgiven from all our sin, so that there is indeed a new creation. We are declared justified, not because of any good that we have done, but only because of God's grace extended to us in Jesus Christ. **In union with Christ through the power of the Spirit we are brought into right relation with the Father, who receives us as His adopted children.**

Jesus Christ is the only Way to this adoption, the sole path by which sinners become children of God, for He is the only-begotten Son, and it is only in union with Him that a believer is able to know God as Father. Only in Jesus Christ is the truth about the Triune God, fully and perfectly revealed, for only He *is* the Truth, only He has seen the Father, and only He can make the Father known. Only Jesus Christ is the new Life that is offered, for He is the bread from heaven and the fountain of living water, the one by whom all things were made, in whom all things hold together. The exclusivity of these claims establishes that God's love is not impersonal, but a particular and intimate love in which each individual child of God is called by name and known as precious; that God's love is not only acceptance, but a transforming and effective love in which His image within us is restored so that we are capable of holy living.

B. Election for salvation and service

The call of God to the individual Christian is not merely an invitation that each person may accept or reject by his or her own free will. **Having lost true freedom of will in the fall, we are incapable of turning toward God of our own volition. God chooses us for Himself in grace before the foundation of the world, not because of any merit on our part, but only because of His love and mercy.** Each of us is chosen in Christ, who is eternally appointed to be head of the body of the elect, our brother and our high priest. He is the one who is bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, our divine Helper who is also our Bridegroom, sharing our human nature so that we may see His glory. We who receive Him and believe in His name do so not by our own will or wisdom, but because His glory compels us irresistibly to turn toward Him. By His enticing call on our lives, Jesus enlightens our minds, softens our hearts, and renews our wills, restoring the freedom that we lost in the fall.

We are all sinners who fall short of God's glory, and we all deserve God's eternal judgment. Apart from the saving work of Jesus Christ, we are incapable of being in God's presence, incapable of bearing the weight of His glory. We rejoice that Jesus Christ offers us safe conduct into the heart of God's consuming and purifying fire, shielding us with His perfect humanity and transforming us by His divine power. Having received such grace, we extend grace to others.

We are not elect for our own benefit alone. God gathers His covenant community to be an instrument of His saving purpose. **Through His regenerating and sanctifying work, the Holy Spirit grants us faith and enables holiness, so that we may be witnesses of God's gracious presence to those who are lost.** The Spirit gathers us in a community that is built up and equipped to be light, salt, and yeast in the world. Christ sends us into the world to make disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that Christ has commanded us. We are now in service to God's plan for the fullness of time: uniting all things in heaven and earth to Himself. To

this end, we preach Christ, calling all persons to repent and believe the gospel. We also care for the natural world, claim all areas of culture in the name of Jesus, serve the poor, feed the hungry, visit the prisoner, and defend the helpless. We do this work not with any thought that we are able to bring in the kingdom, but in the confident hope that God's kingdom is surely coming, a day when suffering and death will pass away and when God will live among His people.

C. Covenant life in the church

We are elect in Christ to become members of the community of the new covenant. This covenant, which God Himself guarantees, unites us to God and to one another. Already in the creation, we discover that we are made to live in relationships to others, male and female, created together in God's image. **In Christ, we are adopted into the family of God and find our new identity as brothers and sisters of one another, since we now share one Father.** Our faith requires our active participation in that covenant community.

Jesus prays that His followers will all be one, and so we both pray and work for the union of the church throughout the world. Even where institutional unity does not seem possible, we are bound to other Christians as our brothers and sisters. In Christ the dividing wall of hostility created by nationality, ethnicity, gender, race and language differences is brought down. God created people so that the rich variety of His wisdom might be reflected in the rich variety of human beings, and the church must already now begin to reflect the eschatological reality of people from every tribe, and tongue and nation bringing the treasures of their kingdoms into the new city of God.

Within the covenant community of the church, God's grace is extended through the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and the faithful practice of mutual discipline. First, through the work of the Holy Spirit, the word proclaimed may indeed become God's address to us. The Spirit's illuminating work is necessary both for the one who preaches and for those who listen. Second, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are signs that are linked to the things signified, sealing to us the promises of Jesus. In the baptism of infants, we confess our confidence in God's gracious initiative, that a baby who cannot turn to God is nonetheless claimed as a member of the covenant community, a child of God, cleansed by grace and sealed by the Spirit; in the baptism of adults, we confess our confidence that God's grace can make us new creations at any stage of our lives. In the Lord's Supper, we confess that as we eat the bread and share one cup the Spirit unites us to the ascended Christ, so that His resurrection life may nourish, strengthen and transform us. Third, the community of the Church practices discipline in order to help one another along the path to new life, speaking the truth in love to one another, bearing one another's burdens, and offering to one another the grace of Christ.

D. Faithful stewardship of all of life

The ministries of the church reflect the three-fold office of Christ as prophet, priest and king - reflected in the church's ordered ministries of teaching elders, deacons, and ruling elders. We affirm that men and women alike are called to all the ministries of the Church, and that every member is called to share in all of Christ's offices within the world beyond the church. Every Christian is called to a prophetic life, proclaiming the good news to the world and enacting that good news. Every Christian is called to extend the lordship of Christ to every corner of the world. And every Christian is called to participate in Christ's priestly, mediatorial work, sharing in the suffering of the world in ways that extend God's blessing and offering intercession to God on behalf of the world. We are equipped to share in these offices by the Holy Spirit, who conforms us to the pattern of Christ's life.

Jesus teaches us that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind.

There is no part of human life that is off limits to the sanctifying claims of God. We reject the claim that love of any sort is self-justifying; we affirm that all our affections and desires must be brought under God's authority. We reject the claim that human souls are unaffected by the fall and remain naturally inclined to God; we affirm that soul and body alike must be cleansed and purified in order to love God properly. We reject the claim that the life of the mind is independent from faith; we affirm that unless we believe we cannot properly understand either God or the world around us. Historically, the Presbyterian tradition has been especially called to explore what it is to love God with all our minds, being committed to the on-going project of Christian education and study at all levels of Christian life.

E. Living in obedience to the Word of God

Progress in holiness is an expected response of gratitude to the grace of God, which is initiated, sustained and fulfilled by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. The first response of gratitude is prayer, and the daily discipline of prayer – both individually and together – should mark the Christian life. The life of prayer includes praise to God for His nature and works, sincere confession of our sin, and intercession for the needs of those we know and for the needs of the world.

As we practice the discipline of regular self-examination and confession, we are especially guided by the Ten Commandments. We therefore hold one another accountable to:

1. worship God alone, living all of life to His glory, renouncing all idolatry and all inordinate loves that might lead us to trust in any other help;
2. worship God in humility, being reticent in either describing or picturing God, recognizing that right worship is best supported not by our own innovative practices but through the living preaching of the Word and the faithful administration of the sacraments;

3. eliminate from both speech and thought any blasphemy, irreverence, or impurity;

4. observe the Sabbath as a day of worship and rest, being faithful in gathering with the people of God;

5. give honor toward those set in authority over us and practice mutual submission within the community of the church;

6. eradicate a spirit of anger, resentment, callousness, violence, or bitterness, and instead cultivate a spirit of gentleness, kindness, peace, and love; recognize and honor the image of God in every human being from conception to natural death.

7. maintain chastity in thought and deed, being faithful within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman as established by God at the creation or embracing a celibate life as established by Jesus in the new covenant;

8. practice right stewardship of the goods we have been given, showing charity to those in need and offering generous support of the Church and its ministries;

9. pursue truth, even when such pursuit is costly, and defend truth when it is challenged, recognizing that truth is in order to goodness and that its preservation matters;

10. resist the pull of envy, greed and acquisition, and instead cultivate a spirit of contentment with the gifts God has given us.

In Jesus Christ we see the perfect expression of God's holy will for human beings offered to God in our place. His holy life must now become our holy life. In Christ, God's will is now written on our hearts, and we look forward to the day when we will be so confirmed in holiness that we will no longer be able to sin. As the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, Jesus leads us along the path of life toward that goal, bringing us into ever deeper intimacy with the Triune God, in whose presence is fullness of joy.

The Theological Project

The Church has a Faith without which she cannot live faithfully.

Truth leads to duty, faith to practice. A church that wants to be a servant found faithful to its commission must be a steward of the Faith entrusted to its care. A fellowship that desires to be an effective witness to the gospel, must know the gospel. An apostolic church must not only live a life like that of the apostles, it must teach what the apostles' taught.

Some generations of believers have tried to live faithfully without a shared Faith; all have failed. Our generation may be particularly tempted to try. Forging theological consensus is hard work in any generation, but ours seems to have concluded that it is impossible work. Private and partisan interpretations are now considered inflexible and intractable. We have forgotten the humble recognition that ambiguities exist and must be respected, and now dwell in a land where ambiguities are preferred, and certainties are suspect. We are coached to celebrate diversity of theological conviction, rather than seeing this as a sign of important work yet to be done.

Theological debates in the church have not always been filled with grace, or even understanding, and many have been unnecessarily divisive. The formative ecclesial debates of earlier history are viewed as arcane. Doctrinal work is unfavorably compared to relationship building as if the two were mutually exclusive. Teaching elders attempt to teach how to live lives faithful to the truth without doing the required work of laying foundations of the truth in the hearts and minds of the congregation. Ruling elders are equipped to be managers of church life rather than able to teach the Faith.

Although these realities are manifest somewhat differently in churches and among leaders who identify themselves as progressive or evangelical, neglect of the substance of the Faith is wide and deep. As a result, all other matters suffer – the strength of disciples, the health of congregations, the effectiveness of councils. Disciplined attention to the Word gives gifts to the Church that it cannot receive elsewhere or by any other means.

Renewal of theological work at the core of our common life is not only an acknowledged need but, in the providence of God, may be a blessed provision. Throughout history, the reformation of the Church has followed theological work – work that grew from recommitment to the Faith. In turn, the reformation of the Church has fostered a recommitment to theological work.

Now is the time to reengage the theological work, for this moment, and for the next generations.

Renewed commitment to sustained conversation is needed. At its best, sustained conversation is characterized by prayerful and rigorous study of the Scripture with attention to clarifying the Reformed theological lens through which we read the Scriptures, by grateful listening to the voice of the church around the world and through the ages, and application of theological wisdom to every part of life before God and for the world.

Toward these ends, we now commit ourselves to the formation of theological friendships in communities that include all teaching and ruling elders - gatherings of elders which covenant to study and learn together, providing mutual encouragement and accountability for the sake of sustaining and advancing the theological and missional work of the church.

Necessary to this commitment are:

1. Identifying the best practices of current theological projects and relationships within the Church that will help guide the shape of these theological friendships.
2. Building the structures that connect elders with each other locally, regionally, and nationally in environments that establish and sustain theological friendships.

These theological friendships should strive to:

transform life and ministry,
be sustained over the years,
include a breadth of participants
gender, age, ethnic and global communities
other Reformed churches
other orthodox and evangelical theological traditions,
engage other theological friendships, thus forming
broadening communities, worship and witness
together.

An invitation is now offered in an excellent resource – “A Pastoral Rule” developed by the Re-forming Ministry Program of the Office of Theology and Worship. This resource invites us to commit to personal disciplines, conduct in ministry that is holy, and mutual encouragement and accountability. It is offered to the whole church as a tool for the formation of theological friendships that sustain us and are sustained over time. We propose that the Fellowship accept that invitation to adapt and then adopt “The Pastoral Rule”.

These three theological projects are offered for broad immediate consideration:

Recommitment to a particular confessional heritage

as an immediate core constituent of our renewed common life, however that common life is re-formed.
Identification and affirmation of the essential tenets of the Reformed Faith.
Commitment to re-engaging the theological enterprise broadly and deeply.

Further advance on these three projects will continue in Orlando as we put our theology on the table for public discussion, deliberation, and decision; share best practices; form theological-missional relationships; build the structures and covenant together.

Questions for immediate consideration:

Do we consider the proposal to reaffirm the Book of Confession as we work to build and test theological consensus among us, to be the right judgment to make at this time? Is this an adequate and helpful articulation of the essentials of the Faith as expressed in Reformed ways, and will we sincerely adopt it? What theological friendships will we form, what practices will we commit to, and what structures will we build for mutual encouragement and accountability?

The theological project is required of the Church, and now is re-engaged by this Fellowship within the Church. The invitation is now offered. How will you respond?

ADDENDUM

Suggested questions for the covenanting gatherings of theological friends:

What has the Spirit gathered the Church to be? What has the Spirit sent the Church to do? Always and everywhere; here and now.

What is the authority of Scripture in the actual life of the church? How will we teach and obey the Scripture?

What does it mean to be saved? What is the gospel we are to preach?

What is the shape of our corporate and individual lives that are formed by that gospel?

Elders, Ruling as well as Teaching, are to be equipped to teach. Teach what, to whom, how? Ruling elders are to measure out the patterns of faithfulness for the congregation. What are those patterns, and how are they measured?

In a time of both ecclesial division and realignment, how can schism among parts of the church be diminished and how can reconnection with the whole church be increased?

The Church has a Faith without which she can not live faithfully. What is that Faith? What is faithful living?



The mission of
The Fellowship of Presbyterians
is to build *flourishing churches*
that make *disciples of Jesus Christ*.

OUR VALUES

Jesus-Shaped Identity

We believe Jesus Christ must be at the center of our lives and making disciples of Jesus at the core of our ministry.

Biblical Integrity

We believe the Bible is the unique and authoritative Word of God, that teaches all that is necessary for faith and life. The prominence of God's Word over our lives shapes our priorities, and the unrivaled authority of the Bible directs our actions to be in concert with Christ's very best for our lives.

Thoughtful Theology

We believe in theological education, constant learning, and the life of the mind; celebrating this as one of the treasures of our Reformed heritage.

Accountable Community

We believe guidance is a corporate spiritual experience. We want to connect leaders to one another in healthy relationships of accountability, synergy, and care.

Egalitarian Ministry

We believe in unleashing the ministry gifts of women, men, and every ethnic group.

Missional Centrality

We believe in living out the whole of the Great Commission — including evangelism, spiritual formation, compassion, and redemptive justice — in our communities and around the world.

Center-Focused Spirituality

We believe in calling people to the core of what it means to be followers of Jesus — what “mere Christianity” is and does — and not fixate on the boundaries.

Leadership Velocity

We believe the work of identifying and developing gospel-centered leaders is critical for the church, and a great leadership culture is risk-taking, innovative, and organic.

Kingdom Vitality

We believe congregations should vigorously reproduce new missional communities to expand the Kingdom of God.



Understanding ECO: 11 Characteristics of Our Polity & Vision

Here is a helpful guide to the major ecclesiastical, substantive, and philosophical characteristics of ECO polity:

- 1. Defined core theology and behavioral expectations** – One of the main concerns for many individuals and congregations considering ECO is that the PC(USA) has not defined essential theology and behavior requirements and will not allow congregations and presbyteries to define these requirements either. In the theology section of the ECO constitution the behavioral and theological core is established and all officers must “receive, adopt, and be bound by” these essentials.
- 2. ECO is concerned with ecclesiastical matters and therefore property is not held in trust** – There are a couple of reasons for this. First, as we have seen, when property is held in trust it can be used as leverage against congregations wishing to maintain theological integrity. Secondly, when presbyteries have interests in property an inordinate amount of time can be spent in property management.
- 3. Voting is done in parity at all levels and only when people are connected with a local congregation.** – ECO polity does not see mission and ministry happening primarily as a result of voting. When there is the need for voting at the presbytery and synod councils, within each council there is a requirement for a 1-1 parity between elders and pastors. Only pastors connected to a local congregation are eligible to vote. A pastor in validated service or honorably retired will only vote if they are an “assistant pastor” connected to an ECO congregation. In this instance the “assistant pastor” would be equivalent to what the PC(USA) calls a “parish associate”.
- 4. Church is redefined.** – ECO polity defines “church” wherever believers are gathered in the name of Jesus. Church can be lived out in small groups, accountability groups, ministry teams, house churches, and mission teams to name just a few.
- 5. Elders and deacons can be deployed for greater ministry** – Because “church” is considered to be the gathering of believers in the name of Jesus in a variety of contexts it is appropriate for the sacraments to be administered in these contexts. Elders and deacons who have been properly trained can be authorized to celebrate the sacraments in various settings. Therefore, not only can communion be celebrated in these various expressions of church but, if someone comes to faith through these expressions of church, they can be baptized by the officers who are charged with shepherding these groups. Elders and deacons can also be commissioned by the presbytery to serve as the pastors of congregations and new church developments for the mission and ministry of the presbytery.
- 6. Emphasis on the role of members as covenant partners** – ECO polity now names members as “covenant partners.” Congregations may choose to use different language if they wish, but this designation is designed to emphasize that individuals aren’t joining an organization. When they say yes to membership in ECO, individuals are covenanting with one another in God’s redemptive mission as expressed in, through, and beyond the congregation.

7. **Greater local flexibility** – There is much within the PC(USA) Book of Order that congregations may wish to continue to affirm, but there will be significant flexibility in these areas. Here are a few examples:
 - **Deacons** – Deacons may serve as part of a board or be commissioned on an annual basis. Since deacons do not have oversight within a congregation, a congregation may choose to continue to elect deacons in congregational meetings or can choose to have the session appoint deacons.
 - **Elders** – Elders in the PC(USA) serve three-year terms and can serve no more than two consecutive terms. Many ECO congregations may wish to continue this practice. But a congregation may choose to redesign their elder election and rotation. For example, they may wish to have elders serve only one 4 year term. In some cultures it is shameful for a person to be rotated off of the elders’ board. Congregations may wish to allow elders to serve an unlimited number of terms. The local ECO congregation continues to be governed by elders and the congregation must elect them, but their terms of service can have flexibility.
 - **Pastors** – A few different categories of pastors are defined. For example, ECO polity has reinstated the office of assistant pastor, hired by the session rather than called by the congregation. This again allows for greater flexibility in pastoral leadership.
8. **Presbyteries also have greater freedom** – In ECO polity, the role of the presbytery is to support, encourage, and resource local congregations. ECO presbyteries are required to have three committees; the Committee on Ministry which can include oversight of candidates, a Permanent Judicial Commission, and a governing council which has the same role and responsibilities of most PC(USA) presbytery councils. Other committees and task forces may be formed as they are necessary for the mission of the presbytery. Presbyteries also have flexibility as they guide congregations in the call process. A typical PNC may be established or a congregation may allow the session to serve this function. However they are called, the congregation must ultimately elect installed pastors.
9. **Missional Affinity Network** – Missional Affinity Networks are networks of congregations in similar ministry settings and facing similar challenges and opportunities. These networks are outside the presbyteries. They could be comprised of congregations near universities or colleges, congregations in urban settings, multiethnic congregations, those who are actively planting worshiping communities, congregations of various sizes, etc. These Missional Affinity Networks have no judicial authority but can be beneficial in a variety of important ways.
10. **Accountability, support, and encouragement** – ECO polity affirms that accountability between congregations is vitally important. Pastors should share with one another where they have seen God most visibly at work as well as what they are discerning as their part in God’s future mission. ECO pastors are expected to covenant to be accountable to one another, ensuring they are living balanced lives and being good stewards of the multiple responsibilities God has given them. Accountable relationships, called “peer reviews,” can take place within the presbytery or within the Missional Affinity Networks.
11. **Flatter structure with an emphasis on God’s work within the local congregation** – There are three layers to the ECO polity structure; session, presbytery and synod. Synod is the widest council in ECO. Each council is designed to have a significantly smaller staff with significantly smaller numbers of congregations comprising a presbytery. The primary role of staff will be mission and ministry in local congregations, facilitating the multiplication of worshiping communities and expansion of the gospel.

ECO
Polity
and DISCIPLINE



Evangelical
Covenant
Order

OF PRESBYTERIANS



THE
Fellowship
OF PRESBYTERIANS

January 2012

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Welcome to the journey, as we discern a “next step” serving the Body of Christ together. These pages will introduce you to the structure of ECO (the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians), but it’s important to begin with heart and vision. This “new Reformed body” is intended to foster a new way of being the Church, just as traditional, mainline denominations rose to serve in their day. We aspire to reclaim a sense of covenanted biblical community, where unity is derived from a shared mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ, rather than by structural mandate. Our theological beliefs and core values unite us and inform our daily ministry, as leaders of all generations are being developed to equip God’s people to speak the gospel into a rapidly-changing world. Congregations will gather together not to debate process or policy, but to collaborate, share best practices, encourage a Jesus way of life, and spur one another on to love and good deeds. These structures and policies are intended to serve the ministry and mission of Christ’s Church, rather than the other way around.

From our earliest conversations fifteen months ago, the underlying reason for bringing the ECO into being has always been the encouragement of vibrant congregations, reaching the communities into which God has placed them. The polity outlined here is a “first step” to make that priority live, to flesh out a connection between leaders and congregations that energizes their common mission. Many aspects of this structure rely on the good work of our heritage, while other parts are new; all these recommendations will require ongoing willingness to adapt along the way. Our bias has been to encourage a spirit of innovation, of Spirit-filled risk-taking that will lead to new possibilities not yet in sight. We so appreciate the courage of your churches and their leaders, even as we recognize the challenges of the days to come.

We offer the Polity papers, along with the Theological documents we are proposing to The Fellowship as a whole, as working documents, enabling us to begin a journey while recognizing the need for alteration. We have incorporated innumerable changes, based on the great feedback we have already received, which have greatly improved the original drafts. **Our current plan is to invite membership into the Fellowship and the ECO with these documents as normative**, with inevitable changes to be proposed and discussed by voting members at Annual Gatherings, the first to be convened in 2013.

We now invite you to joyfully enter into this conversation with your questions and recommendation, but primarily with an eager expectation that God has great things in store for us together!

On Behalf of the Drafting Task Forces,



John Crosby, *President, The Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians*



Jim Singleton, *President, The Fellowship of Presbyterians*

Polity Taskforce

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CHAPTER ONE

Congregations and Their Covenant Partners

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” — Matthew 28:18–20 (NIV)

1.01 The Congregation

1.0101 Nature and Purpose

The Church is visible whenever two or more are gathered in Jesus’ name. The congregation is composed of members of the body of Christ who have covenanted together to engage in the mission of God in their particular context, with Jesus Christ as Head. Each congregation should strive to be a tangible, if provisional, demonstration of the Kingdom of God. Congregations exist in a variety of forms yet have these ends in common: sharing the Good News of reconciliation to God in and through Jesus Christ, gathering people for divine worship and nurturing relationships for spiritual accountability and mutual ministry, all the while preparing disciples to be the sent people of God in the world.

1.0102 Covenants of Accountability

While believers experience their membership in Christ’s body in spontaneous and unstructured gatherings, they fulfill the Lord’s purposes best when they covenant to fulfill the biblical vision of membership in particular congregations. These covenantal relationships provide the real-life context for the Holy Spirit’s ongoing transformation of believers into spiritual maturity, with the belief that these strong relationships nurture understanding, encouragement, correction, and discipleship-in-mission.

Similarly, though congregations discover that the Holy Spirit leads them to network with a variety of other congregations in order to fulfill the Lord’s purposes, they covenant with congregations to form a distinct expression of the Church universal. These covenantal relationships provide the context for the Holy Spirit’s continual reformation of the Church into more faithful and effective participation in God’s mission. By submitting to the spiritual authority of their co-leagues, leaders of congregations honor Christ as the Lord of the Church, and welcome the opportunity for renewal and refinement.

1.0103 Accountability to the Councils of the NRB

A “congregation,” as used in this *Form of Government*, refers to a formally organized community which is chartered and recognized by a presbytery as provided in this *Constitution*, and which is governed by this *Constitution* pursuant to a membership agreement entered into between such community and the presbytery. In becoming covenant partners (also called members) of the congregation, Christ-followers put themselves under the spiritual leadership of the session and higher councils.

1.02 The Organizing of a Congregation

A congregation in the ECO can be organized only by the authority of a presbytery and shall function under the provisions of this *Constitution*. When a group of Christ-followers discern that the Holy Spirit is leading them to become a congregation, they shall craft a covenant which reflects their desire to be bound to Christ and one another as a part of the body of Christ according to the *Essential Tenets* and government of the ECO. After receiving this covenant and its signatures, it shall be the sole discretion of the presbytery to declare them an organized congregation after which the congregation and the presbytery shall enter into a membership agreement. After receiving the presbytery's approval of these initial candidates, the congregation shall then proceed to elect its pastor(s), elders, and (if utilized) deacons. The presbytery shall prepare, examine, ordain, and install these newly elected individuals in this new congregation.

1.03 The Membership of a Congregation

1.0301 *Baptism and Membership*

Through baptism an individual is joined to the Church universal, the body of Christ. Through the covenant of membership an individual is joined to the local congregation, and is able to be fully involved in its mission to the local community and the world.

1.0302 *Openness to All*

The congregation's fellowship shall be open to all who seek to explore spiritual life by participating in the fellowship of the risen Lord. The congregation shall be gracious in providing pastoral care to all who consider themselves a part of the congregation, in the hope that these spiritual friends might become members of Christ's body. All who put their trust in Jesus Christ are welcomed to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

1.0303 *Entry into Membership as Covenant Partners*

After completing a meaningful preparation process as determined by the session, those who wish to embrace the congregation's covenantal expectations may become covenant partners (members) by action of the session after hearing testimony of their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. For those not previously baptized, the Sacrament of Baptism is to be provided for these new members and offered to children under their care. Individuals may testify to their faith in one of the following ways:

- a. Public profession of faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord, after the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit yields personal faith in Christ.
- b. Reaffirmation of faith, for those previously professing faith publicly and already baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. If members of another congregation, this transfer of membership shall be communicated to the former congregation.

1.0304 *The Benefits of Covenantal Partnership*

Becoming a covenant partner (member) is important not only to the congregation but even more importantly for the covenant partner (member), as they are positioned to receive encouragement, support, and correction that the Lord promises to those who share spiritual fellowship. In committing to the cause of a life lived in and through Jesus Christ, members grow in Christian community together to become more Christ-like. In Christian community, we realize the fullness of life together and life in Christ, and discover our unique place in a common mission and narrative of God's work. The covenant partner (member) and the congregation are both blessed and become a great blessing as we covenant together, intentionally, in Christ's work.

1.0305 The Congregation's Expectations of Covenantal Partnership

Each covenant partner (member) shall strive to be faithful to Christ by participating in the congregation's worship, fellowship, and service on an ongoing basis. Faithfulness in Christ involves each covenant partner's dedication of time and talents for the congregation's mission and ministry, in accordance to the gifts that God has bestowed upon them. Faithfulness also involves the stewardship of finances. As each covenant partner grows in the grace of giving, financial support of the congregation's mission and ministry should grow, along with tangible support for other ministries that advance God's Kingdom. Faithfulness to Christ also involves each covenant partner's dedication of time and talents for the congregation's mission and ministry. Those who are invited to take significant leadership roles in the congregation shall be spiritually mature, agree with the *Essential Tenets* of the ECO, be carefully selected, be trained and/or mentored, and be supervised, and should ordinarily be members for at least a year. Covenant partners (members) of the congregation have differing abilities, varied spiritual gifts, and various levels of commitment. The session shall strive to create an effective disciple-making, ministry-discernment process, and equip covenant partners (members) to be missional Christians, being faithful to nurture covenant partners (members) into spiritual maturity and significant ministry.

1.04 Categories of Membership

The membership of a congregation of the ECO includes baptized members and covenant partners.

1.0401 Baptized Member

A baptized member is a person who has received the Sacrament of Baptism, but has not made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

1.0402 Covenant Partner

A covenant partner is a person who has made a profession of faith in Christ, has been baptized, has been received into the membership of the church, has voluntarily submitted to the government of this church, and participates in the church's worship and work. Covenant partners are eligible to vote in congregational meetings.

1.05 Meetings of the Congregation

Meetings of the congregation, shall be governed by the latest edition of *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, unless by its own rule the congregation has adopted other procedures and practices.

1.0501 Quorum

The congregation shall hold an annual meeting and special meetings, as needed, with a quorum of ten percent of the covenant partners (members), unless the congregation, by its own rule, decides to alter the quorum requirement. Only those covenant partners (members) present may vote in a congregational meeting.

1.0502 Calling Meetings

Meetings of the congregation may be called by the session, by the presbytery, or by the session when requested in writing by one-fourth of the covenant partners (members). Adequate notice of the meeting shall be given including announcement in worship a minimum of two Sundays prior, as well as the congregation's other avenues of communication.

1.0503 Business that must be conducted at a Congregational Meeting

The following business items must be conducted at a congregational meeting, but not necessarily at every congregational meeting; nor are congregational meetings limited to just the following:

- a. Electing elders and trustees (as well as deacons, if the congregation chooses. (*see 2.03*)).
- b. Calling a pastor/head of staff, or to request the dissolution of such calls.
- c. Buying, mortgaging, transferring, or selling real property.
- d. Requesting that presbytery dismiss the congregation to another presbytery of the ECO, or requesting that the presbytery dismiss the congregation to another Reformed body. (Either requires a super-majority of two-thirds of the covenant partners (members) present).
- e. Approving any amendments to the congregation's articles of incorporation, bylaws or other corporate governing documents and dissolution, merger and any other corporate action requiring voting member approval.

Whenever permitted by law, both ecclesiastical and corporate business may be conducted at the same congregational meeting.

1.0504 Moderator

The pastor/head of staff shall ordinarily moderate all meetings of the congregation. If it is impractical, or if considering actions pertaining to the pastor/head of staff, the pastor may ask another pastor or elder to preside with the session's approval.

1.0505 Secretary and Minutes

The clerk of session shall ordinarily serve as secretary for all meetings of the congregation. If it is impractical, the congregation shall elect a secretary for that meeting. The session shall review and approve the final form of the minutes.

1.06 The Session

1.0601 Purpose and Composition

Every congregation is governed by its session. The session consists of the elders duly elected by and from the covenant partners (members) of the congregation, along with the congregation's installed pastors and associate pastors. By its own rule, the congregation shall determine the number of elders, their length of service, and the ordering of the session. The minimum number shall be three active elders plus the moderator.

1.0602 Meetings of the Session

The pastor shall ordinarily moderate all meetings of the session. If it is impractical, the pastor may ask another pastor or an elder to preside, with the session's approval.

Meetings of the session, including its quorum, shall be governed by the latest edition of *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, unless by their own rule a congregation has adopted other procedures and practices.

The session shall hold stated meetings at least quarterly, and shall meet at the call of the modera-

tor, at the request of two or more elders, or at the request of the presbytery. Full minutes of the meetings and actions of the session shall be maintained and shall be available to any covenant partner (member) of the congregation or at the request of the presbytery.

1.0603 *The Responsibilities of the Session*

The session has responsibility and authority for governing the congregation and guiding its mission for Christ in the world. In the Reformed tradition the marks of the church are the proclamation of the Word, the Sacraments rightly celebrated, and the exercise of discipline. Therefore, the session shall:

- a. Provide for the worship and educational life of the congregation; provide a place where the congregation may regularly worship; provide for the regular preaching of the Word by persons properly approved; oversee the planning and the ordering of the worship services of the congregation; lead the congregation in ministries of evangelism, compassion, and justice; and develop and nurture relations with other congregations.
- b. Authorize and provide for the regular celebration of the Lord's Supper; authorize the administration of Baptism; exercise due care and provide sufficient education to the congregation and to new believers that the Sacraments may be rightly received as means of grace.
- c. Plan for and provide means of discipleship for the congregation and new believers; provide for and nurture the common life of the congregation; receive and dismiss members; exercise oversight of all programs and finances of the congregation; train, examine, ordain and install those men and women chosen to serve as elders and deacons; lead and teach the congregation in matters of stewardship and Christian living; direct the ministry of deacons, trustees, and all other organizations of the congregation; bear witness against error in doctrine and practice; and serve in judicial matters pertaining to the congregation as specified in the *Rules of Discipline*.
- d. Elect elder commissioners to the presbytery and may propose to the presbytery matters of common interest or concern as well as proposals to amend this *Constitution*. The maximum number of elder commissioners which the session may elect shall be equal to the number of pastors with voting authority as set forth in Section 2.0401 serving the congregation. The session is encouraged in its selection of elder commissioners to promote representation in areas of difference recognized as the basis of discrimination and inequality in church and society, namely race, ethnicity, gender, ability/disability, and age.
- e. Maintain a Roll of Covenant Partners (members) and a Roll of Baptisms. The session may by its own rule grant affiliate status to members of a congregation in another Christian denomination.
- f. The session shall adopt and administer an annual budget and shall publish it to the congregation. The session shall purchase appropriate casualty and liability insurance for the program and property. The session shall arrange for the congregation to participate in the synod's plan of health and welfare benefits and program of assistance and relief covering the congregation's pastors and such full-time lay employees as the session determines appropriate, as such plan is described in the membership agreement (unless the congregation and the synod agree to an alternative plan providing comparable coverage).
- g. Arrange for an independent financial review annually, and shall publish the report to the congregation and to the presbytery.
- h. Evaluate the congregation's ministry and mission annually and report to the presbytery for reasons of mutual accountability and the sharing of best practices.

CHAPTER TWO

Ordained and Commissioned Ministry

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

— *Ephesians 2:10, 4:11–13 (NIV)*

2.01 God's mission requires ordered leadership

Before the foundation of the world, God set a plan of mission to reconcile the world to Himself and chose to use the Church as His instrument of reconciliation. It is incumbent upon all members of the body of Christ to participate in the work of building one another up in Christ and be deployed for His work in the world. To that end, excellent leadership is critical in the Church today, and that is not limited to ordained leaders. God calls some individuals to exercise specific formal leadership, which is modeled after the mind of Christ. The Church should strive to develop strong leaders in every area of life and ministry who lead in the way of Jesus. While pastors, elders, and deacons have unique roles in the structure of the Church, we recognize the importance of ordained and lay leadership at every level.

While the specific offices recognized in the ECO are elder, deacon, and pastor, the ECO acknowledges that additional lay leadership is needed for effective ministry.

2.0101 Qualifications of officers

Elders and deacons are ordained and installed by the session. Pastors are ordained and installed by the presbyteries. Ordaining bodies must ensure that all officers adhere to the *Essential Tenets* of the ECO. Failure of officers to continue to adhere to these standards is grounds for a session or presbytery to remove an officer from service according to the *Rules of Discipline* in this *Constitution*.

2.0102 Preparation and ordination of officers

Ordaining bodies shall determine the appropriate course of preparation, ensuring that candidates for ordination meet all the requirements in this Form of Government. After demonstrating their readiness for service through an examination process, the candidates shall affirm their vows and be ordained by representatives of that ordaining body in a service of public worship.

2.0103 Ordination vows

- a. Do you believe in One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and do you boldly declare Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and acknowledge Him Lord of all and Head of the Church?

- b. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the Word of God, and, inspired by the Holy Spirit, the unique witness to Jesus Christ and the authority for Christian faith and life?
- c. Do you receive and adopt without hesitation the *Essential Tenets* of the ECO as a reliable exposition of what Scripture teaches us to do and to believe, and will you be guided by them in your life and ministry?
- d. Relying on the Holy Spirit, do you humbly submit to God's call on your life, committing yourself to God's mission, and fulfilling your ministry in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture and guided by our confessions?
- e. Will you be governed by the ECO's polity and discipline? And will you be accountable to your fellow elders, deacons, and pastors as you lead?
- f. Do you promise to be faithful in maintaining the truth of the Gospel and the peace, unity, and purity of the Church?
- g. Will you pray for and seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?
- h. (1) (for elder) Will you be a faithful elder, watching over the people in their worship, nurture, and service to God?
- (2) (for deacon) Will you be a faithful deacon, serving the people, urging concern and directing the people's help to those in need?
- (3) (for pastor) Will you be a faithful minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by proclaiming the good news, teaching the faith, showing the people God's mission, and caring for the people?

2.0104 Questions to the congregation

- a. (for elders/deacons) Do we, the covenant partners of this congregation, accept (names) as elders or deacons, chosen by God through the voice of this congregation to lead us in the way of Jesus Christ according to the Word of God and the *Constitution* of the ECO?

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

Having answered these questions in the affirmative, those to be ordained shall kneel, if able, for prayer and the laying on of hands by other ordained officers.

The Moderator will say to the ordained: You are now elders or deacons in the Church and for this congregation. Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Amen.

- b. (for pastor) Do we, the covenant partners of this congregation, accept (name) as our pastor (associate pastor, assistant pastor), chosen by God through the voice of this congregation to lead us in the way of Jesus Christ, according to the Word of God and the *Constitution* of the ECO?

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

Do we agree to pay him (her) fairly and provide for his (her) welfare as he (she) works among us?

Will we listen to the word he (she) preaches, welcome his (her) pastoral care, and honor his (her) servant leadership and authority as he (she) seeks to honor Jesus Christ?

Having answered these questions in the affirmative, the candidate to be ordained and/or installed shall kneel, if able, and the presbytery shall, with prayer and the laying on of hands, ordain the candidate to the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and install him (her) to the particular pastoral responsibility. The presbytery will invite other ordained pastors and elders to join in the laying on of hands.

The presiding member of the presbytery will say: You are now a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, a pastor (associate pastor, assistant pastor) for this congregation. Whatever you do, in word and deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Amen.

2.02 The Ministry of Elders

Elders are given authority and responsibility, along with pastors, to oversee the spiritual health of the congregation as well as the congregation's faithfulness to God's mission. Elders shall be elected by the congregation.

2.03 The Ministry of Deacons

Ordinarily, the biblical office of deacon shall be utilized by the congregation. Deacons lead ministries that nurture fellowship and caregiving within and beyond the congregation. Deacons may also be asked to preach and teach. The congregation shall determine the manner in which they are selected for service. The session shall oversee and direct the ministry of the deacons.

2.04 The Ministry of Pastors

Pastors are to use the spiritual gifts for ministry, with a particular emphasis on the gifts of teaching and leadership. A pastor is to nurture the spiritual health and maturity of the body of Christ in order that the body may be equipped to partner with God in His redemptive work in the world. In addition to adherence to the *Essential Tenets*, presbyteries shall ensure that candidates for ministry are adequately trained for their task. Training shall include a bachelor's degree (or equivalent) and ordinarily a masters degree at an accredited theological seminary in biblical or theological studies, as well as appropriate hands-on ministry experience and mentoring. Candidates for ministry must demonstrate significant theological and biblical competence as well as the necessary skills for pastoral ministry.

2.0401 Categories and responsibilities of pastors

Pastors are members of the presbytery. Thus, their ministry and calling is confirmed by the presbytery or authorized committee that is responsible for examining and credentialing its pastors. All members of the presbytery have voice in its deliberations; the right to vote is given to those serving in a pastoral capacity in a congregation. In order to ensure maximum deployment for the kingdom of God, as well as ensuring the core integrity of theology and ministry, categories and responsibilities of pastors are as follows:

- a. *Pastor/Head of Staff*— Pastors/Heads of Staff or Co-Pastors/Heads of Staff are called by the congregation and installed by the presbytery and shall have the responsibility to moderate session and congregational meetings. He or she is a member of presbytery with voice and vote.

b. *Associate Pastor* – Associate pastors are called by a congregation and installed by the presbytery upon recommendation by the session. They are members of presbytery with voice and vote.

c. *Assistant Pastor* – Assistant pastors are called by the session or pastor/head of staff according to rule of the session. The session, acting as a pastor nominating committee, may propose to the congregation that an assistant pastor be called as an associate pastor. Assistant pastors are members of presbytery with voice and vote.

d. *Transitional Pastor* – Transitional pastors are called by the session and may be used in times of transition when a congregation is without a pastor/head of staff. Transitional pastors shall have the same responsibilities and privileges in presbytery as pastors/heads of staff.

e. *Pastor in a Validated Ministry* – Pastors may be authorized to serve in validated ministries outside a local congregation. Validated ministries might include service in a presbytery, educational institution, hospital, or a variety of mission fields. The presbytery shall validate and annually review the pastor's ministry. Ordinarily, pastors in validated ministry will also be expected to take part in the life and ministry of a local ECO congregation. Pastors in validated ministries have voice and may be granted the right to vote if serving as a part-time assistant pastor.

f. *Affiliate Pastor* – A pastor may be ordained in a different body and may become an affiliate member of the ECO. Affiliate pastors must adhere to the *Essential Tenets* of the ECO. The presbytery shall determine the suitability of an affiliate pastor. If an affiliate pastor serves as pastor/head of staff of a non-union ECO congregation, then the affiliate pastor shall have voice and vote in presbytery; otherwise the affiliate pastor shall just have voice.

g. *Honorably Retired Pastor* – Pastors may request the status of honorably retired. Honorably retired pastors will have voice but no vote in presbytery, unless they are serving as an assistant or transitional pastor. Otherwise each honorably retired pastor is encouraged to become a covenant partner of a congregation, with voice and vote.

2.0402 Peer Review

Pastors and ministries are healthier when there are opportunities for mutually supportive relationships. Therefore, pastors shall participate in a peer review with other pastors. The purpose of this review is to coach, encourage, and pray for one another as they strive for greater missional effectiveness. This peer review shall:

- a. Explore the health of each other's current ministry.
- b. Explore the future objectives for each other's ministry.
- c. Address challenges and obstacles to meeting those objectives.
- d. Share best practices and insights.
- e. Explore each other's physical, spiritual, relational and emotional health.

These peer reviews may occur within presbyteries or affinity networks (see 5.0201). Under its Committee on Ministry, the presbytery shall ensure that an appropriate peer review is conducted at least annually.

2.05 Commissioning for particular service

2.0501 Deployment of officers for greater missional ministry

In order to better facilitate the mission and ministry of a presbytery and its congregations, as well as to maximize the gifts of the totality of the body of Christ, it is often advantageous to commission elders and deacons to more extensive levels of service than ordinarily afforded these offices.

There are two general ways in which officers may be commissioned to provide pastoral leadership and administer the sacraments. First, they may serve in various ways within a congregation under the supervision of the session and a pastor/head of staff or transitional pastor. Second, an elder or deacon may be commissioned to serve in the role of pastor/head of staff for a congregation or a new church development. It is appropriate to refer to individuals serving in either capacity as “lay pastor.” The session shall pre-authorize the administration of the sacraments, and also determine the process by which pre-authorization occurs.

2.0502 Service within a congregation under the session and Pastor/Head of Staff

The Church exists wherever two or more are gathered in the name of Jesus. Therefore, it is appropriate to celebrate sacraments in these smaller units. These smaller units include, but are not limited to: small groups, missional communities, retreats, leaders of satellite congregations, and house church gatherings. If an officer has been commissioned by the session to lead these groups in mission or ministry and has been appropriately trained, he or she shall be authorized to administer the sacraments in these communities. The pastor and the session shall oversee those who are commissioned to such service within a congregation. This commission shall be for a period of twelve months and may be renewed indefinitely.

2.0503 Service within a congregation as the Pastor/Head of Staff

The presbytery, in consultation with the session or other responsible committee, may authorize an elder or deacon to be commissioned to serve in the role of pastor/head of staff of a local congregation or a new church development. With approval of the presbytery, these individuals could moderate session and congregational meetings, administer the sacraments and, where allowed by law, perform marriages. The presbytery shall ensure training to include theological education, and ministry skill development as well as continued mentorship during this commission. This commission shall be for a period of twelve months and may be renewed indefinitely. Because these officers are fulfilling the pastoral role for a congregation, they shall be enrolled as members of presbytery during their commission and be given voice and vote at presbytery meetings.

CHAPTER THREE

Councils of the ECO

Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. They served as judges for the people at all times.
— Exodus 18:24–26 (NIV)

3.01 Presbytery

3.0101 Purpose

The presbytery, as a covenant community, exercises apostolic authority by and for the nurture and benefit of its congregations, that the communities they serve may know the love and invitation of Christ.

3.0102 Membership

The members of the presbytery are its congregations, pastors installed in service to member congregations, pastors serving in validated ministries, and pastors honorably retired. Ordinarily, a presbytery shall be constituted of at least 10 but no more than 20 congregations, and geographically connected (affinity networks are non-geographically connected groups (*see 5.0201*)).

3.0103 Duties

The presbytery has the authority and pastoral responsibility to:

- a. Promote the health of the covenant community to the end that its congregations and members may bear fruit for the Kingdom of God.
- b. Charter and receive new congregations into the presbytery.
- c. Dismiss congregations to other presbyteries or denominations.
- d. Exercise special care and oversight of congregations that does not have an installed pastor, and to appoint the moderator of its session.
- e. Dissolve congregations when their mission work has ceased.
- f. Authorize the celebration of the Lord's Supper beyond particular congregations.
- g. Receive, dismiss, examine, install, provide pastoral care for, and discipline pastors.
- h. Enroll, dismiss, and examine candidates and ordain them to called service.
- i. Validate the call of ministers to service beyond a congregation.
- j. Settle differences between congregations and pastors.
- k. Propose and vote on amendments to the *Constitution*.

l. Elect commissioners to wider councils of the ECO, including the synod. In the selection of such commissioners the presbytery is encouraged to promote representation in areas of difference recognized as the basis of discrimination and inequality in church and society, namely race, ethnicity, gender, ability/disability, and age.

m. Promote and encourage the missional effectiveness of its congregations. Each presbytery shall develop an instrument to assist its congregations in their annual review and narrative report of their ministry and mission. These annual reports shall be reviewed and discussed by the presbytery with each congregation's session.

3.0104 Meetings

The presbytery shall organize itself to accomplish these tasks and fulfill these responsibilities, and may delegate authority to elected committees and commissions. The presbytery shall hold stated meetings at least twice a year. Meetings of the presbytery, including its quorum, shall be governed by the latest edition of *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, unless by its own rule the presbytery has adopted other procedures and practices. Each elder commissioner elected by a member congregation shall be entitled to vote at stated meetings. In addition, member pastors with voting authority as set forth in Section 2.0401 shall also be entitled to vote at stated meetings. The voting members of the presbytery shall have the authority to elect a governing council and to vote on all matters set forth in Section 3.0103. The voting members may also delegate to the presbytery governing council authority with respect to any such matter, other than the chartering or dissolution of congregations and the installation or removal of pastors. Each presbytery shall develop a manual of administrative operations setting forth its structures and procedures.

3.0105 Required Committees

a. Committee on Ministry

Each presbytery shall elect a Committee on Ministry which shall have broad responsibility for the pastoral relationships of the presbytery. The Committee on Ministry shall have at least eight members, all elected by the presbytery, with membership being made up of an equal number of elders and pastors. No more than two members may be from the same congregation. The Committee on Ministry shall be available to any session or pastor of the presbytery. The presbytery shall, by its own rule, delegate and determine the authority and functions of the Committee on Ministry.

b. Permanent Judicial Committee

Each presbytery shall elect a Permanent Judicial Committee as specified in the *Rules of Discipline*.

3.0106 Presbytery Governing Council

The presbytery governing council shall consist of a number of individuals determined by the presbytery, with an equal number of elders and pastors. The presbytery council shall be responsible for the records, finances, policies and procedures of the presbytery and shall perform any functions delegated to such council by the presbytery. The presbytery council shall have the authority to elect corporate officers (including a chief executive officer) and to hire staff to perform any such functions. The council shall review the chief executive officer's performance annually.

3.0107 Records

The presbytery shall keep full and accurate records of its proceedings and make them available on request to any session or pastor of the presbytery. Each presbytery shall annually arrange for an independent financial review and shall publish the report in its minutes.

3.0108 Finances

The presbytery may develop programs, engage staff, adopt budgets, and acquire and manage resources as it deems expedient to the mission of Christ. To support its function and ministry the presbytery may, by its own rule, apportion expenses to its congregations.

3.0109 Policies and Procedures

Each presbytery shall establish processes and procedures for recruiting, training, and encouraging candidates to the ministry.

Each presbytery shall adopt a policy for the prevention of sexual misconduct among its members. This policy shall govern the presbytery's congregations unless a particular session, with the consent of the presbytery, adopts its own policy.

3.02 Synod

3.0201 Purpose

The synod is the widest council of the ECO giving support and guidance to the presbyteries and congregations. The synod shall assess and proclaim the missional vision and theology of the ECO.

3.0202 Duties and Authority

The synod shall:

- a. Provide linkage of presbyteries to one another for mutual encouragement.
- b. Correspond and connect with global mission partners, other denominations and ministry partners.
- c. Maintain the *Constitution* and *Essential Tenets* of the ECO.
- d. Where appropriate and necessary, provide services (i.e. pension and health insurance) for the ECO.

3.0203 Meetings of Synod Commissioners

The synod commissioners shall meet at least annually. The meetings shall serve the purpose of encouraging presbyteries and churches in their mission as well as conducting the business necessary for the mission of the ECO. Meetings of the synod, including its quorum shall be governed by the latest edition of *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, unless by its own rule the synod has adopted other procedures and practices. The Synod commissioners shall have the authority to elect and remove members of the synod governing board and to amend and vote on proposed amendments to this *Constitution* submitted to the synod by at least two presbyteries. Voting members of the synod are those individuals commissioned by and from their presbyteries. Presbyteries shall commission an equal number of ministers and elders. The synod, by its own rule, shall determine the number of commissioners from each presbytery, and each presbytery shall be entitled to at least one elder and one pastor commissioner.

3.0204 Synod Executive Committee

The synod executive committee shall consist of between six and nine individuals, with at least three being ruling elders and the remainder being ordained pastors. The synod executive committee shall have the power to:

- a. Constitute, divide, and dissolve presbyteries, and settle disputes between them, provided any such action is approved by two-thirds of the members of the governing board then in office.
- b. Receive and approve union presbyteries into the ECO, provided any such action is approved by two-thirds of the members of the governing board then in office.
- c. Adopt an annual budget and may receive, hold, manage, sell and expend funds and other assets.
- d. Elect corporate officers (including a president) and hire staff.
- e. Represent the ECO to ecumenical and mission partners when needed.
- f. Develop a manual of operations for its activities and functions.
- g. Own the distinctive trademarks, tradenames and other intellectual property of the ECO and protect against unauthorized use thereof.
- h. Exercise all other powers of a nonprofit corporation under applicable law.

3.0205 Records

The synod shall keep full and accurate records of its proceedings and make them available on request to any member presbytery or congregation. The synod shall annually arrange for an independent financial review and shall publish the report in its minutes.

3.0206 Finances

To support its function and ministry, the synod may, by its own rule, apportion expenses to its presbyteries and/or affinity networks.

3.0207 Policies and Procedures

The synod shall develop a manual of administrative operations setting forth its structures and procedures.

CHAPTER FOUR

Civil Authority and Property

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;
— Psalm 24:1 (NIV)

Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain.
— Psalm 127:1 (NIV)

4.01 Incorporation and Trustees

Where permitted by civil law, each congregation, each presbytery, and the synod shall cause a nonprofit corporation to be formed and maintained through which it shall act legally. If incorporation of a particular congregation or presbytery is not permitted under applicable law, individual trustees shall be elected from the congregation's membership in the same manner as for electing elders, or by rule of the presbytery for its trustees.

4.0101 *The Congregation*

The nonprofit corporation of a congregation so formed, or the individual trustees, shall have all powers of a nonprofit corporation under applicable law including the power to:

- a. Receive, hold, encumber, manage and transfer property, real or personal, provided that in buying, selling, and mortgaging real property, the trustees shall act only after the approval of the congregation, granted at a duly constituted meeting.
- b. Accept and execute deeds of title to such property, and to hold and defend title to such property.
- c. Manage any permanent special funds for the mission of the congregation.

A congregation's session shall serve as the governing board of the nonprofit corporation of such congregation unless the corporation's governing documents provide for a separate corporate governing board, in which case such governing board shall operate under the authority of the session. The session or other governing board shall elect an elder to serve as the chief executive officer of the corporation and may elect other corporate officers as it deems appropriate or as required by law. The powers and duties of the trustees shall not infringe upon the powers and duties of the session.

4.0102 *The Presbytery*

The corporation of a presbytery so formed, or its individual trustees, shall have the power to receive, hold, encumber, manage and transfer property, real or personal. The presbytery shall not, however, direct the use of, co-sign, or guaranty any debt instrument issued by a member congregation or any other entity (except a subsidiary of the presbytery), nor will it guaranty performance of any instrument securing such debt, be it mortgage or deed of trust or a security agreement.

A presbytery's governing council shall serve as the governing board of the corporation of such presbytery. Such governing board shall elect corporate officers as it deems appropriate or as required by applicable law.

4.0103 *The Synod*

The corporation of the synod so formed shall have the power to receive, hold, encumber, manage and transfer property, real or personal, to accept and execute deeds of title to such property, and to defend title to such property.

The corporation of the synod shall have the power to manage any permanent special funds accepted by and for purposes directed by the synod.

The powers and duties of the synod corporation shall not infringe on the powers and duties of the synod, and the corporation shall in all matters be subject to the direction, review, and control of the synod exercised through the synod governing board.

The Synod's executive committee shall serve as the governing board of the corporation of the Synod. Such governing board shall elect corporate officers as it deems appropriate or as required by applicable law.

CHAPTER FIVE

Ecumenicity and Union

Aim for perfection, . . . be of one mind, live in peace.

And the God of love and peace will be with you. — 2 Corinthians 13:11 (NIV)

5.01 Ecumenicity

The ECO recognizes that God calls all to one faith, one Lord, one baptism in the body of Christ, the Church. The center of this life together is based in the covenant promises of the Lord, who is known as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We trust in Christ as Savior and commit to life together with Christ as our Lord. As the called people of God, we desire unity of ministry by the power of the Holy Spirit. As heirs of the Reformed tradition, we recognize that we are but one expression of that spiritual life together. We desire communication, cooperation, and partnership with other Christian groups, noting common goals where possible and conversation where core differences exist.

5.02 Reformed and Presbyterian

We cherish our common history with all expressions of Reformed and Presbyterian churches. We wish to partner in mission and ministry, while confessing the common historical biblical and orthodox faith as given to us in God's Word, our authority for faith and life.

5.0201 Affinity Network

A congregation of joint witness, which adheres to the *Constitution* of the ECO, may request to be part of a non-geographically connected affinity network or geographically connected presbytery of the ECO while remaining as members in the PC(USA) and functioning as part of an established PC(USA) presbytery.

This joint witness is centered around a common mission or affinity such as outreach to ethnic, age or mission specific groups, worship size or style, or geographical proximity.

5.0202 Union Congregations

Congregations, historically members of the PC(USA) or other Reformed denominations, who wish to maintain that membership while joining with the ECO and who recognize and teach the *Essential Tenets* may request to join a presbytery of the ECO after a period and process of discernment, and a two-thirds vote of the congregation at a duly called meeting. This joint witness shall be formed in communication with the presbytery or comparable governing body of each denomination. Wherever the constitutions of the denominations differ, any mandatory provisions of one shall apply in all cases where the other is permissive.

5.0203 Union Presbyteries

A presbytery of the ECO may unite to form a union presbytery with one or more comparable councils or governing bodies, each of which is a member of another Reformed body, with the approval of the governing body of which each is a part. Wherever the constitutions of the denominations differ, any mandatory provisions of one shall apply in all cases where the other is permissive. A union presbytery shall be created by the adoption of a plan of union by two-thirds vote of each presbytery or governing body that is party to the union. The synod and/or governing body having jurisdiction over each of the uniting bodies shall approve the plan of union.

5.03 Other denominations

Out of our common Protestant heritage, partnership and joint congregational witness will be encouraged where mission, ministry, and collegiality can be coordinated and approved by the appropriate governing bodies, and where the *Constitution* and *Essential Tenets* of the ECO can be followed.

CHAPTER SIX

The Constitution

6.01 Composition of the Constitution

The *Constitution* of the ECO includes the *Essential Tenets*, the *Form of Government*, and the *Rules of Discipline*.

6.02 Amending this Constitution

Presbyteries may overture the synod of the ECO for changes in this *Constitution* as follows:

- a. Two presbyteries must concur in the proposed changes and overture the larger body with changes.
- b. The synod may amend and transmit the proposed changes to the *Constitution* to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative vote, and a two-thirds majority of the presbyteries shall be required for adoption.
- c. Any amendment to the *Essential Tenets* shall require an affirmative vote of two-thirds of the voting members of the synod present and voting. In addition, the affirmative vote of each presbytery for such amendment shall require an affirmative vote of two-thirds of the voting members of such presbytery present and voting.

Rules of Discipline

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. — Galatians 6:1-2

1.0 PURPOSE OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

- 1.1 All human beings are sinners by nature, by influence, by choice, and by action. Sin is destructive, contagious, parasitical, polluting, and disabling. The purpose of church discipline is redemptive: to correct and restrain sin, to help the spiritual growth of people; to achieve justice and compassion for all participants involved; to correct or restrain wrongdoing in order to bring members to repentance and restoration; and to correct the weaknesses, mistakes and offenses of individuals and councils. Appropriate reasons for discipline are actions contrary to the faith and practice to which, according to Scripture, all Christians are called, or which are contrary to the *Constitution* of the ECO.
- 1.2 Discipline in the church should be appropriate to the nature of the error or offense. All acts of discipline, both for individuals and councils, should be weighed carefully, keeping in mind the purpose of discipline. In all cases, the process and procedures used in church discipline shall afford all the opportunity to be heard and shall be fair and just to all participants.
- 1.3 The traditional biblical obligation to conciliate, mediate, and adjust differences without strife is not diminished by these *Rules of Discipline*. The biblical duty of church people to “come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court...” (Matthew 5:25) is not abated or diminished. It remains the duty of every church member to try (prayerfully and seriously) to bring about an adjustment or settlement of the quarrel, complaint, delinquency, or irregularity asserted.

2.0 JUDICIAL PROCESS

- 2.1 Judicial process consists of two types of cases: remedial and disciplinary. A remedial case is one in which (a) an erroneous decision or action, or (b) an omission or failure to act, may be corrected by a council with higher or wider authority. A disciplinary case is one in which a church member or officer may be censured for an offense. Church officers are pastors, elders, and deacons. An offense is any act or omission by a member or officer of the church that is contrary to the Scriptures or the *Constitution* of the ECO.
- 2.2 The responsibility and authority for discipline in a particular church belongs to the session. The responsibility and authority for discipline of pastors and lay pastors belongs to the presbytery. The responsibility and authority for remedial cases and appeals is the presbytery and the synod.
- 2.3 Each council shall enforce and recognize the judgments, decisions, and orders of every other council acting under the provisions of the *Rules of Discipline*.
- 2.4 Judicial process ends when a church officer or a member renounces the jurisdiction of the church.

Should the accused in a disciplinary case renounce the jurisdiction of the church, the clerk or stated clerk shall report to the governing body both the renunciation and the status of the matter at that time, including the name of the accused, the date and fact of renunciation during an investigation or hearing, and the charges filed.

3.0 JUDICIAL COMMISSIONS

- 3.1 Each presbytery shall elect a permanent judicial commission from the pastors and elders within the presbytery. Once five (5) presbyteries have been established, the synod shall elect a permanent judicial commission. In the event five (5) presbyteries are not established, the synod shall elect a judicial commission to act in specific cases. Each commission shall be composed of pastors and elders in numbers as nearly equal as possible. When the commission consists of an odd number of members, the additional member may be either a pastor or an elder. The synod commission shall be composed of no fewer than five members distributed equally, insofar as possible, among the constituent presbyteries. The presbytery commission shall be composed of no fewer than five members, with no more than one of its elder members from any one of its constituent churches.
- 3.2 The term of each member of a permanent judicial commission shall be six years. Commissioners shall be elected in three classes, with no more than one half of the members to be in one class. When established for the first time, one class shall serve for two years, the second class for four years, and the third class for six years. Any vacancy due to resignation, death, or any other cause may be filled by the electing governing body, which may elect a person to fill the unexpired term.
- 3.3 No person who has served on a permanent judicial commission for a full term of six years shall be eligible for reelection until four years have elapsed after the expired six-year term. No person shall serve on more than one judicial commission at the same time.
- 3.4 The quorum of a judicial commission shall be a majority of the members. For judicial process, the session is a judicial commission and the quorum of a session for judicial process shall be the moderator of the session and a majority of the elder members.
- 3.5 When a church or council is a party to a case, members of a judicial commission who are members of that church, or of that council, or of churches within that council shall not participate in the trial or appeal of that case.
- 3.6 A judicial commission shall exercise the powers and responsibilities entrusted to it by these *Rules of Discipline*, and is authorized to deliberate upon and conclude any matters submitted to it under these Rules. A judicial commission may hold a pre-hearing conference, require the exchange of lists of witnesses and exhibits, may request written briefs from the parties, provide for reasonable discovery of evidence, set reasonable schedules for discovery, briefs, and the hearing of the case, and take such other action as may be necessary to provide for a full and fair hearing for all participants. A judicial commission shall have full authority and power to control the conduct of the hearing and of all parties, witnesses, counsel, and the public, including removal of them, to the end that proper dignity and decorum shall be maintained. Questions as to procedure, the competency of witnesses, or the admissibility of evidence arising in the course of a hearing shall be decided by the judicial commission after the parties have had an opportunity to be heard.

4.0 REMEDIAL CASES

- 4.1 A remedial case is initiated by the filing of a complaint with the stated clerk of the governing body having jurisdiction. A complaint is a written statement alleging: (a) an erroneous decision or action, or (b) an omission or failure to act. The filing of a complaint does not, by itself, stay enforcement of the decision or action.
- 4.2 The action or decision of a council or of a judicial commission may be suspended by a stay of enforcement. To seek a stay of enforcement, the complainant or appellant shall deliver to the stated clerk a copy of the complaint or notice of appeal and a request for stay containing a short

statement of the basis for challenging the decision or action, and a short statement of the harm that will occur if the decision or action is not stayed. The stated clerk shall promptly transmit the request for stay to all members of the judicial commission eligible to participate in consideration of the complaint or appeal. A stay of enforcement shall be entered when it is signed by at least three of the members of the judicial commission having jurisdiction to hear the complaint or appeal on the decision or action. A stay of enforcement has no evidentiary or procedural effect on the merits of the case.

- 4.3 Remedial complaints shall be filed within ninety days. Those eligible to file such a complaint are: (a) a pastor or an elder enrolled as a member of a presbytery, against that presbytery, and the complaint is filed with the synod; (b) a session against the presbytery, and the complaint is filed with the synod; (c) any council against any other council of the same level, and the complaint is filed with the council immediately wider than the council complained against; (d) a member of a church against the session of that church, and the complaint is filed with the presbytery.
- 4.4 A complaint shall include the following: (a) the name of the complainant and the name of the respondent; (b) the alleged erroneous decision, action, omission, or failure to act which shall include the date, place, and circumstances thereof; (c) the reasons for the remedial complaint; (d) the interest or relationship of the complainant, showing why that party has a right to file the complaint; and (e) the relief requested.
- 4.5 A copy of the complaint shall be delivered to the respondent and the complainant shall file with the stated clerk a receipt signed by the respondent or an affidavit of personal service.
- 4.6 The respondent shall file with the stated clerk a concise answer within forty-five days after receipt of the complaint, and shall furnish a copy of the answer to the complainant. The answer shall admit those facts alleged in the complaint that are true, deny those allegations that are not true or are mistakenly stated, and present other facts that may explain the situation.
- 4.7 The hearing in a remedial case shall be conducted by the judicial commission. Each of the parties in a remedial case shall be entitled to appear and may be represented by counsel, provided, however, that no person shall act as counsel who is not a member of the ECO. No member of a judicial commission shall appear as counsel before that commission while a member. Counsel need not be a paid representative or an attorney-at-law.
- 4.8 A member of a judicial commission is disqualified if the member is personally interested in the case, is related by blood or marriage to any party, or has been active for or against any party. Any member of a judicial commission may be challenged by any party, and the validity of the challenge shall be determined by the remaining members of the permanent judicial commission.
- 4.9 At the hearing on a remedial complaint, the parties shall be given an opportunity to make opening statements, present evidence, and the parties shall be given an opportunity to make final statements, the complainant having the right of opening and closing the argument. The judicial commission shall then meet privately to decide the case.
- 4.10 The judicial commission shall then decide the case. If the complaint is sustained either in whole or in part, the commission shall either order such action as is appropriate or direct the lower governing body to conduct further proceedings in the matter. A written decision shall be prepared and shall become the final decision when a copy of the written decision is signed by the moderator of the judicial commission. A copy of the written decision shall be delivered to the parties to the case. The decision shall be filed with the stated clerk of the governing body that appointed the judicial commission.

5.0 DISCIPLINARY CASES

- 5.1 A disciplinary case is initiated by submitting a written statement of an alleged offense to the clerk of session or the stated clerk of the presbytery. The statement shall give a clear narrative and allege facts with supporting information, that, if proven true, would likely result in disciplinary action.
- 5.2 Upon receipt of a written statement of an alleged offense, the clerk of session or the stated clerk of presbytery, without undertaking further inquiry, shall report to the council only that an offense has been alleged without naming the accused or the nature of the alleged offense, and refer the statement immediately to an investigating committee. A session shall not grant a certificate of transfer to a member, nor shall a presbytery grant a certificate of transfer to a minister, while an inquiry or charges are pending.
- 5.3 When a written statement of an alleged offense of sexual abuse toward any person under the age of eighteen, or who it is alleged lacked the mental capacity to consent, has been received against a pastor, the stated clerk receiving the allegation shall immediately communicate the allegation to the judicial commission. The moderator of the judicial commission shall within three days designate two members of presbytery (who shall not be members of the investigating committee) to determine whether the accused shall be placed on a paid administrative leave during the resolution of the matter. The cost of such shall be borne by the employing entity whenever possible or be shared by the presbytery as necessary. While administrative leave is in effect, the pastor may not perform any pastoral, administrative, educational, or supervisory duties, and may not officiate at any functions such as Baptism, funerals, or weddings.
- 5.4 Upon receiving a written allegation of an offense, the council having jurisdiction over the accused member shall appoint an investigating committee to determine whether charges should be filed. An investigating committee shall have no more than five but no less than three members. A session shall not appoint members of the session as members of the investigating committee. A presbytery may provide by rule for appointment of an investigating committee.
- 5.5 The investigating committee shall: (a) provide the accused with a copy of the statement of alleged offense; (b) make a thorough inquiry into the facts and circumstances of the alleged offense; (c) examine all relevant papers, documents, and records available to it; (d) ascertain all available witnesses and inquire of them; (e) determine whether there are probable grounds or cause to believe that an offense was committed by the accused; (f) decide whether the charge(s) filed can reasonably be proved, having due regard for the character, availability, and credibility of the witnesses and evidence available; (g) report to the governing body having jurisdiction over the accused only whether or not it will file charges; and (h) if charges are to be filed, prepare and file them and designate one or more persons (to be known as the prosecuting committee) from among its membership to prosecute the case.
- 5.6 The investigating committee, prior to filing charges against an accused, may initiate alternative forms of resolution to determine if agreement can be reached between all parties involved concerning any charges which may be filed. If such agreement is reached, the investigating committee shall report it to the judicial commission for its approval.
- 5.7 If the investigating committee decides to file charges, it shall inform the accused in writing of the charges it will make, including a summary of the facts it expects to prove at the hearing to support those charges. It shall ask the accused if that person wishes to plead guilty to the charges to avoid a full hearing and indicate the censure it will recommend to the judicial commission.
- 5.8 If no charges are filed, the investigating committee shall file a written report of that fact alone with the clerk of session or stated clerk of the presbytery, and notify the person who submitted the written statement. If no charges are filed, the disposition of the investigating committee's records shall be in accordance with session or presbytery policy.
- 5.9 No charges shall be filed later than three years from the time of the commission of the alleged

offense, nor later than one year from the date the investigating committee was formed, whichever occurs first, except as follows. For instances of sexual abuse of another person, the three year time limit shall not apply. Charges may be brought regardless of the date on which an offense is alleged to have occurred. Sexual abuse of another person is any offense involving sexual conduct in relation to: (a) any person under the age of eighteen years or anyone over the age of eighteen years without the mental capacity to consent; or (b) any person when the conduct includes force, threat, coercion, intimidation, or misuse of office or position.

- 5.10 All disciplinary cases shall be filed and prosecuted by a governing body through an investigating committee and a prosecuting committee. The prosecuting committee is the representative of the church and, as such, has all of the rights of the appropriate governing body in the case. Each charge shall be numbered and set forth the conduct that constituted the offense. Each charge shall state (as far as possible) the time, place, and circumstances of the commission of the alleged conduct. Each charge shall also be accompanied by a list of the names and addresses of the witnesses for the prosecution and a description of the records and documents to be cited for its support. Every charge shall be prepared in writing and filed with the clerk of session or stated clerk of the presbytery. Upon receipt of a charge, the clerk of a session shall present the charge to the session at its next meeting. Upon receipt of a charge, the stated clerk of the presbytery shall immediately forward it to the judicial commission of that presbytery.
- 5.11 The hearing in a disciplinary case shall be conducted by a judicial commission. Each of the parties in a disciplinary case shall be entitled to appear and may be represented by counsel, provided, however, that no person shall act as counsel who is not a member of the ECO. No member of a judicial commission shall appear as counsel before that commission while a member. If the accused in a disciplinary case is unable to secure counsel, the judicial commission shall appoint counsel for the accused. Reasonable expenses for defense shall be authorized and reimbursed by the governing body in which the case originated. Counsel need not be a paid representative or attorney-at-law.
- 5.12 A member of a judicial commission is disqualified if the member is personally interested in the case, is related by blood or marriage to any party, or has been active for or against any party. Any member of a judicial commission may be challenged by any party, and the validity of the challenge shall be determined by the remaining members of the judicial commission.
- 5.13 The proceedings shall ordinarily be conducted in open session; however, at the request of any party, or on its own initiative, the judicial commission may determine at any stage of the proceedings, by a vote of two thirds of the members present, to exclude persons other than the parties and their counsel.
- 5.14 The accused in a disciplinary case is presumed to be innocent until the contrary is proved, and unless guilt is established beyond a reasonable doubt, the accused is entitled to be found not guilty.
- 5.15 The judicial commission shall determine all preliminary objections and any other objection affecting the order or regularity of the proceedings. It may dismiss the case or permit amendments to the charges in the furtherance of justice, provided that such amendments do not change the substance of the charges or prejudice the accused. If the proceedings are found to be in order, and the charges are considered sufficient, the accused shall be called upon to plead 'guilty' or 'not guilty' to each charge. The plea shall be entered on the record. If the accused declines to answer or pleads 'not guilty,' a plea of 'not guilty' shall be entered on the record and the hearing shall proceed. If the accused pleads 'guilty,' the council shall proceed to hear evidence of harm, mitigation, rehabilitation, and redemption, and to determine the degree of censure to be imposed.
- 5.16 If a plea of not guilty is entered on the record, the parties shall then be given an opportunity to make opening statements. The prosecuting committee shall present its evidence in support of the charges, subject to objection and cross-examination by the accused. The accused shall have the opportunity to present evidence, subject to objection and cross-examination by the prosecuting committee. The prosecuting committee then may introduce additional evidence, but only to rebut evidence introduced on behalf of the accused. This additional evidence is subject to objection

and cross-examination by the accused. The parties shall be given an opportunity to make final statements. The prosecuting committee shall have the right of opening and closing the argument.

- 5.17 The judicial commission shall then meet privately. All persons not members of the session or permanent judicial commission shall be excluded. After careful deliberation, the judicial commission shall vote on each charge separately and record the vote in its minutes. In order to find the accused guilty of a charge, the judicial commission must find that the pertinent facts within that charge have been proven beyond a reasonable doubt. Proof beyond a reasonable doubt occurs when the comparison and consideration of all the evidence compels an abiding conviction that the material facts necessary to prove the charge are true. No judgment of guilt may be found on a charge unless at least two thirds of the members of the judicial commission eligible to vote agree on the judgment. When a judicial commission has arrived at a decision, the moderator shall, in open meeting, announce the verdict for each charge separately.
- 5.18 If the accused is found guilty or after a guilty plea, the judicial commission shall permit the parties to present evidence as to the extent of the injury suffered, mitigation, rehabilitation, and redemption. This evidence may be offered by either party or the original accuser or that person's representative. The person who was directly harmed by the offense may submit a victim impact statement. That statement shall not be subject to cross-examination. The judicial commission shall then meet privately to determine the degree of censure to be imposed. Following such determination and in an open meeting, the moderator of the judicial commission shall then pronounce the censure. A written decision stating the judgment on each charge and the determination of the degree of censure, if any, shall be prepared. It shall become the final decision when signed by the moderator of the judicial commission, and shall be filed with the clerk or stated clerk of the council. The clerk or stated clerk of the council shall deliver a copy of the decision to each party named in the decision.

6.0 CENSURE AND RESTORATION IN A DISCIPLINARY CASE

- 6.1 The degrees of church censure are rebuke, rebuke with supervised rehabilitation, temporary exclusion from exercise of ordained office or membership, and removal from ordained office or membership. Rebuke is the lowest degree of censure for an offense and is completed when pronounced. It consists of setting forth publicly the character of the offense, together with reproof.
- 6.2 Rebuke with supervised rehabilitation is the next to lowest degree of censure. It consists of setting forth the character of the offense, together with reproof and mandating a period of supervised rehabilitation imposed by the judicial commission. The judicial commission shall formally communicate to the supervising entity and the person censured the goals of the rehabilitation and the specific authority conferred on the supervisor(s). The description of the rehabilitation program shall include a clear statement of how progress will be evaluated and how it will be determined when and if the supervised rehabilitation has been satisfactorily completed.
- 6.3 Temporary exclusion from the exercise of ordained office or membership is a higher degree of censure for a more aggravated offense and shall be for a definite period of time, or for a period defined by completion of supervised rehabilitation imposed by the judicial commission. If the period of temporary exclusion is defined by completion of supervised rehabilitation, the judicial commission shall formally communicate to the supervising entity and the person found guilty the specific authority conferred on the supervisor. During the period of temporary exclusion from ordained office, the person found guilty shall refrain from the exercise of any function of ordained office. During the period of temporary exclusion from membership, the person found guilty shall refrain from participating and voting in meetings and from holding or exercising any office. If a pastor is temporarily excluded from the exercise of the office of ordained minister, the presbytery may, if no appeal from the case is pending, declare the pastoral relationship dissolved. A person under the censure of temporary exclusion shall apply in writing to the council, through the clerk of session or stated clerk, for restoration upon the expiration of the time of exclusion or completion of the supervised rehabilitation pronounced. The council that imposed the censure shall approve the restoration when the time of exclusion has expired or when the council is fully satisfied that the supervised rehabilitation pronounced has been completed. A person under the censure of temporary exclusion from the exercise of ordained office or from membership may

apply in writing to the council that imposed the censure (through its clerk) to be restored prior to the expiration of the time of exclusion or the completion of the supervised rehabilitation fixed in the censure. The council may approve such a restoration when it is fully satisfied that the action is justified.

- 6.4 Removal from office or membership is the highest degree of censure. Removal from office is the censure by which the ordination and election of the person found guilty are set aside, and the person is removed from all offices without removal from membership. Removal from membership is the censure by which the membership of the person found guilty is terminated, the person is removed from all rolls, and the person's ordination and election to all offices are set aside. If a pastor is removed from office without removal from membership, the presbytery shall give the pastor a certificate of membership to a church of the pastor's choice. Any pastoral relationship is automatically dissolved by the censure.

7.0 APPEAL

- 7.1 An appeal of a remedial or disciplinary case is the transfer to the next wider council of a case in which a decision has been rendered in a smaller council, for the purpose of obtaining a review of the proceedings and decision to correct, modify, set aside, or reverse the decision. Either party may initiate an appeal by the filing of a written notice of appeal.
- 7.2 In a remedial case, the notice of appeal shall not suspend any further action implementing the decision being appealed unless a stay of enforcement has been obtained in accordance with the provisions of 4.2 above.
- 7.3 In a disciplinary case, the notice of appeal, if properly and timely filed, shall suspend further proceedings by lower councils, except that, in the instance of temporary exclusion from exercise of ordained office or membership or removal from office or membership, the person against whom the judgment has been pronounced shall refrain from the exercise of office or from participating and voting in meetings until the appeal is finally decided.
- 7.4 On application, the judicial commission of the wider council may grant a petition for withdrawal of an appeal. The judicial commission shall deny a petition if its approval would defeat the ends of justice.
- 7.5 The grounds for appeal are: (a) irregularity in the proceedings; (b) refusing a party reasonable opportunity to be heard or to obtain or present evidence; (c) receiving improper, or declining to receive proper, evidence or testimony; (d) hastening to a decision before the evidence or testimony is fully received; (e) manifestation of prejudice in the conduct of the case; (f) injustice in the process or decision; (g) error in constitutional interpretation; and (h) in an appeal by a person found guilty, undue severity of censure.
- 7.6 A written notice of appeal shall be filed within forty-five days after a copy of the decision has been delivered to the party appealing. The written notice of appeal shall be filed with the clerk or stated clerk of the lower governing body that elected the judicial commission from whose decision the appeal is taken. The party appealing shall provide a copy of the notice of appeal to each of the other parties and to the stated clerk of the governing body that will hear the appeal. The written notice of appeal shall include the following: (a) the name of the party or parties filing the appeal, called the appellant or appellants, and their counsel if any; (b) the name of the other party or parties, called the appellee or appellees, and their counsel if any; (c) the governing body from whose decision the appeal is taken; (d) the decision, and date and place thereof, from which the appeal is taken (enclose a copy of the decision with the notice of appeal); and (e) a statement of the alleged errors of the judicial commission which conducted the hearing that are the grounds for appeal.
- 7.7 A copy of the notice of appeal shall be delivered to each of the other parties and the appellant(s) shall file with the stated clerk a receipt signed by the other parties or an affidavit of personal service.

- 7.8 Within forty-five days after the receipt of a written notice of appeal, the clerk of session or stated clerk of the lower governing body shall list in writing to the parties all of the papers and other materials that constitute the record of the case. Within fifteen days thereafter, any party may file with the stated clerk of the lower council a written statement challenging the accuracy or completeness of the record of the case as listed by the stated clerk. The written challenge shall state specifically the item or items which are claimed to be omitted from the record of the case.
- 7.9 The stated clerk of the lower council shall certify and file the record of the case, which may include authenticated copies of parts of the record, and shall include any written challenges disputing the completeness or accuracy of the record, with the stated clerk of the wider council. If anything material to either party is omitted from the record by error or accident or is misstated therein, the omission or misstatement may be corrected. The parties may stipulate to the correction, or the judicial commission of the lower council may certify and transmit a supplemental record. All other questions as to the form and content of the record shall be presented to the judicial commission of the higher governing body.
- 7.10 Within thirty days after the date of the filing of the record on appeal, the appellant shall file with the stated clerk of the wider council a written brief containing specifications of the errors alleged in the notice of appeal and arguments, reasons, and citations of authorities in support of the appellant's contentions as to the alleged errors specified. The brief shall be accompanied by a certification that a copy has been furnished to the other party or parties. For good cause shown, the stated clerk of the wider council may extend this time limit for a reasonable period. Failure of appellant to file a brief within the time allowed, without good cause, shall be deemed by the judicial commission an abandonment of the appeal.
- 7.11 Within thirty days after the filing of appellant's brief, the appellee shall file with the stated clerk of the wider council a written brief responding to the appellant's brief. The brief shall be accompanied by a certification that a copy has been furnished to the other party or parties. For good cause shown, the stated clerk of the higher governing body may extend this time limit for a reasonable period. Failure by appellee to file a brief within the time allowed, without good cause, shall constitute waiver of the rights to file a brief, to appear, and to be heard.
- 7.12 Upon receipt of the record and the briefs, or upon the expiration of the time for filing them, the stated clerk of the wider council shall transmit the record and briefs to the judicial commission. At any time after an appeal is received by a judicial commission, the commission may direct the parties or their counsel, if any, to attend a prehearing conference, to seek agreement on any of the disputed issues in the appeal, and to take other action which might reasonably and impartially narrow the dispute and expedite its resolution.
- 7.13 The moderator of the judicial commission shall notify the parties of the date when they may appear in person or by counsel before the judicial commission to present the appeal. Failure of a party to appear in person or by counsel shall constitute a waiver of participation in the hearing on appeal.
- 7.14 At the hearing, the judicial commission shall determine whether to receive newly discovered evidence; and give opportunity to be heard on the grounds of the appeal to those parties who have not waived that right, the appellant having the right of opening and closing the argument.
- 7.15 After the hearing and after deliberation, the judicial commission shall vote separately on each specification of error alleged. The vote shall be on the question, "Shall the specification of error be sustained?" The minutes shall record the numerical vote on each specification of error. If none of the specifications of error is sustained, and no other error is found, the decision of the lower governing body shall be affirmed. If one or more errors are found, the judicial commission shall determine whether the decision of the lower council shall be affirmed, set aside, reversed, modified, or the case remanded for a new hearing.
- 7.16 A written decision shall be prepared, and shall become the final decision when a copy of the written decision is signed by the moderator of the commission. The decision shall be filed with the stated clerk of the council that appointed the judicial commission and delivered to the parties to the case.



The mission of
The Fellowship of Presbyterians
is to build *flourishing churches*
that make *disciples of Jesus Christ*.

OUR VALUES

Jesus-Shaped Identity

We believe Jesus Christ must be at the center of our lives and making disciples of Jesus at the core of our ministry.

Biblical Integrity

We believe the Bible is the unique and authoritative Word of God, that teaches all that is necessary for faith and life. The prominence of God's Word over our lives shapes our priorities, and the unrivaled authority of the Bible directs our actions to be in concert with Christ's very best for our lives.

Thoughtful Theology

We believe in theological education, constant learning, and the life of the mind; celebrating this as one of the treasures of our Reformed heritage.

Accountable Community

We believe guidance is a corporate spiritual experience. We want to connect leaders to one another in healthy relationships of accountability, synergy, and care.

Egalitarian Ministry

We believe in unleashing the ministry gifts of women, men, and every ethnic group.

Missional Centrality

We believe in living out the whole of the Great Commission — including evangelism, spiritual formation, compassion, and redemptive justice — in our communities and around the world.

Center-Focused Spirituality

We believe in calling people to the core of what it means to be followers of Jesus — what "mere Christianity" is and does — and not fixate on the boundaries.

Leadership Velocity

We believe the work of identifying and developing gospel-centered leaders is critical for the church, and a great leadership culture is risk-taking, innovative, and organic.

Kingdom Vitality

We believe congregations should vigorously reproduce new missional communities to expand the Kingdom of God.



Evangelical
Covenant
Order
OF PRESBYTERIANS

2012/13 EMPLOYEE BENEFITS PROGRAM

We believe healthy ministry grows from healthy leaders. We are committed to offering a comprehensive benefits package that protects you and your family as you serve. When our individual lives are healthy and balanced, we are best equipped to advance the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ.



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Evangelical Covenant Order Benefit Program

The Evangelical Covenant Order’s (ECO) goal is to provide quality, affordable health insurance for Pastors and Church Staff. It’s critical that all Churches support the ECO insurance program.

The Employee Benefit Program effective date is April 1, 2012.

The ECO will work with each Church to avoid any lapse in coverage. The Church will need to submit the Employee Health and Welfare questionnaire at least 60 days prior to their target effective date for benefit coverage.

For example, if the Church would like an April 1, 2012 effective date for their Employee Benefit Program, the questionnaire will need to be submitted no later than January 31, 2012.

Full Participation

ECO’s goal is to make available affordable and comprehensive health insurance coverage for Pastors and Church staff. To accomplish this goal, it is imperative all Churches support the ECO Health Welfare program. Health Insurance is a key benefit provided by all major denominations in the U.S. today. The majority of these programs require full participation from their member Churches. With having the full participation requirement, the ECO program will capture enough membership to be viable in today’s medical insurance marketplace.

What is required by the Church?

The Church will offer the Employee Benefit Program and contribute *at a minimum* to the Core Medical plan 100% of the employee only coverage; offer the dental plan on a contributory or voluntary basis and provide life and disability coverage.

Benefits At-A-Glance

BENEFIT PLAN	COVERAGE BEGINS	CHURCH SPONSORED Church Pays a Portion of Benefit	VOLUNTARY Employee Pays for Benefit	WHO PAYS	
				Pastor	Church Staff
Core Benefits				Pastor	Church Staff
Medical/Rx	Date of Hire	✓		Church is responsible for 100% of Medical Coverage	Church is responsible for 100% of Core Plan Employee Only Coverage
Dental	Date of Hire	✓	✓	Offered on either a Contributory or Voluntary basis	
Vision	Date of Hire	✓	✓	Offered on either a Contributory or Voluntary basis	
Ancillary Benefits					
Basic Life	Date of Hire	✓		100% Church paid	
Voluntary Life Insurance	Date of Hire		✓	100% Employee paid	
Short Term Disability (STD)	Date of Hire	✓		100% Church paid	
Long Term Disability (LTD)	Date of Hire	✓		100% Church paid	
FSA	Date of Hire		✓	100% Employee paid	
Employee Assistance Program (EAP)	Date of Hire	✓		100% Church paid	

¹ See Page 6 for the Premium Grant Assistance Program

Medical Coverage – Cigna HealthCare

The ECO offers three Medical plans through Cigna. Cigna is the fourth largest carrier in the U.S. with coverage in over 29 countries. Cigna’s mission is to help customers improve their health, well-being and sense of security.

Our plans comprehensive medical coverage, wellness and preventive care includes:

- 100% coverage for many routine check-up, cancer screening and immunizations
- On-line tools for provider networks, medical and pharmacy cost estimators, researching symptoms and treatment options, and claims resources.

Below is a comparison of the current Board of Pensions Plan to the NEW ECO Plan.

Summary of Medical Benefits	Current Board of Pension (BOP) Plan		NEW Open Access Plus Core EPO Plan ¹
	In-Network	Out-of-Network	In-Network Only
Covered Services			
Office Visits			
Primary Care Physician	\$25 Copay	Deductible then 40%	\$25 Copay
Specialist	\$45 Copay		\$45 Copay
Preventive Care	Covered at 100%	Deductible then 40%	Covered at 100%
Diagnostic Laboratory	Deductible then 20%	Deductible then 40%	Deductible then 20%
X-Rays, including Therapeutic MRI/CAT/PET Scans	Deductible then 20%	Deductible then 40%	Deductible then 20%
Emergency Medical Care			
Emergency Room	Deductible then 20%		\$200 Copay
Hospital Services			
Inpatient Services	Deductible then 20%	Deductible then 40%	Deductible then 20%
Outpatient Services	Deductible then 20%	Deductible then 40%	Deductible then 20%
Prescription Plan			
Tier 1 - Generic	\$8 Copay		\$8 Copay
Tier 2 – Brand/Formulary	30% of Cost (Min. \$20 to Max \$100)		\$40 Copay
Tier 3 – Brand Non-Formulary	50% of Cost (Min. \$50 to Max \$150)		\$70 Copay
Tier 4 – Specialty	Based on Formulary		\$150 Copay
Mail Order (90 Day Supply)	2.5X Retail Copay		2.5X Retail Copay
Deductibles and Maximums²			
Calendar Year Deductible (January 1 – December 31)			
Individual	Variable by Salary	Variable by Salary	\$1,000
Family			\$2,000
Coinsurance	80%	60%/50%	80%
Out-of-Pocket Maximum Annual Maximum (Includes Deductible)			
Individual	Variable by Salary	Variable by Salary	\$3,000
Family			\$6,000
Lifetime Benefit Max.	Unlimited		Unlimited
This summary is provided for informational purposes only. Details may differ from state-to-state. In the event of a conflict between this benefits summary and the Summary Plan Description (SPD), the SPD will prevail.			

¹ The ECO Core plan will be based on full-participation by the Church.

² Grant Assistance Program is available for deductible and out-of-pocket costs in excess of the Board of Pensions and is subject to qualification.

Medical Coverage - Cigna HealthCare (Continued)

The following plans will be offered as a buy up plan. If the Church elects to offer a buy-up plan, the Church is required to cover 100% of the Core Plan Employee Only coverage.

Summary of Medical Benefits	Open Access Plus Plan #2 (Buy Up)		Open Access Plus Plan #3 (Buy Up)	
	In-Network	Out- of-Network	In-Network	Out- of-Network
Covered Services				
Office Visits				
Primary Care Physician	\$25 Copay	Deductible then 40%	\$30 Copay	Deductible then 50%
Specialist	\$50 Copay		\$60 Copay	
Preventive Care	Covered at 100%	Exam: In-Network Only	Covered at 100%	Exam: In-Network Only
Diagnostic Laboratory	Deductible then 20%	Deductible then 40%	Deductible then 20%	Deductible then 50%
X-Rays, including Therapeutic MRI/CAT/PET Scans	Deductible then 20%	Deductible then 40%	Deductible then 20%	Deductible then 50%
Emergency Medical Care				
Emergency Room	\$200 Copay		\$250 Copay	
Hospital Services				
Inpatient Services	Deductible then 20%	Deductible then 40%	Deductible then 20%	Deductible then 50%
Outpatient Services	Deductible then 20%	Deductible then 40%	Deductible then 20%	Deductible then 50%
Prescription Plan				
Tier 1 - Generic	\$8 Copay	50%	\$10 Copay	50%
Tier 2 – Brand/Formulary	\$25 Copay		\$35 Copay	
Tier 3 – Brand Non-Formulary	\$50 Copay		\$60 Copay	
Tier 4 – Specialty	\$100 Copay		\$120 Copay	
Mail Order (90 Day Supply)	2.5X Retail Copay	Not Covered	2.5X Retail Copay	Not Covered
Deductibles and Maximums				
Calendar Year Deductible (January 1 – December 31)				
Individual	\$500	\$1,000	\$2,000	\$4,000
Family	\$1,000	\$2,000	\$4,000	\$8,000
Coinsurance	80%	60%	80%	50%
Out-of-Pocket Maximum Annual Maximum (Includes Deductible)				
Individual	\$2,000	\$4,000	\$4,000	\$8,000
Family	\$4,000	\$8,000	\$8,000	\$16,000
Lifetime Benefit Max.	Unlimited		Unlimited	
This summary is provided for informational purposes only. Details may differ from state-to-state. In the event of a conflict between this benefits summary and the Summary Plan Description (SPD), the SPD will prevail.				

Network Access – Open Access Plus

Cigna Health Insurance has over 500,000 participating healthcare professionals and facilities throughout the country. For the most up-to-date healthcare listings visit the Cigna Provider Search tool at <http://cigna.benefitnation.net/cigna/docdir.aspx> - Find a Doctor and select the Open Access Plus network. Emergent coverage is covered regardless of where the treatment was obtained. The Pharmacy Network consists of national retail chains as well as independent pharmacies inclusive of **Walgreens**.

Dental Coverage – Cigna HealthCare

The ECO offers three dental plans administered by Cigna. The Church can offer the Dental plan as either a Contributory (Church pays a percent toward coverage) or a Voluntary Plan (Employee is responsible for 100% of premium).

Summary of Dental Benefits					
Calendar Year Benefits	DMO Plan #1	PPO Plan #2		PPO Plan #3	
	In-Network Only	In-Network	Non-Network	In-Network	Non-Network
Calendar Year Maximum	None	\$1,000 per Individual		\$1,500 per Individual	
Annual Deductible					
Individual	None	\$50	\$50	\$50	\$50
Family		\$150	\$150	\$150	\$150
Class I – Preventive & Diagnostic Care Exams, Cleanings Fluoride Treatment (child), Space Maintainers, X-Rays Sealants	Copay Schedule from \$0 - \$50	100%, No Deductible	80%, No Deductible	100%, No Deductible	80%, No Deductible
Class II – Basic Restorative Care Fillings, Endodontics (Root Canal), Periodontics (Gum Disease)	Copay Schedule from \$17 - \$110	Deductible then 80%	Deductible then 60%	Deductible then 80%	Deductible then 60%
Class III – Major Restorative Care Crowns, Inlays, Onlays, Bridges, Dentures	Copay Schedule from \$100 - \$515	Deductible then 50%	Deductible then 40%	Deductible then 50%	Deductible then 40%
Class IV – Orthodontia	Copay Schedule from \$195 - \$3,330	Not Covered		50% up to \$1,000	

This summary is provided for informational purposes only. Details may differ from state-to-state. In the event of a conflict between this benefits summary and the Summary Plan Description (SPD), the SPD will prevail.

Vision Coverage - EyeMed

The Church can offer the Vision plan administered by EyeMed as either a Contributory (Church pays a percent toward coverage) or a Voluntary Plan (Employee is responsible for 100% of premium).

Summary of Vision Benefits		
Benefit	In-Network	Out-of-Network
Eye Exams	\$10 Copay, Once every 12 Months	Reimbursement, Once every 12 Months
Lenses	\$25 Copay, Once every 12 Months	Reimbursement, Once every 12 Months
Frames	\$130 Allowance, Once every 24 Months	Reimbursement, Once every 24 Months
Contacts Lenses	\$130 Allowance, Once every 24 Months	Reimbursement, Once every 12 Months

This summary of Benefits is provided for informational purposes only. In the event of a conflict between this benefits summary and the Summary Plan Description (SPD), the SPD will prevail.

Basic Life/AD&D Coverage – Cigna Group Insurance

The Life insurance plan is 100% paid by the Church.

Summary of Basic Life / AD&D Benefits	Basic Life/AD&D Plan #1	Basic Life/AD&D Plan #2
Basic Life/AD&D	Pastors: Flat \$152,000 (Inclusive of Housing Allowance)	Pastors: Flat \$152,000 (Inclusive of Housing Allowance)
	Church Staff: 1x Annual Salary	Church Staff: 2x Annual Salary
This summary of benefits is provided for informational purposes only. In the event of a conflict between this benefits summary and the Summary Plan Description (SPD), the SPD will prevail.		

Voluntary Life/AD&D Coverage – Cigna Group Insurance

Employees have the ability to purchase additional Life Insurance for themselves as well as their spouses and children.

Summary of Voluntary Life / AD&D Benefits	Benefit Amount	Guarantee Issue
Voluntary Life/AD&D	Employee: \$10,000 Increments Spouse: \$5,000 Increments Child: \$1,000 Increments	Employee: \$100,000 Spouse: \$25,000 Child: \$10,000
This summary of benefits is provided for informational purposes only. In the event of a conflict between this benefits summary and the Summary Plan Description (SPD), the SPD will prevail.		

Disability Coverage – Cigna Group Insurance

The Disability plan is 100% paid by the Church. The Disability plan provides protection if an employee becomes disabled and cannot return to their job.

Short Term Disability Coverage

Short Term Disability can be Self-Administered via sick leave, PTO or an insurance program.

Summary of STD Benefits	Short Term Disability Plan #1 (90 Days)	Short Term Disability Plan #2 (180 Days)
Pastors	60% up to \$1,200/week, 30 day elimination period, 90 days benefit duration	60% up to \$1,200/week, 30 day elimination period, 180 days benefit duration
Church Staff	60% up to \$875/week, 30 day elimination period, 90 days benefit duration	60% up to \$875/week, 30 day elimination period, 180 days benefit duration
This summary of benefits is provided for informational purposes only. In the event of a conflict between this benefits summary and the Summary Plan Description (SPD), the SPD will prevail.		

Long Term Disability Coverage

Summary of LTD Benefits	Long Term Disability Plan #1 (90 Days)	Long Term Disability Plan #2 (180 Days)
Pastors	60% up to \$5,000/month, 90 day elimination period, 24 month own occupation duration	60% up to \$5,000/month, 180 day elimination period, 24 month own occupation duration
Church Staff	60% up to \$3,800/month, 90 day elimination period, 24 month own occupation duration	60% up to \$3,800/month, 180 day elimination period, 24 month own occupation duration
This summary of benefits is provided for informational purposes only. In the event of a conflict between this benefits summary and the Summary Plan Description (SPD), the SPD will prevail.		

For individuals wanting to protect additional income, we have the ability to offer an individual disability buy-up program.

Value Added Programs Available

- **Employee Assistance Program (EAP)**

- Cigna Behavioral Health provides employees and their dependents unlimited, 24/7 telephone access to a toll-free helpline staffed by Master's level counselors, included as a part of the group Long Term Disability (LTD) insurance program. Counselors will help employees develop an assistance plan and provide referrals to a professional network of providers. If needed, the employee and his or her dependents may use up to three face-to-face sessions per problem with a counselor, financial planner, or legal advisor.

To access the EAP program, please call their toll-free number 1-800-538-3543 or use their website at www.cignabehavioral.com/cgi

- **Travel Assistance (Secure Travel)**

- This program provides emergency medical, financial, legal and communications assistance to individuals who travel domestically and internationally. You have access to a toll-free customer service center that is available 24/7 and can even accept collect calls.

- **Will Preparation**

- Cigna makes it easy for you to take charge of those difficult life and health legal decisions. There are no more reasons to hesitate planning for the future with Cigna's online will preparation services. Cigna provides a standard document template at no cost to you.

- **Flexible Spending Account (FSA)**

- An FSA (Flexible Spending Account) offers you an easy way to reduce your taxes. When you participate in an FSA, you are only taxed on the income left over after you have paid certain out-of-pocket healthcare and daycare expenses. It allows you to set aside some of your compensation on a tax-free basis and as you incur expenses during the plan year, you are reimbursed from these accounts.

- **Long Term Care (LTC)**

- Long term care covers a wide range of supportive services provided to those who are not able to care for themselves due to a chronic illness, disability, or severe cognitive impairment, such as Alzheimer's disease. We often think long term care is nursing home care, but it is more than that. It comprises home health care, adult daycare, assisted living facilities, and Alzheimer's facilities.

- **Grant Assistance Program (GAP)**

The Grant Assistance Program is available to the Church to provide benefits for the Pastor and Church Staff currently enrolled on the BOP medical plan. The GAP programs offers assistance for qualified participants based on the availability of funds.

GAP provides resources for the following:

1. Pastoral Premium Assistance - Helps pay premium for lower income employees
2. Healthcare Hardship Assistance - Helps pay catastrophic claims for the Deductible and Out of Pocket Maximum

To apply for a grant, the participant will complete an application form.

- **Wellness *healthyou***

- At ECO, we are deeply committed to providing and promoting a culture which encourages health lifestyles and supports you and your family in your wellness efforts.

For that reason, we are proud to announce that we are offering a wellness program for the 2012/13 plan year. Healthyou is an individual-based program which encourages you to learn, grow and improve your health as well as your quality of life. This wellness program is available to all employees.

- **Worksite Voluntary Plans**

- The worksite voluntary plans will include: Critical Illness, Accident and Additional Life Programs.

Benefits Enrollment Overview

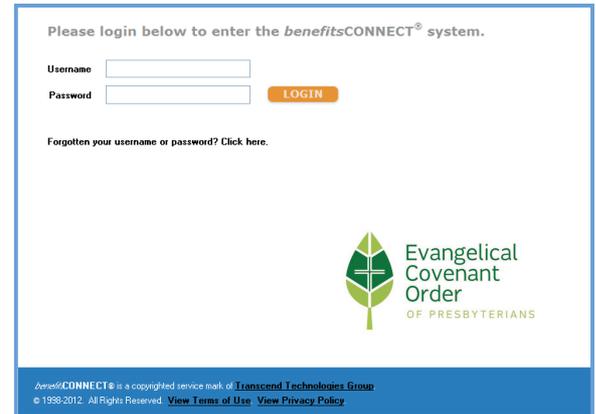
ECO will have a 24x7 on-line, web-based enrollment tool. The on-line system will provide enrollment support for you and your employees.

Professional enrollment counselors

- Personalized support inclusive of benefits
- Assist the Church and their employees with questions regarding the employee benefit program
- Assistance and guidance on benefit plan options and selection for the employee and their family

Online enrollment tool *benefitsCONNECT*[®]

- 24x7 web-based enrollment capability
- Employees select their benefits through simple, paperless enrollment process
- Manage qualifying event changes throughout the year
- Save time and money with the efficiency of managing employee eligibility, elections and payroll connections in one system that provides direct reporting to each Church



How Do I Participate in the ECO Employee Health and Welfare Program?

Step 1: Complete the Employee Health and Welfare Questionnaire

Starting April 1, 2012 the Employee Benefit Program will be available for all qualified Church members.

Step 2: Call Benefit Services Group, your benefits support team for help transitioning to the ECO Employee Benefit Plan.

ECO along with Benefit Services Group will provide assistance and counselors to help throughout the transition process.

ECO Service Partners

Benefit Services Group, Inc. (BSG) is your dedicated service partner for handling your health and welfare administration and questions. Our clients represent a spectrum of sizes ranging from small businesses up to nationally-based entities. We are here to support you and your employees as you transition to the ECO program in addition to throughout the year. Our contact information is:

Benefit Services Group, Inc.			
Web site: www.benefitservices-co.com		Toll Free: 866-417-9931	
Contact	Title	Phone	Email
Judy Mackey	President and CEO	719-314-3502	judy.mackey@bsg-co.com
Tina Neuendorf	Senior VP, Business Practice Leader	719-314-3505	tina.neuendorf@bsg-co.com
Erin Kautzner	Associate Account Manager	719-314-3506	erin.kautzner@bsg-co.com

Affirmation of Participation in the ECO 403(b) (9) Church Retirement Plan

The signature on this document affirms the decision by the Member Sponsor Church to participate in and does hereby adopt the 403(b)(9) Retirement Plan of the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians (ECO). All of the terms and provisions of the plan are hereby adopted. The Member Sponsor Church has both reviewed the terms of the plan and agrees to distribute to all eligible participants the Summary Plan Description in accordance with it. The Adoption agreement of the ECO Plan accurately reflects the Member Sponsor understanding of the plan and its operation.

The Member Sponsor agrees that their participation in the plan is directly contingent upon their membership in good standing of ECO. The determination of "good standing" rests totally with the Administrator of the Plan.

The Member Sponsor also understands that they, the Church Member Sponsor, have both options and responsibilities under the plan. These responsibilities include and are not limited to:

1. Understand that all "called" ministers, full or part time, will receive a minimum 10% contribution based upon total compensation beginning with the date of hire. Total compensation includes housing allowance.
2. Determination of who, in addition to the "called Ministers", is eligible for the plan
3. Determination of the eligibility provisions for each participant
4. Determination of the amount, if any, the Member Sponsor will contribute to the plan
5. Understand that all full and part-time employees of the Member Sponsor are eligible upon hire to contribute on a voluntary basis to the plan and will be advised of such availability at least annually
6. Will distribute the Summary Plan Description to each eligible employee annually
7. Will make all contributions to the plan coincident with each payroll, and will make this contribution in accordance with the Plan's standard administrative contribution method
8. The Member Sponsor shall be responsible for signing off of any required approval regarding loans or distributions from the plan, using the designated administrative systems provided
9. The Plan Sponsor has no responsibility to the Plan Participants for any actions by the Member Sponsor pursuant to the carrying out of the Member Sponsor responsibilities

Further, the Member Sponsor Church understands that all legal, administrative, and investment decisions and oversight are part of the ECO Plan. ECO has both a standing Retirement Plan Oversight Committee (RPOC) and an approved Investment Policy Statement designed to provide systematic review and oversight of the plan. The Member Sponsor may communicate with the RPOC making any comments or observations, but has no legal standing regarding the oversight or administration of the

Affirmation of Participation in the ECO 403(b) (9) Church Retirement Plan

Plan. The Plan Document and related documents are the controlling documents of the ECO Plan and the Member Sponsor.

The Member Sponsor understands that the following steps will be taken to establish the Member Sponsor Participation:

1. Provide the necessary information to adequately identify the Member Sponsor that allows the Plan Service Provider, Envoy TPA and Recordkeeping, Inc., to establish your Member Sponsor information on the Envoy Web Portal.
2. Access the Envoy Web Portal upon receipt of sign up instructions, and complete the Member Sponsor Adoption Agreement. On this document you will record the unique eligibility and contribution plan elements that compose your Member Sponsor Plan.
3. Download from the Web Portal the Census spreadsheet, complete it and follow the instructions for submittal.
4. You will then be provided through the Web Portal Resource Center, all instructions for enrollment and contribution submittal.

Affirmation of Participation:

Church Name:	
Address:	
Phone Number:	
Responsible Party:	
Email address:	

Signature:	
Date:	



FELLOWSHIP Covenant

Making a covenant is a highly personal decision. It acknowledges that something beyond us is more important than ourselves. It is only in the keeping of such personal commitments however, that meaningful communities are formed and life in the church flourishes. When one part of the Body rejoices, we all rejoice and when one part suffers, we all suffer: *Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ . . . Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.* (1 Corinthians 12: 12, 27)

I. Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (*Philippians 2: 9-11*)

- Because Jesus Christ is Lord, I will seek to be subject to Him in all areas of my life: (*Matthew 22: 37-40*)

II. You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

1 Corinthians 6: 19b-20

Because my life is not my own...

- I will take responsibility for my thoughts and actions: (*1 Timothy 6: 11b-12*)
- I will make the glory and enjoyment of God my focus: (*Westminster Larger Catechism, Q-1*)
- I will, relying on the Holy Spirit, rejoice in the Lord at all times: (*Philippians 4: 4-7*)
- Scripture will be my final authority in all decisions, choices, and actions: (*2 Timothy 3:16-17*)

III. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. (*Acts 20:28*)

Because the church is not my own...

- I will actively support, pray for, and encourage the ordained leaders of my congregation, serving when called in accordance with my spiritual gifts: (*Hebrews 13:7*)
- I will fulfill my part of the baptismal covenant, nurturing children and those new in the faith: (*Deuteronomy 6: 6-9*)
- I will hold my personal preferences lightly and guard the good of the whole: (*Philippians 2: 1-4*)

IV. The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it; the world, and all who live in it... (*Psalm 24:1*)

Because the world is not my own...

- I will commit to a biblical tithing of my assets, joyfully giving additional offerings whenever and wherever possible to support the work of the gospel and the welfare of God's people. (*2 Chronicles 31:12*)
- I will consider my tithes and gifts as an expression of gratitude to the One who has been extravagantly generous toward me: (*Psalm 116: 12, 17*)
- I will be a faithful steward of God's creation. I will treat the creation as a gift to be cared for and used in ways which honor and glorify the Creator: (*Genesis 2:15*)
- I will behold the creation as a 'theater of God's glory', praising God for every reminder of His presence and love: (*Psalm 19:1*)
- I will honor the sanctity of human life above the claims of human freedom: (*Psalm 8: 4-5*)
- I will treat others with respect, honoring the image of God in them, however broken. I will seek God's peace and biblical reconciliation in all times and places: (*1 Peter 2:17*)
- I will sacrificially provide for the needs of the poor and the oppressed, the neglected and the abused, the widow and the orphan: (*Isaiah 58:6-7*)

V. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (*Galatians 5: 22-23*)

Because the Holy Spirit nurtures new and fruitful lives...

- I will yield to the work of the Spirit in my life so that I will be transformed from the inside out: (*Romans 12: 1-2*)
- I will pray that God's transforming work in my life will serve Him: (*Ephesians 2:10*)
- I will set my gaze upon Jesus so that I may become what I behold, for the good of the church and the glory of God: (*2 Corinthians 3: 18*)

VI. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. (*Hebrews 12: 1-2a*)

Because I do not journey through this life alone, but in the company of others and under a great cloud of witnesses...

- I will be an encourager of my brothers and sisters: (*Hebrews 3: 13*)
- I will gather regularly with my brothers and sisters, hearing the word of God, participating in the sacraments and preparing to be sent into God's world: (*Hebrews 10: 24-25*)
- I will give others who sign this covenant permission to both nurture and admonish me: (*Proverbs 1:5*)

Name _____ Date _____



THE
Fellowship
OF PRESBYTERIANS