

# Appropriate Response

## *A Declaration of Theology and Action*

From the Session<sup>1</sup> of Community Presbyterian Church of Ventura  
to the Presbytery of Santa Barbara and Presbyterian Church (USA)  
Reformation Day—October 31<sup>st</sup> 2006

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### **I. An Appeal to the Presbyteries, Congregations, and Christians in the PC (USA)**

With many in the church we have over many years carefully and prayerfully followed the actions, decisions, controversies, and perspectives manifesting across the Presbyterian Church (USA). We have studied, discussed, and wrestled with the many difficult issues. We have pondered over and prayed over events, statements, litigations, and meetings. Through all this we have intentionally moved slowly, cautiously and thoughtfully, recognizing that misinformed acts and reactionary stands are neither helpful nor faithful. We believe that if we have erred it is on the side of reticence and silence. Through this season of discernment, study, and prayer we have sought an appropriate response to the gracious call and command of God to submit our lives to the Lordship of Christ Jesus and to give our lives to fulfilling the Great Ends of the Church.

We stand profoundly grateful to God, certain that he has through this time of reflection, study, and participation with the broader church given us a word of guidance for our congregation, our presbytery, and the church as a whole. This word is not a new word or a word that seeks division, schism, or the creating of a new and separate body. Rather it is an acknowledgement and reaffirmation of our history, theology, and polity and passionate appeal that our church as a whole and every constituent congregation and presbytery within it turn from the naturalistic theology, romanticism<sup>2</sup>, folly, and idolatry that has too often been allowed to shape and characterize our church and return to its first love, Jesus Christ, Lord of the church and the One Word which we alone must hear and obey. Our intention is to stand in faith and unity against the destruction of our church, its confession, and its witness. We seek and call for a return to the Scriptures, our Reformed theology, and the standards of our Constitution. We joyfully and gratefully acknowledge that within our history we have worked together to reconcile our differences. We have been able, on numerous occasions in our long history to restore our structural unity and thus we now seek the higher good of restoring our confessional unity and integrity. We call the church to pursue and know the genuine, God given peace, unity, and purity that is the necessary fruit of faithfulness, integrity, and godliness. And we call the church to return to its first work of mission centered around and upon the life changing and world changing word of the Gospel and to follow our Lord's command to go out into all the world to make disciples in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

There can be little doubt that the church we have loved and served is in the midst of a profound crisis that is clearly worsening. The hope vested in the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity has—thus far—failed to materialize. Arguably the 217<sup>th</sup> General Assembly's approval of the Task Force Report, even as amended, has only moved us further into crisis. The report's recommendations—now authoritative interpretations—may open the door for local license<sup>3</sup> and certainly has

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<sup>1</sup> Pastors Mark Rayburn Patterson, Paul Dugan, and Marsha Martin; Elders: Dan Tapia, Rocky Ludes, Jim Lisi, Debby Barker, Glen Lowes, Marcia Drescher, Jim Peters, Kevin White, Bob Pedroza, Denny Armstrong, Connie Tice, Richard Armstrong, Marta Helmer, Paul Burke, Dave Heiss, Randy Guzik, Jack Wallace, Ted Temple and Kirk Hamilton.

<sup>2</sup> Romanticism refers to a broad, and thus difficult to define worldview. For our purposes it is important to look at epistemological issues (how we know what we know). Romanticism emphasizes idealism over realism and knowledge drawn from feeling and intuition over reason and empiricism. Romanticism would define the universal through the particulars whereas realism (and thus evangelicalism) would take the opposite course, defining the particulars from the universal. Romanticism is open to contradictory ideas remaining unreconciled and still valid viewing these as part of a grand, inoculated whole that lies beyond reason but may be known intuitively and experientially. For two helpful studies see: Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Religion in the Age of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and Stephen Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion: The Tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

<sup>3</sup> Local license or local option refers to a local governing body (session or presbytery) abandoning, ignoring, or annulling (whether temporarily or permanently) standards of the national church in favour of locally agreed upon values or rules. The PUP report, in allowing conceivably any doctrine or practice to be declared a scruple by a candidate, theoretically allows the national standards of the church to be trumped by locally held opinions and interpretations. Ultimately the full implications of the PUP authoritative interpretations will not be known until cases are brought to church courts which could happen as early as October 2006.

34 led increasing numbers of sessions and presbyteries to clearly articulate what beliefs and practices are considered essential  
35 and non-negotiable<sup>4</sup>. Additionally, many are taking up issues of property, per capita, and even separation from the PC  
36 (USA)<sup>5</sup>. While our history as a church is replete with controversy and conflict, it is painfully clear that we stand before the  
37 most threatening crisis in our church's long history.<sup>6</sup>

38 The depth and significance of the current controversies must not be underestimated. While many would say, "Peace,  
39 peace..." there is in fact no peace and little chance of finding peace if the church continues to ignore, deny, or simply re-  
40 nounce the serious issues we face. We can no longer afford theological sound bites, confessions that are PowerPoint deep,  
41 and "truths" that are little more than romantic wishes and emotional subjectivism. We must have the courage to sincerely and  
42 fearlessly address the issues dividing us and move beyond tepid pronouncements or declarations of peace while denying all  
43 reality and ignoring the real issues confusing and dividing us. We must make an appropriate response, to God and to those  
44 he has placed under our care, and to those who are disrupting the peace unity, and purity of the church through ignorance,  
45 error or evil.

46 The Session of Community Presbyterian Church of Ventura California calls upon the Santa Barbara Presbytery and all con-  
47 gregations and governing bodies within the PC (USA) to unite behind the Scriptures, confessions, and polity of the church.  
48 We call upon every member, pastor, elder, and governing body to study this document and "test the spirits to see whether  
49 they are of God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world."<sup>7</sup> Test our words and actions before the Scriptures,  
50 confessions of the Church and standards of the Reformed tradition. If you find that we are speaking contrary to these stan-  
51 dards do not listen to us! But if you find that our perspective and actions are faithful to the Scriptures and our constitution  
52 then we urge you to stand with us. "Let no fear or temptation keep you from treading with us on the path of faith and obedi-  
53 ence to the Word of God in order that God's people be of one mind upon earth and that we in faith experience what he him-  
54 self has said: 'I will never leave you, nor forsake you.' Therefore, 'Fear not little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to  
55 give you the kingdom.'"<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In addition to this document before the Santa Barbara Presbytery the following may be noted as examples: Both San Diego and Santa Barbara presbyteries have passed "essential tenets" guidelines for ordaining, installing, and receiving ministers into their membership. The Presbytery of Central Florida has approved a resolution declaring that G-6.0106b is an essential requirement for ordination and will not recognize any ordination done in violation to this standard. Other presbyteries, including Pittsburgh and Holston are considering similar actions. The Sacramento Presbytery has passed four resolutions dealing with ordination standards, per capita, and property. The Presbytery of San Francisco will soon address conflicting resolutions that reflect the tensions across the larger church: one calls for the strict maintenance of constitutional standards while the other seeks full inclusion of any person into the life and witness of the church. As of this writing almost thirty presbyteries are considering resolutions that affirm constitutional standards. In the September 12<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Charlotte Observer* twelve pastors representing nearly 3,500 members of the PC (USA) published a full page statement which declared the actions of the 217<sup>th</sup> General Assembly "collectively represent grievous error and a significant departure from the biblical and confessional principles of the Christian faith."

<sup>5</sup> To give some examples: First Presbyterian Church of Baton Rouge and Kirk of the Hills in Tulsa have both filed suit against their presbyteries seeking affirmation of full rights and ownership over their property. Kirk of the Hills, the largest church in its presbytery with over 2,800 members has gone even further with its pastors renouncing the jurisdiction of the church and the congregation overwhelming approving a resolution to leave the PC (USA) and join the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. Milwaukee Presbytery has allowed a small member congregation to also join the EPC—though requiring it to pay \$150,000 for the right to maintain its property. Across the denomination many congregations are pondering if, when, and how to leave the PC (USA) and examples abound in the news. Exacerbating issues, secret advisory papers drafted by the offices of the General Assembly and the GAC and recently made public, show the denomination intends to squelch all dissent and retaliate against any seeking to withhold control over church property. Tactics advised include defrocking offending ministers, lawsuits against ministers and elders, and removal of sessions. Trust and co-operation is all but non-existent.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Walker (King's College, London) and Robert Wuthnow (Princeton) have both suggested that the larger church is heading for the third great schism. The issues tearing at the PC (USA) are similarly affecting many other churches and denominations and leading to the unique situation in which evangelicals within the PC (USA) have more in common with evangelicals in the Episcopal and Methodist Churches (to give two examples) than they do with progressives within their own church (and vice versa). The whole of Christendom may well be heading towards a split across and through countless denominations and traditions which divides the holy catholic church into two camps or perspectives: evangelicals and progressives. Certainly the gap between these two within the PC (USA) is expanding.

<sup>7</sup> I Jn. 4:1. See also: Jer. 29:8; II Peter 2:1

<sup>8</sup> 8.04, *Book of Confessions*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part I. *The Theological Declaration of Barmen*, while written in an entirely different political setting, was nevertheless wrestling with nearly identical theological issues and thus forms a crucial document for our day and situation.

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## II. Concerning the Present Situation of the Presbyterian Church (USA)

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The issues tearing apart the church are neither peripheral nor incidental. At stake is nothing less than our integrity, our future, our mission and our message. At question is whether we have been, are, and can be trustworthy before God or whether we will abandon the faith once and for all delivered to the saints for a populist, culturally determined Gospel that is hostile to the work of Christ. Ensnared within claims of piety and words of faith are alien principles that have entered our church damaging the theological basis and standards that have defined and shaped the church. At issue is a natural theology<sup>9</sup> that forms the essence of the progressive theology in the PC (USA) in contrast to evangelical<sup>10</sup> theology which forms the essence of Reformed theology within the church. In spite of shared language there are profound, even mutually exclusive, differences between the progressive theology that has long sought center stage and the Evangelical theology that has long formed the center and foundation of Presbyterian belief and currently defines the majority of our members and congregations.<sup>11</sup> While some may hope for and proclaim that there is room within the PC (USA) for both (or all) sides<sup>12</sup> the fact remains that these perspectives are in many places mutually exclusive and irreconcilable. One can not declare Jesus “the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the only way to the Father”<sup>13</sup> and simultaneously declare that he is but one way among many. One can not affirm the authority of the Scriptures over all matters of faith and practice<sup>14</sup> while simultaneously proclaiming that experience, emotions, and opinions have equal (or greater!) voice. One can not hold that the ethical standards of Scripture are to be required while simultaneously holding that truth is uncertain and each must choose their own course, beliefs, and behaviours. There is always room for diversity within the church when these beliefs deal with non-essentials or are not mutually exclusive. But that is not the case today within the PC (USA). Essentials upon which the church has been built and which exist as standards in

<sup>9</sup> Natural theology is most simply described as “bottom up” while evangelical theology may be described as “top down.” Obviously these are over simplified and thus not wholly accurate but they allow those inexperienced with the concepts to begin wrestling with the issues at stake. Evangelical (i.e. Reformed) theology has always started at the top, beginning with questions about the nature, will, and work of God and only secondarily with questions of what this means and how we are to respond. Natural theology works from an opposite direction, wrestling first or primarily with who we are as God’s creation and how we experience God and then deducing from these who God is and what He does. This simple difference has profound implications and leads to vastly different perspectives. To find an example one need only look at the issue of homosexuality. Where evangelical theology would hold that the will of God revealed through His acts (creation, *et. al.*) and testified to in the Scriptures declares the practice of homosexuality to be sinful, natural theology would hold that because such feelings or attractions exist in one whom God made then God logically approves of the practice and lifestyle. From the top down the lifestyle is viewed as antithetical to the Christian life while from the bottom up it is viewed as a faithful expression of God’s diverse creativity. These views, based upon profoundly different starting points and theological perspectives and methodologies are difficult, if not impossible to reconcile. In fact, no significant attempt of evaluating or reconciling such disparate doctrines has been made as the church has instead been content to grant both the stamp of legitimacy and propriety in the name of diversity and the nebulous ethic of tolerance.

<sup>10</sup> The word evangelical comes from the Greek word *euangellion*, meaning good news. Today it is broadly and not always accurately used. According to Karl Barth, one of the most important reformed theologians in our history, “Evangelical means informed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, as heard afresh in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation by a direct return to Holy Scripture.” Evangelicalism when used in its strict theological sense is not bound to a particular tradition but cuts through all sectarian lines. Evangelicals are first upwardly or vertically focused with the horizontal focus coming as a certain and necessary response to revelation and relationship with God. Evangelicalism is centered upon God not humanity, the sacrifice given to us not the sacrifice we make, the power of God to heal and save not the intrinsic power or worth of the human being. It draws its guidance from Scripture, finding here the authoritative instruction about both God and faithful human response to his revealed will. Donald Bloesch has noted that “Evangelical theology aims not only to be faithful to Scripture, but also to expose the unfaithfulness of the Christian community to Scripture.” Evangelicalism is profoundly concerned with the poor and the righting of injustice. And it is all these (and more!) because of its passionate Christocentrism which rigorously holds Jesus Christ at the center of all of life, the focus of God’s activity, the revelation of his will, and the source and goal of all creation.

<sup>11</sup> For a helpful study of the differences between progressive and evangelical theology see: Gerrit Scot Dawson and Mark R. Patterson, *Given and Sent in One Love: The True Church of Jesus Christ* (Lenoir North Carolina, Reformation Press, 2005), pp. 79-86.

<sup>12</sup> To give one recent example, advice on the Presbyterian Women page of the PC (USA) web site stated: “Talk about Christianity in a way that is not imperialistic. Do not assume that ...Christianity offers something better than other religions” (<http://www.pcusa.org/pw/resources/bias-free-guidelines.htm>). It is impossible to reconcile this with the evangelical perspective set forth in either the *Book of Confessions* or *Book of Order* (cf. G-1.0100 “All power in heaven and earth is given to Jesus Christ by Almighty God, who raised Christ from the dead and set him above all rule and authority, all power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. God has put all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and has made Christ Head of the Church, which is his body.” The Reformed tradition has always held that it has something better to offer than other religions and his name is Jesus.

<sup>13</sup> John 14:6. 8.10, *Book of Confessions*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part I.

<sup>14</sup> 5.003; 6.001-006, *Book of Confessions*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part I.

74 our Confessions are routinely denied, annulled, or simply ignored while counterfeit alternatives are raised as viable options  
75 without any recognition that these contradict our history and tradition. With the loss of our defining doctrines the PC (USA)  
76 has become increasingly directionless, messageless, and meaningless.

77 While diversity of belief, experiences, and practices have long characterized the PC (USA) they have never been success-  
78 fully reconciled. For decades we have been encouraged to “celebrate our diversity” without ever being called to reconcile our  
79 diversity or wrestle with the difficult and painful questions about the legitimacy, propriety, and truth of disparate beliefs and  
80 truth claims. We hold that not everything proclaimed or believed is true. Nor is every belief affirmed under the banner of di-  
81 versity legitimately Reformed or in some cases, even Christian, and therefore to be received as valid for the church. For true  
82 peace, unity, and purity to exist and flourish, for our mission to continue and deepen, for the church to be faithful before God  
83 and relevant to the people of this world we must value theological legitimacy over theological diversity.<sup>15</sup>

84 The issues tearing at the PC (USA) today are theological. Appeals for tolerance, reforms of polity, and pursuit of our mission  
85 may have some value but are not theological answers and thus can not, ultimately, answer the theological difficulties tearing  
86 at us. The church must decide what it believes if it is really going to be whole, healthy, and functional and it must make an  
87 appropriate and fitting response to the Triune God of grace. This is especially true for us within the Reformed and Presbyte-  
88 rian tradition. For we are a confessional church. Our very existence is based on confessions held and expressed over and  
89 against other possible expressions of faith, beliefs, and practices that lie outside our tradition and even outside the Christian  
90 faith. Our very life and faith is grounded upon the fact that in the face of many beliefs and claims of truth one may hold, some  
91 are not true, not accurate, and not of God. They are inherently and essentially inappropriate as they are inconsistent with the  
92 work and nature of God. The PC (USA) is a confessional church whose very existence is defined and mission shaped by  
93 what we hold to be true. To now hold disparate doctrines, to believe that any belief is valid and valuable, to encourage each  
94 to determine their own ethical lifestyle is not only logically ludicrous, it is categorically contrary to the whole of the Reformed  
95 tradition and the church catholic. Yet it is this attitude and perspective that is increasingly shaping the theology of the PC  
96 (USA) and in the process, deceiving many.

97 That is of course not to say that Reformed theology—or any theology for that matter—should be considered perfect, com-  
98 plete, or beyond need of correction and improvement. Indeed, a hallmark of our confessional tradition is that our theology is  
99 “Reformed always being reformed by the Word of God and the call of the Spirit.”<sup>16</sup> But this phrase, when taken in its entirety  
100 reveals the inherent tension that must remain. While our theology grows in understanding and our message is translated into  
101 ever new contexts and cultures, the Word of God underlying such human statements remains fixed and unchanging. Where  
102 our confessions and mission are consistent with the Word they may be called faithful and true, even where still in need of  
103 further improvement or clarification and even when held “in tension” with other doctrines. But where our theological state-  
104 ments contradict, annul, or transcend the Word they may be, indeed *must be*, declared deficient, untruthful, scandalous, and  
105 heretical. The Reformed tradition approaches theology humbly but not stupidly. Acknowledging that God is ultimately beyond  
106 all attempts of description it nevertheless holds that he can be truly known, accurately described, and actually obeyed. Ad-  
107 mitting that all attempts to describe God are mere human efforts to describe what is eternal and beyond full human descrip-  
108 tion, it nevertheless remains foolish to imagine and pernicious to proclaim that any description may work and one confession  
109 is a good as another. The proponents of such error and folly, have in fact moved outside of the PC (USA), being an essential  
110 renunciation of the church through denial of its essential tenets, history, and theological perspective.

111 It is obvious, but important enough to state explicitly that this paper and the theology it expresses is written from and ad-  
112 dressed to a Reformed and Presbyterian perspective. In other words, we are not interpreting, critiquing, or correcting the  
113 theology of the Episcopal Church, the Methodists, Lutherans, or anyone else within the Christian family. There are under the  
114 large umbrella of Christian orthodoxy many theological traditions and doctrines. Doctrines held by one tradition within the  
115 Christian faith may be different than those in another and may even contradict them. The understanding of the nature of the  
116 Lord’s Supper, for example, is decidedly different in the Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed traditions, but not sufficiently so as

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<sup>15</sup> The greatest hope in recent years that this might occur evaporated with the report of the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity. In spite of good intentions, high hopes, and hard labor, the task force in the end failed to address the real theological issues tearing us apart. Instead of seriously wrestling with the profound differences of theological perspectives within the PC (USA) they instead only tangentially addressed them, that is, (for those mathematically astute) without touching them at all. While speaking of the centrality of Christ or the authority of Scripture no word of guidance is given to help the church discern what these mean, where it may have erred and why, or how to reconcile the different understandings attached to such statements. The task force, while affirming the authority of Scripture abdicated all responsibility of leading the church into legitimate and faithful interpretation by simply expressing that Presbyterians disagree over interpretation. In the end their report failed by offering a polity solution to a theological problem and thus leaving the greatest problems before us essentially untouched and certainly unresolved.

<sup>16</sup> G-2.0200. *Book of Order*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part II.

117 to render any one of these as unorthodox or unfaithful. Different traditions hold different doctrines on baptism, grace and  
118 works, free will and election, eternal security and perseverance, eschatology, and many others, while still remaining Christian  
119 and united around the essential articles of faith. Each of these traditions has particular historical-theological-cultural charac-  
120 teristics which shape their doctrine, life, and witness. The Reformed tradition also has unique and defining characteristics,  
121 particularly “its affirmation of the majesty, holiness, and providence of God who creates, sustains, rules, and redeems the  
122 world in the freedom of sovereign righteousness and love.”<sup>17</sup> The purpose in this paper’s theological reflection is first to call  
123 the PC (USA) to understand that some doctrines, practices, and philosophies, regardless of claims, are simply not Christian.  
124 They are not a part of any orthodox tradition or its confessions and practices and must be acknowledged as such. And sec-  
125 ond, it is to call the PC (USA) to understand that some doctrines, practices, and philosophies, while genuinely Christian are  
126 not part of our particular tradition. It is our purpose and hope that the PC (USA) will discern these differences and seriously  
127 endeavour to stand for the truths of the Christian faith. And it is our purpose and hope that the PC (USA) will grasp the  
128 unique and valuable perspective of the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition and not lightly ignore, forget, or deny our  
129 particular historical experience of God and the Gospel.<sup>18</sup> We are a church within the Reformed tradition. As a church we must  
130 stand courageously for the faith once and for all delivered to the saints.<sup>19</sup> As members of the Reformed and Presbyterian  
131 tradition we may joyfully acknowledge that we share many common beliefs and practices with the larger church.<sup>20</sup> And we  
132 must endeavour to learn from our sisters and brothers in other traditions while remaining faithful to our own tradition and its  
133 unique and valuable witness. Our intent in this study is to simply express that much of what is currently defining our church  
134 today is not Reformed and in some case not even Christian. We can not accept or believe everything or anything and long  
135 remain either Presbyterian or even Christian. Our future, our faithfulness, our mission depend upon our rightly discerning the  
136 truth of God and his revelation. We must have a truthful and accurate understanding of the nature and work of God and a  
137 response that is fitting and appropriate to the reality of God.

138 It is time for the PC (USA)—that is, its members, congregations, and governing bodies—to express what the church believes,  
139 and as necessary corollary of this declaration, it must express what it does not believe. In doing this, it need not express all  
140 that it believes nor hold that these expressions are inerrant and final. For fuller descriptions already exist—primarily for us in  
141 the *Book of Confessions*, but also in Reformed theological works such as Calvin’s *Institutes*, Weber’s *Grundlagen Der Dog-*  
142 *matik*, Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*—and any human work can be better expressed to more accurately describe the eternal  
143 reality behind it. Nevertheless, it remains crucial in our time that the PC (USA) courageously affirm (decide?) what it believes.  
144 We must reaffirm that our words of confession may accurately—if not fully—express the truth of God revealed to us by His  
145 acts and witnessed to by the Word written and proclaimed. And we must in our affirmation, have the courage to discern and  
146 denounce error and heresy wherever it occurs. We must utterly reject as inappropriate the naive but popular folly, proclaimed  
147 in the name of tolerance and diversity, that the church can and may hold disparate doctrines simultaneously and proclaim  
148 both as true. It is time for the PC (USA) to reject the hopeless ambiguity and uncertainty that has marked our confession in  
149 recent decades and stand for the truth of the Gospel revealed through Jesus the Saviour of the world. And it is time that this  
150 be done by more than a few leaders, individuals, or congregations who in recent years and decades have boldly stood for  
151 the Gospel. As the life and future of our church is at stake, it is required in our day that *all* who love the Lord Jesus stand for  
152 the truth of his gospel and renounce and repent of the errors—great and small and of which, in their variety we are all  
153 guilty—that have overwhelmed our confession, mission, and ethics. It is time for the faithful to rise and fearlessly express the

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<sup>17</sup> Other great themes of the Reformed Tradition include: (1) The election of the people of God for service as well as for salvation; (2) Covenant life marked by a disciplined concern for order in the church according to the Word of God; (3) A faithful stewardship that shuns ostentation and seeks proper use of the gifts of God’s creation; (4) The recognition of the human tendency to idolatry and tyranny, which calls the people of God to work for the transformation of society by seeking justice and living in obedience to the Word of God (G-2.0500. *Book of Order*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part II).

<sup>18</sup> Or, as the Constitution puts it: “The creeds and confessions of this church reflect a particular stance within the history of God’s people. They are the result of prayer, thought, and experience within a living tradition. They serve to strengthen personal commitment and the life and witness of the community of believers” (G-2.0500b. *Book of Order*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part II).

<sup>19</sup> “Dear friends, although I have been eager to write to you about our common salvation, I now feel compelled instead to write to encourage you to contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” Jude 1:3 NET.

<sup>20</sup> Again, as the Constitution states: “In its confessions, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) gives witness to the faith of the Church catholic. The confessions express the faith of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church in the recognition of canonical Scriptures and the formulation and adoption of the ecumenical creeds, notably the Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds with their definitions of the mystery of the triune God and of the incarnation of the eternal Word of God in Jesus Christ” (G-2.0300). And again: “In its confessions, the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.) identifies with the affirmations of the Protestant Reformation. The focus of these affirmations is the rediscovery of God’s grace in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures. The Protestant watchwords—grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone—embody principles of understanding which continue to guide and motivate the people of God in the life of faith” (G-2.0400).

154 message we have been entrusted to bear. It is time for those who sit on the fence of indifference to rise from their Laodicean  
 155 complacency and grasp the severity of the situation, perceive the call of God in this hour, and rise to the church's need of  
 156 their witness. And it is time for those who have for decades rejected the clear teaching of the Scriptures and the essential  
 157 tenets of the Christian faith to honestly acknowledge their renunciation and peaceably leave the church as the Constitution  
 158 requires.<sup>21</sup>

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### III. A Theological Declaration

160 We hold, with deep gratitude and humility, that God has called us to speak with one voice and given us a word which must  
 161 be proclaimed. After years of discerning, praying, studying, and conversing the time has come for all in leadership and all  
 162 congregations to affirm again the heart of what we believe and express afresh what we hold true and dear in these troubled  
 163 times. "We believe we have been given a common message to utter in time of common need and temptation"<sup>22</sup> and we invite  
 164 all within the PC (USA) to join us in this affirmation.

165 We live in an age that is profoundly skeptical of any truth claim especially any raised over and against others. Our age is  
 166 uncertain that truth exists, that truth can be known, or that any perspective should be proclaimed as such. It is also a time of  
 167 rampant subjectivism where each not only decides what is right in their own eyes, but is actually encouraged to do so. The  
 168 skepticism and subjectivism combine to cause profound trauma and confusion within the church as each looks within to de-  
 169 termine what is right and true for them. The very nature of the church takes a new shape as doubt and diversity become our  
 170 confession and the ancient confessions that have always defined us are lost to the god of uncertainty and subjectivity.

171 Other ages have had to face different points of error or confusion. Athanasius addressed a church wrestling with the nature  
 172 of Christ and the Trinity. Augustine confronted the errors of Pelagius on grace and salvation. Luther and Calvin stood against  
 173 the corruption of the church that had replaced grace and justification with self-righteousness, works, and indulgences. Barth  
 174 stood against the natural theology of Third Reich Germany that was increasingly allowed (by the church!) to shape the  
 175 church's theology, mission and ethics. In every age the church is called to address the errors, misunderstandings, corrup-  
 176 tions, and heresies that occlude the truth of the Gospel and thus its message and mission. Rarely, if ever, is the church al-  
 177 lowed to choose its battles. Instead these usually emerge from the issues, values, and philosophies of the current culture in  
 178 which the church is placed. In every case and era it is required of the church, as a necessary element of its mission, to ad-  
 179 dress these values and philosophies, affirming what is true and critically assessing what is false all under the authoritative  
 180 and defining revelation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And in the process it must consciously resist the temptation to take the  
 181 popular and easy course of changing the Gospel to fit the values and philosophies of the day.<sup>23</sup>

182 In our time the issues at the center of our debate are not the Trinity or the nature of Christ, they are not about justification or  
 183 even ordination standards or homosexuality. The primary issue facing (and confusing) the church today is the nature, reality,  
 184 and means of revelation and, from the human side, what constitutes a real and proper knowledge of God. Secondly, and  
 185 inseparably bound to this, is the question of what constitutes righteousness before God. While many areas and details of  
 186 theology and ethics may be specifically addressed we hold that the root of error and misunderstanding today revolves  
 187 around our understanding of God's revelation, Christian epistemology, and misunderstandings regarding the nature of and  
 188 distinctions between inherent and imparted righteousness. We hold that the natural theology manifesting in the progressive  
 189 wing of the church and defining its theology is radically inconsistent with the teaching of Scripture and our Reformed tradition.  
 190 This misuse of Scripture and redefining of essential and/or traditional elements of Reformed theology has led the church into  
 191 confusion, biblical illiteracy, and even heresy. We hold that a clear—if brief—word of correction must be voiced if we are to  
 192 be faithful to God and the word he has given us and faithful in leading the church through the dangers raised against its wit-  
 193 ness.

194 In view of the errors of natural theology manifesting within the progressive wing of the church and the devastating harm  
 195 these doctrines and their proponents are bringing to the peace unity and purity of the church we therefore confess the follow-  
 196 ing evangelical and Reformed truths:

<sup>21</sup> G-6.0108, footnote 1. *Book of Order*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part II.

<sup>22</sup> 8.08, *Book of Confessions*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part I.

<sup>23</sup> This has become the common approach of the PC (USA) and the dominant methodology of the progressive wing of Protestantism. The values and philosophies are made authoritative and the church is then required to shape its message and mission around these values. The history of both Judaism and the church reveal disastrous results whenever this is allowed and call us to remember such lessons, lest we repeat them.

197

i.

198

*"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but through me."*

199

John 14:6

200

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.... I am the door; if anyone enters by me, he will be saved."*

201

202

203

John 10:1, 9

204

*"For we teach and believe that this Jesus Christ our Lord is the unique and eternal Saviour of the human race, and thus of the whole world... Wherefore we quite openly profess and preach that Jesus Christ is the sole Redeemer and Saviour."*

205

206

207

Second Helvetic Confession, Ch. XII

208

*"All power in heaven and earth is given to Jesus Christ by Almighty God, who raised Christ from the dead and set him above all rule, and authority, all power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in the age but also that which is to come."*

209

210

211

Preliminary Principles, Constitution—G-1.0100, PC (USA)

212

We hold, with the testimony of the Scriptures and in consistency with the Reformed faith and the church catholic that there is but one mediator between God and the human race, one Saviour, Redeemer and King, the Lord Jesus Christ. By his name alone salvation is graciously given as the Father freely determines and in him alone are we reconciled, redeemed, and restored to God and the life He intends. In accord with the singular message of Scripture, Reformed theology, and the holy catholic church we affirm that Jesus is unique, unrivaled, and singular in nature, being, and work, the center of God's saving work and the singular goal of creation.

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We reject therefore the errors of progressive and revisionist theology that denies or annuls the singular saving work of Christ by proclaiming that Jesus is but one way of salvation among others of equal validity, truth, and efficacy. We reject and denounce any testimony that seeks to limit his saving work, power, or efficacy to that of mere example of spirituality, godliness, or morality. Further, we reject the false doctrine that would hold that there are areas of life in which we would not need God's justification and sanctification through Christ. We believe that any holding or teaching such errors have departed from the Reformed faith, are deceived, and have become promoters of heresy.

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ii.

225

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

226

227

John 1:14 NRSV

228

*Christ is the visible expression of the invisible God.*

229

Colossians 1:15—Phillips Translation

230

*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.*

231

232

233

Hebrews 1:1-2, ESV

234

*Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation; therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church.*

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239

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter I

240

*The very light of nature in man, and the works of God, declare plainly that there is a God; but his Word and Spirit only, do sufficiently and effectually reveal him unto men for their salvation.*

241

242

Larger Catechism, Question 1

243

We believe that Jesus Christ is the One Word of God to whom we turn, whom alone we obey and trust in life and in death. We believe, in keeping with the Scriptural witness and the central tenets of the Reformed faith, that God's nature and work

244

245 finds its primary revelation in the person and work of Christ, for with Luther we hold that “elsewhere God is utterly incompre-  
 246 hensible but comprehensible in the flesh of Christ alone.”<sup>24</sup> Thus it is to Christ alone that we turn to know God and learn of  
 247 His ways, work, and will. For Christ Jesus, as the Word of God incarnate, is the essential form of God’s revelation and the  
 248 only means by which we may know of the nature, will and work of God. We hold that God’s revelation in Christ receives pri-  
 249 mary witness through the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and is made efficacious and perspicuous through the  
 250 illumining grace of the Holy Spirit.<sup>25</sup>

251 “We reject the false doctrine, as though the church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation,  
 252 apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God’s revelation.”<sup>26</sup> We  
 253 reject the false claims of modern Gnosticism and neo-mysticism that boasts of secret, personal, innate or inner knowledge  
 254 that openly contradicts God’s self revelation, whether this knowledge pertains to the nature or work of God or a human re-  
 255 sponse of belief, lifestyle, or ethics. We reject the voices of culture that call us from the holiness of God to take up lives  
 256 marked and characterized by self, pleasure, license, materialism, and injustice.

257

## iii.

258

*Every word of God proves true....Do not add to his words,  
 lest he rebuke you, and you be found a liar.*

259

Proverbs 30:5, 6

260

261

*The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.*

262

Isaiah 40:8

263

*All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction,  
 and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God  
 may be proficient, equipped for every good work.*

264

265

II Timothy 3:16-17

266

267

*The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory,  
 man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture,  
 or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture:  
 unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations  
 of the Spirit, or traditions of men.*

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269

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271

Westminster Confession, 1.6

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273

We hold that the Scriptures by God’s inspiration and the interpretive work of the Holy Spirit do manifest themselves to be the  
 274 Word of God written, and thus wholly sufficient to lead the church into true wisdom, godliness, reform, obedience, and wor-  
 275 ship of God. As God’s written Word the Scriptures are trustworthy, authoritative, and able to express God’s will to every age  
 276 and people. “Insofar as Christ’s will for the church is set forth in the Scripture, it is to be obeyed.”<sup>27</sup>

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280

We reject the false doctrine that would raise alongside or over the Scriptures other authorities, opinions, and voices intended  
 to transcend, correct, repeal or annul the word of God. While fully affirming that God does speak through the voice of the  
 Holy Spirit we deny and reject any claim of hearing his voice that contradicts or denies the clear teaching of Scripture,  
 whether this concern is the nature and work of God or the character and detail of the godly life he intends. We hold, with the

<sup>24</sup> The full quote is as follows: “I have no God whether in heaven or in earth, and I know of none, outside the flesh that lies in the bosom of the Virgin Mary. For elsewhere God is utterly incomprehensible, but comprehensible in the flesh of Christ alone.” Quoted in H. R. Mackintosh, *The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1962), p. 231.

<sup>25</sup> Excellent articulations of the Reformed understanding of Christian epistemology and God self-revelation may be found in Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1981), pp. 169-227. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.1 and I.2. T. F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology: The Realism of Christian Revelation* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1982). Colin Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995). Emil Bruner, *Revelation and Reason: The Christian Doctrine of Faith and Knowledge* (Wake Forest: Chanticleer Publishing, 1946). Edward Dowey, Jr., *The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1994).

<sup>26</sup> 8.12, *Book of Confessions*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part I.

<sup>27</sup> G-1.-0100c, *Book of Order*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part II.

281 guidance of Calvin, that opinions formed without the leading of the Word of God are of no account to the church and are  
282 voices without authority or relevance to the Christian life.

283

## iv.

284 *If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything*  
285 *has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has*  
286 *given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself,*  
287 *not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.*  
288 *So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on*  
289 *behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so*  
290 *that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

291

II Corinthians 5:17-21

292 *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin,*  
293 *we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice*  
294 *for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*

295

John 2:1-2, NRSV

296 *From this we confess and avow that there remains no other sacrifice for sin;*  
297 *if any affirm so, we do not hesitate to say that they are blasphemers against Christ's death and*  
298 *the everlasting atonement thereby purchased for us.*

299

Scots Confession, Chapter IX

300 *Therefore, it is necessary for us to be righteous before we may love and do good works.*

301

*We are made truly righteous, as we have said, by faith in Christ*

302

*purely by the grace of God, who does not impute to us our sins,*

303

*but the righteousness of Christ, or rather,*

304

*he imputes faith in Christ to us for righteousness.*

305

II Helvetic Confession, Chapter XV

306

307 We hold, with the testimony of Scripture and our Reformed Confessions, that our righteousness before the Triune God is  
308 itself a gift of God through Christ, wholly imparted and thus entirely an act of grace. While the Bible uses many and varied  
309 terms to describe the depth and reality of this mystery—redemption, ransom, reconciliation, deliverance, propitiation, expia-  
310 tion, and others—these together testify to the fact that our righteousness, that is our right standing before God, is the fruit  
311 and effect of his act in and for us. We hold that Christ Jesus is our righteousness, our justification, our sanctification and this  
312 righteousness, extrinsic to us by nature, is made ours only through the sacrifice of Christ and the inner work of the Holy Spirit  
313 and true faith which is its fruit and effect.

314 We reject as false any doctrine or teaching that holds that persons by their nature bear or possess an intrinsic, natural, or  
315 innate righteousness before God based upon human works, nature, spirituality, or by the fact of their being created in God's  
316 image. We reject as heresy any doctrine that would hold the human race as essentially righteous, holy, and pleasing before  
317 God apart from the work of salvation in Christ Jesus or that certain attributes or actions are sufficiently righteous in them-  
318 selves to be without need of the justifying work of Christ Jesus and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

319

## v.

320 *And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people.*

321

Leviticus 26:12

322 *You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I, the LORD, am your God and there is no*  
323 *other. And my people shall never again be put to shame.*

324

Joel 2:27

325 *I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will*  
326 *bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them forevermore. My dwelling*  
327 *place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations*  
328 *shall know that I the LORD sanctify Israel,*

329 *when my sanctuary is among them forevermore.*  
330 Ezekiel 37:26-28

331 *After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said,*  
332 *"Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you,*  
333 *since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life*  
334 *to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you,*  
335 *the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*  
336 John 17:1-3

337 *For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give*  
338 *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*  
339 II Corinthians 4:6

340 *The Spirit of God quickens people to an awareness of God's grace and claim upon their lives.*  
341 *The Spirit moves them to respond by naming and calling upon God, by remembering*  
342 *and proclaiming God's acts of self-revelation in word and deed,*  
343 *and by committing their lives to God's reign in the world*  
344 *Book of Order, W-1.1002.*  
345

346 We hold that God's revelation of himself is personal, relational, and thus saving. Our knowledge of God is neither noetic<sup>28</sup> nor  
347 a postulate of human reason or discovery but the result of God being among us, drawing us to himself as his people and  
348 redeeming us to be a nation of priests before him and through this, unveiling himself to us. God's salvation is not so much a  
349 thing bestowed as the consequence of his relational presence among his people and their appropriate response to this pres-  
350 ence. God gives himself in loving, redeeming relationship, moving our hearts to repentance, our minds to understanding and  
351 our wills to obedience. His saving work is revelatory and his revelatory work saving and transformational.

352 We reject the populist doctrine that one can know God without true relationship—making God a postulate of human knowl-  
353 edge—or that one can have a relationship with God without true knowledge of his revealed will and work—making God little  
354 more than the fabrication of subjective romanticism or Gnostic mysticism. We reject and renounce any and all claims of theo-  
355 logical knowledge and/or a relationship with God that leads one into a faith and life that contradicts or denies his revealed will  
356 made clear in the Scriptures.<sup>29</sup>

357

358 We hold that the above five statements express specific points that must be heard and confirmed and proclaimed in our day.  
359 These essential and defining doctrines of the Reformed faith are being annulled by alien principles leveraging for a place of  
360 authority in the PC (USA). In stating these principles we neither seek nor make new statements or requirements. On the  
361 contrary, we seek the opposite and place these before the church as a reminder of what we have always held, always be-  
362 lieved, and always sought to manifest in our communion. It is not these statements that are new but those that have been  
363 raised against them claiming authority over against the Scriptures as other "words"—as if any truly existed!—other saviours  
364 over or alongside Jesus the Messiah of God—and other forms of knowledge and sources of truth than those revealed by  
365 God through his saving, revelatory work. The anemic and impotent state of the church today is the result of its confusion over  
366 doctrine, its faithlessness, immorality, materialism, and its subtle replacement of the Gospel of Christ for another gospel that  
367 is nothing more than the romantic hopes of a lost humanity. We call the church to study these issues, wrestle with their truth  
368 and implications, challenge where they are wrongly or poorly stated, and discern what the Spirit is saying to the church of our  
369 day.

370 In this act of study and discernment, we fully and sincerely affirm the importance of mutual forbearance, agreeing that be-  
371 lievers of good conscience will disagree.<sup>30</sup> We affirm the importance of listening, mutual dialogue, and humility for only when  
372 we acknowledge the imperfection of each of our perspectives and learn from one another will we grow in the fullness God

<sup>28</sup> Noetic: 1) of or pertaining to the mind. 2) Originating in or apprehended by the reason. Or, put most simply, true knowledge of God is not mere "head-knowledge" separated from actual life and practice.

<sup>29</sup> Psa. 1:1-2; Matt. 15:7-9; John 3:19-20; I John 1:6, 2:4; Rev. 3:17.

<sup>30</sup> G-1.0305, *Book of Order*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part II.

373 intends. However there must be limits to this forbearance.<sup>31</sup> The Constitution, in calling us to this standard, makes clear that  
 374 difference of opinion does not mean absence of truth. The Scriptures and Constitution command and expect that we will  
 375 firmly hold to the truth of the Gospel and our Reformed witness. Even as the Constitution calls us to mutual forbearance it  
 376 reminds us that

377           No opinion can be either more pernicious or more absurd than that which brings truth and falsehood upon a level,  
 378           and represents it as of no consequence what a man's opinions are. On the contrary, we are persuaded that there  
 379           is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty. Otherwise, it would be of no consequence  
 380           either to discover truth or to embrace it.<sup>32</sup>

381 It would be institutional suicide and utter faithlessness before God to equate forbearance with uncertainty or require toler-  
 382   ance to mean denial, agnosticism, or rejection of truth. In certain times and seasons situations demand that we affirm afresh  
 383   what we believe, value, and refuse to surrender. Regretfully the term and practice of forbearance has become wholly misun-  
 384   derstood within the church and as such has become not an aid to its peace, unity, and purity but a cause of its decay and  
 385   ruin. The Constitution acknowledges that "there are truths and forms with respect to which men of good characters and prin-  
 386   ciples may differ."<sup>33</sup> These statements reflect a humility that has characterized our tradition from its first days and manifests  
 387   in the consistent refusal to hold the Reformed faith as alone true, best, and uniquely of God. We have always held that oth-  
 388   ers believe differently and their beliefs are to be honored, respected, and allowed. But this does not necessarily mean within  
 389   the church generally or the Reformed tradition specifically. To allow and respect the conscience of a Muslim, a Mormon, or  
 390   atheist does not mean we agree with them, hold their doctrine, or welcome them as equal members within the church. As a  
 391   confessional church—an essential and irrefutable characteristic of the PC (USA)—we state our beliefs and reasons for hold-  
 392   ing them, welcoming all who would agree, to join us in our confession and life. Those who disagree on secondary or periph-  
 393   eral issues we acknowledge as full members in the holy, catholic church though outside of the Reformed tradition.<sup>34</sup> Those  
 394   who disagree on essential articles of faith and ethics, whose conscience is held captive to other doctrines, values, and phi-  
 395   losophies we bless, love, and pray for but do not receive as members, officers, or pastors with equally valid perspectives.  
 396   Indeed, on the very page that calls us to forbearance and to respect the consciences of those who believe differently is the  
 397   reminder:

398           That our blessed Savior, for the edification of the visible Church, which is his body, hath appointed officers, not only  
 399           to preach the gospel and administer the Sacraments, but also to exercise discipline, for the preservation of both  
 400           truth and duty; and that it is *incumbent* upon these officers, and upon the whole Church, in whose name they act,  
 401           *to censure or cast out the erroneous and scandalous*, observing, in all cases, the rules contained in the Word of  
 402           God.<sup>35</sup>

403 It is both unreasonable and unfaithful to hold, simultaneously, theological and ethical tenets that are disparate and mutually  
 404   exclusive. This does not refer to discussions and debates over non-essential issues nor does it request or expect a perfectly  
 405   homogeneous church. This would be unreasonable, unfaithful, and unhealthy. We refer to central, crucial, and essential doc-  
 406   trines and ethical practices that are in danger of being lost by the church and non-Reformed, non-Christian teachings that are  
 407   increasingly held as equally valid and legitimate with our historical standards. Currently within the PC (USA) there exist those  
 408   who hold to the biblical and historical standards of the Reformed faith and others that have promoted serious, even heretical  
 409   departures from these standards. Sadly, many in leadership of the church have ignored the clear mandate of the constitution  
 410   and refused "to censure or cast out the erroneous and scandalous." Indeed, all of us within the church are guilty of participat-  
 411   ing and furthering the decline of the PC (USA) as we have together refused to stand for the truth of the Gospel, too readily

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<sup>31</sup> This fact is completely lost in the PC (USA) today.

<sup>32</sup> G-1.0304, *Book of Order*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part II.

<sup>33</sup> G-1.0305, *Book of Order*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part II.

<sup>34</sup> Within the 348 member churches of the World Council of Churches there exists broad parameters of belief. Nevertheless, both the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) and Jehovah's Witnesses are denied membership because of heterodoxy, i.e. beliefs that stand outside of and contrary to even the broadest understanding of Christian faith and doctrine.

<sup>35</sup> G-1.0303, *Book of Order*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part II (italics mine). Time and space does not allow a discussion of the obvious principle that some doctrines and practices are considered essential while others are not. The Trinitarian nature of God, salvation by grace through faith, and the bodily resurrection of Jesus (to name three) are obviously more central and more important to our faith than manner of baptism, styles of worship, or which hymnbook we will use. The tension inherent in holding standards and seeking to show forbearance is perhaps best practiced by following Augustine's axiom that we be resolute and unbending with what is essential, generous on what is non-essential and gracious over all.

412 accepted vapid substitutes, fallen for the lies of materialism and the idols of self-centeredness, and failed to live out the clear  
 413 teachings of the Word of God. The consequences are grave. As a confessional church we have all but lost our confession.  
 414 As a body we have lost all sense of real unity and instead become content with the prostheses of connectionalism and toler-  
 415 ance.<sup>36</sup> But in losing real unity we have lost our witness and are in the process of losing our very existence. At some point, if  
 416 we have enough courage, we will need to wrestle with the question of whether our divided house and hearts have not led us  
 417 to lose our God. The failure of *some* of our leaders—within and across the General Assembly, synods, presbyteries, perman-  
 418 ent judicial commissions, and sessions—to maintain this standard (and numerous other standards) has brought us to a  
 419 point at which others must arise to correct the errors and deficiencies that have gone uncorrected for decades while realizing  
 420 the damage done may be too deep to heal. But it is clear that we can no longer remain silent and in our silence give tacit  
 421 approval to that which is foolish, idolatrous, and evil. We can no longer be content with sitting on the sidelines wringing our  
 422 hands or naively hoping that all this will simply go away. We can no longer cry, “Peace, peace...” when there is no peace. It  
 423 is time to set aside our denial and acknowledge the magnitude of our problem the weight of which is greater than tolerance  
 424 or celebration of diversity can bear or heal.

425 It is time for the church to choose whom it will follow: whether it will be the magnanimous gods of the age who rise without  
 426 form or reality from every creed and who speak equally through every opinion and feeling or whether we will turn again to the  
 427 God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the king-  
 428 dom of the Son he loves. Many of our number have chosen the former and effectively left the fold of the PC (USA) and its  
 429 theological traditions. Their boasts of faithfulness and full participation to the contrary, they have already left the church, if not  
 430 in fact then in principle. It is time, in the name of integrity and honesty, for those who have denied and rejected the central  
 431 tenets of the Reformed faith to graciously separate from the body and leave the church to those who have remained faithful  
 432 to its standards, doctrine, and traditions. It is time for all within the PC (USA) to decide afresh whom it will follow. But as for  
 433 us, we will serve, follow, and love the Lord God revealed in Christ and borne witness to in the Holy Scriptures, the God who  
 434 graciously dwells among us making us his people.

#### 435 **IV. Faith and Full Participation in Christ Jesus**

436 ***“One becomes an active member of the church through faith in Jesus Christ***  
 437 ***and acceptance of his Lordship in all of life”<sup>37</sup>***

438 Our disunity within the PC (USA) is further exacerbated by our denomination’s confusion regarding the nature and character  
 439 of the church, and what it means to be a member, and an officer within it. Our understanding of participation, membership,  
 440 and leadership within the church are interrelated and both define and determine our ecclesiology. The PC (USA) stands  
 441 confused over the nature, character, and mission of the church and this confusion has brought devastating consequences.  
 442 For where the nature of the church is confused the mission of the church is lost. It is therefore necessary that we reaffirm our  
 443 understanding of the church as well as what it means to be a member of it. These standards of membership in turn form the  
 444 basis and standard of ordination as elder, deacon, and minister of Word and sacrament making it even more crucial that they  
 445 be determined, understood, and held by the church.

446 The church is God’s creation and work. We believe that the Father, from the creation of the human race, has faithfully, pre-  
 447 served, instructed, multiplied, honored, adored, and called from death to life, a gathering of faithful people.<sup>38</sup> We affirm that  
 448 God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, making us his new creation, and calling us to be ambassadors of recon-  
 449 ciliation<sup>39</sup> and witnesses to the transforming power of Christ’s resurrection<sup>40</sup>. As such, the church exists as the body of  
 450 Christ,<sup>41</sup> a people of integrity, purity and devotion, born of God and ceaselessly striving to faithfully respond to the faithfulness  
 451 of our Father in heaven. We are, by God’s gracious work, a people of faith.

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<sup>36</sup> Weinsheimer’s brilliant distinction is worth noting: “Tolerance is a social and political, not cognitive, value. It promotes peace, not truth.”  
 This is found in Joel Weinsheimer, *Eighteenth Century Hermeneutics: Philosophy of Interpretation in England from Locke to Burke* (New  
 Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

<sup>37</sup> G-5.0101, *Book of Order*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part II.

<sup>38</sup> 3.05, *Book of Confessions*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part I.

<sup>39</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.

<sup>40</sup> Acts 1:8.

<sup>41</sup> See Rom. 7:4, 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:12, 5:23. See also 5.130, 6.054, 6.186, *Book of Confessions*, Constitution of the PC (USA) part  
 I and G-1.0100, *Book of Order*, Constitution of the PC (USA) part II.

452 Faith in Jesus Christ is the only basis for church membership<sup>42</sup> and thus *Active Membership*—that is the beginning of full  
 453 participation in the life and witness of the church and the standing upon which all ordained offices are contingent—means  
 454 nothing less than genuine, vibrant faith in Christ which accepts and exhibits his Lordship over all of life. By our faith, we are  
 455 justified, that is declared righteous in His eyes and reconciled to God. Thus, faith provides understanding of God’s nature,  
 456 will and work, binds us in trusting relationship to the Lord, and defines the shape of our lives. For these reasons, the health of  
 457 the church and its members is directly tied to the depth, integrity, and truth of the faith they hold and live. Where this faith  
 458 exists with integrity and vibrancy one can be assured of the health and future of the body. Where this is annulled, culturally  
 459 defined, or simply forgotten the church will certainly fall into impotency and irrelevance. We hold that it is this latter state that  
 460 accurately and increasingly describes the PC (USA) today. Thus we call all we can and certainly those within the PC (USA)  
 461 to return to the living God in that full faith that lays claim upon and transforms the whole of one’s life.

462 We understand faith to be “the sure and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence towards us, which, being founded on the  
 463 truth of the gracious promise in Christ is both revealed to our minds and confirmed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>43</sup> Faith is  
 464 not an opinion, perspective, or feeling. It is more than mere personal conviction. Faith is the fruit and effect of the Holy  
 465 Spirit’s work on our lives. Revealing the truth of God to our hearts, the Spirit enables us to see and comprehend God’s will  
 466 and enables us to wholeheartedly follow and live a life that is pleasing to God. We hold that faith means understanding,  
 467 receiving, and appropriately responding to the essential tenets of the Christian faith, that is, the real acts and revealed nature  
 468 and thus truth of God our Father. These are learned from the Bible’s witness and include<sup>44</sup> our affirmation...  
 469

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| ❖ ...of the Trinity and God's existence as one being in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit | ❖ ...of Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead and ascension to heaven                                       | ❖ ...that God has, through Christ, called a church into being to do His will and proclaim his nature and work.           |
| ❖ ...of the Lordship of Jesus.  | ❖ ...that salvation is through Christ alone  | ❖ ...that we are to live holy lives after the example of Christ  |
| ❖ ...of Jesus Christ's dual nature, fully God and fully human.                                      | ❖ ...that salvation is by grace through faith, not of works.   | ❖ ...that we are to go into all the world, making disciples of all people and teaching them all that Jesus said and did. |
| ❖ ...that Jesus was crucified, dead, and buried.  | ❖ ...of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, who with the Father and the Son works to effect our salvation. | ❖ ...that Jesus will return to gather his church to himself and reign forever over all creation.                         |
| ❖ ...of the forgiveness of sins through faith in the person and work of Christ.                     | ❖ ...of the Bible's inspiration and authority.   |  |

470

**V. Faith as Response**

471 The Christian life is a specific response of faith by which we publicly submit the whole of our lives to the lordship of Christ,  
 472 entrust the whole of our lives to his mercy and grace, live the whole of our lives in joyous expectant obedience, and give the  
 473 whole of our lives to the manifestation, exhibition, and expansion of his kingdom. Most practically, this means personal com-  
 474 mitment to and sharing in the proclamation of the good news, participation in the life and worship of the church, prayer, study  
 475 of the Scriptures and faith of the church, and supporting the church through the giving of money, time, support, and service.<sup>45</sup>  
 476 For faith informs and transforms our lives. Knowing and trusting God’s will and work we are justified (declared righteous) and  
 477 living our faith before God and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit we are sanctified (made righteous). In faith we turn to  
 478 God and in the process, turn from all that would keep us from him and his blessings.

479 *Since, then, we do not have the excuse of ignorance, everything—and I do mean everything—*  
 480 *connected with that old way of life has to go. It's rotten through and through. Get rid of it! And then take*  
 481 *on an entirely new way of life—a God-fashioned life, a life renewed from the inside and working itself*

<sup>42</sup> G-5.0103, *Book of Order*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part II.

<sup>43</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of The Christian Religion*, III.ii.7. See also 5.112, *Book of Confessions*, Constitution of the PC (USA) part I.

<sup>44</sup> This should not be considered an exhaustive list of all that one might include as an “essential tenet.” This simply notes some crucial points of faith that have been held by the church across its whole history, proclaimed in the Scriptures and repeatedly affirmed in the creeds and confessions of the PC (USA). The Scriptures and *Book of Confessions* provide a fuller and richer understanding of the content, object, and meaning of faith.

<sup>45</sup> G-5.0102, *Book of Order*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part II.

482 *into your conduct as God accurately reproduces his character in you. What this adds up to, then, is this:*  
 483 *no more lies, no more pretense... In Christ's body we're all connected to each other, after all.<sup>46</sup>*

484 We hold that faith in Christ and purity of life are the two, necessary, sides of the one act of Christian discipleship. One can  
 485 not have one without the other.<sup>47</sup> Jesus came that we might have life, and have it abundantly.<sup>48</sup> This means that faith not only  
 486 receives God's gifts and blessings, it endeavours to throw off all that would limit, deny or annul them. Faith, and thus church  
 487 membership, is to put off the old and put on the new life God intends and thus, as an act of faith, in obedience and love to  
 488 God, and in pursuit of that life Christ came to give, we put off our sinful nature seeking to reflect the image of Christ Jesus.

489 PUT OFF- Marks of the sinful nature<sup>49</sup>:

- 490     ▪ Sexual immorality: adultery, impurity, fornication, homosexual behavior, lust, pornography, orgies, prostitution, ca-  
 491         rouching, lewdness
- 492     ▪ Malice: slander, deceit, murder, bitterness, falsehood, dissent, gossip, discord, revenge, hatred, unwholesome  
 493         talk, coarse joking, obscenity, abusive talk, strife, disobedience to parents, treachery
- 494     ▪ Greed: envy, love of money, theft, jealousy, idolatry, covetousness, swindling
- 495     ▪ Lack of self-discipline: fits of rage, drunkenness, debauchery, laziness, love of pleasure
- 496     ▪ Pride: selfish ambition, arrogance, boasting, conceit,
- 497     ▪ False spirituality: witchcraft, false teaching, empty religion

498 PUT ON- Marks of the new life in Christ:

- 499     ▪ Sexual purity: fidelity to marital vows between a man and a woman, chastity in singleness
- 500     ▪ Love: honesty, peacemaking, speaking the truth in love, forgiving, a mastered tongue, self-control, patience,  
 501         kindness, sincere, impartial, merciful, considerate, forbearing, compassionate, thankful, loyal, gentle
- 502     ▪ Humility: regard for authority, submissive
- 503     ▪ Freedom from greed: contentment, faithful stewardship, financial/vocational integrity, generosity
- 504     ▪ Sound doctrine: passion for godliness, worship of the true God, love of the Truth

505 Not one of us is free from sin, not one of us perfect<sup>50</sup> and thus we are all ever in need of God's grace and forgiveness which  
 506 is available to all who confess their sins.<sup>51</sup> We are ever in need also of the loving guidance and support of the church, rec-  
 507 ognizing that Scripture teaches us to rescue and restore one another in love.<sup>52</sup> Only together, in humility and confession, in  
 508 the fullness of mutual encouragement and love, can we grow into the life Christ died to provide. Nevertheless these Scrip-  
 509 tural standards declare the will of God for our lives and the goals toward which we are to strive.

510 We stand eternally grateful to God for the Presbyterian Church (USA) and seek through these theological statements and the  
 511 resolutions that follow to be a part of its restoration and healing. It is our intent to build up, unify, encourage, and strengthen  
 512 the church in every way possible. It is our aim to advance the efficacy of its mission and ministry. It is our desire to protect  
 513 the church from schism and heresy, doing all that is within our power to help build a church that brings glory to God through  
 514 the display of his truth, purity, holiness, grace, and love. Where hard words and painful diagnoses have been expressed let it  
 515 be known that it was done so not with joy but sorrow and heaviness of hearts deeply grieved over the state of our church.  
 516 But we speak out from a deep trust in the power of God and hope that the church can be reformed, renewed, and unleashed  
 517 to fulfill the Great Ends of the Church to the glory of God who alone is Saviour and Lord.

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<sup>46</sup> Ephesians 4.22-25 (*The Message*)

<sup>47</sup> Romans 6.1-23; 1 Corinthians 6.9-11; Galatians 2.20; 5.13-18; Ephesians 4.17- 24; Colossians 2.11-12; 3.1-3; Titus 2.11-3.8; 1 Peter 1.13-2.12; 4.1-7

<sup>48</sup> John 10:10.

<sup>49</sup> These are composite lists derived from the following moral/ethical summaries in the New Testament: Mark 7.21-23; Romans 1:26-32; 13.8-14; 1 Corinthians 6.9-11; Galatians 5.16-25; Ephesians 4.22-5.21; Colossians 3.1-17; 1 Timothy 6.3-10; 2 Timothy 3:1-9; Hebrews 12.14- 13.6; James 3:14-18; 1 Peter 2:1-3; 4:1-7

<sup>50</sup> Rom. 3:23, 3:10-18; 1 John 1:8-10; Ecclesiastes 7:20.

<sup>51</sup> 1 John 1.5-2.6

<sup>52</sup> Matthew 18:15-20; Galatians 6:1-2; James 5:19-20.

## RESOLUTIONS FOR THE PRESBYTERY OF SANTA BARBARA

### *Toward Peace, Unity And Purity*

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#### 521 **Rationale:**

522 Our recent General Assembly's adoption of the Theological Task Force's Report on the Peace, Unity, and Purity of the  
523 Church focuses attention on the responsibility of each governing body within the denomination to apply the constitution in its  
524 particular setting. The following resolutions are presented to accomplish this at our presbytery level and to provide leadership  
525 and guidance for our member congregations.

#### 526 **Resolutions:**

527 1. In its discernment of the essentials of Reformed polity and for the sake of the peace, unity, and purity of the  
528 church, the Presbytery of Santa Barbara adopts the principle that compliance with the standards for ordination  
529 adopted by the whole church in the *Book of Order* is an essential of Reformed polity. Therefore, any departure from  
530 the standards for ordination expressed in the Book of Order will bar a candidate from ordination and/or installation  
531 by or membership within this governing body. Provisions of the *Book of Order* are signified as being standards by  
532 use of the term "shall," "is/are to be," "requirement," or equivalent expression. Those violating these standards shall  
533 be ineligible for ordination, installation, and/or service as minister of Word and Sacrament within our presbytery.

534 2. To promote the peace, unity, and purity of our presbytery, we resolve that the Presbytery of Santa Barbara shall  
535 not receive into membership, nor recognize as a member, anyone who has been made eligible for ordination or in-  
536 stallation via the granting of an exception for his or her departure from the essentials of Reformed polity which de-  
537 nies or annuls any of the ordination standards as set forth in the Constitution of the PCUSA [G-1.0500]) as de-  
538 scribed above.

539 3. In its discernment of the essentials of Reformed polity and for the sake of the peace, unity, and purity of the  
540 church, the Presbytery of Santa Barbara adopts the principle that compliance with the standards for ordination  
541 adopted by the whole church in the *Book of Order* is an essential of Reformed polity. Since every session member  
542 has vowed to be governed by our denomination's polity, any conscious and collective departure from the essentials  
543 of Reformed polity is a sign of spiritual illness. The presbytery has the express power (a power that only the pres-  
544 bytery can exercise) to provide pastoral care for the churches and members of presbytery, visiting sessions and  
545 ministers on a regular basis (G-11.0103g). Therefore, the presbytery will counsel, guide and, if necessary, en-  
546 deavour to bring healing to any session that is spiritually ill.

547 4. In its discernment of the essentials of Reformed polity and for the sake of the peace, unity, and purity of the  
548 church, the Presbytery of Santa Barbara adopts the principle that compliance with the standards for ordination  
549 adopted by the whole church in the *Book of Order* is an essential of Reformed polity. Since every pastor has vowed  
550 at ordination to be governed by our denomination's polity, any conscious and deliberate departure from the essen-  
551 tials of Reformed polity is a sign of spiritual rebellion and/or illness. The presbytery has the express power (a  
552 power that only the presbytery can exercise) to provide pastoral care for the members of presbytery, visiting ses-  
553 sions and ministers on a regular basis (G-11.0103g). Therefore, the presbytery will counsel, guide and, if neces-  
554 sary, correct each pastor that is spiritually ill or in rebellion.

555 5. To promote the peace, unity, and purity of our presbytery, we resolve that the Presbytery of Santa Barbara shall  
556 therefore work pastorally with any pastor, session or congregation that contemplates or seeks dismissal from the  
557 Presbyterian Church (USA); shall not preemptively take any coercive action against any pastor, session or congre-  
558 gation who merely considers faithfully following the Great Ends of the Church (G-1.0200) in another Reformed de-  
559 nomination; and shall not treat property as a basis for unity or as an opportunity for division. The presbytery inter-  
560 prets "use and benefit of the Presbyterian Church (USA)" in G-8.0201 to mean, in the judgment of this presbytery,  
561 solely whatever furthers the Great Ends of Church (G-1.0200); interprets its express power "to coordinate the work  
562 of its member churches, guiding them and mobilizing their strength for the most effective witness to the broader  
563 community for which it has responsibility" (G-11.0103b) to mean that in some cases, a congregation, with its prop-  
564 erty and financial assets, may be dismissed from the Presbyterian Church (USA) without penalty.

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## Stewardship and the Great Ends of the Church

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566 **Rationale:**

567 Per-capita payments were established in 1803 as voluntary contributions to the church to aid commissioners who live at a  
 568 distance in attending meetings of higher governing bodies. This idea is continued to the present day with the *Book of Order*  
 569 allowing per-capita funds to be used for meeting the expenses of those attending. Nevertheless, over the decades and cen-  
 570 turies the per-capita has grown in both the amount assessed each congregation and the number of areas funded by per-  
 571 capita revenues. Numerous attempts of reform have been made including the 1986 General Assembly ruling that “only those  
 572 ecclesiastical functions which enable the General Assembly to plan, oversee, and evaluate the mission of the church will be  
 573 funded by per capita.” But these attempts at reform have brought little change and today the per capita continues to grow  
 574 and fund areas far beyond meeting expenses or the mission of the church.

575

576 In 2006 the General Assembly anticipated \$13,155,538 in per-capita revenue. Of that \$718,895 was designated for perma-  
 577 nent and special committees<sup>53</sup>, \$783,895 to ecumenical groups<sup>54</sup>, \$2,097,613 to Presbyterian Historical Society, \$992,476 to  
 578 Constitutional Services, and numerous other expenses.<sup>55</sup> In fact these expenses are so great and so many that the General  
 579 Assembly anticipates expenditures of \$15,201,911—over 1.8 million dollars more than expected per-capita revenue.

580

581 We hold that 1) the historic and constitutional grounds for the per capita have been lost; 2) millions of dollars are spent upon  
 582 areas that many within our congregations find controversial and even reprehensible; 3) the vast majority of money spent from  
 583 per-capita apportionments does not further the mission of the church; 4) mission is best done within and by the local church  
 584 and presbyteries; and 5) as part of the larger church with no desire to withdraw or separate, we are morally obligated to par-  
 585 ticipate in supporting our share of legitimate expenses, prioritizing these and all presbytery expenses according to the great  
 586 ends of the church (G-1.0200).

587

**Resolutions:**

588 1. In order to further the ministry of the presbytery and faithfully steward the funds entrusted to us, we the member  
 589 churches of Santa Barbara affirm our higher moral obligation to further the Great Ends of the Church (G-1.0200) and,  
 590 as a presbytery, to coordinate and guide the collective ministry of our member churches (G-11.0103a, b). Therefore,  
 591 we resolve to willingly and cheerfully contribute to the Presbytery of Santa Barbara the full per-capita apportionment  
 592 determined by the presbytery with the understanding that funds so designated will be used by the presbytery to fur-  
 593 ther its mission and ministry.<sup>56</sup>

594 2. To promote the peace, unity, and purity of our presbytery and faithfully steward the funds entrusted to us, we resolve  
 595 that the Presbytery of Santa Barbara shall honor the protest of every congregation that chooses to exercise its right  
 596 to withhold its per capita while also considering remittance of per capita to General Assembly and synod to be a high  
 597 moral obligation. Be it further resolved that this presbytery holds its express powers and duties enumerated in G-  
 598 11.0103a & b to include higher moral obligations.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> For example: Comm. On Ecumenical Relations; Adv. Comm. On Constitution; Adv. Comm. on Litigation; Theological Diversity Task Force; Adv. Comm. on Social Witness Policy; and others.

<sup>54</sup> For example: National Council of Churches (\$325,000); World Council of Churches (\$458,402); and others. Of the 348 member churches/denominations in the WCC the PC (USA) is by far the single greatest financial contributor. For details one may read the entire 57 page Financial Report of the WCC online at:  
[http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wccmain/2006pdfs/Financial\\_Report\\_2005\\_final.pdf](http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wccmain/2006pdfs/Financial_Report_2005_final.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> The General Assembly Per Capita Statement of Activities has 35 separate lines under expenditures, far more than space allows here. This document may be found online at <http://www.pcusa.org/financials/percapita/0706pcnetassets.pdf>.

<sup>56</sup> Anticipated Santa Barbara Presbytery for 2006-07 per capita assessment will be \$18.63 per member.

<sup>57</sup> This is permitted by ruling of the 1999 General Assembly: “If churches refuse to pay their portion...the presbytery has the responsibility to pay the full amount irrespective to the specific collection from churches, *as long as funds are available within the presbytery*” (italics mine). 211<sup>th</sup> GA minutes (1999, 65, 107, 16.008-.009, Req. 99-1). Note: This was an Authoritative Interpretation (AI) of the constitution by the General Assembly which *has the force of law*. It is worth noting that the General Assembly’s Advisory Committee on the Constitution has declined to speculate on circumstances that would make funds unavailable. It currently remains the express power of the presbytery to make this assessment and designation.

- 599 3. In order to further the ministry of the presbytery and faithfully steward the funds entrusted to us, we resolve to explore  
600 the propriety, feasibility, and advisability of pursuing remedial and legislative action to correct inappropriate use of  
601 per-capita funds by the General Assembly and the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii.

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## Peace, Unity, Property

### 603 Rationale

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Historically, we Presbyterians are connectional, constitutional, and confessional. All too often, we have also been combative and conciliatory as evidenced by our numerous splits and mergers. While we have a long tradition of encouraging people to advocate strongly for their positions, we also have a deeply rooted ethos to be conciliatory, even in the midst of great strife.

Since the 217th General Assembly in 2006, many faithful believers within the Presbyterian Church (USA) have been experiencing crises of conscience that may lead them to reassess their relationship with the denomination and even seek dismissal from this denomination. This has resulted in increasing discord and turbulence in the denomination over the issue of property. In 2005, the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly (SC) engaged legal counsel regarding possible actions to be taken against pastors, sessions and congregations who might seek a claim on church property and/or dismissal from the denomination. Their advice<sup>58</sup> included many harsh and procrustean measures that are designed to squelch all potential dissent possible.<sup>59</sup> This unrestrained preemptive grasp for power and control has forced congregations into a defensive posture and required them to consider a faithful and appropriate response.

There are two problems with the Stated Clerk's preemptive act and the advice he received. First, these unbiblical tactics fundamentally forsake and damage the connectional nature of our community by being both harsh and preemptive. The compulsion of civil law cannot replace true connectionalism. Indeed, it destroys it. Second, despite much public rhetoric by the SC about peacefulness, community and conciliation, there has been no official repudiation of this legal advice. The lack of repudiation feeds the fear that those who would exercise freedom of speech will face preemptive retaliation. The result is connectionalism through intimidation and the ruin of biblical peace, unity, and purity. Further, it forces churches to consider how they may defend themselves against possible legal action raised against them by their own denomination even as they pursue to faithfully fulfill the great commission of Christ and the Great Ends of the Church described within the Constitution.

Against the actions of the SC and the advice he has received are the Great Ends of the Church (G-1.0200) and the first Historic Principle of Church Order, namely, "God alone is Lord of the conscience" (G-1.0301). First, our goal is to further the Kingdom of God. This may or may not include this denomination. The Presbyterian Church (USA) is only a part of the Church. Second, Presbyterians have historically given wide latitude in discussing all manners of issues. To squelch discussion or dissent preemptively is troubling. 1 Corinthians 6 is clear in directing believers to come together before going to secular court. We are deeply concerned that the denomination has created a war chest for anticipated secular legal battles. As people of faith, as ordained officers who are bound together by common vows, we should follow biblical principles for conflict resolution rather than employing scandalous tactics that are designed to win at all costs and maintain existing power structures. In John 17:21 Jesus prays that those who believe in Him would be one. We believe that the unity Christ calls us to is

<sup>58</sup> This is found in two documents: *Processes for Presbyteries in Responding to Congregations Seeking to Withdraw and Church Property Disputes: A Resource for those Representing Presbyterian Church (USA) Presbyteries* and *True Churches in the Civil Courts*.

<sup>59</sup> Some recommendations included in these documents are the following:

- 1) the formation of administrative commissions to: (a) remove pastors who merely seek to discuss the possibility of being dismissed from the denomination (*Processes*, III.4.D.1.b); (b) assume original jurisdiction in order to prevent the Session from calling a congregational meeting to vote to request the presbytery to exercise its G-11.0103i power to dismiss the congregations (*Processes*, III.4.D.2.d); (c) "to keep the presbytery in a "defensive" secular legal posture (let the schismatics seek Caesar's help)" (*Processes*, III.4.F.2); (d) prior even to disciplinary charges being filed, to remove a pastor from office on the presumption of guilt (*Processes*, III.4.F.3.A.1).
- 2) Preemptively file an affidavit against the title of property trust of the real estate. (*Church Property Disputes: A Resource for those Representing Presbyterian Church (USA) Presbyteries and True Churches in the Civil Courts*, page 3). In other words, the presbyteries are being encouraged to file a lien or encumbrance against congregational real estate in public records. Effectively, this is a way of warning people that there is a claim against the ownership of the property. It would make it difficult for a congregation to use the property as collateral or to sell it.
- 3) Label the defendants as schismatics in all legal filings (*Church Property Disputes: A Resource for those Representing Presbyterian Church (USA) Presbyteries and True Churches in the Civil Courts*, page 3).

635 beyond denominational lines. The Presbyterian Church (USA), like all Christian denominations, is only one part of the Church  
 636 over whom Christ alone is the head (G-1.0100). Therefore, whatever furthers the Great Ends of the Church (G-1.0200)  
 637 serves for the "use and benefit" of our denomination (G-8.0201).

638 **Be it resolved that this presbytery:**

- 639 1. respectfully, yet strongly, requests that the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly publicly repudiate the coercive,  
 640 unbiblical, and unconstitutional practices advocated by his legal counsel regarding actions to be taken in secular or  
 641 church courts against pastors, sessions and congregations who might contemplate or seek dismissal from the  
 642 Presbyterian Church (USA). Furthermore, the Presbytery instructs its stated clerk to send this paragraph to the  
 643 Stated Clerk of the General Assembly in a personal letter notifying him of the will of the presbytery on this issue.
- 644 2. recognizes and acknowledges its authority under G-8.0000 and G-11.0103i to evaluate questions concerning  
 645 church property in light of the particular circumstances presented in each instance and to exercise its good judg-  
 646 ment in accordance with Authoritative Interpretations of G-11.0103 made by the General Assembly in 1988, 1989,  
 647 and 1990.
- 648 3. shall therefore work pastorally with any pastor, session or congregation that contemplates or seeks dismissal from  
 649 the Presbyterian Church (USA);
- 650 4. shall not preemptively take any coercive action, as currently recommended by the Stated Clerk of the General As-  
 651 sembly, against any pastor, session or congregation who merely considers faithfully following the Great Ends of the  
 652 Church (G-1.0200) in another Reformed denomination;
- 653 5. shall not treat property as a basis for unity or as an opportunity for division.
- 654 6. interprets "use and benefit of the Presbyterian Church (USA)" in G-8.0201 to mean solely whatever, in the judg-  
 655 ment of this presbytery, furthers the Great Ends of Church (G-1.0200);
- 656 7. interprets its express power "to coordinate the work of its member churches, guiding them and mobilizing their  
 657 strength for the most effective witness to the broader community for which it has responsibility" (G-11.0103b) to  
 658 mean that in some cases, a congregation, with its property and financial assets, may be dismissed from the Pres-  
 659 byterian Church (USA) without penalty.

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## 660 *Preparing For The Future*

661 **Rationale:**

662 More than ever healthy, covenantal relationships with the larger church are necessary if the church is to remain faithful,  
 663 vibrant, and useful. Historically—and perhaps ideally—such covenantal relationships existed through and across the  
 664 larger denomination which shared a unique heritage and confession. Sadly, this is no longer the case. Growing divi-  
 665 sions, mistrust, and vastly different theological perspectives and values have led to a fragmented church. New covenan-  
 666 tal relationships are therefore necessary in order to protect faithful congregations within hostile presbyteries, unite for  
 667 the maintenance of Reformed standards of faith and practice, accountability, mission, and fellowship. New covenantal  
 668 relationships are also necessary for assessing the state and future of the PC (USA) and determining a response of faith  
 669 and integrity. We have long boasted in our connectional nature within the PC (USA). While we do not deny this reality,  
 670 we hold that it is fractured and dysfunctional. Additionally, we hold that the higher standard expressed in the Scriptures  
 671 is to be our goal and thus we seek new, vibrant, working relationships built around the unity of shared convictions, mes-  
 672 sage, and ministry. Finally, we believe we are called to participate in bringing peace, unity, and purity to the larger  
 673 church. With these in mind we adopt the following resolutions.

674 **Resolutions:**

- 675 1. We, the Presbytery of Santa Barbara resolve to form *The New Covenant Task Force* comprised of nine elders and  
 676 pastors (roughly equal in number) of the presbytery chosen by the moderator and Executive Presbyter and af-  
 677 firmed by the vote of the presbytery charging them with the following tasks and responsibilities (as well as others  
 678 made necessary by their work):

- 679 a. Determine like minded presbyteries and congregations with whom we might enter a covenantal relation-  
680 ship.
- 681 b. Explore as a presbytery and with other like minded presbyteries and congregations the potential shape,  
682 function(s), mission, and nature of these covenantal groups.
- 683 c. Study and evaluate issues, decisions, and actions occurring in and through the PC (USA) for the purpose  
684 of educating the presbytery and, where deemed important or necessary, formulating a response that will  
685 be presented to the presbytery for its approval.
- 686 d. Explore issues of property, per capita, pensions, and others that effect the presbytery, its member  
687 churches and ministers, making recommendations to Presbytery regarding actions that further our faith-  
688 fulness to God, the Great Ends of the Church, stewardship of that which God has given, the Constitution  
689 of the PC (USA), and our covenantal relationships.
- 690 e. Explore how the Presbytery, with other covenantal partners, might seek to bring reform and renewal to  
691 our member churches.
- 692 f. Explore how the Presbytery, with other covenantal partners, might seek to bring reform and renewal to  
693 the PC (USA).
- 694 g. Make regular reports to the Presbytery regarding its findings, work, and recommendations.
- 695 2. We the presbytery of San Barbara instruct our stated clerk to send the full text of this document (theological pages  
696 and resolutions) to the stated clerks of every congregation and governing body within the PC (USA) for the purpose  
697 of dialogue, discernment, and in hope that we in some way can participate in leading the church to renewal of life  
698 and faithfulness and thus genuine peace, unity, and purity.