

05-12 Mid Council Report to the 220th General Assembly—From the General Assembly Commission on Mid Councils.

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Review Consideration

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RECOMMENDATION

The General Assembly Commission on Mid Councils recommends that the 212th General Assembly (2012) do the following:

1. Direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendments to the Book of Order to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes to take effect at the close of the 222nd General Assembly (2016):

a. Shall G-3.04, The Synod, be deleted, including Sections G-3.0401 through G-3.0406) and Section G-3.05 (including G-3.0501–.0503) be renumbered as G-3.04 (G-3.0401-.0403).

b. Shall G-3.03, The Presbytery, be amended as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown as italic.]

~~"G-3.03 THE PRESBYTERY~~

~~"G-3.0301 Composition and Responsibilities~~

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

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

~~"The presbytery is responsible for the life, ministry, and government of the church throughout its district, and for assisting and supporting the witness of congregations to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that all congregations throughout its region become communities of faith, hope, love, and witness. As it leads and guides the witness of its congregations, the presbytery shall keep before it the marks of the Church (F-1.0302), the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed communities have identified themselves through history (F-1.0303) and the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304).~~

~~"[The remainder of this section to remain the same.]~~

~~"G-3.0302 Relations with Synod and General Assembly the Church~~

~~"The presbytery has a responsibility to maintain regular and continuing relationship to synod and with other presbyteries and to the General Assembly by:~~

~~"a. consulting with other presbyteries in their region about creating regional mission partnerships for racial ethnic advocacy and support, mission, and ministry projects, and other~~

programs of shared life, diversity, and connection to the larger church

"a. b. electing commissioners to ~~synod~~ and General Assembly and receiving their reports;

"b. c. electing ruling and teaching elders to be readers of standard ordination examinations;

"c. d. seeing that the guidance and communication of ~~synod~~ and General Assembly are considered and that any binding actions are observed and carried out;

"d. e. proposing to ~~synod~~ or General Assembly such measures as may be of common concern to the mission of the church; and

"e. f. sending annually to ~~synod~~ and General Assembly statistical and other information according to the requirements of those bodies. [The remainder of G-3.03, G-3.0303-.0307 to remain the same.]"

2. Instruct the synods, in consultation with their constituent presbyteries, to develop and bring to the 221st General Assembly (2014) plans to transfer assets, funds, projects, and programs to the appropriate trusts, foundations, or entities of their choice for implementation by the synods by the close of the 222nd General Assembly (2016).

3. Instruct the Moderator to appoint a committee to work in consultation with the Stated Clerk and to bring to the 221st General Assembly (2014):

a. Recommendations, including any necessary changes in the Manual of the General Assembly, for the appointment of five regional administrative commissions to facilitate churches and presbyteries to fulfill their missional objectives when realignment is necessary and also to support the presbyteries and regions in promoting the full expression of rich diversity in membership, participation, and decision-making (Book of Order, G-3.0103);

b. Recommendations, including any necessary changes in the Book of Order and the Manual of the General Assembly, in order to continue to facilitate and support the racial ethnic ministries that have historically been supported by the synods.

c. Any additional editorial changes to the Book of Order that will be made necessary by the action of Recommendation 1.

4. Instruct the Moderator to appoint a committee to work in consultation with the Stated Clerk and to bring to the 221st General Assembly (2014) recommendations, including any necessary changes in the Book of Order and the Manual of the General Assembly, to create the necessary number of regional judicial commissions, rooted in the various regions, to serve as courts of appeal to decisions of presbytery permanent judicial commissions (PJs) and as courts of original jurisdiction in remedial cases against presbyteries or upon reference from presbytery PJs.

5. Instruct the Moderator to appoint a commission to work in consultation with the Stated Clerk to do the following:

a. By direction of the 220th General Assembly (2012), or upon a majority affirmative vote of the affected presbytery or presbyteries or a majority affirmative vote of the presbyteries in the affected synod or synods, the commission is authorized to act as the General Assembly to

i. organize new synods and to divide, unite, or otherwise combine synods or portions of synods previously existing; and

ii. approve the organization, division, uniting, or combining of presbyteries or portions of presbyteries by synods.

b. Report to the 221st General Assembly (2014) and to the 222nd General Assembly (2016) all actions taken on its behalf.

c. To cease existence and transfer all authority to the regional administrative commissions as soon as the regional administrative commissions have been constituted.

6. Direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendments to the Book of Order to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

a. Shall G-3.0403 be amended by adding a new section "d." to read as follows:

"d. approving the formation of provisional nongeographic presbyteries for particular missional purposes, upon petition of ten or more congregations and ten or more teaching elders within its bounds, with the concurrence of existing presbyteries. The petition shall include a plan outlining the missional purposes of the proposed presbytery and continuing covenant relationships with existing presbyteries. Such presbyteries shall have all the rights and powers of presbyteries, except that they shall not have the authority to dissolve, dismiss, or divide congregations or to approve the sale, mortgage, lease, or transfer of the real property of its constituent congregations without the consent of the congregation's presbytery of origin. This provision shall expire December 31, 2021, at which time all presbyteries formed under this provision shall be dissolved and their congregations and teaching elder members dismissed to their presbyteries of origin."

b. Shall G-3.0303 be amended by adding a new section "g." to read as follows:

"g. approve the temporary dismissal of congregations, for particular missional purposes, to another presbytery within the synod or to another geographically contiguous synod, subject to G-3.0403c and G-3.0502e, with the following conditions: (1) the congregation shall continue to affiliate with the presbytery of origin for the purpose of mutual blessing, and shall have voice at presbytery meetings, except in matters related to conditions (2) and (3) in which they shall have voice and vote; (2) the congregation may not sell, mortgage, transfer, or lease its real property without the consent of the presbytery of origin; (3) the congregation may not be dissolved, divided, or dismissed without the concurrence of the presbytery of origin; (4) distribution of per capita or mission funds remitted may be divided according to a covenant between the presbytery of membership and the presbytery of origin; (5) all relationships established under this provision shall be rescinded December 31, 2021, and may be rescinded at any time by vote of either presbytery in consultation with the congregation."

7. Establish a task force to review the nature and function of the General Assembly Mission Council and the Office of the General Assembly, specifically with respect to their relationship with and support of mid councils as they serve the vitality and mission of congregations in our changing context.

8. In light of what we have heard in our conversation with the church identifying a critical condition concerning lack of confidence in the substance and direction of racial ethnic ministry, we recommend

a. that the Moderator of the 220th General Assembly (2012) be empowered to appoint a National Racial Ethnic Ministries Task Force exclusively to review, assess, and explore the call to, responsibility in, and vision for racial ethnic ministry within the PC(USA), reporting its findings for implementation to the 221st General Assembly (2014); and

b. that this task force be comprised of representatives from

—racial ethnic church leadership;

—racial ethnic caucus leadership;

—the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC);

—presbytery leadership; and

—the General Assembly Committee on Representation;

c. that this task force be independent from the OGA task force in Recommendation 3. above; and

d. that this task force be charged specifically to address the issue of language access, sensitivity, and resourcing (particularly as relates to the Spanish and Korean languages) within the existing frame of council operation, as well as within the context of any regional administrative structure that might emerge as a result of the repurposing of synods.

[Note: Furthermore, in our conversations with the church we found significant interest in developing a new mechanism (1) to review the models in mid councils and congregations of racial ethnic ministry that are operating successfully in the denomination with particular focus on, but not limited to, those noted in the Report of the Racial Ethnic Strategy Task Force; and (2) to explore the viability of a nationally organized racial ethnic ministry advocacy model on the local and/or cluster congregation level. While it is not within our charge formally to recommend so, the assembly may nevertheless wish to consider assigning these additional responsibilities to the National Racial Ethnic Ministries Task Force recommended above.]

RATIONALE

Rationale

“How are those governing bodies best organized to be responsive both to the Spirit of Christ and the changing opportunities for discipleship? Are [the structures of history] the best platforms for carrying our mission into the future?” **(From the Rationale of the charge to the General Assembly Commission on Middle Governing Bodies, Minutes, 2010, Part I, p. 275)**

Our Charge

The Assembly Committee on Middle Governing Body Issues recommends that the 219th General Assembly (2010) direct the Moderators of the 218th and 219th General Assemblies (2008 and 2010), in consultation with the General Assembly Nominating Committee, to appoint twenty-one persons to a General Assembly Commission on Middle Governing Bodies with the understanding that the Moderators, as they make their appointments, shall make an intentional effort for theological diversity. The commission shall have the following focus and powers:

1. The commission will consult with sessions, presbyteries, synods, and the wider church on the mission and function of middle governing bodies. Such a process should include:
 - a. current diversity in the role and functions of middle governing bodies.
 - b. demographics and financial realities that affect the role and function of synods and presbyteries.
 - c. the role of each governing body in its oversight role—presbyteries of congregations, synods of presbyteries, and General Assembly of synods—both historically and in present experience.
 - d. relationships with General Assembly agencies in role and function.
2. The commission will develop models that reflect the roles of middle governing bodies in our polity and the changing context of our witness in the United States and their relationships with other governing bodies.
3. The commission will prepare a report to the 220th General Assembly (2012) of its findings and any recommended Book of Order changes. Recommendation for future roles and responsibilities will also be made to the 220th General Assembly about changes in middle governing bodies that may best serve the in the 21st century.
4. The commission will implement, within the powers granted it, any decisions forwarded from the 219th General Assembly (2010) and approved by presbyteries regarding the form and function of middle governing bodies with a report to the 220th General Assembly (2012).
5. By direction of the 219th General Assembly (2010), or upon a majority affirmative vote of the affected presbytery or presbyteries or a majority affirmative vote of the presbyteries in the affected synod or synods, the commission is authorized to act as the General Assembly according to

a. G-13.0103m: "to organize new synods and to divide, unite, or otherwise combine synods or portions of synods previously existing;"

b. G-13.0103n: "to approve the organization, division, uniting, or combining of presbyteries or portions of presbyteries by synods."

6. The commission will supervise the Special Administrative Review Committee on Puerto Rico and act on any recommendations they may make within the powers given to the commission.

7. The actions of the commission shall require a two-thirds majority for approval. (Minutes, 2010, Part I, pp. 274–75)

The Commission

The Reverend Tod Bolsinger, moderator, Los Ranchos Presbytery, Synod of Southern California and Hawaii

The Reverend José Manuel Capella-Pratts, Presbiterio de San Juan, Sínodo Presbiteriano Borinquén

Elder Warren B. Cooper, Philadelphia Presbytery, Synod of the Trinity

The Reverend Karen E. Dimon, Cayuga-Syracuse Presbytery, Synod of the Northeast

Elder Miriam Dolin, San Francisco Presbytery, Synod of the Pacific

The Reverend Lemuel Garcia-Arroyo, Salem Presbytery, Synod of Mid-Atlantic

The Reverend James B. Harper, Greater Atlanta Presbytery, Synod of South Atlantic

Elder Robert Hay Jr., Greater Atlanta Presbytery, Synod of South Atlantic

The Reverend Liza Hendricks, Western Reserve Presbytery, Synod of the Covenant

Elder Viola Hickson Lee, Mission Presbytery, Synod of the Sun

Elder J. Roger Lee, Seattle Presbytery, Synod of Alaska-Northwest

Elder Kelli Lowe, Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery, Synod of Mid-America

The Reverend Terry Newland, Sheppards & Lapsley Presbytery, Synod of Living Waters

The Reverend José Olagues, Grand Canyon Presbytery. Synod of the Southwest

Elder Barbara Ranta, Seattle Presbytery, Synod of Alaska-Northwest

The Reverend Sam Roberson, Charlotte Presbytery, Synod of Mid-Atlantic

The Reverend Richard H. Rojas Banuchi, Presbiterio de San Juan, Sínodo Presbiteriano Borinquén

Elder David Seung-Il Rue, M.D., Sacramento Presbytery, Synod of the Pacific

Elder Jane D. Smith, Riverside Presbytery, Synod of Southern California and Hawaii

Elder William L. Stafford, Milwaukee Presbytery, Synod of Lakes and Prairies

The Reverend Laura Stellmon, Utah Presbytery, Synod of the Rocky Mountains

The Reverend John W. Vest, Chicago Presbytery, Synod of Lincoln Trails

Staff to the Commission:

The Reverend Jill M. Hudson, Associate Stated Clerk

The Reverend Dan Saperstein, Advisory Committee on the Constitution

Angela Lucear, Sr. Administrative Assistant

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Rationale: An Executive Summary

A Season of Experimentation for Adapting to a Rapidly Changing World

The changing cultural context, the shifts that middle governing bodies are themselves already making, and a new domestic mission frontier all make this the right time, God's time for us to examine the role, function and form of presbyteries and synods. (From the rationale of the charge to the General Assembly Commission on Middle Governing Bodies, Minutes, 2010, Part I, p. 275)

At the heart of the eight formal recommendations the [Mid Council Commission](#)* has offered to the General Assembly is a twofold proposal that necessitates the constitutional changes suggested above:

1. The flattening of denominational hierarchy and bureaucracy by repurposing synods as [Multi-Presbytery Missional Partnerships](#). This will be accomplished by eliminating the ecclesiastical responsibilities of synods as councils of the church, referring permanent judicial commission functions to another created structure, and creating regional administrative commissions of the General Assembly to offer ecclesiastical accountability for boundary decisions between presbyteries and to facilitate the church's commitment to diversity.

2. The reinvigorating of presbyteries as the locus of support for missional congregations by allowing more flexibility in the formation of connectional relationships. In order to do this, we call the church to engage in a designated [Season of Reflective Experimentation](#) that will last until December 31, 2021. Among the possibilities to be explored during this season of experimentation are the creation of provisional nongeographic presbyteries and provisional presbytery realignments for specific missional purposes.

We live in a rapidly changing world and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is not the same denomination it was sixty or thirty years ago, when the structural framework of our current version of Presbyterianism was developed and implemented. As we have envisioned what the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) of our [post-Christendom](#) world may look like, our Commission has assumed the role of those who prepare the space, invite the artists, and affirm the creativity that already resides in our [mid council](#) system.

Based on a deep examination of our rapidly changing contexts for mission in the world, our recommendations create the conditions for [adaptive change](#) with a clear focus: "The stimulation of creative collaboration within and among presbyteries to strengthen the vitality of missional congregations in a post-Christendom world."

The foundational ecclesiological principle behind our recommendations is articulated in our new Form of Government: the congregation—in covenant relationships called presbyteries—is the 'basic form' of the mission of God to the world.¹

In order to develop our recommendations:

- We listened deeply to the church by means of surveys, conference calls with key constituents, and numerous conversations in every synod, at every major gathering of the church, and with key leaders in every level of the church's life. ([See the report, "Listening \[and Looking\] Deeply: Data and Discussions"](#))
- We learned from experts in theology, history, and sociology, as well as from the most respected leaders in our current system about the urgency, necessity, and process of deep transformation. ([See the section, "Changing Contexts and Adaptive Change"](#))
- We initiated a transparent and public conversation using social media, blogs, articles, and conversations about our recommendations while they were still in "draft" stages.
- We developed a set of Guiding Principles that reaffirm the recently adopted new Form of Government, setting us on our way to more missional and contextual decision making, and more flexibility and freedom to experiment. ([See the report in Appendix 1, "Guiding Principles"](#))

Our recommendations were not developed in a vacuum. Throughout our process of listening, we discovered a variety of mid councils that are already producing new and creative expressions of connectional mission. To document these findings, our full report lifts up models of exemplary mid councils and suggests key attributes embodied in healthy councils. (See the report, ["The Colors of Vitality: Models and Attributes of Healthy Presbyteries"](#))

We bring our recommendations with confidence that there is already significant capacity for transformation within our system that only needs to be shared and harnessed for creative change.

Repurposing Synods

Our first recommendation is to [flatten](#) the hierarchy and bureaucracy of our church by eliminating one level of ecclesiastical structure. We seek to stimulate structural change from the ground up. In doing so, we affirm and support multi-presbytery missional projects and programs that have been the traditional jewels of our synods and call for a commitment to reaffirm the longstanding tradition of mid council partnership for Racial Ethnic Ministries.²

We have recommended regional administrative commissions as organizational ["safe holding environments"](#)³ for experimentation and collaboration that ensure wise, constitutionally consistent decision making in a larger geographic area. These administrative commissions will have the authority of the General Assembly in regards to boundary issues within and between presbyteries and to facilitate the church's commitment to diversity.

The recommendation to repurpose the synods into multi-presbytery [partnerships](#) (and remove ecclesiastical status) responds to what we heard from the church: a call for structures that prioritize the vitality and mission of congregations. This recommendation separates out the three

traditional functions of a synod—ecclesiastical oversight of presbytery boundaries, judicial appeal, and shared ministry and mission—into three different arenas:

- Ecclesiastical oversight will now be accomplished through five regional administrative commissions of the General Assembly whereby representatives of the constitutive presbyteries within a region will gather as needed and have the authority necessary for responding quickly and constitutionally to petitions to change presbytery boundaries and transfer of churches. These commissions will also have the responsibility to ensure our church's commitment to diversity within each region.
- A committee will work with the Office of the General Assembly to discern a more effective "appellate court" system that is separate from these regional administrative commissions.
- Relationships and programs for shared ministry and mission across greater regions can continue or be developed through the initiative of the presbyteries within those regions. The works of ministry that have been supported by the mission giving of a synod can be retained in whatever forms the affected presbyteries determine will most effectively support their mission.

These multi-presbytery missional partnerships will become arenas for more connectional life as congregations and presbyteries decide to support and engage in relationships that are the most fruitful expressions of congregations in mission. This proposal to repurpose synods is the larger canvas in a secure constitutional frame that is meant to stimulate widespread collaborative creativity for the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ.

A Season of Reflective Experimentation

We propose a designated season of reflective experimentation with new models of missional governance, through the adoption of two significant temporary changes in our [polity](#):

- We propose that the church amend the Constitution to permit synods to organize provisional nongeographic missional presbyteries, upon petition of sessions and teaching elders, with the concurrence of affected councils.
- We further propose that during this season of reflective experimentation presbyteries may dismiss congregations, with the concurrence of all affected councils, to another presbytery (either provisional or currently constituted). We propose that this season of reflective experimentation expire December 31, 2021, and recommend that the 222nd General Assembly (2016) be charged with designing and making provision for the evaluation of the season of experimentation.

These proposals are intended to entrust presbyteries with the flexibility and responsibility of working together to discern and create mid council structures and relationships that will enable their missional congregations to thrive and adapt.

We envision this season of reflective experimentation to stimulate engagement, learning, and missional collaboration within every context of the broader church. We envision churches that are given—within the proper relational and constitutional bounds—the flexibility and freedom to create new presbyteries or to become members of existing presbyteries within their larger region for achieving specific missional purposes. We envision presbyteries being formed through shared calling, shared commitments, and with a shared conviction to continue to build relationships, partnerships, and understanding both within and among various presbyteries. This will naturally require more cooperation, more collaboration, and more trust (of which we will have more to say later in this report).

We envision churches in conversations within their presbyteries of origin creating covenants of shared life and "mutual blessing" even while they create new provisional presbyteries or provisionally become members of other presbyteries.

We envision churches being committed to both their local neighborhoods and to a growing network of relationships and missional opportunities in a world where communication allows more creativity and opportunity for change.

We envision possibilities like those of the City Classis of the Reformed Church of America⁴ that has created a mid council for the express purpose of planting new urban congregations and developing urban church planting leaders. We envision possibilities like the Fresh Expressions of the United Kingdom that has called for both “neighborhood” and “network” church structures.⁵ We envision the potential for much deeper engagement by the emerging leaders of our church as a new generation that is fluent in the language and mores of our flat and networked world are given the trust and freedom to create and share in the accountability and oversight of new forms of ministry and covenanted life.

We dream of the creation of provisional presbyteries formed to express different deeply held missional callings of congregations and their leaders.

We envision different presbyteries in the same larger geographic area (perhaps even sharing the same staff) that come together with a special call for urban ministry, suburban ministry, rural ministry, reconciliation ministry, revitalizing congregations, or planting new congregations.

We envision churches free to move from one presbytery to another in a particular region in order to better live out their calling. We envision that some will want to be in smaller, more localized presbyteries; while others will want larger, more programmatic presbyteries; still others will choose to be part of “virtual” presbyteries that are spread across larger geographic areas.

Mostly, we envision a new generation of emerging leaders—who are most at home in what Doug Pagitt calls the [Inventive Age](#)—to become more personally involved in the reinvention of missional congregations supported by thriving, focused presbyteries in a denomination that is fully embracing the challenges of our rapidly changing world.

We offer these recommendations in the hope that they will energize the whole church to a season of more engaged partnership, collaboration, and creativity for bringing the mission of the God’s kingdom into diverse and rapidly changing local contexts.

These proposals shift the focus of our connectional structures to presbyteries and congregations; refocus the church on mission, discipleship, and shared covenants; and train our focus on the post-Christendom cultural landscape, the future before us, and a new generation of leadership that is already emerging.

Further Work

From the beginning of our work, the commission understood that our charge was limited to mid councils. However, our data collection, which was one of the largest listening projects ever conducted in the PC(USA), provided a broad and deep look at the perspectives of session members, presbytery and synod leaders, focus groups of racial ethnic constituencies, young pastors, large and small presbytery moderators and executive staffs, and a substantial “at large” representation of Presbyterians, all of whom rated and commented on our ecclesial structures. After a sustained and thorough time of listening to the church, it became clear to us that at least two issues beyond our focus on mid councils need to be lifted up for further work, expressed in Recommendations [7](#) and [8](#).

Our data clearly shows that many Presbyterians are calling for a shift from the top-down model of our current structure to a model that is characterized by a church-wide commitment to build up and support local congregations. Generally, congregations do not feel well supported by General Assembly agencies. Only 26 percent of session-level respondents rated the Office of the General Assembly (OGA) “excellent” or “very good” and only 33 percent gave those ratings to General Assembly Mission Council (GAMC). There is a significant disconnect between local congregations and the agencies of the General Assembly. We therefore call for the creation of a task force to review the nature and function of the General Assembly Mission Council and the Office of the General Assembly, specifically with respect to their relationship with and support of mid councils as they serve the vitality and mission of congregations in our changing context.

The response throughout the church to our recommended change in the ecclesiastical status of

synods heightened our awareness that there is need for a longer, more thorough examination of the conditions and possibilities of racial ethnic ministry in the context of changing ecclesial structures. The commission created its own task force to consult with leadership across the church and offers a report of its findings (see [Report from the Racial Ethnic Strategy Task Force](#)). In response to these concerns, we recommend the creation of a National Racial Ethnic Ministries Task Force to ensure that the advocacy for racial ethnic ministries, which has been traditionally located in synods, continue in the new ecclesial structures that emerge in the PC(USA).

Lastly, we offer the church some observations of underlying issues identified in our research that go beyond structural concerns of mid councils but are vital to the health and transformation of the PC(USA).

Conclusion

Our report and recommendations invite the church to live into what has been called the “[adjacent possible](#)”.⁶ It invites us to be a people who together take wise, deliberate, and provisional steps; who experiment with ways of being together; who “try on” relationships; who make temporary covenants without fully leaving behind the historical and geographical connections that have shaped our denomination to date.

Our proposal does not require change at the congregational or presbytery level, but allows for flexibility, freedom, and authority for those who endeavor to work out our connectional convictions in developing strategies, creating structures, initiating ministries, and sharing projects, all while being protected by the constitutional oversight of a regional administrative commission and a clear expiration date for what—God willing—will be a bold season of experimentation for a changing church in a changing world.

Changing Contexts and Adaptive Change

“How can we have enough freedom to imagine and articulate a real historical newness in our situation?” Walter Brueggemann

Our Vision

We envision a larger geographic canvas, a secure frame of constitutional accountability, and creative, collaborative leaders experimenting in creating missional communities for sending disciples into the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We envision elders and congregations in thoughtful, bold experiments within and across presbyteries having as much flexibility as they need to create new models of “[covenant communities of missional congregations](#).”

We envision presbyteries as “[learning communities](#)” committed to a constant process of examining what works and adapting the organization to meet ever-changing needs.

We envision a growing commitment to [cultural proficiency](#), enriching and expanding each others’ cultural experiences, and demonstrating the gospel of Christ, which calls us all to be participants.

We envision innovative, practical expressions of [parity](#) between teaching and ruling elders, a cornerstone of Reformed polity, by encouraging experiments where churches and elders willingly take the steps necessary to discover what elder-led councils look like in a world full of demands.

We envision a growing number of specific, covenanted communities made up of churches that are uniquely called to the risks, experimentation, and leadership capacity that will be required to develop new churches and “[worshipping communities](#)” and support young congregational experiments.

We envision even more established congregations who join together either permanently or provisionally for a season of time to fulfill a call to nurture small or struggling congregations in bold

and generous acts of partnership.

We envision "[network](#)" [presbyteries](#) existing alongside "[neighborhood](#)" [presbyteries](#) that better express and respond to the multiple ways that we live and build relationships in our world today.²

We understand that one commission cannot possibly envision all the ways that Presbyterian connectionalism can be expressed in intentional, covenantal life together.

We believe that the church is longing

- for a revitalization of healthy missional congregations,;
- to see more diverse, gifted, passionate, and engaged leadership collaborating for the mission of Jesus Christ;
- to stimulate the creation of new worshipping communities to live out the gospel to a world in need;
- to strengthen the bonds of congregational covenants;
- to exercise creativity for developing new models of a shared life of discipleship in a post-Christendom context;
- to trust one another more.

Toward a Vibrant Picture of Post-Christendom Presbyterianism

We want to catalyze the church to see with new eyes. We want to encourage faithful ruling and teaching elders to engage in collaborative works of missional artistry. We call upon the Spirit to inspire new visions of vibrant missional congregational life that faithfully witnesses to the gospel of Jesus Christ in a post-Christendom world. We invite ruling and teaching elders to converse and experiment around two pivotal questions of our time:

- What does a vital missional congregation in a post-Christendom context really look like?
- What leadership, structures, and covenant relationships will enable those missional congregations to flourish?

In this report, we see ourselves as "stretching a larger canvas," creating a "strong frame" of constitutional oversight, and inviting congregations and presbyteries to engage in collaborative, contextual, and provisional creative experimentation. In addition, we have provided the "colors" of vibrancy that are already being used in the church—models that have been given generously to all of us from different places where experimentation is already occurring and have drawn attention to the spaces in the canvas where more work is needed.

We have listened to the church. We have learned from experts. We have talked and prayed long. We have discovered much to share. In addition to two significant recommendations, we offer reports, raise issues, and make five additional recommendations to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church in a world that is rapidly changing—which is where we begin.

Presbyterians in a Post-Christendom World: The Changing Context of Mission in the 21st Century

The changing cultural context, the shifts that middle governing bodies are themselves already making, and a new domestic mission frontier all make this the right time, God's time for us to examine the role, function and form of presbyteries and synods. (From the rationale of the charge to the General Assembly Commission on Middle Governing Bodies, Minutes, 2010, Part I, p. 275)

In such a situation of profound change, it is no surprise that the ecclesial structures developed for Christendom appear to have less relevance after Christendom. Darrell Guder

Like all [mainline Protestant](#) denominations in the United States, the PC(USA) feels like a church in crisis. For at least four decades our numbers have diminished at a steady rate. We desperately

hold on to dying congregations and yet fail to see the imperative need to plant new communities of faith. What we now call mid councils—presbyteries and synods—feel like relics of the past. Created for a different time, we are incapable of supporting their lumbering bureaucracies today. Our biennial General Assemblies are locked in endless battles over regulations and persist in making social proclamations to which no one seems to pay much attention. We wonder if it is possible to maintain unity in the midst of great diversity, and we have no clear sense of what that unity might actually look like.

Christianity is like a river with many branches. Like others before it, the Presbyterian stream could run its course. It could disperse into nothing. Its water could run dry. But, it is just as likely that this stream will experience a resurgence of living water. For many, this is a time of hope and new life. It is a time of emergence and the birthing of new ways of being Christian—perhaps even new ways of being Presbyterian.

A Denomination in Decline

It is well known that practically every mainline Protestant denomination—and increasingly, many of the evangelical denominations—has experienced a significant decline in membership and overall strength since the middle of the 20th century.⁸ The experience of the PC(USA) is consistent with this overall trend. The membership of the PC(USA) is now half of what its predecessor denominations were in 1965, a loss of more than 2,000,000 members.⁹

In 2008, as the PC(USA) celebrated the 25th anniversary of Reunion, the denomination had experienced a net loss of almost 1,000,000 members since the 1983 merger, from 3,131,228 to 2,140,165. By 2010, our membership had further dropped to 2,016,091—a decrease of almost 36 percent over the course of twenty-seven years.¹⁰ Though the rate of decline is less severe, the number of PC(USA) congregations has also dropped from 11,662 in 1983 to 10,560 in 2010, a loss of nearly 9.5 percent. In every year since Reunion, we have lost more congregations than we have gained.¹¹

For the congregations that remain, the situation is often dire. We are an increasingly aging denomination, with a median age of 61. The average size of PC(USA) congregations has been significantly reduced over the past quarter century. It is now the case that half of all congregations have a membership of 100 or less.¹² During this same time, average worship attendance has also dropped significantly.¹³ The percentage of these shrinking congregations that can afford to employ an installed pastor has decreased dramatically. In 2010, 44 percent of PC(USA) congregations had no installed pastor.¹⁴

The reasons for this overall decline in church membership are often debated. Though a widespread assumption persists that denominational controversies cause people to leave their local congregations, research has long demonstrated that this is not the case.¹⁵ Membership losses among all mainline Protestant denominations have been steady and consistent for half a century, regardless of particular leaders or particular controversies.

Presbyterian statistician Jack Marcum has suggested a variety of explanations for the decline of the PC(USA), all of which ultimately come down to the fact that every year we lose more members than we gain. Low birth rates are a significant cause.¹⁶ It is also the case that we lose more members to transfers than we attract.¹⁷

Most significantly, however, is the reality that we are not reaching out to newcomers or investing in new church development.¹⁸ As a denomination, across all geographic areas, we are not planting enough new faith communities. Between 2000 and 2010, only 226 new churches were chartered.¹⁹ This is simply not sustainable. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) of the 21st century must be a denomination that encourages and nurtures new church development.

Diminishing Resources

What the membership decline of our denomination means for mid councils is clear. Though individual financial giving to congregations has steadily increased since Reunion,²⁰ the sharp decline in membership has created significant funding problems for presbyteries and synods. For years, we have depended on human and financial resources from local congregations to fund and provide leadership for these middle judicatories. As both types of resources are increasingly strained at the local level, it is obvious that there is less and less available to sustain the older bureaucratic models of church governance.

Unsustainable Bureaucracies

The evolution of presbyteries as the characteristic feature of Presbyterian polity in the United States is an important element of our contextual understanding. Presbyteries as we know them today developed from [ecclesial institutions](#) in Calvin's Geneva that were responsible for church order, discipline, ordination of ministers, continuing education, mutual encouragement, and missionary work. Joseph Small notes that while order, discipline, ordination, and mission have prevailed as the major responsibilities of presbyteries, theology and mutual encouragement are no longer central. "Without the corporate engagement of pastors and elders in biblical, theological, and ecclesiological inquiry, ecclesial order is easily bureaucratized while discipline is either ignored or factionalized."²¹

Small goes on to describe how church judicatories became governing bodies, which were quickly bureaucratized in parallel with the bureaucratization of American society in the middle of the 20th century.²² In the 1970s, presbyteries were further transformed into mission agencies and were expected to carry out mission of their own, rather than function primarily as support for the mission of local congregations. Over time these bodies became complex and cumbersome bureaucracies.²³ Synods became equally bureaucratized and program driven. At both levels, the demand for professional staff—predominantly drawn from teaching elders—contributed to the gradual clericalization of the church as the role of teaching elder eclipsed the role of ruling elder.

This approach to mid councils made sense and actually worked quite well for an American society that valued bureaucracy and the organizational models of the corporate business world. At the time of these developments, the church had enough members to sustain such complex structures. But in today's globalized world of flatter organizational structures, and with the realities of a much smaller and less resourced church, these bureaucratic and program driven mid council models are anachronistic, burdensome, and unsustainable. In response, most mainline Protestant denominations are moving away from centralized bureaucracies to flatter, more fluid structures.²⁴

The Quest for True Parity

A central element of John Calvin's [ecclesiology](#) was the rejection of [clericalism](#). By instituting the ecclesial offices of elder and deacon, Calvin broke down the distinction between "clergy" and "laity".²⁵ It follows, then, that the basic structure and polity of Presbyterianism in the United States demands parity between what have traditionally been called teaching elders and ruling elders. At the time of Reunion, these traditional titles were changed to minister of the Word and Sacrament and elder. This change in language, along with the gradual bureaucratization of middle governing bodies, led to the very kind of clericalism that Calvin intended to avoid—pastors were considered true ministers and elders were relegated to supporting roles.²⁶

The return to the traditional titles of teaching elder and ruling elder in the new Form of Government represents a desire within the church to reverse this clericalizing trend. However, without accompanying structural changes to bureaucratic mid councils, the idealism of parity between teaching elders and ruling elders will remain impractical.

Ruling elders must balance their ecclesial commitments with the demands of their careers and the general busyness of contemporary life. Many functions of mid councils are being carried out by volunteers instead of paid staff because of diminishing resources and budget cuts. This means longer and more frequent meetings in already tight schedules. Additionally, taking time off from work for church meetings is much less acceptable in today's culture than it was in the past. Does

true parity exist when participation in mid councils is understood as part of the job description of teaching elders but ruling elders are forced to either take time off from work or not participate at all? Are we able to ensure representation from younger professionals, hourly wage workers, and single parents?

As we will see, parity between teaching elders and ruling elder is consistent with the values of emerging generations. Can we develop structures and practices that move this parity from a professed ideal to a lived reality?

Differences, Divisions, and Conflicts

As we have already noted, research demonstrates that denominational controversies are not, as many often assume, the primary cause for membership losses in mainline Protestant denominations like the PC(USA). Nonetheless, we must consider the realities of the "[post-10-A](#)" world in which we now live. After decades of conflict, congregations dissatisfied with recent changes in ordination standards are leaving the denomination and/or considering the creation of new Reformed bodies.

When the process of Reunion formally concluded in 1991, rumblings of discontent were quick to surface when a seventeen-member Special Committee on Human Sexuality produced a controversial report called "Keeping Body and Soul Together: Sexuality, Spirituality, and Social Justice." Although the General Assembly did not approve this report, its reverberations were felt across the denomination. While this was not the first time human sexuality was addressed by the General Assembly, it did mark the beginning of a long and sustained season of open conflict about the issue. Six years later, when the "fidelity and chastity" clause was added to the Book of Order, the matter was far from settled. Division and dissension increased with every subsequent debate and vote on ordination standards, leading up to and including the 2010 General Assembly approval of Amendment 10-A, which replaced the "fidelity and chastity" clause, and its eventual ratification by a majority of presbyteries in 2011.

Two realities of this twenty-year period of conflict and constitutional maneuvering need to be reckoned with. First, while faithful Presbyterians were engaged in meaningful mission and ministry to a broken and hurting world, the success of these endeavors was often overshadowed by persistent denominational controversies. Second, as our denomination experienced significant declines in membership, it has been difficult to address new ways of approaching ministry in a rapidly changing world while being continually engaged in internal theological conflict. As a result, polarized factions within the church are now ill-equipped to work together as an effective church for the 21st century.

Our biblical and theological traditions exhort us to dwell together in Christian unity. This unity should serve as a witness to the world, pointing people to Christ's vision of God's kingdom. Unfortunately, discord and disunity are more typical characteristics of our public witness. Though our theology and polity encourage unity, we are increasingly incapable of sustaining significant relationships across party lines.

Nonetheless, it may be that our discord more accurately reflects failed institutional practices than a disregard for Christian unity. Our polity is guided by parliamentary procedure and the processes of constitutional emendation, both of which rely on divisive debates and polarizing votes. This approach assumes that it is possible and desirable for the church to arrive at a single conclusion that will resolve a given conflict. We have relied on conflict resolution rather than polarity management.²⁷

This method has not served us well. Resolving differences on important, complex, and controversial matters is not accomplished through parliamentary procedures. Biblical and theological discernment has become a competitive and political process in which there are always winners and losers.

Denominational structures and practices aimed at achieving a singular stance on a controversial issue is a remarkably mono-cultural approach during an era marked by commitments

to multiculturalism, diversity, and pluralism. Is it possible for a multiplicity of Christian perspectives on controversial issues to exist within a single church?²⁸ Is it possible to develop structures and practices that allow Presbyterians to express with integrity diverse biblical and theological commitments?

When it comes to theological differences within our denomination, human sexuality is only the tip of the iceberg. Some have even argued that these differences constitute distinct religious traditions and cultures that cannot be reconciled. Whether that is true or not, without creative and flexible structures and practices, we will continue to wage battles designed to decide winners and losers. In the end, we will all lose.

Multiculturalism and Racial Ethnic Representation

Diversity and multiculturalism are professed values of the PC(USA), but it is clear that this is still not our reality. Even though, in relative terms, racial ethnic minorities are growing while the white majority is decreasing,²⁹ we are still an overwhelmingly white church in terms of membership and culture. In this respect, the church is not keeping up with demographic and cultural shifts within the wider American society. Census Bureau projections indicate that by 2050 current minorities will become the majority in the United States.³⁰

Is our church capable of adapting to this new reality? How can we be intentional in the development of ministries that reflect the multiethnic and multicultural composition of the United States? What kinds of structural models can be developed in order to ensure the full participation of racial ethnic constituencies in all the councils of the church? How can we grow as a multicultural church that ministers effectively to and with first generation immigrants as well as second and third generations whose language, cultural characteristics, and worldviews are becoming different from their predecessors?

Beyond racial diversity, religious diversity is also becoming more and more pronounced in American society. Yet Robert Wuthnow has exposed how poorly American Christians are doing at engaging this growing pluralism.³¹ At macro-levels of Christian theology and in local expressions of Christian communities, it seems that interreligious dialogue and cooperation have been more idealistic than experienced in reality. While our laws protect against religious discrimination and promote religious freedom, our cultural engagement with diversity has been superficial at best and mired in ignorance at worst. Christian leaders and congregation members have survived, in part, by burying their heads in the sand and ignoring the diversity that is growing around them. Yet this is becoming less and less possible as populations of non-Christians grow ever more numerous and involved in public discourse. Wuthnow challenges religious leaders, especially those in the dwindling Christian majority, to develop more effective and meaningful ways of interacting with the religious diversity of our culture.

Expanding our focus to global realities, Philip Jenkins has chronicled how the historical locus of Western Christianity in Europe and North America is being supplanted by the exponential rise of Christianity in the global South, especially in Africa, Latin America, and Asia.³² The long-held dominance of Europeans and North Americans in global Christianity is a thing of the past and, given trends in both the Western world (in which Christianity is waning) and the developing world (in which Christianity is flourishing), this seems unlikely to change in the future. The post-Christendom reality of Christianity in the United States, about which we will say more below, is no longer simply a matter of the [disestablishment](#) of mainline Protestantism and the dwindling sense of influence and relevancy the church has in public discourse. Rather, our post-Christendom status has been reduced even further. Not only has mainline Protestantism lost its place in American culture, we have lost our dominance in Christianity around the world. A telling reality check in this regard is the 2011 vote of the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico to end its 139-year mission relationship with the PC(USA).³³

In addition to getting its own house in order, the PC(USA) needs to figure out its identity as a minority communion within the wider body of global Christianity.

Living in the "Posts"

Human beings have a tendency to view our history chronologically. More specifically, we tend to think of history diachronically (that is, through time) rather than synchronically (one period at a time) or synoptically (all at once). We most often consider our present with respect to our immediate past. We outline history as a succession of periods, realizing, of course, that the boundaries between periods are often fuzzy. Living in the midst of massive cultural change, it is now common to understand ourselves as living in a variety of "posts."

Post-Christendom

For centuries, Christian religion and culture dominated the Western world. This was especially true in American culture up through the middle of the 20th century. But this is no longer the case. Christianity in general—and, for Americans, Protestantism in particular—is no longer the definitive center and shaper of culture. "Christendom"—the triumphal reign of Christianity in Western culture—is over.

Theologian Douglas John Hall provides a concise summary of cultural shifts that help us understand this development.

Many influences have brought about this historiographic change: the decline of Christianity in the West; the decline of the West itself; the failure of the modern vision; the new consciousness of their own worth on the part of non-European people; a critical perception of the technological society on the part of many who have experienced its most advanced forms; the impact of religious and cultural pluralism, especially perhaps in North America; and (not least of all) the self-criticism of serious Christianity, its recognition of its own questionable triumphalism, of patriarchalism, of the equation of the Christian mission with Euro-American imperialism and so forth.³⁴

For mainline Protestant churches like the PC(USA), this means that we are no longer part of the cultural "establishment." We must struggle for visibility and battle numerous competing institutions and elements of popular culture for the interest, time, and resources we used to take for granted in our membership. Sunday morning is no longer sacred time in American society. Across the country, Presbyterians rarely represent a significant percentage of local populations.³⁵ Our influence in the public square is greatly diminished. When our General Assemblies make bold public statements about social issues, we wonder if anyone is paying attention.

Missional theologian Darrell Guder helps us understand the structural implications of these shifts for a denomination like the PC(USA).

In such a situation of profound change, it is no surprise that the ecclesial structures developed for Christendom appear to have less relevance after Christendom. Whereas at one time it was the task of presbyteries, as one expression of a Christendom structure, to ensure that the church carried out all its duties in a region, there may now be better ways of doing that.³⁶

Like all mainline Protestant denominations, the PC(USA) must come to terms with what it means to be a post-establishment, post-Christendom church in the 21st century.

Post-Denominational

At the same time as Protestantism in general has lost its cultural cachet, the appreciation of distinct denominational identities has become less critical to the average American Protestant. The great variety of Protestant denominations in the United States is the result of both theological and ethnic differentiation among European peoples who settled on this continent. As these groups continued to develop with time, as cultures mixed, as people moved throughout the country, and as populations shifted from the relative isolation of rural communities to highly concentrated urban centers, denominational identity has become less and less important. In the contemporary marketplace of religious options, in which there are negligible costs—financial or cultural—for switching between congregations and faith communities, denominational affiliation is no longer the primary reason people choose a particular church. "Brand loyalty" is no longer a compelling factor in the growth or success of a congregation.

In his compelling essay on the theology of denominations, Barry Ensign-George reminds us that denomination is a “middle term between congregation and church” that “binds congregations together in formal patterns of mutual life.” Ensign-George defines denomination as “a contingent, intermediary, partial and permeable embodiment of the church which binds together multiple congregations in a shared commitment to live together in a particular pattern of common life which is built on shared decisions about theological adiaphora and essentials.”³⁷ While previous generations may have balked at words like “contingent” and “permeable,” it is exactly this more fluid understanding of larger church life that must be at the center of any discussion about the PC(USA)’s self-understanding as a denomination in a changing world.

What does it mean to be a Presbyterian denomination in this larger [post-denominational](#) cultural context? Are there in fact distinctive features of our form of Christianity that will—or should—persist in this era? How much can we change and adapt before we stop being Presbyterian? Does that even matter anymore?

Postmodern

Perhaps the most misunderstood “post” in which we find ourselves is the radical shift from modernism to [postmodernism](#) that characterized the 20th century and continues to shape the 21st. In fact, this monumental “post” is at least in part responsible for the other “posts” we have considered. In the postmodern era, the multifaceted ways in which Western culture was transformed by the Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment have been called into question. New ways of perceiving the world and our place in it have taken root. As a waning fixture of a Western culture that is being dramatically reshaped, the church must come to terms with what postmodernism means for our expression of the gospel.

Embracing the Pathos of Our Situation

Having surveyed a variety of ways in which the context of mission and ministry is rapidly changing, we must recognize that this is a [kairotic](#) moment for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Walter Brueggemann, who has suggested that exile is a fitting metaphor for the situation in which the U.S. church now finds itself,³⁸ describes the embrace of pathos as a critical moment in the exercise of prophetic imagination.³⁹ “How,” asks Brueggemann, “can we have enough freedom to imagine and articulate a real historical newness in our situation?”⁴⁰ His answer lies in the embrace of pathos and the willingness to engage the very real possibility of our own demise.

Brueggemann notes that we have a remarkable propensity for numbness about death. Apathy—the absence of pathos—characterizes our attitude toward the institutions that we rely on for order, security, and meaning. We refuse to recognize failure. We cling to familiar patterns and structures. We want to pacify our grief and reassure ourselves that everything is going to be okay.

Prophetic imagination cuts through these tendencies and brings us face-to-face with the realities of our situation. In order to move us into a place where we can envision new realities, we must first confront the sobering realization that our current trajectory is leading us to death.

When some in our church suggested that our denomination is “deathly ill,”⁴¹ many reacted with defensive protests that there is still plenty of life and vitality in the PC(USA). Anecdotal evidence, drawn from positive experiences in thriving congregations and with faithful people, is offered as a counter-narrative to the “deathly ill” diagnosis. We hold fast to evidence that God is doing good things in our midst.

But we cannot let these legitimate signs of God’s Spirit moving throughout our church obscure the equally evident reality of our slow but steady demise—a “doomsday scenario” based on a statistical projection suggests that our membership could shrink to zero in just twenty years.⁴² We must hold these realities together in creative tension. For all of our genuine vitality, there are also critical indications of death. Our declining numbers, aging congregations, diminished resources, and debilitating conflicts cannot be ignored any longer. We must not move too quickly to obscure the grief of our situation with comfort or hope, as important as these are. We must embrace the

pathos associated with admitting that what we are doing is not working.

More bluntly, we must admit that we are dying in order to experience rebirth.

A New World

As it turns out, observers of both culture and religion have been eagerly reporting that now is in fact an era of change, rebirth, and emergence throughout Western and global culture.

Change is happening to us, whether we initiate or not. The multifaceted impact of [globalization](#) has flattened our world in a way unprecedented in human history.⁴³ Networks of innovation and adaptation we cannot see enmesh us in complex connections through such systems as stock markets, gas prices, and global disease. The human condition cannot be understood locally or nationally, but only globally.⁴⁴ [Web 2.0](#) and [wiki culture](#) have changed the way we collaborate and innovate across the globe.⁴⁵ Hierarchies and bureaucracies are being eclipsed by flat, decentralized, and egalitarian organizational models.⁴⁶ Within these emerging networks of relationships and collaboration, imagination and experimentation drive innovation in new and exciting ways.⁴⁷

Various suggestions have been made for how we might understand the intersection of these cultural revolutions and the church. In a recent analysis of American Christianity over the past 200 years—a relatively short period of time that has seen remarkably quick and far-reaching change—Doug Pagitt divides our history into four successive periods: the Agrarian Age, the Industrial Age, the Information Age, and what he calls the Inventive Age.⁴⁸ Most pertinent to our discussion is the transition from the Information Age to the Inventive Age, which Pagitt describes as a shift from being consumers of information to producers and participants. If the Information Age was characterized by television and the mass consumption of information on the internet, the Inventive Age is typified by Web 2.0, wiki culture, and social networking. “The Inventive Age is one in which inclusion, participation, collaboration, and beauty are essential values. It is the age of ownership and customization and user-created content.”⁴⁹

Phyllis Tickle has developed an influential [stratigraphy](#) of Christian history which suggests that every 500 years the church engages in a cultural and ecclesiastical “rummage sale” that sifts through the dead and dying elements of the past en route to a new expression of life and faith. The latest of these, in the midst of which we currently find ourselves, Tickle labels [the Great Emergence](#).⁵⁰

As Tickle narrates it, the Great Emergence began in the 20th century with the publication of Albert Einstein’s “Special Theory of Relativity,” followed by Heisenberg’s “Uncertainty Principle.” These revolutionary concepts changed the way we think about the world by pointing out that the very act of observation changes the object being observed.⁵¹ An analogous development in literary studies called deconstruction suggested that truth is also relative and dependent on the act of interpretation. All the while, rapidly accelerating technological advances and unprecedented changes in family structures and gender roles were radically changing American culture. In some respects, the hierarchal and centralized structures of midcentury Protestant denominations grew in response to this destabilization of traditional American life. But as these denominations experienced post-Christendom disestablishment, traditional religion was greatly challenged. “Spiritual but not religious” became a popular alternative, an alternative that Reformation Christianity was not prepared to engage.⁵² The world was changing. The triumphant certainty of modernity gave way to the ambiguity, uncertainty, and humility of post-Christendom life in a postmodern world.

Emerging Church Responses to Our Changing World

In some cases, the church has reacted to these shifts in defensive or fundamentalist ways.⁵³ In other cases, the church has tried to change and adapt along with the rest of the world, recognizing that these changes are not threatening or challenging, but liberating and life-giving.

Hierarchal and bureaucratic forms of ecclesial structures are giving way to [network theory](#) and [crowd sourcing](#).⁵⁴ [Bounded-set](#) understandings of church membership are being replaced with [center-set](#) approaches.⁵⁵ Philosophically and theologically, narrative is taking priority over logic.⁵⁶ All of these can be understood as Christian adaptations to the changing contexts of our flat, networked, postmodern, post-Christendom world.

Theologian Tony Jones suggests a variety of ways in which the still developing [emerging church movement](#) is reconciling Christian faith and practice with the changing world. In descriptive statements that Jones calls “dispatches from the emergent frontier,” one can recognize specific reflections, responses, and adaptations to the changing contexts of our world. Here are some of the dispatches most pertinent to our inquiry, paired with concepts from the changing contexts we have discussed.

Dispatch from the Emergent Frontier	Changing Contexts
Emergents find little importance in the discrete differences between the various flavors of Christianity. Instead, they practice a generous orthodoxy that appreciates the contributions of all Christian movements. ⁵⁷	Post-denominationalism Differences, Divisions, and Conflicts Multiculturalism
Emergents reject the politics and theologies of left versus right. Seeing both sides as remnant of modernity, they look forward to a more complex reality. ⁵⁸	Differences, Divisions, and Conflicts Embrace of complexity, ambiguity, paradox, and plurality Suspicion of certainty
The emergent movement is not exclusively North American; it is growing around the globe. ⁵⁹	Multiculturalism New global Christianity Post-colonial, post-Christendom
Emergents see God’s activity in all aspects of culture and reject the sacred-secular divides. ⁶⁰	Post-Christendom Quest for true polarity and anti-clericalism
Emergents believe that an envelope of friendship and reconciliation must surround all debates about doctrine and dogma. ⁶¹	Differences, Divisions, and Conflicts Suspicion of certainty Critique of objectivity Relativity
Emergents find the biblical call to community more compelling than the democratic call to individual rights. The challenge lies in being faithful to both ideals. ⁶²	Shift from individualism to community
Emergents believe that theology is local, conversational, and temporary. To be faithful to the theological giants of the past, emergents endeavor to continue their theological dialogue. ⁶³	Challenges to old assumptions and authorities Deconstruction Suspicion of certainty Embrace of complexity, ambiguity, paradox, and plurality
Emergents believe that awareness of our relative position—to God, to one another, and to history—breeds biblical humility, not	Relativity Critique of objectivity

Emergents believe that truth, like God, cannot be definitively articulated by finite human beings. ⁶⁵	Suspicion of certainty Embrace of complexity, ambiguity, paradox, and plurality
Emergents embrace paradox, especially those that are core components of the Christian story. ⁶⁶	Suspicion of certainty Embrace of complexity, ambiguity, paradox, and plurality
Emergents believe that church should function more like an open-source network and less like a hierarchy or bureaucracy. ⁶⁷	Globalism and flattening Networking, Web 2.0, and wiki culture Shift from individualism to community
Emergents downplay—or outright reject—the differences between clergy and laity. ⁶⁸	Quest for true polarity and anti-clericalism Post-Christendom

What can Presbyterians learn from these innovations? To be sure, in pockets of the PC(USA) the emerging church movement has already taken root and is yielding creative new ways of being church. But how might this movement inform our project of reimagining the structure of our denomination at the mid council level?

Geography Isn't What It Used to Be

In our flat and networked world, geography does not mean the same thing it once did. Transportation, information, and communication technologies have redefined how we answer the timeless question, "Who is my neighbor?"

As we consider what it means to be Presbyterian in a flat, networked, post-Christendom world, we must be open to expressions of connectionalism that neither Calvin nor the founders of American Presbyterianism could have possibly imagined.

Theologian and historian Craig Van Gelder addresses how this changing reality intersects with Presbyterian polity.

"A key turn in the missional church conversation has been its shift toward focusing mission on every congregation's immediate context rather than on some distant community. This remains a pivotal impulse. Yet the geographical focus of the missional church on particular places in which churches are located must be complemented by consideration of the non-geographical character of community life today. The question, who is my neighbor? is now much more complex. It is not enough merely to focus on an immediate geographic neighborhood. If one does, one will likely discover that the neighbors' tightest relational networks may span hundreds of thousands of miles. Building relationships with neighbors and participating in their lives and living spaces must engage virtual, as well as physical forms of community. ... The classic Christendom pattern of the geographical parish must be rethought for churches in the west that are inheritors of the state church traditions from Europe (Roman Catholic and mainline denominations in particular). On the one hand, the parish concept points toward a particular locale as a focus for missional participation... On the other hand, the natural flows of community life are often no longer primarily neighborhood based..."⁶⁹

According to Van Gelder, our polity must take into consideration the changing nature of our relationships. What was once assumed—that neighbor meant proximity—is much more complex in a flat and networked world. People of all generations now maintain relationships across vast distances. Churches develop meaningful partnerships in countries around the world. As the world becomes at once more connected and more distant, the church needs to live into and help shape this reality for the cause of Christ.

From Changing Contexts to New Models

This section of our report has attempted to summarize as succinctly as possible the incredible ways in which the contexts for mission and ministry in which we find ourselves are rapidly changing. Perhaps never in the history of the PC(USA) or its predecessor denominations has so much changed so rapidly, demanding new forms and methods of being church. As we move on

from our assessment of changing contexts to new models, we suggest the following questions as guides and evaluative tools.

- Will our models help us reach [emerging generations](#)?
- Will our models support new church development?
- Will our models help us manage the polarity of our church?
- Will our models help us become a truly multicultural church?
- Will our models ensure representation and support of racial ethnic minorities?
- Will our models be flexible enough to adapt (reform) in anticipation of continuing, rapid change?
- Will our models nurture connectionalism and relationships in a flat, networked world?
- Will our models enhance true parity between ruling and teaching elders?
- Do our models reflect a missional ecclesiology?
- Will our models enable participation, creativity, and innovation?

Our commission offers a response to these questions arising from this changing context.

A Church (and a Commission) in a Rapidly Changing World

The American Protestant church is in a wholesale struggle about what it means to be a denominated group of Christian believers ... Doing traditional functions in new ways is likely inadequate. Eileen Lindner

Beyond the congregation, however, mainline Protestant institutions are in a state of deep crisis and desperately in need of renewal. After this journey, I am more convinced than ever that if American religious institutions are to regain their spiritual grounding, they will need to listen to and learn from the spiritual practices of local congregations. Diana Butler Bass

How does the church truly regain its understanding of itself as called and sent, remembering that the term mission means, in fact, 'sending' (see John 20:21)? How does the church move beyond the idea that Christian identity is basically a geographical or cultural or organizational concept?⁷⁰ Darrell Guder

If western societies have become post-Christian mission fields, how can traditional churches become then missionary churches?⁷¹ Lesslie Newbigin

As we have already demonstrated, we are living in a moment of rapid, intense, global and cultural change. Every sector of public and private life—every institution, every organization and, for our purposes, every church—is facing a moment of intense transition. (Indeed, even our commission was renamed in the middle of our work because the denomination adopted a new Form of Government.) In this report, the Mid Council Commission of the 219th General Assembly (2010) sought to answer one looming question that was at the heart of our very formation: "How are governing bodies best organized to be responsive both to the Spirit of Christ and changing opportunities for discipleship?"

To answer this question, the Mid Council Commission offers two bold recommendations that will require the engagement and assent of the whole church and changes to our Constitution. This is not a quick fix. Nor is it anything near a final or perfect answer. But these recommendations alter the way we address our deepest challenges and engage the church in processes of learning and reinvention that could shape the church for decades to come.

From our conversations, readings, and reflections, we offer a variety of perspectives and recommendations for creating the conditions that will equip the whole church to create councils and support congregations who winsomely proclaim and demonstrate the gospel and mission of

Jesus Christ in the world.

The rationale for the creation of our commission also asked a second question that guided us in our pursuit of an answer to the first: "Are the structures of history the best platforms for carrying our mission into the future?"

Our response is a clear "Yes and No."

Yes, the theological, ecclesiological, missional, and relational structures that make up our Presbyterian tradition and ethos are exactly the platforms we need for carrying our mission into the future. Our commitment to the mission of Jesus Christ, our passion for collaborative and relational connectionalism, our rich theological history, our hard-won wisdom for including all voices and perspectives are the cultural and identity structures that indeed provide the foundation for our mission.

No, after extensive listening to the church, consulting with experts from the fields of theology, history, polity, and sociology, after reading both deep and wide in the lessons of change that are coming out of every institution in the world today, and after considering the changing contexts in which we live, we can say clearly that the structures of mid councils (formerly middle governing bodies) and the institutional mental models that they have been based upon (especially in the regulatory and institutional era of the just past century)²² are not adequate for the "changing opportunities for discipleship" that engage and challenge us today.

We believe that the changing cultural contexts of our day require deep adaptation as opposed to anxious striving for simple solutions. Our proposal creates the conditions for adaptive change at the mid council level—change that is consistent with our theological values and for the express purpose of revitalizing missional congregations in a post-Christendom world.

Scholars and practitioners of adaptive change²³ call for an approach that has large-scale, group learning as the core practice. As disciples (literally, "learners") of Jesus Christ, this is an expression of our most treasured identity. Adaptive change requires creating organizational "safe holding environments" where experimentation and risk taking can take place. As members of communities founded on the grace and forgiveness of God, this is familiar terrain. Adaptive change requires group transformation in order to address our greatest challenges. It addresses underlying and competing values, and especially "giving the work back to the people who are most affected" to experiment with new approaches for addressing their biggest challenges.

If we can recapture our own conviction that, as theologian Emil Brunner stated, the essence of the congregation is the fellowship of believers who are joined in love for the mission of God in its local context,²⁴ then the essence of the presbytery is the covenant relationship of those congregations, (which Darrell Guder helpfully defines—and will become our working definition—as "Covenant Communities of Missional Congregations").

Further, if the essence of the presbytery IS the covenant relationship of the churches that are joined together for missional ends, then exploring and experimenting with the practices and possibilities that arise from this understanding will be at the heart of any faithful and lasting adaptation.

In Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all creation, the Church seeks a new openness to God's mission in the world...As it participates in God's mission, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) seeks...a new openness to see both the possibilities and perils of its institutional forms in order to ensure the faithfulness and usefulness of these forms to God's activity in the world (F-1.0404)

As we have listened to the church, we heard considerable yearning in every layer of the church's life, from ordained officers to frustrated folk in the pews, to see these deeply shared biblical convictions flourish once again:

- To discover practices and ways of being church in a post-Christendom context.

- To engage in evangelism that sees people come to faith and be baptized as followers of Jesus Christ.
- To experience more relational and less regulatory ways of being connectational.
- To focus on mission to the world not denominational fights.
- To plant new congregations, to birth new worshipping communities.

We believe this is the voice of the Spirit in the church and we contend that if every structure of our church is committed to the health and vitality of local congregations as the locus of God's mission in the world, then these convictions will become the practices that bring revitalization.

So instead of affirming structures that only protect us from the dysfunction of a few, we offer a proposal for the "maturing, motivated, and the missional"; that is, those who are willing to work together to draw upon the historic values of our past and faithfully reinterpret them to engage a far different world than any of our forbearers imagined.

Maturing

By this we mean that we need structures for lifetime learners, for continually adapting disciples, for those who are restless to keep pressing on, growing, discerning, surrendering, and humbly staying open to the word of God and the voice of the Spirit. We need structures that give freedom to fail and encourage self and communal expression. We need structures that will call us to live in mutual submission and growing trust as we grow in wisdom, understanding, faithfulness, and fruitfulness. We need structures that adapt to and accommodate those who are committed to building trust through transparency, accountability, and congruence of belief and life. We need structures that allow for both clearly communicated convictions and the patience to respectfully be with others who we believe are in error. We envision many more structures where the system honors, values, rewards, invests in, and even adapts to those who are willing to take responsibility for shaping the healthy and the good; permission-giving structures that are built around shared agreements, covenants, values, and convictions rather than around top-down enforced alignment.

Motivated

Creative people in presbyteries all over the country are experimenting and innovating—aligning around shared missional passions and faith convictions—giving a fresh expression to their deepest beliefs. We are constitutionally called to be an elder-led, context specific, collaborative church. While we need regulations that enable us to fulfill our fiduciary responsibilities, provide accountability, and ensure that all decisions that are made are consistent with our theology and polity. We also need room to try new things, to affirm risk-taking, and to give space for discernment. We need structures that reward passion and motivation; that generously celebrate innovation; that respectfully collaborate in one creative leap of faith after another; that encourage big risks, big failures, and the deep learning that comes from them

Missional

Missional congregations are those where the central organizing principle is personal and communal participation in the mission of God in Jesus Christ to redeem and heal all of creation. To be a missional congregation means that the discerned calling of a community of believers to serve in the world as Christ's witness is the result of their gathering, worship, and sending. To be a missional PC(USA) means that we live in the conviction that every structure beyond the congregation exists so that congregations can fulfill their mission.

In today's culture, many are weighed down by endless debates, issue politics, and suspicion of other's motivation. The church is hindered from being missional within this environment. As a result, many congregations and councils are not thriving because they have turned inward, focusing on survival.

If there is one clear missional conviction that is growing into a chorus of shared enthusiasm

throughout many diverse contexts in the church, it is making a fundamental priority of new church development. A church-wide initiative envisions 1,001 new worshipping communities.⁷⁵ We contend that number is way too low. Can we imagine mid councils that would enable us to conceive birth, nurture, and mature new generations of missional worshipping communities? How would seminaries and other entities charged with the development of leaders support this conviction?

At the heart of adaptive change is the requirement to “give work back to the people most affected.” We believe that the constitutional changes we propose are an expression of the conviction that health and vitality, faithfulness, and fidelity will only come about through more congregational engagement, more personal responsibility-taking, more passionate convictions, more freedom and creativity within safe, clear shared boundaries than ever before. We must have structures that encourage adaptation toward health and faithfulness, toward those who are willing to keep maturing, who are motivated to take on the mantle of calling and personal responsibility by continually re-engaging and re-committing to each other, and who are from start to finish utterly committed to the missional principle of the local congregation as the primary locus for participating in the mission of Jesus Christ in every context.

To that end we offer these questions to encourage this larger conversation:

- What if presbyteries were formed and shaped by diverse and multi-dimensional relationships and missional convictions with the purpose of serving missional congregations?
- What would it look like, what would change, how would we reconfigure our presbytery life if the very essence of it was relational, communal, and covenantal?
- What if the only purpose of regulations (which are indeed necessary) was to safeguard those defining values?
- What would it look like if we had structures that encouraged each congregation to discern whatever configuration of presbytery would nurture its unique and shared missional calling as it lives its life in mutual submission to other congregations?
- What would be the possibilities for presbyteries shaped around specific callings, including birthing new missional communities, the unique challenges of a particular context, or shared partnership in specific mission endeavors?⁷⁶
- What if we allowed change for our denomination to come NOT only from a centralized strategy of a General Assembly Commission, but instead from every locale of the missional frontier, the congregations and presbyteries that are actively engaged in the mission of God in particular contexts?

In *To Change the World*, University of Virginia sociologist, James Davison Hunter, wrote,

Change is often initiated outside of the centermost positions. When change is initiated in the center, then it typically comes from outside of the center’s nucleus. Wherever innovation begins, it comes as a challenge to the dominant ideas and moral systems defined by the elites who possess the highest levels of symbolic capital.”

For true lasting change to occur (even within an institution) those in the “center” and those “outside of the center” must be engaged in the conversation.⁷⁷ It is the interaction of the margins and the center that creates the new possibilities. And it is exactly that interaction—and the lively experiments that would come from it—that we recommend become the primary work of the church for the next season.

For a generation of Presbyterians who were reared on political, regulatory, and institutional approaches to problem solving, this recommendation will stretch us tremendously. We will need to develop the capacity to learn from our rich diversity; to have hard conversations about competing values and often unspoken issues that keep us from health and growth; and mostly to trust each other enough to attempt innovative experiments—many of which will likely fail—in order to find successful adaptations that will take us into our future together.

Historian and President Emeritus of Union Theological Seminary, Louis Weeks said, "No group of Christians has adaptation more in their DNA than Presbyterians." We concur. A tradition that reconceived a communal function for what had been "bishops"; that adapted its polity from the European church-state models to a completely new context in a then new country; and rethought and reproduced its core values in numerous diverse contexts worldwide through its mission endeavors, has the capacity to revitalize itself for a post-Christendom and increasingly post-denominational context.

In his book on "the natural history of innovation," Steven Johnson writes about the "adjacent possible."⁷⁸ The "adjacent possible" is the new innovation, the new discovery, that is only possible by first taking one step, or making one decision. The only way to get from the phonograph to the iPod is through a series of steps. Innovation does not come through giant leaps, but through one trial-and-error attempt at a time.⁷⁹ That first step leads to more possibilities that could not otherwise happen, like how opening one door into a hallway offers more doors that could not be seen from the previous room. The "adjacent possible" also always allows for the possibility of returning back through the one door we have passed through and trying a different option.

Our proposal invites the church to live into the "adjacent possible."⁸⁰ It invites us to be a people who together take wise, deliberate "provisional" steps; who experiment with ways of being together, who "try on" relationships, who make temporary covenants without fully leaving behind the historical, geographical connections that have shaped our polity to date.

Steven Johnson's contention is that all innovation is "the story of a gradual but relentless probing" of what could come next given the pieces and parts at our disposal. We advance, he writes, "by taking available resources and cobbling them together to create new uses." So, while the condition we find ourselves in is dire, our capacity for change has never been greater. As we will show you, not only is our situation urgently in need of all the wise creativity we can express, but the "available resources" available to us are significant, indeed.

Becoming a Community of Missional Artists, Architects, and Collaborative Designers

Perhaps the greatest capacity for transformation is our people. Our proposal soberly affirms and joyfully celebrates that the most important work necessary to reinvent the church for a post-Christendom context will not be found in our structures. It is sobering to know that we cannot make the transition to a fully engaged, contextually effective, faithfully missional, post-Christendom church through an act of a commission or even a General Assembly. Transformation requires large numbers of people to begin to act differently.

We have been privileged to be in a long, passionate, and expanding conversation with Presbyterians across the geographic, cultural, and theological spectrum. We joyfully contend that there is a holy restlessness throughout the church—indeed a growing frustration—to embrace the challenge of our changing context of our world as the calling of our generation. We believe that restlessness and frustration is the work of the Spirit that is calling forth "missional artists, architects, and collaborative designers" to work together to re-create the church for the next generation.

To that end we offer these suggestions discerned from our commission conversation with a restless church.

Reengage the Pew in Presbyterian Shared Life, Mission, and Governance

Can we envision a day when a presbytery gathering might be the most valuable and anticipated meeting in the life of a congregation? Can we envision what it would take for Presbyterians to so personally experience the depth, vibrancy, and community of shared life with other congregations in a presbytery that the most engaged, committed, and creative elders would lobby to be in presbytery leadership? Can we envision a time when the jokes about "committees" will fade into the background and Presbyterians will be known for our commitment to a shared life that wisely combines mission, governance, and community in effective and edifying ways?

We believe that we have the potential to see this kind of life and vitality if mid council leaders would truly embrace, listen deeply, and reorganize their life together for a clear purpose: to reengage "the pew" in the shared life, mission, and governance (in that order!) that is the Presbyterian tradition.

Since most presbyteries are served and supported by an older generation of elders and pastors who understand a shared obligation to "connectionalism," there is indeed a crisis of leadership and participation in many presbyteries across the country. Stories of the difficulties of finding people to serve on committees, garnering volunteers to serve as representatives to General Assembly, and "recruiting" younger elders and pastors to take on any role beyond the congregation are legion. For a generation of Presbyterians who have used per capita, mandatory meetings with roll call attendance, and mandated terms of committee service to "fuel" the structures of mid councils, it will take significant amounts of creativity and persistence to reinvent presbyteries as communities and gatherings that are valued for what they bring to the congregation and how they stretch all of us to see beyond ourselves.

We need presbytery life that offers both the wise fiduciary and ecclesiastical accountability we require (and value the most according to our data!), as well as being "balconies" offering those "on the ground" a greater perspective of Christ's work in the world than any one congregation can provide. Presbyteries need to be understood and experienced as a "covenant community" that shares the mission of mutually strengthening missional congregations. Presbyteries need to reconsider every program, every project, and every asset with one clear mandate: Does it engage, equip, and serve the congregation as the expression of the mission of God in its local context?

We have long celebrated the beauty of shared leadership between "elders" and "ministers". With the adoption of the new Form of Government, the primacy of "elders"—both ruling and teaching—as a genuinely collaborative and complementary form of shared leadership has been reaffirmed. We concur wholeheartedly and believe that if presbyteries were to develop practices, styles, and leadership functions that are shaped demonstrably and witness completely to our deeply held value of shared rule by both teaching and ruling elders (indeed, we long for the day when we will only speak of "elders" without having to distinguish between the two!), we will see not only the development of wise structures of presbyteries but also revitalized missional congregations.

In addition, even the Office of the General Assembly and the General Assembly Mission Council need to be reviewed as to how their practices serve presbyteries in their mission to serve congregations. Over and over, stories were told about the pervasive distrust of General Assembly, about the amount of resources that go into our six-part structure, the lack of an effective and clear national strategy toward immigrant populations, and the ways in which the GAMC "competes" with presbyteries and synods for giving dollars. A flatter hierarchy with a focus on the congregation as the center of the mission of the church will not be complete until the church reconsiders the bureaucratic structures of GAMC and eliminates any competition for power or resources between the GAMC and OGA. These conditions foster a bureaucratic mentality at a time when we need to do get back to mission and ministry, doing "whatever it takes" to revitalize local congregations. It is not within the purview of commission to make such recommendations, so we call on the 220th General Assembly(2012) to establish a task force to review the nature and functions of the General Assembly offices and departments in light of the charge given to us.

Growing in Cultural Proficiency to Engage an Increasingly Multicultural Context

... As it participates in God's mission, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) seeks ... a new openness in its own membership, becoming in fact as well as in faith a community of women and men of all ages, races, ethnicities, and worldly conditions, made one in Christ by the power of the Spirit, as a visible sign of the new humanity... (Book of Order, F-1.0404)

Perhaps the greatest potential for church-wide transformation beyond a Christendom context is the deep commitment to valuing the rich diversity of the church. Diversity is our strength. We can and must develop and deploy this strength with wisdom and ability. Our proposal calls for

deliberate decision making about structures that will ensure that our commitment to racial ethnic advocacy and inclusion is strengthened in a less structured, less regulated era. In addition, we call on the church to develop our "cultural proficiency" (a process that focuses on organizational transformation and individual transformation) in every level of the church's life.

Cultural Proficiency derives from the work of Terry Cross, a First Nation clinical social worker, who observed that European American clinicians in the center where he worked were not providing competent care to their Eskimo and First Nation clients because they were not taking into account the cultural perspectives and experience of the people they were working with. As a result, Cross developed a set of tools to help people understand and respond more effectively to the differences between them,⁸¹ and some of those tools for understanding Cultural Proficiency are in [Appendix 3](#).

Thus, Cultural Proficiency is about valuing diversity in people for the gifts they bring to the culture of an organization and the interactions between individuals. The tools of cultural proficiency work towards better self-awareness, clear articulation of core values, and a process that results in positive, effective interactions among the people and the systems of a diverse environment.

Cultural Proficiency acknowledges that patterns of oppression are embedded in the structures of organizations. Without direct intervention and intentional efforts to change, organizational cultures perpetuate systemic patterns of oppression, even where individuals within the organization do not intend to discriminate or marginalize those who do not belong or participate in the dominant culture.

Cultural Proficiency also acknowledges that change does not happen overnight, that people and organizations move on a continuum from highly exclusive and oppressive organizations and behaviors to highly inclusive organizations and behaviors. It is built on a foundation that aligns the principles of inclusivity in diversity with the core values and mission of the organization. It also acknowledges that organizations are resistant to change and that the causes of resistance must be taken into account and addressed openly in order to bring about cultural transformation within an organization.

The goal of Cultural Proficiency Initiative is to transform the organizational culture integrating the best of organizational practices and church values so that it becomes and serves as a model for a healthy church.

As we grow in cultural proficiency, we envision that without exception, all of God's children will be able to contribute their given gifts and talents thus leading to healthier, more faithful expressions of the gospel of Christ in and through our congregations.

We envision that our facility to engage new immigrant communities and those communities who have long been marginalized will be strengthened. We believe that we will better discern practices and approaches to ministry and structures of governance, accountability, and support that will enable us to engage an ever expanding mission field of possibilities.

We charge all sectors of the church to a commitment to grow in Cultural Proficiency to engage a rapidly multicultural world into enriching and expanding each others' cultural experience. As a result we shall be able to better express the beauty of the gospel of Christ which calls all of us to be participants.

Develop Capacity to Lead Congregational Transformation

Perhaps the most crucial element to reinventing the church for a post-Christendom age is the lack of transformational leadership capacity within the church as a whole. Over and over again, the single biggest factor cited both positively and negatively focused around the ability and strength (or lack) of leadership in local leaders. Most of us have been trained for stewardship of Christendom congregations, but the changing conditions of the day require different leadership capacities. The church needs to work with seminaries, committees on preparation for ministry, and General Assembly entities to transition the processes for leadership preparation from a Christendom stewardship model to a post-Christendom leadership-as-transformation model. Executive

presbyters (EPs) need to become mentors in change leadership. Ruling and teaching elders with gifts in congregational transformation need to be identified and called into roles as EPs, mentors, and advisors. We need to avail ourselves of and learn from those in other fields who are already in the middle of organizational transformation. We believe that this next season of experimentation will serve to develop the transformational leadership gifts of a whole new generation of church leaders. Different contexts challenge us all to learn how to lead differently.

Rebuild Trust

“Regulation cannot do what the loss of trust has undone.” Cynthia Bolbach, Moderator of the 219th General Assembly (2010)

Of all the “non-structural issues” that we have identified, perhaps the single greatest gift that this commission can raise up for the church is to say as loudly and as clearly as we possibly can that there is a crisis of trust in our denomination and that it, more than anything else, is the single greatest threat to the vitality and future existence of the church.

Congregational leaders don’t trust presbyteries. Presbyteries don’t trust synods. Synod leaders see themselves as the “breakwater” protecting the church from the General Assembly (which might be the least trusted system of all.) As the report from our commission’s Racial Ethnic Strategy Task Force states, “Also prominent in the commission’s polling of the church were the expressions of deep and abiding mistrust—fueled by a general absence of meaningful connection to the national, regional and even local judicatories.”

We do not believe that this is due to any individual persons acting in any particularly egregious and untrustworthy ways. Indeed, we believe that the great majority of General Assembly, presbytery, and synod staff members and leaders are trustworthy people. But the system itself fosters mistrust.

Generations of attempting to solve problems by constitutional fiat have left us without the ability to build relationships with those who deeply disagree with us. We have trusted that our membership in presbyteries and synods, and our participation in council deliberative processes and committee assignments, would be context enough to build trust. Once again, a reliance on compliance with regulation has not only sapped our creativity, it has made it impossible for us to give ourselves enough “room” to trust each other again. Indeed, at the center of the commission’s own work of deliberation was a commitment to transparency through our entire process. We have used media, including social media, to engage in a conversation with the entire church. We have traveled many miles, engaged in numerous conversations, and listened deeply to people who disagree with each other (and often ourselves!) about the causes of concern and the potential future of the church. We have engaged people from across various spectrums in a conversation with full disclosure, even taking our most provocative proposals to the church before the final report was finished to allow input. Within the commission itself, we have come to realize that, for the sake of the mission, nothing can substitute for taking the time to build relationships, work through conflicts, and get beyond the stereotypes that we each bring into any circumstance. Indeed, we needed to learn to trust each other enough to become comfortable with discussing, debating, and finally deciding to bring even these proposals to the church.

Perhaps the greatest effect of our proposals is that it will by necessity bring the church closer. Now, for congregations to have more flexibility they will necessarily practice discernment within both presbytery and General Assembly processes. While the flexibility to experiment comes with built-in mechanisms to ensure relational and constitutional fidelity, the true test of our trust will come as we allow room for others to create presbyteries that are different than our preferences and maybe even contradictory to our convictions.

Barry Ensign-George offers “[theological friendship](#)”⁸² as a different possibility for nurturing the rebuilding of trust. Theological friendship is based on the conviction that in conversations both about and with the Triune God, we are brought closer to each other through transformation. This is not the result of regulation or polity, but intentional spiritual practice. Trust, like friendship, takes time to cultivate and flourishes in the “space between created differences.” Ensign-George

encourages us to hold on to the values, and live in the relational realities of both diversity and compatibility as an opportunity for continued transformation as a spiritual practice to which we willingly and, yes, voluntarily enter in. "Communities of theological friendship flourish through diversity and a wise attention to compatibility ... Communities of theological friendship recognize the need for diversity that genuinely stretches and the importance of willingness to join in a shared journey with a particular group of people."⁸³ As Ensign-George reminds us, this very practice of trust-building through friendship could become an act of witness to a deeply divided world. "Theological friendship, which is to say, incorporation into friendship with Jesus Christ, is what we are empowered to offer to a world rife with disconnection's long and deadly reach (even in our world that prides itself on being connected!)."

The Confession of 1967 has this poignant line: "The quality of their relation with other persons is the measure of the church's fidelity."⁸⁴ Trust is the life blood of a community. Without rebuilding trust we will never have the quality of relationships that we desire. We are under no illusions about the sorry state of trust in our denomination and know that our proposals will not pass through the assembly without it. We also believe that if we engage in this provisional presbytery experiment, we will need to trust each other more than some of us think possible. We hope that even the conversations about our recommendations will be a spur for rebuilding the trust to truly enable us to be a dynamic missional denomination again.

The Reports

Our Process

Our commission convened via conference call on October 14, 2010, to inaugurate our oversight of the Special Committee of Administrative Review, Boriquen (SCARB) and to give a brief orientation for the commissioners. Our first official commission meeting was on November 4–6, 2010, in Baltimore, Maryland. At that meeting we agreed that our commitment to the church would be:

- To be a listening commission...
- To be an experimenting commission...
- To be a discerning commission...
- To be a transparent commission

Over the next fifteen months we convened meetings in Orlando, Seattle, Indianapolis, and Dallas; we learned from church experts on demographics, history, polity, and theology; we invited executive and general presbyters from around the country to offer us perspective; and we engaged some of the most creative leaders in the church to share their observations and learning with us.⁸⁵

In order to listen to the broader church, we contracted with Presbyterian Research Services to conduct surveys and gather data from a wide swath of the church; we conducted focus groups in every synod, at every large denominational event, and in consultations with group of executive presbyters, synod executives, the GAMC, and the OGA Executive Team. In addition, we had smaller group consultations with representatives from the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns, the General Assembly Committee on Representation, and a host of conference calls with specific focus group constituents. (See the next section for more details.)

From the very beginning, our commission endeavored to create a transparent conversation with the entire church. We used social media and blog postings to reflect back to the church our observations, we traveled extensively throughout the country to engage in discussions, and we called upon church leaders, theologians, and historians to help us gain perspective. In addition, we looked at models in other denominations, consulting especially with the City Classis of the Reformed Church of America, and invited two mid council leaders who had recently led reorganization teams in their respective mid councils to share their insights.

For the better part of a year, we listened. Consultations were held in every synod. A survey was developed and phone consultations with diverse demographic groups were provided by Presbyterian Research Services. Additional consultations, conversations, and presentations were conducted by commission members for Big Tent, NEXT Church Conference, the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly, the Executive Committee of the General Assembly Mission Council, The Association of Executive Presbyters, The Clerks Conference, The Moderators' Conference, the Synod Executive Forum (twice) as well as consultations with representatives from Synod of the Pacific, Synod of Southern California and Hawaii, Synod of the Northeast, and a number of individual conversations with presbytery and synod leadership.

A summary of the data collected from these listening sessions is provided in next section and the full data reports are in [Appendix 4](#). At the same time, we charged a group with doing even more research into the changing context of our world. Both brought substantive reports to our Indianapolis commission meeting.

At our final two commission meetings, in response to these reports, and in the interim between, with considerable discussion, debate, and time for discernment between commission members and with leaders in the larger church, the recommendations that are included here took shape.

Looking (and Listening) Deeply: Data and Discussions

The mandate from the 219th General Assembly (2010) required the administrative commission to:

...consult with sessions, presbyteries, synods, and the wider church on the mission and function of middle governing bodies. Such a process should include

- a. current diversity in the role and functions of middle governing bodies,
- b. demographics and financial realities that affect the role and function of synods and presbyteries.
- c. the role of each governing body in its oversight role—presbyteries of congregations, synods of presbyteries, and General Assembly of synods—both historically and in present experience.
- d. relationships with General Assembly agencies in role and function.” (Minutes, 2010, Part I, p. 212 of printed copy, pp. 274–75 of the electronic version)

In order to fulfill this mandate, the commission contracted with Presbyterian Research Services (PRS) to conduct surveys of session, presbytery, and synod leaders, and to gather data from focus groups including leaders of large and small presbyteries, young pastors, African American, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian, Middle Eastern, and Asian American church leaders. The data design also included an “open invitation” survey for individuals from all over the denomination to provide input for administrative commissioners to consider.

In addition to these formal research activities, a team of two commission members met in consultation with each of the sixteen synods, and members of the commission personally interviewed participants at the following events: The Big Tent, two Board of Pensions regional meetings, the General Assembly Mission Council, the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly, and the Coordinating Council of Korean American presbyteries.

All of these data were provided to all commission members, and a summary report was presented to the commission prior to their consideration of proposed models or changes in the constitution. The data collected in this process is voluminous, and summaries of the data are contained in Appendix 4. In response to the mandate from the 219th General Assembly (2010), this report will summarize the data reported in the four mandated categories.

Current Diversity in the Role and Functions of Middle Governing Bodies

The PRS survey assumed that diversity meant demographic diversity, when the intent of the General Assembly was diversity in role and function, not demographics. Nonetheless, the Models subgroup gathered a significant amount of data as to how presbyteries and synods are currently

operating in the current context. These data are more helpful to this mandate (please see the following report, "[The Colors of Vitality: Trends and Attributes in Transformational Presbyteries](#)"). It may be helpful for this report to note that while presbyteries and synods operate in vastly different ways depending on whether they are highly urban, highly rural, small or large, the differences relate primarily to form, not function. All presbyteries and synods seem to retain the same functions and roles, in keeping with the Book of Order, but how those functions are carried out varies widely throughout the denomination.

Demographics and Financial Realities That Affect the Role and Function of Synods and Presbyteries

When session members were asked to rate their presbytery membership and leadership for how well it represented the racial ethnic, age, economic, rural/urban, size, and theological diversity demographics of their churches, most participants responded that the representation was "effective." When asked to assess the size of their presbyteries, 58 percent of respondents reported that their geographic size was "about right" and 64 percent reported that the number of congregations was "about right." Size and demographic realities of either presbytery or synod did not seem to be big issues among the participants in the various surveys and focus groups.

In contrast, financial realities were a significant issue. Seventy-two percent of presbytery leaders reported that their finances have decreased in the past five years, and more than half of presbyteries predict continued reduction in revenue, programs, membership, and attendance in the next five years. Insufficient funding and lack of support from congregations were listed by presbytery leaders as two major obstacles to accomplishing their mission. Sixty-eight percent reported that worship attendance had decreased in the past five years. Two-thirds of synod leaders believe that presbytery giving to synods will decrease in the next five years, and only one-third of presbytery leaders report that their relationship to the synod was "excellent" or "very good." About half of synod and presbytery leaders are familiar with their council's budget, but 77 percent of presbytery AND synod leaders feel that less per capita should go to synods.

The PRS survey asked presbytery leaders whether congregation support was an obstacle, but in our consultations we heard very clearly that the question that most needs to be asked is: How does the presbytery support the congregation?

The Role of Each Governing Body in Its Oversight Role—Presbyteries of Congregations, Synods of Presbyteries, and General Assembly of Synods—Both Historically and in Present Experience

When asked how supportive presbyteries have been to congregations, only 30 percent of session members responded "very" or "a little supportive," suggesting that most session members do not see presbytery as highly supportive of their congregation. The highest scores in this arena were for support when congregations are in crisis (40 percent either "very" or "a little" supportive). This would suggest that when congregations need an outside influence, presbytery is there and is generally supportive. Otherwise, presbytery plays a very minor role in the life of the congregation.

When survey participants were asked what roles or functions their presbytery carried out most effectively they (very generally) rated fairly high the ecclesiastical responsibilities such as review of records, ordaining and receiving ministers, electing commissioners, working with candidates, and having a nominating committee (40–45 percent). They are less positive about presbytery's role in initiating new programs, visiting with sessions, and providing a strong vision for area Presbyterians.

Only about one-third of sessions provided an opinion on the question, "which term best summarizes your congregation's relationship with the synod" over the past two years? Indeed, more than half responded "not enough contact on which to base an opinion" (52 percent; another 12 percent are "not sure"). Of those with an opinion—36 percent of the total—only 21 percent responded either "excellent" or "very good." One of the clear themes of the conversation data (synod consultations and conversations at other "events") was that although connectionalism is highly valued, there is also a sense that the communication between the governing bodies is a major problem. The governance structure is seen as a hindrance, and participants longed for more focus on mission; less on rules. When participants were asked, "What is working well in middle

governing bodies?", the most common response was "no response." Of those who did respond, there was clear support for racial ethnic ministries and the programs and processes that support pastors, both in the call process and in their ministry. The comment, "We're better at closing churches than at planting them," seemed to sum up the frustration with rule-based processes vs. the messy work of evangelism and relationships. There is frustration with presbyteries that care more about their projects than they do their congregations.

No empirical data were collected related to the historical roles of each governing body. Members of the commission perceived that one of the changing contexts in which the church is living is the notion that congregations should support a large bureaucracy. In today's world, congregations are more inclined to wonder how their per capita dollars support their own ministries, not the larger bureaucracy of which they are a part.

Relationships with General Assembly Agencies in Role and Functions

In multiple conversations with synod executives, the lack of trust and consternation with the General Assembly organization and structure was repeatedly articulated. Indeed, some synod executives believed that one of the primary roles of synods was to be a "buffer" between presbyteries and a meddling and unhelpful General Assembly structure.

From the PRS report:

Majorities of sessions and leaders report that [they]... had related in some way with three of the six General Assembly agencies in the past two years: the General Assembly Mission Council, the Board of Pensions, and the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation.

Almost all leaders (96%) also report relating with the Office of the General Assembly, though only 35% of sessions do so.

A majority of sessions report an "excellent" or "very good" relationship with only one agency, the Board of Pensions (60%). The next highest "excellent"/"very good" total is 44%, for the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. At the low end, with 26%, is the Office of the General Assembly. ...

Many more presbytery and synod leaders than session members used "excellent" or "very good" to describe the relationship between their entity and each General Assembly agency.

The concern about these data is that the questions were answered in ways that assumed the role and function and focused on the quantity and quality of the relationship (e.g., "Has your synod/presbytery/ session related to the Board of Pensions in any of the following ways in the last year?" and "Which term best summarizes your relationship with the agency?"). The issue of role and function was not addressed.

Data Informing Commission Decisions

As will become evident, clearly, the data that most impacted the decisions of the commission were those that relate to the synod as a council. The data from the consultations with the synods showed that the number one change desired by respondents was to either re-define or eliminate the synod as a "governing body." Of sixteen synod reports, nine listed "change or eliminate synod" as a primary theme in the responses of the attendees. This refrain was also heard from the Big Tent event, Committee on the Office of the General Assembly, General Assembly Mission Council, and Board of Pensions meetings. Combined with data from PRS that indicated synods should receive less per capita and that the average session member has had no connection to synod, the commission felt that there was a clear mandate from the denomination to reconsider the role that synods play.⁸⁶

A second area where the data led to commission action was the role of synods related to racial ethnic ministries. When asked what is working with middle governing bodies, the most common response was either a blank or "nothing." Nonetheless, of those who responded positively, most reported that the work of racial ethnic ministry was a positive aspect of synods. The commission recommendation regarding racial ethnic ministry is a direct result of these data.

To a lesser but not unsubstantial degree, the recommendations regarding presbyteries were

also influenced by the data. The data showed that few session members saw the presbytery as a partner in their ministry. Presbyteries were generally seen as regulatory agencies. Many participants in the consultations made comments about inverting the pyramid and calling for all church councils to focus their energy and resources on the vitality of local congregations. By allowing churches some choice in their connectional relationships, one hopeful outcome is more accountability on the part of presbyteries to the health and satisfaction of their member churches.

Finally, the commission's recommendation regarding a review of General Assembly agencies came very directly from the data that show a serious disconnect between session members and the GAMC or OGA. It was also heavily influenced by the synod executives' comments about playing the role of "buffer" between presbyteries and the General Assembly.

The Colors of Vitality: Trends and Attributes in Transformational Presbyteries

The Mid Council Commission mandate includes developing "models that reflect the roles of middle governing bodies in our polity and the changing context of our witness." Initially the commission endeavored to learn about emerging models in presbyteries and synods with a track record of success that could be recommended to the whole church. Members researched a variety of councils both within the PC(USA) and in a few international bodies. It quickly became apparent that there is considerable experimentation across the church, however with the pace of change many of these endeavors are so new that they are just coming off the drawing board and others are continuing to adapt. While the commission had some thought that it would be possible to develop models for different sizes or types of presbyteries or synods, it became clear from conversations with mid council leaders and from data gathered that councils that reflect emerging trends were very conscious of their particular context, culture, function and need for discernment about how God might be at work in their midst.

The very concept of "models" is problematic because it suggests that a presbytery or synod could simply copy a standard form and succeed in meeting the needs of a changing society and church. Steve Yamaguchi, presbytery pastor in Los Ranchos Presbytery, spoke to the commission about the importance of councils "learning to learn" so that they are continually exploring new paths and adapting to a rapidly changing environment. The commission has concluded that the desire for "models" is an expression of the desire for technical solutions, for generic answers to challenges the church faces, when such solutions do not exist. This is not to say that councils cannot learn from one another's experience. On the contrary, the commission wants to lift up emerging trends, celebrate the creativity of many mid councils, and offer these many good models as 'tools' for other's creative use, and encourage all councils to reflect on how they can engage in adaptive conversations reflecting on their particular circumstances, calling, challenges and possibilities.

Consequently the commission first calls the church's attention to the following trends in healthy presbyteries and synods:

Emerging Trends

- The number one shift in presbyteries is to a new focus on support of congregations as the primary agents of mission in the world—that is, instead of seeing themselves as "doing mission" and supporting mission programs, they are putting most of their energies and dollars into supporting congregations as they seek to engage in God's mission. By the same token, the number one shift in synods is to support presbyteries.
- Presbyteries are intent on building relationships and developing a sense of community in the presbytery while a similar trend can be seen in some synods.
- There is a renewed emphasis on deepening the spiritual life of presbyteries and encouraging spiritual practices in congregations.

Related to the focus on serving congregations is a demand for excellence in ruling and teaching elders—for lifting up the spiritual leadership role of ruling elders, encouraging pastors to participate

in ongoing spiritual formation and learning new skills in congregational transformation.

- Presbyteries and synods are experimenting with structures and patterns of decision-making—from down-sizing committees and staffing to using discernment practices or new technologies to connect people for meetings. Some presbyteries took a “sabbatical” for a time from all but Book of Order committee functions to see what emerged as important to renew or begin.
- As giving patterns in our culture have changed mid councils are seeking ways to respond—with different ways of cultivating generous stewards and/or encouraging people to give to their passions. They are attending to their fiduciary responsibilities while looking for new funding streams.
- Cultural shifts and in many cases declining financial support also push mid councils as organizations to let go of some ways of doing things—no longer offering a range of programs or providing staff to do the work of numerous committees or funding local social service agencies.
- Changing demographics are leading some mid councils to risk doing ministry in new ways to reach out to new immigrant communities and/or younger generations—new church developments, fellowships, and emergent worshipping communities may take different forms and use bi-vocational pastors, Commissioned ruling elders, or full-time organizing pastors. Presbyteries and congregations are conscious of the nature of their “mission field” and recognize that traditional forms of new church development may not be appropriate. The best efforts include developing “cultural proficiency” among present members of the presbytery so that they learn how “to interact effectively with people who differ from them” (“Cultural Proficiency: What Is It?” The Cultural Proficiency Group, Beverly Hills, Calif., 2003, p. 1).

The Tools for Creating Adaptive Mid Councils

As a commission, our deep desire is to see the whole church engaged in a wholesale process of reinvigorating congregations through reinventing presbyteries. In many places around the church today this process has already begun. The commission is convinced that what works in one presbytery (or synod) will not work in all their counterparts. There is no magic bullet, no “one size fits all” model, or even models that work for similar size mid councils. Just as congregations are unique, so are presbyteries and synods. There are a variety of factors that come into play for councils as they clarify their purpose and discover new patterns for engaging in ministry: context, size, culture, resources, leadership, etc. Instead of developing “models” that will not fit all situations or survive the test of changing times, the commission has identified components of models, an artist’s palette of primary colors that adaptive mid councils seem to take into account in shaping and painting the picture of their life. Each of these components of what might be a “model” is illustrated with a range of examples in the hope that presbyteries might use them as a palette of colors in a collaborative development of their own approach to mid council ministry.

Focus

In the changing context of the church and world, each presbytery needs to engage in a process of discernment, seeking clarity about its calling for this particular time. Mid councils are at different stages of this process, with some clearly recognizing that the effort to maintain comprehensive programs and mission can no longer be supported by diminishing resources and trends in voluntarism that value short-term, hands-on involvement over general giving. The commission’s research supports the conclusion in the new Constitution, that in addition to governance, the presbytery’s primary role is “assisting and supporting the witness of congregations” (Book of Order, G-3.0301). The missional character of presbyteries may look different as each one determines what is most important given its context, culture, and size. Presbyteries will each have a unique focus for their life—such as a guiding biblical narrative or image, an emphasis on spiritual formation, equipping healthy congregations, prioritizing missional theology, fostering community and accountability, promoting collaboration and partnership, and/ or developing a virtual organization. The synods that are vital are recognizing new trends in the church and see their role as supporting presbyteries, focusing their energies and resources to that end.

The Presbytery of Hudson River developed its own discernment process beginning with a leadership retreat in which they learned about how the church and the world were changing. One of the questions they considered in small groups was what metaphors or biblical stories came to mind to explain their situation. The image of "dying and rising to new life" which surfaced that day has given them energy and focus for guiding their future. As a presbytery they now declare that they are "practicing resurrection with passion and partnership, in a changing world." (In his book *Holy Conversations*, Gil Rendle provides a similar exercise congregations and presbyteries can use).

Lehigh Presbytery began work during an interim period clarifying their purpose and core values. Their explicit focus is on nurturing congregations, with the presbytery gathering as "communities for worship, spiritual renewal and Christian fellowship." They called a teaching presbyter gifted in developing spiritual practices.

St. Augustine Presbytery recognized that it had to ask "who are we?" and "what are we to do?" before they could ask "how do we structure ourselves"; it was a shift from asking organizational to theological questions. The result is a commitment to strengthening missional congregations, developing new missional communities, and forming missional leaders, tasks identified by Darrell L. Guder, Henry Winters Luce Professor of Missional and Ecumenical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, in his writings about missional ecclesiology. The presbytery tries to live out three virtues: humility, reconciliation, and trust.

San Diego Presbytery has discerned that it has a "missional calling," rooted in the experience of the early church sending people into the mission field (Acts 13:1-3). The presbytery went through a three-stage process that included working with a missional church consultant, Alan Roxburgh. It sees itself today as a learning community that is shaped by spiritual, missional, and relational factors. It chooses to take a permission-giving stance and cultivates missional imagination, innovation, creativity, and thinking outside the box. Reflection on Jesus' words in John 20:21: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you," is leading them to explore how to move back into the neighborhood, how to discern what the Spirit is up to, and how to participate in the mission of God today.

Context

The commission defines context as "who we are in relation to where we are." Mid councils need to ask questions about where God has placed us and recognize the characteristics of our environment and times as relevant factors in shaping a presbytery or synod's life and calling. What are the characteristics of the geography, how do natural boundaries divide or impact travel and relationships, how dense and diverse is the population, are there a variety of people groups or is it a fairly homogeneous region? How do economic factors shape life, is the economy stable, are there a variety of lifestyles and resources represented? How are societal changes impacting the nature of life in our communities and congregations? How is the presbytery or synod taking these factors into account, not as problems to be solved but as ways to discover the opportunities and possibilities for discerning identity and engaging in God's mission?

Palisades Presbytery in northern New Jersey is in the midst of a rapidly changing context, with the growth of Asian and Hispanic/Latino populations in a three county area with 2 million residents in northern New Jersey. The presbytery reflects the multi-ethnic character of the region with twelve racial-ethnic congregations out of forty-nine, plus a Korean new church development, and four immigrant fellowships. For the past few years the presbytery has had a unique staffing pattern with three, part-time presbyters; one of the three is a multicultural presbyter to resource these congregations and to assist others to transform into multicultural places of worship. With increased financial pressures, the presbytery is now re-visiting the staffing plan.

Glacier Presbytery in Montana, by contrast, has 3,000 members in nineteen congregations across a broad geographic region. Members may drive eight to nine hours from its eastern to western borders making connections between congregations and members challenging. The presbytery has begun rotating committee and presbytery meetings between four clusters and holding meetings by teleconference on alternate months.

Baltimore Presbytery with 16,000 members in its large metropolitan context has become conscious of how its congregations have become disconnected from their neighborhoods so one of its new emphases is on reconciling with the community in ways that advance God's reign.

Pacific Presbytery has long been conscious of its multicultural context and the realities of a changing world. It is intentionally seeking to encourage and promote younger leaders. The presbytery is using a two year stimulus grant from its synod to encourage young congregational leaders with ideas to revitalize their congregations.

Size

What is the "right" size for a presbytery or synod? Is it large enough to sustain mission but small enough to foster community and expect accountability? A majority of those surveyed believe their presbytery is the right size, yet the commission also heard concerns across the country about financial viability on the one hand and the importance of building relationships, on the other. Larger membership presbyteries often have the advantage of greater resources but need to consider how they establish community between congregations, and between teaching and ruling elders. Small presbyteries may experience community naturally but often struggle with how to support ministry with minimal finances. Size by itself is an insufficient means of evaluating a presbytery's health or identity but it is a reality that needs to be addressed as presbyteries look to the future and consider emerging trends.

National Capitol Presbytery with its 108 churches and 32,000 members identifies itself as "Missional, Pastoral and Prophetic." While it is addressing some financial challenges it continues to have resources for multiple staff and ministries. As part of its concern for pastoral well-being and a concern to build community, the presbytery requires pastors to be in a support/accountability group and name who "their own pastor" will be. Presbytery meetings are organized to promote conversation "with one another and the Holy One." The emphasis is relational, focused on "the Lord's Table not the Clerk's table." The committee on ministry hosts a dinner two to three times a year with the moderators of pastor nominating committees and new pastors where brief faith journeys are shared.

Santa Fe and Sierra Blanca Presbyteries together cover 90 percent of the state of New Mexico, with approximately 8,000 members in sixty-three congregations and two Hispanic new church developments. For a few years the two presbyteries explored how they might share leadership without merging. Together they called a regional presbyter to serve both presbyteries while each continues to have its own associate stated clerk. After experiencing this pattern for more than a year, when they began talking about the future, someone suggested that they create a new presbytery—not as a merger but by exploring what it would look like to start from scratch. A joint presbytery task force was appointed in 2011 with key leaders from each presbytery. A vision and values conversation at a joint presbytery meeting provided an opportunity for feedback and encouragement to continue the conversation, fleshing out more details. The process will continue into the spring of 2012 before the two presbyteries will consider voting on a proposal. While the process was initiated due to financial pressures and grief over losing some congregations, there is new energy and excitement as people sense that God is at work.

Cayuga-Syracuse Presbytery in upstate New York, by contrast, covers four counties with 5,323 members in forty congregations within about ninety minutes of one another. The presbytery engaged in a three-year process to look at the realities and possibilities of their decreasing size, human and financial resources. They decided to hire a transitional presbyter who has consulting experience to help the presbytery with the next phase of their vision and planning. The transition process is leading them to identify ways to rebuild community and become less staff dependent. A "Creation Team" appointed by the presbytery, evaluated policies, standing rules, and bylaws in order to develop and propose recommendations for how to carry out presbytery-directives. Over the next year the presbytery will move to a new leadership pattern with fifteen council members directing the work of presbytery, overseeing fiduciary responsibilities and Book of Order requirements, organized in a variety of ways. By the end of 2012 they will have a virtual office and the only staff position will be a combined stated clerk and web spinner. The transitional presbyter

will oversee and resource the council as they move into this new way of being and then will step aside.

Culture

According to the handbook, *Studying Congregations*, edited by Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney, "Culture is who we are and the world we have created to live in. It is the predictable patterns of who does what and habitual strategies for telling the world about the things held most dear." Students of culture look for patterns of life that give a community, a congregation, a presbytery, or a synod its identity. The handbook further explains that culture is not "who we always will be nor who we ought to be. It is who we are and all the ways in which we reinforce and recreate who we are." Culture includes style, attitude, emotional climate, the gifts and passions of the people and congregations. The culture of a presbytery or synod should foster trust, build community among congregations, be conscious of and ready to adapt to a changing world and the needs of younger generations and new populations. In his article "The Travail of the Presbytery," Joseph D. Small, recently retired director of Theology and Worship for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), argues for the importance of developing presbytery culture that is more relational and able to hold pastors and congregations accountable to one another. Some mid councils are working on developing a "virtual culture" that relies heavily on social networking and Go To Meeting types of technology, in order to be good stewards of time and resources, while still attending to relationships. Other councils emphasize a "sending culture," to nurture, guide, and strengthen congregations for witness and service in their particular context, as described by writers such as Princeton University professor, Darrell L. Guder, and Paul Hooker, executive presbyter and stated clerk of the Presbytery of St. Augustine.

The Presbytery of Los Ranchos in Southern California is moving from a culture of "command and control" to one of "collaborating and connecting," of recognizing the importance of being a missional learning community that is always "learning to learn." The presbytery created an "Odyssey" group to define the purpose and function of the presbytery that resulted in "flipping the presbytery," from expecting congregations to support the presbytery to a presbytery serving congregations. The process identified that the most vibrant conversations going on at presbytery meetings were happening in the narthex, so the Odyssey group asked what would happen if those conversations became the meeting. Now "open space" time during "presbytery gatherings" provide opportunity for people in the presbytery to offer a variety of voluntary learning and discussion forums open to all and organized by those who are present.

Muskingham Valley Presbytery, in rural Ohio, has made a major shift in its culture through a spiritual "Journey with Jesus" that is transforming its life and that of its congregations. The presbytery is intentional about identifying the gifts of members, encouraging spiritual disciplines, developing and supporting leaders. Several pastors and leaders have become oblates in various Catholic orders, particularly the Order of St. Benedict. The presbytery has an action learning team leading the presbytery in discernment about what it would mean to commit to "shared rhythms," to be shaped by the Word, daily prayer, service to community, fellowship at the table, and ordering their lives around the liturgical calendar.

The Presbytery of Western North Carolina has a strong commitment to international and local mission through congregational partnerships. The region has a long history of supporting missionaries and is the home of Montreat Conference Center. The presbytery encourages congregational initiatives, assists with networking, and promotes projects. The presbytery's stated focus is on congregational transformation, but it sees "strengthening churches to be faithful and vital witnesses to Jesus Christ" growing through mission partnerships and exposure to the lives of others. The presbytery's history and culture of mission partnership supports the focus on congregational transformation which in turn generates greater vitality and mission.

The Presbytery of the Western Reserve values relationships between congregations and between members. For over a decade an email prayer chain has built community; cluster session visits and congregational partnerships are promoted; and, while imperfectly practiced, an attitude of "walking with" congregations is being encouraged, especially through its committee on ministry.

As presbytery leaders began looking at how to implement a new focus on equipping congregations, a subtle but significant change came from reflection on Jesus' words to his disciples about recognizing what they had and going into the crowd and feed the people. After years of seeing struggling congregations as "problems to be solved," the presbytery has embraced as a core assumption, that "God has given each congregation a gift for ministry," beginning a new approach to supporting vital congregations and being in community.

Function

In the new Form of Government presbyteries continue to have a number of important responsibilities. The focus groups conducted by Presbyterian Research Services for the commission identified support for congregations as the most valued function of presbyteries. Secondly, people cited the importance of pastoral care and accountability for teaching elders. The synod consultations and focus group respondents value and would not want to lose networking and collaboration. Rule-oriented administrative processes were least valued by respondents from various settings. Sessions gave high ratings for presbytery processes in orienting new pastors, review of records, and pastor accountability, but were less complimentary about missional aspects of their presbyteries. Nonetheless, two-thirds reported the presbytery had been supportive of their congregation in the last two years.

While all presbyteries have fiduciary functions, some approach those responsibilities by targeting the support of congregational vitality as their goal. This represents a shift from monitoring the life of congregations through the lens of rules and regulations to one that seeks to build healthy relationships both internally within congregations and between the presbytery and the congregation. As noted above, some presbyteries are making concerted efforts to develop spiritual practices, encourage excellence in ruling and teaching elders, and foster community, particularly among teaching elders. Several presbyteries are experimenting with patterns of decision-making, particularly to reconsider the purpose and format of presbytery meetings, reducing time spent on "business" in favor of worship, spiritual formation, theological reflection, or generative conversations. Two synods have moved toward more virtual practices of decision-making while focusing resources on presbytery needs.

Charlotte Presbytery sees empowering the transformation of congregations as its most important function and has attempted to direct its staffing, structure, and resources to that end. The presbytery is clear that all congregations need to be going through transformation and is intentional about supporting multicultural learning and new church plants with most new immigrants. The third largest presbytery in the PC(USA) with 130 congregations and 39,900 members, Charlotte addresses the challenge of developing relationships by organizing five regional committee on ministry cluster teams (COM cluster team) to serve all its congregations. Each COM cluster team has co-moderators and seven to ten members. Most committee on ministry responsibilities reside with the cluster. The Church Development, Leadership Development, and Mission and Justice committees actively work through the cluster teams to offer support and deliver resources. This system is designed to bring the presbytery to the pastors and congregations as well as encourage regional identity.

The Presbytery of Los Ranchos declares that "the presbytery is wherever two or three congregations are gathered to partner in mission." It encourages the initiative of congregations and people with passion partnering for mission, instead of trying to maintain its own mission and program functions. The new format of presbytery gatherings compresses business to one hour and allows for people with common interests to network during the "open space" time. The presbytery council coordinates three teams: Administrative (resources and assets), Strategic (how to do mission), and Generative (which views the presbytery from "the balcony" raising challenges and opportunities). The Presbytery pastor moderates the council which acts as the steward.

Lehigh Presbytery, with its thirty-six worshipping communities, also places emphasis on strengthening and supporting congregations, but as a smaller presbytery it functions very differently with minimal staff leadership and resources. With some assistance from the synod, it supports a multiyear contract with missional church consultants working with clusters of

congregations. Among the presbytery's core values are affirming collaboration and partnerships; nurturing mutual trust; pursuing openness to new ideas and risk-taking; challenging individuals to discover their gifts. It models discernment and spiritual development through its gatherings. Each presbytery meeting begins with twenty minutes of Dwelling in the Word, a Bible reflection on the same Scripture passage for the whole year, which is also used by committees and congregations. They spend up to an hour in worship, an hour for education, and an hour for business. In 2011, the presbytery is engaged in studying Peter Block's book, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*. Members of congregations who are not commissioners to presbytery are recruited to serve as "presence keepers," to pray for the community as it meets, pay attention to dynamics and have a gong to call attention to something the body may be missing whether it is less appropriate behavior or pointing out something worthy of praise. They are intentional about hospitality and frame presbytery service in terms of "calling."

The Presbytery of St. Augustine, covering nineteen counties in north Florida, reduced its committee structure by roughly 50 percent and reconceived the function of committees to exist as resources for ministries, not as ends in themselves. The presbytery council is empowered to carry out functions once done by separate committees: personnel, bills and overtures, review and evaluation, and worship planning. The presbytery assembly meets three times per year and includes worship with a guest preacher from outside the presbytery and a block of time for theological reflection with the business agenda at the end.

The five presbyteries of South Carolina hold one joint meeting each year and their presbytery executives meet monthly to nurture relationships across presbytery lines but within a geographic area that is less than one-third the size of their synod.

Structure

The new Form of Government recognizes the diverse contexts and needs facing mid councils. It identifies the basic responsibilities of a council yet gives permission for them to adapt their organizational design to fit particular circumstances. Emerging models are already moving toward alternative ways of making decisions and seeking ways to "flatten" or de-centralize the organization. Presbyteries and synods are experimenting with different structures to fit their needs. Given cultural shifts in how people make time commitments today, many have reduced the number and size of committees, with some only having Book of Order mandated committees. Instead, some encourage mission initiatives through congregational partnerships, short-term ministry teams or networks of people with a common passion, networks, and more decision-making delegated to committees, commissions, or clusters of congregations.

Palisades Presbytery has gone through a major restructuring of committees and staff that "flattens" the organization and allows for broader participation. The presbytery formerly had divisions to provide programs to congregations and now has three roundtables:

Resources: assisting congregations with property issues, development, and funding;

Evangelism and Community Outreach;

Discipleship: includes Christian Education, spiritual development, youth ministry, training, and development.

Each roundtable includes three ruling and three teaching elders who are elected, yet all meetings of roundtables are "open" so anyone can attend. Agendas for roundtables are widely publicized. Each roundtable intentionally supports parity with co-moderators, a ruling and a teaching elder. The structure is designed to shift from a few people developing ideas for programs to an open opportunity for developing ways to resource actual needs in congregations.

Pueblo Presbytery in Southern Colorado has organized itself into four clusters of congregations across its 35,000 square miles as a way of building on the connectional, relational values they lift up in their mission statement. The clusters enable them to "learn to live together, live to love each other, and love to serve God." All mission grants are determined by the local church clusters with

each cluster sending advocates to the budget meeting. Through the clusters, the presbytery also developed peer learning groups for pastors using recommended books to help them grow as missional leaders. Accountability is taken seriously as the presbytery learns from the work of Paul Borden, author of *Hitting the Bullseye* and *Direct Hit*. The presbytery has developed a covenant process for congregations and pastors willing to commit to significant learning time and risk reorienting change; it has provided weekend consultations, workshops, and coaching.

Baltimore Presbytery has taken intentional steps to decentralize decision-making and encourage community among its seventy-two congregations and 16,000 members. A recent reorganization provides for three commissions to make decisions for the presbytery: Thriving and Reconciling Congregations, Spiritual Leader Development, and Presbytery Administration and Shared Witness. The presbytery council's role is to oversee implementation of presbytery decisions and hold commissions and staff accountable. The Commission on Thriving and Reconciling Congregations will work through six ministry groups with twelve congregations each, enabling congregations and leaders to learn from and with one another and have a greater role in decision-making. Each group will be provided with \$25,000 and one day a week of a presbytery staff member's time. The committee on ministry will continue to carry out the examination and reception of incoming ministers on behalf of the presbytery.

The Presbytery of Greater Atlanta engaged in a major re-visioning, restructuring process to address declining vitality and church membership. The process has resulted in an effort to move from an emphasis on gate-keeping and maintenance of a large structure towards a more permission-giving culture, focused on equipping healthy, growing congregations. The decision to shift the primary function and culture was tied to a dramatic reorganization. For years the flow of energy and effort was from congregations toward programs of the presbytery and higher governing bodies. The relatively new plan calls for staff consultants to work directly with congregations, ends the maintenance of myriad committees, eliminates staff support for committees other than Book of Order units. The expectation is that networks of churches and people with passion for particular ministries will continue some work once done by committees and develop new initiatives.

Leadership

All presbyteries need effective leadership whether paid or unpaid. Good leadership is inspirational but is expressed in a variety of styles. In an era that calls for adaptive change, it is not resident "experts" who are needed, but leaders who can help the organization continually ask the questions that lead to vision, focus, and hope. We believe that the church will need to rely more heavily than ever on real parity of ruling and teaching elders, not as a matter of technical balance but as spiritual leaders with particular gifts, functions, and responsibilities. Efforts to identify, prepare, and support younger, multicultural leaders is a sign of a vital presbytery attending to contextual and cultural shifts. Trends in leadership development in emerging models point to the importance of framing service in terms of "calling" and willingness to pursue excellence. Presbyteries promote opportunities for spiritual formation, coaching, intentional exposure to new ideas and best practices, and the creation of learning communities that encourage mutual teaching and learning.

New patterns for staffing are evolving with economic pressures and the movement to prioritize support for congregations. Larger membership presbyteries continue to have multiple staff but may deploy them differently while medium and small presbyteries are looking for creative ways to function with fewer or minimal paid staff. Thoughtful councils, experimenting with greater use of part-time or contract staff, are trying to balance reduced personnel costs with concerns about how to reduce staff responsibilities and the ethics of providing adequate benefits and support for staff. Titles and roles of presbytery staff leaders also vary from presbytery to presbytery: presbytery pastor, connectional presbyter, transformational presbyter, presbytery leader or, more commonly, general presbyter or executive presbyter. The Presbytery of Southern New England recently changed the position description and title of its full-time executive presbyter to presbyter to the spiritual community. The position is described with the images of Sentinel, Midwife, and Tender of the New Vineyards.

Cimarron Presbytery in Oklahoma has a ruling elder who has served for several years as a “dollar-a-year” executive presbyter as well as volunteer stated clerk and treasurer. They have minimal structure with a council and task forces. Their aim is to be responsive to what comes from the individual congregations. South Dakota Presbytery has a similar pattern with a “retired” ruling elder serving as Presbytery administrator.

The Presbytery of Greater Atlanta, with more than 44,000 members in 108 congregations in urban, suburban, and rural counties, has redirected staff roles, replacing three full-time associate executive positions with two full-time and two part-time congregation consultants. In addition, several ruling elders are being trained as additional consultant/mentors. While eliminating some positions, the presbytery added a communications/technology position.

Muskingham Valley Presbytery’s transformation includes implementing a nominating process with clear criteria, communication of high expectations, and consideration of spiritual gifts for people serving presbytery committees and ministries. A number of ruling and teaching elders have received training in specific congregational processes so that they can serve as consultants.

The Presbytery of Great Rivers in Illinois encourages internal leadership rather than “outside experts.” Great Rivers has a pool of funds to enable ruling and teaching elders to provide particular services to congregations such as ways to “go green” or assist with writing church information forms.

Several presbyteries, among them: Giddings-Lovejoy, Genesee Valley, Eastminster, Western Reserve, and Philadelphia have recruited and trained coaches to work with pastors seeking to improve their resilience and creativity for ministry or with congregational groups in the midst of transformation. Detroit Presbytery has trained leaders to serve as “healthy congregations” coaches.

Not all models are successful. The Presbytery of Northern New York experimented with dividing the presbytery into three geographic deaneries. The design called for each deanery to elect an elder or minister of Word and Sacrament from within the deanery to serve as dean for a term of three years. The purpose of the deanery and the mission of the dean was to help churches thrive by identifying resources to solve problems, celebrating individual congregations’ identity and contribution, and further relationships. The deans were not to do the work but to help congregations and pastors to do the work to which God called them. The deans were accountable to a council of deans including two members each appointed annually by the committee on ministry and presbytery council. An annual covenant agreement between the deans, the council of deans, and the presbytery set the year’s responsibilities and compensation. Although this model has not continued in this particular presbytery, a variation of it might work in another setting and so it’s worth applauding and sharing their effort to be creative.

Financial Viability:

How much money is enough? How much do you need “to run” a mid council? In the present economic climate and given declining membership in many congregations, mid councils are looking at what kind of financial assets they have, how to allocate them and expand their revenue streams. Financial challenges are creating a sense of urgency and openness to change, prompting mid councils to seek ways of being more effective with less, building a better stewardship environment and a theology of abundance. Some are discovering that limited resources can foster innovation and drive opportunities for partnering with other presbyteries or organizations. Size, context, functions, leadership needs, and realities are part of the process of determining priorities and looking for synchronicity and “the possible.” While some presbyteries are reducing paid staff or experimenting with leadership models that address their context, others are deploying staff to work out of coffee shops, copy centers, and cars rather than maintaining office space. A number of presbyteries report dealing with significant financial challenges in supporting camp and conference ministry: a few presbyteries partner to support a camp and conference center, others have turned their camps into separate 501c3 entities responsible for their own management, and some have sold their camping facilities setting aside funds to use for outdoor ministry. Long-standing programs, camp maintenance, and aid to agencies and congregations are being reconsidered as

presbyteries focus increasingly on equipping missional congregations and congregational mission partnerships. There are a number of experiments underway as mid councils clarify their focus, set priorities, and consider options.

Mid Kentucky Presbytery has focused on developing new faith communities, immigrant ministries, and deepening the presbytery's prayer life. To address financial realities the presbytery is reducing its office space to enough for one administrative assistant, with the expectation that continuing staff will work from home or coffee shops, to prioritize resources for outreach to new populations.

The Monmouth and New Brunswick Presbyteries in New Jersey are beginning a shared leadership model by calling a regional presbyter. The new partnership will reduce overhead to enable mission. They continue to be two presbyteries, each retaining its own stated clerk, distinct culture, functions, and structure. In the process of working together on the position description for the shared regional presbyter they recognized that they did not want an administrator but someone who could assist them with vision and equipping leaders.

Three presbyteries in New York—Utica, Susquehanna, and Cayuga-Syracuse—share bookkeeping and financial services; those three presbyteries and Albany Presbytery share some staff. In northeast Ohio, two associations of the United Church of Christ share one office for communications, financial, and other administrative services while Regional ministers (similar to executive and associate executive presbyters) work from home or a small shared satellite office.

Charlotte Presbytery seeks to be effective stewards of its resources. Numerous educational efforts have been attempted to raise awareness of the importance of the presbytery's mission and ministry. Appreciation of the presbytery's work has been regularly documented, yet income from local churches has continued to decline. By policy, revenue from closed churches has become immediately available for church development. This revenue source, carefully utilized and managed, has permitted the presbytery to avoid untenable financial crisis. At the same time the presbytery continues to make strategic decisions about expenditures and priorities, including plans to move to smaller office space when the current lease expires.

Pacific Presbytery has determined to lease property from closed congregations for ten years and then evaluate needs. Some other presbyteries specify that assets from closed congregations be dedicated to supporting urban churches or new church development.

National Capital Presbytery encouraged stewardship education in a presbytery meeting using a speed-dating format: people were divided into small groups and attended a dozen presentations of five to ten minutes as they rotated around the fellowship hall. Participants were energized by learning from one another, gathering ideas and handouts, and experiencing presbytery as equipping leaders.

Each of these "colors" of healthy, adaptive mid councils that exhibit emerging trends, are founded on basic foundational assumptions that

- Presbyteries have important fiduciary, governance responsibilities that need to be carried out well;
- Presbyteries recognize that their role is to "assist and support the witness of congregations"; while they
- "Nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ" within their region (Book of Order, G-3.0301, G-3.0301c, G-3.0304, G-3.0304c).

In these changing times, each council will need to continually seek to discern God's call to them in their context, given their culture, size, gifts, and challenges. Each council will need to learn some new behaviors, to engage in being a community that is continually "learning to learn." As Gil Rendle notes in his book, *Journey in the Wilderness: New Life for Mainline Churches*, the task is to keep asking questions about who we are? What do we need to be doing in the next few years to be more faithful? What are we trying to make different? What difference are we making in the lives of

others and the life of the world?

One presbytery focused its conversation around these questions, questions that we on the mid council commission believe need to be at the center of a larger, broader, deeper discussion:

1. What kind of people do we want to send into the world?
2. What kinds of congregations send those kinds of people?
3. What kind of leadership equips that kind of congregation?
4. What kind of presbytery structure and staff leadership will set free those kinds of leaders to equip those kinds of people to be sent into the world?

The Outlines of Possibilities: Synods as Multi-Presbytery Missional Partnerships

The action of the commission is to eliminate the synod as a council, or ecclesiastical entity. The intent of the commission is to take a step toward "flattening" the church's organization for the purpose of reducing redundancy in process and the bureaucratic layers between the local congregation and the national church. It was not the commission's intent to eliminate those programs and processes that cross presbytery lines and either provide economies of scale or address identified missional goals. Indeed, we believe that the ingenuity and effort necessary to retain or reinvent these assets is crucial to the ongoing vitality of the church. Some examples of highly valued ministries and assets that will need to be reformed and retained in a new ecclesiastical system:

- The Synod of Living Waters believes its mission is to give presbyteries a chance to thrive. The synod seeks to create community among presbytery leaders and draws its strategy from those leaders. They are clear that they do not do anything that does not support their presbyteries. The Synod of Living Waters is also the home to a nationally recognized ministry that provides clean water for impoverished areas around the world. This mission already stretches far beyond the geographical bounds of the synod.
- The Synod of the Trinity's mission statement declares that its role is "to provide support, resources, and nurture to its presbyteries." It provides major grants to presbyteries for consultants to work with clusters of missional congregations.
- The Synod of Rocky Mountains also has funding available to support members within the synod providing their expertise.
- The Synod of Lincoln Trails is known for its commitment to work in partnership with its presbyteries and congregations to develop and support leaders. It offers training and continuing education for commissioned ruling elders, hosts seminars for new pastors spanning a three-year timeframe, provides interim pastor and interim executive training, and has a fund for Ministerial Excellence to assist pastors and congregations with education for dealing with economic challenges.
- The Synod of the Pacific determined years ago to provide financial and administrative services and never became a programmatic body. It developed a unique revenue stream by creating a savings and loan program to benefit congregations, presbyteries, and Presbyterian entities within its bounds. Due to economies of scale, the program is able to generate revenues to cover synod expenses beyond per capita so that all mission funds from congregations support their presbyteries and General Assembly. The synod is able to take on several fiduciary functions, including personnel services and some health benefits, on behalf of its presbyteries. The synod staff places a high value on "customer service," listening and responding to the presbyteries.
- The Synod of Lakes and Prairies has a nationally respected "Synod School" for training church leaders, educators, and officers that draws from a large and diverse population offering churches the very highest caliber of resources.

- The Synod of Mid America virtual model grew out of recognition that the ways people in our culture communicate and relate to one another have changed. With people having limited time for meetings it was unrealistic to expect people to travel across state to make routine administrative decisions. They were also conscious that using newer technologies was better stewardship of financial and environmental resources. They are making decisions using conference calls, web-based platforms like Skype or Go To Meeting, and other evolving modes of communication. They will continue to have mission and training opportunities, but believe community will also be created by web-based discussion forums, blogs, and other virtual options.
- The Synod of Alaska-Northwest has started a new way of coming together that they name a "Call to Table." Two or more presbyteries can call a gathering to look at a common challenge or mission opportunity
- The Synod of Living Waters values relationships and effectiveness. It gave up a physical office for a virtual one, not for financial reasons, but to allow staff to spend more time meeting with people in presbyteries. All documents are scanned and saved into "the cloud" for easy access. To encourage broader participation, particularly among younger Presbyterians many meetings are held by conference call, Skype, Go To Meeting, and other electronic formats. The synod also changed its approach to doing the Living Waters for the World project—after the first few years of asking people for money to do the mission and installing a handful of water systems, they stopped "doing the mission" and switched to training and equipping people, installing hundreds of water systems with teams from inside and outside synod bounds.

Organization: Presbyteries will be free to continue to collaborate for programs, mission, and all other needs where collaboration produces better outcomes. Under the new structure, it is also possible that any presbytery in the denomination could be part of this collaborative if the board of directors or those responsible for project chose to broaden its scope.

The difference is that presbyteries would no longer rely on synod as a council of the church to administer such a program; the presbyteries would collaborate on the structure for such a program as an administrative operation. Presbyteries could form a "joint powers authority" (JPA), a foundation, or simply agree to elect members of a committee or board to exercise administrative power over a program. This has the intended consequence of making the program more accountable to the end users.

Programs: It is the intent of the commission that ministry programs such as Synod of Lakes and Prairies "Synod School" and the Synod of the Pacific's Loan Program would not be eliminated. While there will certainly be work and cost involved in transitioning these programs, we believe that they are validated by their missional relevance to churches and presbyteries, and not just vested in the synod structure, and therefore could continue to thrive in a new structure with creative leadership.

Advocacy: Another piece of significant data that was reviewed by the commission is the concern that racial ethnic ministries seem to work better across presbytery lines where there are more numbers and hence, more energy for their particular ministries. This issue requires serious attention of presbyteries.

Many members of the racial ethnic Presbyterian community have contributed greatly to the history and vibrancy of the PC(USA); initiating and modeling leadership, guiding the church to more socially and theologically responsible posture in its witness to the world, creatively enhancing the form and substance of worship, sensitizing and educating the church regarding manners of race, and providing a unique Presbyterian witness of the ministry of Jesus Christ. The call for the church to review and reorganize its commitment and approach to racial ethnic ministry is significant both within and beyond the notion of a Presbyterian reality that removes the ecclesiastical functions from synods. The need to discover a posture from which genuine ministry partnership can thrive is vital to the current health and future relevance of the church.

It is worthy of note that the plight of many established and emerging racial ethnic congregations directly mirrors the plight of small churches in the denomination. Exploring models

that support and strengthen racial ethnic ministry has the added benefit of discovering new ways in which the entire church can be strengthened, both structurally and relationally. Beyond the notion of tolerance, God calls us to be imaginative and authentic in our interactions and in our witness. As a church, the degree to which we extend ourselves to and within racial ethnic communities will be directly reflected in the health and relevance of our brand of witness. A culturally proficient engagement will bear much fruit, not only in matters of church development and growth, but also in matters of spiritual health and wellness.

Using the regional administrative commissions authorized under the commission's recommendation to give oversight and accountability to the committee of representation's work, one of the most significant presbytery collaborations should be an active commitment to the particular needs and requirements of racial ethnic ministries. We are hopeful that this would end up being a priority in the creation of multi-presbytery partnerships to support the kinds of ministries that exist in regional areas. Hopefully, a good consequence could be more ownership of racial ethnic programs and ministries by the presbyteries.

In their cry to the PC(USA) for resource, relevant inclusion, nurture, and support, the racial ethnic Presbyterian community must be met with a posture that authentically values diversity, genuinely respects culture, and fully recognizes that what can be gained from honest engagement is not just the joy of giving, but the blessing of receiving. Within this frame, partnership emerges beyond paternalism as a fundamental engaging principle for racial ethnic ministry, and the denomination achieves an enhanced eligibility for the richness of blessing that compliance with God's inclusive intention can bring.

Mission Projects: As described above, the commission is confident that when mission activities are valued by the presbyteries and churches, they will continue to exist under a new structure that actually gives them more accountability and control. By converting projects to 501 3c organizations, or foundations, or by creating joint powers authorities, collaborative groups of an unlimited number of presbyteries can continue the mission activities that capture the imagination and energy of their members. The solar project in the Synod of the Sun and the Living Waters of the World project of the Synod of Living Waters are examples of possible mission activities. As the commission understands, the Living Waters project can "stand alone." It now functions under the purview of the synod, but could just as easily be a project on its own. That is an exemplar of what the commission hopes would happen with such mission projects.

Shared Life: This is where the rubber meets the road. In reviewing the survey data, it was apparent that while we talk the talk about connectionalism, there is a significant lack of walking the walk. Survey respondents listed connectionalism as a very high value, but they also listed lack of communication among middle councils and with congregations as a major problem. The commission believes that by not mandating cross presbytery connections in an ecclesiastical entity, the new structure will actually require presbyteries to define when and how they choose to collaborate with each other in a shared spiritual life, and in making the notion of "one body in Christ" a reality. With the possibility of provisional presbyteries and provisional membership of presbyteries beyond its original geographic bounds, we strongly urge the formation of covenants of agreements between churches and their membership and affiliated congregations.

It is the commission's hope that in this season of reflective experimentation presbyteries will pay even closer attention to how churches connect to each other across presbytery boundaries, regional boundaries, and indeed throughout the denomination. What does it truly mean to be connectional? If we're not required to do it, will we actually embrace the notion of "one body"?

Assets: Although this varies widely from synod to synod, it is true that many existing synods have significant assets in the form of endowments, property, and reserves. The relocation of the management of these assets will be a significant issue if the new structure is approved. It is also true that the state in which these assets reside is a significant variable and would have to be considered on a case-by-case basis. The commission recommends that each existing synod establish a committee made up of representatives from each presbytery within the existing structure and that these committees be charged with developing a plan for the management of

what is now thought of as synod assets.

Report of the General Assembly Mid Council Commission Racial Ethnic Strategy Task Force.

The General Assembly Mid Council Commission Racial Ethnic Strategy Task Force proposed the following recommendations for the General Assembly Mid Council Commission to present to the 220th General Assembly (2012): [These recommendations have been incorporated into the report as [Recommendation 8](#) above.]

1. Establish a National Racial Ethnic Ministries Task Force comprised of representatives from racial ethnic church leadership; racial ethnic caucus leadership; the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC); presbytery leadership; and the General Assembly Committee on Representation. This task force will exclusively review, assess, and explore the call to, responsibility in, and vision for, racial ethnic ministry within the PC(USA), reporting its findings for implementation to the 221st General Assembly (2014).
2. In light of what we have heard in our conversation with the church, identifying a critical condition concerning confidence in the substance and direction of racial ethnic ministry, we would also recommend that the National Racial Ethnic Task Force be
 - a. created separate and apart from the proposed OGA task force;
 - b. created whether or not the motion for the repurposing of synods is approved;
 - c. instructed to specifically address the issue of language access, sensitivity and resource (particularly as relates to the Spanish and Korean languages) within the existing frame of judicatory operation, as well as within the context of any regional administrative structure that emerges as a result of the approval of the repurposing of synods;
 - d. instructed to review the models of racial ethnic ministry that are operating successfully in the denomination with particular focus on, but not limited to, those noted in this commission's report.
 - e. instructed to explore the viability of a nationally organized racial ethnic ministry advocacy model on the local and/or cluster congregation level.

Charge

To address the question: "In the light of what we have heard from the church regarding the intrinsic value of racial ethnic ministry within the PC(USA), how will that priority be preserved in the face of transition to a structure that does not include synods with ecclesiastical status?"

Process

Representatives from the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC), representing the collective community of the racial ethnic Presbyterian family, presented the commission with a unified case for considering the historic role of synods in the vitality of racial ethnic Presbyterian ministry. Subsequently ACREC was invited to partner with this task force. Working together, we embarked on a process of exploration, assessment, and visioning regarding potential options and elements of a strategy for the PC(USA) to sustain the viability of established racial ethnic Presbyterian congregations and communities as well as those that are emerging, and those that have yet to. The focus of this exploration was founded in the overwhelming response in the commission's polling of the church that consistently lifted up racial ethnic ministry as the number one element that needed to be accounted for in a post-synod Presbyterian universe.

Rationale

Even though the work of this task force was focused on identifying models for racial ethnic ministry in the face of potential transition to a structure that does not include synods with ecclesiastical power, we heard a wide spread outcry for relief from conditions as they currently exist. Established racial ethnic congregations continue to struggle in their relationships with their Presbyteries, resourcing and nurture are widely unavailable to them, and there is a feeling within this community that they are being abandoned in favor of other priorities within the denomination. The commitment to racial ethnic ministry that the PC(USA) has professed is seen as mere lip service, due to the general absence of evidence of that commitment on the local church level. The notion of life in the absence of Synod ecclesiastical authority is, for many racial ethnic

congregations, the "last straw" in what has developed into a perceived tradition of tacit exclusion.

It is widely acknowledged, and factually irrefutable, that synods have been the traditional Safe Haven for matters regarding racial ethnic ministry. This truth emerges from two primary factors, Critical Mass and Sociological Necessity. Regarding Critical Mass, it is clear that in many areas of the country the numerical count of racial ethnic Presbyterians was insufficient to command the attention, sensitivity, and focus of many presbyteries. Synods provided the place where racial ethnic Presbyterians could gather in numbers that afforded them a voice that was not available on the presbytery level. Regarding Sociological Necessity, one need only refer to the historical truths that required federal government intervention in the local implementation of civil rights in many parts of the United States. Unfortunately the truths that called for such a solution were also actively impacting the life of the PC(USA), and the ecclesiastical power of synods served as the lone buffer for many racial ethnic Presbyterians and congregations.

The place of synods in this mix was both programmatic and resource oriented. Many synods had dedicated staff focused on the particular and peculiar place of racial ethnic ministry within the established Presbyterian domain. Local congregations were resourced with people, programs, and funding generated from the synod, which also evolved into a place of shelter and recourse for racial ethnic Presbyterians unable to access justice, recognition, and relief within their own presbyteries. The historic memory of this era looms somewhat larger than more recent renditions of that reality, but the spirit of the role that synods have played in the life of racial ethnic Presbyterian ministry continues to be the measure by which they are valued among the community of racial ethnic Presbyterians.

A historical fact that bears mention is that "racial ethnic" prior to the 1980s was primarily a "black and white" issue. That is to say, that the focus of most matters regarding ethnicity and race in America was conjugated in the context of the "Negro/Black/African American" struggle for equal rights. The Presbyterian church, in the southern and northern versions of itself, was challenged to respond to the social injustices of the time with ground breaking postures and statements that valued the parity, ministry, and witness of Black Presbyterians within the life and body of the church. In the northern church this was evidenced by, among other things, the hiring of Black Presbyterians into the established structure. In the southern church the social circumstance manifested the continuation of a structure that included the thriving presence of all-Black presbyteries and synods.

The fact that these all-Black judicatories (like the Synods of Atlantic, Blue Ridge, Canadian, and Catawba, and Presbyteries like Cape Fear, Yadkin, Southern Virginia, Tennessee, and others) were "structured" out of existence (along with much of the programming focused on their constituency) in a process advanced by the "redistricting" that followed the 1983 Reunion, is a fact that serves as a point of reference for the current concern that the fruits of the church's current plan for restructuring will include sour grapes for those historically disenfranchised within the mainstream of American reality. The Native American concern had already been marginalized and because it was less visible in the "nightly news," it less often received the recognition of having provided the original context (at least in principle) for the civil rights struggle. There were also Mexican presbyteries, which were more remote in connection, but no less relevant in the overall historic context of racial ethnic Presbyterian ministry.

Today when we use the term "racial ethnic" it refers to a multitude of cultures, including immigrants of all "non-white" races and ethnicities. The fact that most of them, like the Negro / Black/African and Native Americans became Presbyterian pursuant to global efforts of mission (albeit in somewhat of a different storyline of historic context), is one that is relevant to the universal nature of Presbyterian witness. It is this witness that moves "front and center" in forward looking discussions concerning the future of racial ethnic Presbyterian ministry, particularly in light of the demographic shifts occurring within the American mission field.

Also prominent in the commission's polling of the church, were the expressions of deep and abiding mistrust—fueled by a general absence of meaningful connection to the national, regional, and even local judicatories. This is by no means a racial ethnic phenomenon, but it has peculiar

ramifications within the racial ethnic Presbyterian community. Those feelings of distant disconnect are exacerbated by the day-to-day experiences of those within the communities of traditionally disenfranchised people; it is in fact a double-disconnect from society as a whole and from the church, so the distance seems greater—and the isolation more severe.

In a spirit that recognized “what Jesus would do,” the PC(USA) in the Book of Order creates a context for its place of responsibility to such communities:

F-1.0403 Unity in Diversity

“As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:27–29).

The unity of believers in Christ is reflected in the rich diversity of the Church’s membership. In Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God unites persons through baptism regardless of race, ethnicity, age, sex, disability, geography, or theological conviction. There is therefore no place in the life of the Church for discrimination against any person. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall guarantee full participation and representation in its worship, governance, and emerging life to all persons or groups within its membership. No member shall be denied participation or representation for any reason other than those stated in this Constitution.

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

The mutual interconnection of the church through its councils is a sign of the unity of the church. Congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), while possessing all the gifts necessary to be the church, are nonetheless not sufficient in themselves to be the church. Rather, they are called to share with others both within and beyond the congregation the task of bearing witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in the world. This call to bear witness is the work of all believers. The particular responsibility of the councils of the church is to nurture, guide, and govern those who witness as part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), to the end that such witness strengthens the whole church and gives glory to God.

APPENDIX B—ARTICLE 8. RACIAL ETHNIC REPRESENTATION, PARTICIPATION AND ORGANIZATIONS

8.1 The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall provide for a Committee on Representation for each governing body above the Session. Its membership shall consist of equal numbers of men and women. A majority of the members shall be selected from the racial ethnic groups within the governing body and the total membership shall include persons from each of the following categories:

- a. majority male membership
- b. majority female membership
- c. racial ethnic male membership
- d. racial ethnic female membership
- e. youth male and female membership

Its main function shall be to guide the governing bodies with respect to their membership and to that of their committees, boards, agencies and other units, in implementation of the principles of participation and inclusiveness, to ensure effective representation in the decision making of the church.

8.2 Governing bodies of the Church shall be responsible for implementing the Church’s commitment to inclusiveness and participation which provides for the full expression of the rich diversity within its membership. All governing bodies shall work to become more open and inclusive and to correct past patterns of discrimination on the basis of racial ethnic background.

Racial ethnic members in the United States (Presbyterians of African, Hispanic and Asian descent and Native Americans) shall be guaranteed full participation and access to representation in the decision-making of the Church, and shall be able to form caucuses.

Participation and representation of racial ethnic membership shall be assured by the Committees on Representation (8.1).

The challenges we are currently facing as a church regarding racial ethnic ministry relate to the concept of fundamental commitment to this ideal. Arguably, the church’s passion has not been

invested in racial ethnic ministry, regardless of the number of "success stories" that can be celebrated. Diminishing resources pumped through a structure of systems that are decades old continues to serve fewer and fewer people. Emerging racial ethnic worshipping communities are receiving their due priority, but more and more often it is at the expense of established racial ethnic congregations, who are struggling (along with the entire denomination) with the realities of decline in vitality and relevance. All of this while voice after voice echoes the sentiment that the PC(USA) continues to speak "out of both sides of its mouth"—stating the priority nature of racial ethnic ministry while simultaneously withdrawing resources from the places that would enhance and support it.

In response to a demographic reality in which the racial ethnic tide continues to swell, the PC(USA) has embraced multiculturalism as "... the answer ..." divesting itself further and further from racial ethnic ministry support. Valuing multicultural contexts of worship could never be "wrong," but to choose those contexts as alternatives to racial ethnic ministry would be a mistake that many already believe the denomination to be making. The identified trend of immigrant racial ethnic congregations seeking to call pastors from their homeland of origin speaks to the critical nature of a cultural context in ministry. This cultural context is critical not only to the Taiwanese, Hispanic/Latinos, and Nigerians, it is critical for the long-established racial ethnic Presbyterian worshipping communities as well. A "... both/and ..." strategy is called for, and the PC(USA), if it is to be true to its stated priority for racial ethnic ministry (in a way that is consistent with the Book of Order), must passionately invest in both streams of racial ethnic ministry.

A structural reality that does not include synods with ecclesiastical power presents a fundamental threat to racial ethnic ministry, because it removes a recognized place of shelter. As relates to the concepts of "injury" and "harm," they are experienced in both actual and perceived ways by the racial ethnic Presbyterian communities who have traditionally found nurture, protection, and care in a place that may no longer exist. In the sequence that calls for the "repurposing" of synods then, there must be a simultaneous process of identifying new and effective ways to resource, support, and enhance racial ethnic Presbyterian ministry; only then can the angst of "being restructured out of relevance in, and connection to the denomination" be replaced by a "purposeful discovery of a place from which to regroup and grow ... again."

A fundamental element in this entire process is cultural proficiency, an ideal that is more prominently finding its way into popular focus. Yet in spite of most of us "beginning to be aware that we should be aware" (in matters of cultural [and other categories of] diversity) there is a lack of organized consensus regarding the measurement of our progress in that direction. As we speak there are, emerging from a varied set of sources within the denomination, numerous calls for us to fundamentally value the fruits of diversity with a reverence and respect that will allow us to truly grow together as a unified community in the Body of Christ.

The fragrant flowers of this ideal must be cultivated and nurtured however, and we have heard the voices of racial ethnic Presbyterians crying out (as in the wilderness) for an authentic diversity that has a shelf life beyond the boundaries of a photo opportunity. In the light of all those who are laboring to craft a church adaptive model, and in the face of a circumstance where the fantasy of "One Lord, One Faith, and One Baptism" is accosted by the reality of "Divided Mind, Divided Body, and Divided Spirit," we would represent the awareness of an overwhelming desire for cultural proficiency to become one of the "Marks of the Presbyterian Church"; setting a visible example for a world that is sorely in need of one.

Conclusion

In our journey through the evident possibilities for a structure that would take all of these elements into account and provide a framework for the enhancement, nurture, and support of racial ethnic ministry in a post-synod Presbyterian context, there were a number of models that emerged. They ranged from the formation of new commissions and the creation of local advocates exclusively assigned to racial ethnic ministry concerns, to the adjustment of existing General Assembly constitutional provisions. At the end of the day the boundaries of our charge as a commission limited the degree to which we could prescriptively address these matters.

Additionally, all of the primary stakeholders were not present at the table of our discussion.

In our unified effort, the members of ACREC and the members of this task force agree that the discussion we have been marinating needs to continue into a level of detail calls for significant, time, prayer, and study. Certainly there is much we can learn from those racial ethnic worshipping communities who are thriving and growing. Certainly there is wisdom to be gleaned from the Korean councils currently and the racial ethnic judicatories that appear in the history of our denomination. Certainly there are many structural options that have the capacity to transform our denominational ethos as relates to racial ethnic ministry. We find this to be a process that calls for all racial ethnic ministry stakeholders to engage in a constructive dialogue that can serve to heal past harms and forge a bold path forward into a vibrant and relevant vision for the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As Jesus ministered to the Samaritan woman at the well, and the "Good" Samaritan man ministered to his Jewish "neighbor," we are called—in Christ—into one another's care. As a church we must not only embrace, but also live into the vision of an ethos that values the content of each character, regardless of the skin it's in. Christ calls us to this as individuals and as a church for the very same reason—to provide a demonstrative witness to the world of the Kingdom of Heaven. The PC(USA) posture on racial ethnic ministry must be reflective of this context as it moves to address the question of how the disproportionate injury to the established racial ethnic Presbyterian community (caused by the removal of ecclesiastical status from synods) will be balanced in any new structure moving forward; but even if the synod structure is retained there is a cry for the PC(USA) to reassess, re-conjugate, reset, and refocus its approach to racial ethnic ministry.

With this aim in mind, we conclude that it would be most productive for all of the primary stakeholders in the PC(USA) frame of racial ethnic ministry to be convened and focused on an agenda of reflection, assessment, and imaginatively bold visioning—for the purpose of forging an effective and historically responsible model for moving forward in the effort to revitalize racial ethnic ministry on the national and congregational level.

Final Report from the Special Committee on the Administrative Review of the Synod of Boriquén (Puerto Rico), the Reverend Mauricio Chacón, Moderator.

Introduction

This report serves as our final report to the General Assembly Commission on Mid Councils, formerly the General Assembly Commission on Middle Governing Bodies (the commission).

As you are aware, the 219th General Assembly (2010) approved Item 04-06 creating the commission and, among other foci, charging it with the supervision of "the Special Administrative Review Committee on Puerto Rico and act on any recommendations they may make within the powers given to the commission" (Minutes, 2010, Part I, p. 275 of the electronic version, p. 212 of the print version).

In directing that the SCARB continue, the rationale of Item 04-06 noted that "it is important for them [SCARB] to continue to function as a committee in dialogue with the church in Puerto Rico ... [foreseeing] that the General Assembly may be asked to implement recommendations that the committee may make in the months ahead" (Ibid., p. 276).

Observations

In response to this charge from the General Assembly, the entire membership of the SCARB met in 2011 from February 22nd thru 25th with the councils and assemblies of the mid councils of the Synod of Boriquén (the "synod") and the synod's Committee on the Future in an effort to continue the dialogue with and encourage dialogue among and between the leaders of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (the "PC(USA)") in Puerto Rico.

As a result of that visit and subsequent informal communications with leaders of the Synod of Boriquén and its constituent mid councils, we make the following observations:

1. Though there continue to be power struggles among and between the leaders of the individual presbyteries and the synod, we observed during our visit that considerable effort has been made by all the leaders to mitigate those struggles and find ways and areas in which the mid councils can work together, or, at least, not interfere with one another.

Thus, we the members of SCARB believe we have done all we can in this respect and that any further efforts on our part would not serve to further encourage or enhance that dialogue and spirit of cooperation and community.

2. The need to search for and identify a permanent synod executive remains unresolved. Though all parties engaged in the leadership of the synod acknowledged the need to engage in such a search, the synod has not yet moved forward in this important process. Now it has been brought to our attention that the interim synod executive is on medical leave and we are unaware of when he will return and resume his responsibilities to the synod.

However, given the release of the commission's proposed recommendations to the General Assembly redefining the role of synods, including the elimination of their status as councils of the church, the matter of searching for and installing a permanent synod executive seems to be moot. As such, it would be our suggestion that the synod be encouraged to seek a new interim executive, with the principal role of assisting the synod to move forward on addressing the future of the synod in light of the commission's recommendations, if it is determined that the current interim will not soon return to his duties.

3. As previously mentioned and assuming that the commission will follow through in its recommendations to the General Assembly to remove the status of synods as councils of the church, and that the General Assembly and then the presbyteries of the PC(USA) approve moving in this direction, we would encourage the synod, in consultation with its presbyteries, to begin the process of considering the future of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in Puerto Rico without a synod.

In that regard, we believe there are three options open to the PC(USA) in Puerto Rico:

- a. continue to be divided into three distinct presbyteries;
- b. realignment of the current presbytery boundaries, resulting in perhaps two or three distinct, but differently aligned presbyteries; or,
- c. creation of one, new presbytery.

While we recognize that any realignment, such as those suggested by options b and c, above, may lead to further power struggles within the synod, we believe that this is also an opportunity for our sisters and brothers in Puerto Rico to come together in common cause, setting aside their differences and working together to best serve the congregations and people of Puerto Rico.

We are also aware that at the biennial meeting of the Synod of Boriquén in November, 2011, its Committee on the Future offered three possible directions that could be taken by the synod; they included:

- a the synod with its three constituent presbyteries and a revised structure;
- b. one presbytery to attach to a synod of PC(USA); or
- c. The Presbyterian Church in/of Puerto Rico with
 - (1) one presbytery with regional mission groups and program; or
 - (2) three presbyteries with one administrative unit/office; or
 - (3) four presbyteries with a synod or General Assembly; or
 - (4) a church organized in councils.

However, we have yet to receive any report from the synod regarding what action(s) they took in response to those recommendations. Should we receive word of what action they took, we will certainly take those into consideration and communicate that to the commission with any revisions to this final report that may be necessary.

In any event, we, the members of SCARB, stand ready, individually or as a group, in whatever way the leadership of the Synod of Boriquén might deem appropriate, to assist the synod to work through any of the processes that might be a change from its current structure.

4. There continue to be voices of discord within the church that would encourage separation from the PC(USA), but we believe those voices to be a very small minority. However, the principal manifestation of these voices of discord and separation appear to be lodged in the Puerto Rican Presbyterian Caucus (PRPC). Here, as with the issue of the search for a permanent synod executive, though most leaders within the synod acknowledge that the caucus does not speak for the majority of the churches or their members on the issues of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in Puerto Rico and, further, do not represent the synod, no definitive actions have been taken by the synod to assert that position and belief.

As a result, even the Office of Hispanic/Latino Congregational Support of the PC(USA) (OHLCS) continues to fund, at least in part, the participation of the members of the PRPC at the triennial meetings of the Caucus Nacional Presbiteriano Hispano Latino (Hispanic/Latino Caucus of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)). We appreciate that this position is based upon the OHLCS's belief that, having not received official communications to the contrary, the PRPC-designated participants to the Caucus Nacional are the officially sanctioned representatives of the synod.

Here, again, as in our observations and suggestions noted in Item 3., above, we believe that the discussions and decisions about how to proceed into the future as the manifestation and presence of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in Puerto Rico without a synod will necessarily provide the opportunity to address this particular issue head on.

Irregularities or delinquencies

Finally, we feel it is necessary that we reiterate to the commission and to the leadership of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in Puerto Rico, that SCARB was not constituted for the purpose of correcting known irregularities or delinquencies; but, rather, to investigate and make suggestions regarding, but not limited to:

- The effectiveness of the stated clerk of the synod and effectiveness of the synod council;
- The effectiveness of the leadership of the three presbyteries;
- The relationship among the presbyteries within the synod;
- The synod's financial practices and those financial practices of presbyteries;
- Whether there is significant desire in Puerto Rico for a national Puerto Rican Presbyterian denomination.

Thus, we were to identify irregularities and delinquencies that may have occurred in the administration and governance of the mid councils of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in Puerto Rico and which irregularities and delinquencies may have or are contributing to the issues identified in the original charge to SCARB by the Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Moderator of the 218th General Assembly (2008).

In fact, we did identify such irregularities during the original term of SCARB. Those included the intended actions of the synod, at the insistence of certain presbyteries, to dismiss the synod stated clerk without due process and the legal issues surrounding the building of a parking garage on synod property without the express permission of the synod assembly. These irregularities were identified, verified, and brought to the attention of the synod leadership and, as reported in the SCARB report to the 219th General Assembly (2010); those irregularities were appropriately and

adequately addressed.

Consultation and Review of Final Report with Leadership of the Synod of Boriquén

We would note that we promised our sisters and brothers in Puerto Rico that we would give them an opportunity to review and comment on this final report before it is submitted to the commission. In that regard, the Moderator of SCARB, the Reverend Mauricio Chacón, and the commission's designee, the Reverend José Olagues, attended the biennial meeting of the Synod of Boriquén, held in el Campamento El Guacio en San Sebastián, Puerto Rico, from November 10–12, 2011, and this report reflects that consultation and conversation.

Summary Response of the Synod of Boriquen to the Final Report of the Special Committee on Administrative Review (SCARB).

The Synod of Boriquén welcomed representatives from the special committee at its stated meeting on November 11–12, 2011, and engaged in dialogue with them regarding their report.

They also viewed a PowerPoint report from the synod's "Committee of the Future," which included three options for the synod's consideration:

1. The synod with its three constituent presbyteries and a revised structure;
2. One presbytery to attach to a synod of PC(USA); or
3. The Presbyterian Church in/of Puerto Rico with
 - a. one presbytery with regional mission groups and program; or
 - b. three presbyteries with one administrative unit/office; or
 - c. four presbyteries with a synod or General Assembly; or
 - d. a church organized in councils. (from SCARB's final report to commission)

The synod assembly later combined options 1 & 2 above as Model A, for the Synod of Boriquén to continue belonging to the PC(USA) as it is currently and option 3, with its 4 variants as Model B, for the creation of a Presbyterian Church in Puerto Rico with fraternal relationships with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

The vote results were 33 for Model A (to remain in PC(USA) and 30 (to form a Presbyterian Church in Puerto Rico). The synod instructed the moderator of the Synod of Boriquén to appoint a special committee to study, analyze, and negotiate between option 1 & option 2 above (originally proposed by Committee of the Future and combined into Model A—to remain in PC(USA) and to report at a special synod assembly sometime in the future.

The Committee of the Future was dismissed with thanks.

Note: The portion of the minutes of the Synod of Boriquén recording the above reported actions can be found in Appendix #5.

Appendix #1

Our Guiding Principles

- We live in a post-Christendom context that calls for continual reconsideration of our mission, our structures, and our practices in order to be faithful to Christ and fruitful participants in God's mission to the world.⁸⁷ This reality is now undeniable. We live in a new day, a new epoch. It is as significant as it was for the Reformed tradition to be transported from Europe to America, and it requires no less a reconsideration and reformulation of our way of being the church. And if we do not do so, they will eventually die.

- The missional congregation in a healthy, faithful covenant community is the center of the mission and faithful life of discipleship of Jesus Christ. Congregations are the "basic but insufficient" form

of God's mission in the world (Book of Order, G-1.0101) The congregation is the basic form of mission, but for congregations to be faithful to their mission also requires them to be in covenant relationships with other congregations for shared authority, accountability, edification, and missional support.

- Councils exist to serve the mission of the congregations in their local context. In the words, of Louis Weeks, president emeritus of Union Theological Seminary, "The highest council in the church is really the Session. The rest of the governing bodies serve the Session." Presbyteries are "covenant communities of missional congregations"⁸⁸ and the center of our corporate life, governance, and mission together connecting congregations to each other and the larger witness of the church. It is a "collegial bishop" charged with preparing and ordering the ministry of teaching elders, it is a covenant community of missional congregations, it is the "balcony" that offers a broader perspective to congregational leaders so that they might serve wisely and well in their specific contexts.

- This report and our recommendations are committed to refocusing the mid council structure on one goal: serving fruitful and faithful missional congregations. To that end, our structures, especially our mid council structures, must engage and serve the mission of God in the world through missional congregations and partnerships, not our institutional or denominational concerns.

- There is no "one size fits all model." Ecclesial structure follows missional function and is always marked by a commitment to being covenantal and contextual. The best ecclesiastical structures are discerned by those who live in it together. They will be contained within the frame of our shared constitutional life, but those structural changes should ordinarily come from the local context, not the "national office." The new Form of Government and the passage of Amendment 10A indicate a shift of authority to the local contexts for discerning the shape of a mission and we want to affirm and build upon that shift.

- Our structures must serve and support healthy, shared, spiritual and collaborative leadership between ruling and teaching elders.

- This report continues, builds upon, and lives into the decisions made by the church to accept a new Form of Government and place the discernment of fitness for ordination on local churches and presbyteries. Our proposal is a next step in a trajectory that we believe will result in further collaborative creativity by the whole church in every context.

- We envision a "big canvas with a clear frame." While remaining securely within the "Foundations" of our theological and governance tradition, we call the church to create the conditions to energize collaborative creativity, missional innovation, and relational accountability with permission for many different models of middle councils to emerge that will foster the vitality and fruitfulness of missional congregations.

Appendix #2

Glossary of Key Terms

ADAPTIVE CHANGE: In contrast to "technical solutions" that are built on best practices and known insights or techniques, adaptive change demands group learning and institutional transformation to address new realities, circumstances, and challenges. Adaptive challenges require experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments across the organization. Technical problems may involve intentional effort and accountability or better communication. Adaptive challenges require the organization to change values, behaviors, and attitudes. Adaptive challenges require leaders to learn something new in order to address the situation. In the adaptive context, the leader's role is not to "fix the problem" but to help the system understand the underlying issues and competing values at work in order to lead the system in a shift in habits, beliefs, values or behaviors that will open up new possibilities for facing the challenge.

ADJACENT POSSIBLE: Drawn from the work of Steven Johnson (Where Good Ideas Come From), this concept suggests that innovation comes by small steps through a process of trial and error and the insights of joining previously disparate ideas into a new understanding. Each small step opens up possibilities for new discoveries and innovations.

BALCONY: A concept of adaptive change, the "balcony" is a place for perspective and reflecting, for noticing patterns and seeing possibilities. To "get on the balcony" does not mean to run away from "the fray," but rather, to pause and detach, in order to develop a broader, longer-range perspective on the issues. "Without the capacity to move back and forth between the field of action and the balcony, to reflect day to day, moment to moment, on the many ways in which an organization's habits can sabotage adaptive work, a leader easily and unwittingly becomes a prisoner of the system"

Heifetz and Laurie.

BOUNDED SET: An organizational model in which group membership is determined and maintained by establishing and enforcing boundaries. In churches, these boundaries can be doctrinal, practical, or cultural.

CENTERED SET: An organizational model in which group affiliation is more loosely determined and maintained, not by means of boundaries, but by means of shared commitments to a central idea or practice.

CLASSIS: In the Reformed Church in America, classis is the equivalent of our presbytery. In RCA polity, a classis can be a loose collection of churches who share a common mission, not just common geography.

CLERICALISM: A tendency to rely on professional clergy for the work of the church, at both congregational and mid council levels. Clericalism results in the loss of parity between ruling and teaching elders. John Calvin developed Presbyterian polity, in part, as a way to avoid clericalism in the church.

CONNECTIONALISM: A core principle of Presbyterian theology, ecclesiology, and polity, connectionalism is the insistence that congregations are more effective at mission and ministry when working together in covenantal relationships of support and mutual accountability.

COVENANT COMMUNITIES OF MISSIONAL CONGREGATIONS: This concept, drawn from the missional ecclesiology of Darrell Guder, serves as our working definition of what a presbytery should be. This way of thinking about presbyteries de-emphasizes traditional focus on the governing, regulatory, and judicial functions of presbyteries, and instead highlights the relational and missional character of a council.

CROWD SOURCING: A decentralized form of creativity in which an open call is made to collaborate on a shared project.

CULTURE: Kikanza Nuri Robbins writes, "Culture is the shared beliefs, customs, values and behaviors that unite a group of people and distinguish them from others. People belong to several cultures that are usually associated with their race or ethnicity, language, occupation or organization."

CULTURAL PROFICIENCY: A process of discernment and problem solving by learning to look at issues from the cultural perspectives of those involved.

DISESTABLISHMENT: Beginning with the withdrawal of state recognition and/or support from churches in Western societies, disestablishment in the contemporary United States also refers to the post-Christendom reality that church is no longer at the center of culture.

ECCLESIAL INSTITUTIONS: Church structures responsible for order, discipline, ordination of ministers, continuing education, mutual encouragement, and missionary work.

ECCLESIOLOGY: Theological reflection on the nature, purpose, and organizational structure of the church.

EMERGING CHURCH MOVEMENT: In various manifestations coming from both evangelical and mainline churches, the emerging church movement is an innovative and ever-developing attempt to reconsider Christian traditions in light of the changing contexts of our flat, networked, postmodern, post-Christendom world.

EMERGING GENERATIONS: Youth and young adults in Generation X (born between the mid 60s and early 80s), Millennials (also known as Generation Y; born between the early 80s and mid 90s), and the subsequent generation.

FLAT: Popularized in the title of Thomas Friedman's seminal work on globalization, *The World Is Flat*, flattening refers to the "shrinking" and connecting of our world through travel and communication technologies, as well as a growing preference for non-hierarchical and non-bureaucratic organizational models.

GLOBALIZATION: The pervasive interconnectedness of global economies and culture.

THE GREAT EMERGENCE: In her influential book, *The Great Emergence*, Phyllis Tickle suggests that every 500 years the church engages in a cultural and ecclesiastical "rummage sale" that sifts through the dead and dying elements of the past en route to a new expression of life and faith. Tickle argues

that we are in the midst of one of these periods, which she calls the Great Emergence, occurring about 500 years after the Protestant Reformation.

THE INVENTIVE AGE: In a series of recent books, Doug Pagitt labels our contemporary time the Inventive Age. Most pertinent to our discussion is the transition from the recent Information Age (which is more familiar to many of us) to the Inventive Age, which Pagitt describes as a shift from being consumers of information to producers and participants in information and media. The Inventive Age is typified by Web 2.0, wiki culture, and social networking.

KAIROTIC TIME: Kairos is a Greek word used in the New Testament to indicate an appointed time for God's action. In Christian theology, it has come to mean a crucial juncture, a moment of truth, a turning point in history.

LEARNING COMMUNITY: The ability to learn new ways of understanding, responding, and growing is a necessary aspect of adaptive change. Learning communities nurture flexibility and adaptability as key characteristics needed to meet the challenges of rapidly changing environments. In a learning community, adaptive change is an ongoing reality of life.

MAINLINE PROTESTANT: This term refers to the streams of Christianity that represented the majority of Americans up through the middle of the 20th century. Mainline denominations include the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church (U.S.A.), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the United Church of Christ, the Disciples of Christ, and the Reformed Church in America.

MID COUNCILS: In the terminology of our new Form of Government, which went into effect in 2011, presbyteries and synods are now known as "mid councils" instead of "middle governing bodies."

MID COUNCIL COMMISSION: In response to the 219th General Assembly (2010), Moderator Cynthia Bolbach and outgoing Moderator Bruce Reyes-Chow created the Middle Governing Bodies Commission. After the 2011 ratification of the new Form of Government, this commission was renamed the Mid Councils Commission to reflect the terminology of the new Form of Government.

MISSIONAL: Whether describing theology, ecclesiology, mid councils, or congregations, "missional" indicates that the central purpose and organizing principle of a congregation is personal and communal participation in the *Missio Dei*—the mission of God in Jesus Christ to redeem and heal the world. In missional ecclesiology, there is a shift away from thinking of churches having missions to a realization that the church is mission.

MULTI-PRESBYTERY MISSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS: According to our proposals, after the ecclesiastical functions of synods are replaced by regional administrative commissions, presbyteries will focus on the missional partnerships that have always characterized healthy synods. The repurposing of synods as multi-presbytery missional partnerships responds to our changing contexts by flattening denominational hierarchy and bureaucracy.

NEIGHBORHOOD PRESBYTERY: A presbytery model defined by shared geography.

NETWORK PRESBYTERY: A presbytery model that spans geographical boundaries and is defined more by shared missional purposes or affinity to particular theologies or ideologies. Networks are often built around more fluid structural organization and are more focused on common concerns, objectives, and relationships.

NETWORK THEORY: Originating in computer science, the study of how networks function and affect systems. Contemporary social networks, facilitated by developing social media, are of particular concern for our reflection on the changing contexts of ministry in the 21st century.

PARITY: John Calvin's basic concept of Presbyterian polity creates and sustains a relationship of equal and shared leadership, authority, and accountability between ruling and teaching elders.

PARTNERSHIPS: Two or more groups, organizations, or parties forging a relationship for mutual benefit and mission. Partnerships might be formal or informal, simple or complex, involve many people or just a few.

POLITY: The structural system of governance for a church. The three primary forms of polity are Congregational, Episcopal, and Presbyterian.

POST 10-A: A description of life in the PC(USA) after the 2010–11 approval and ratification of Amendment 10-A, which replaced the "fidelity and chastity" clause in the Book of Order.

POST-CHRISTENDOM: In today's Western world, Christianity is no longer the definitive center and shaper of culture, as it had been since Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. "Christendom"—the triumphal reign of Christianity in Western culture—is over. No longer part of the "cultural establishment," the church must envision new ways of bearing witness to God's kingdom in a rapidly changing world. (See "[disestablishment](#).")

POST-DENOMINATIONAL: The current reality in which appreciation of distinct denominational identities has become less critical to the average American Protestant. "Brand loyalty" is no longer a compelling factor in the growth or success of a congregation.

POSTMODERNISM: Philosophical challenges to the multifaceted ways in which Western culture was transformed by the Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment.

PROVISIONAL PRESBYTERY: A temporary presbytery that can be created and explored during the season of reflective experimentation recommended in this report.

REGULATORY: An understanding of mid councils that prioritizes the sense of appropriate control and accountability exercised by a mid council over its constituent councils and/or individuals. While this term often elicits a negative connotation, it describes the legitimate need for organizations to live and work together in mutual accountability under a set of shared values and commitments.

SAFE HOLDING ENVIRONMENT: In the process of adaptive change, a "safe holding environment" is a place or situation in which experimentation and risk taking can take place. In the context of our report and recommendations, we suggest that regional administrative commissions (taking the ecclesiastical place of synods) will function as the safe holding environment for experimentation, risk taking, and innovation at the presbytery level. Likewise, the kinds of presbyteries we envision will function as safe holding environments for experimentation, risk taking, and innovation in local congregations.

SEASON OF REFLECTIVE EXPERIMENTATION: A proposed time in which the church will allow experimentation and flexibility in the formation of connectional relationships at the presbytery level. Among the possibilities to be explored during this season of experimentation are the creation of provisional nongeographic presbyteries and provisional presbytery realignments for specific missional purposes. This season of experimentation will be evaluated by subsequent General Assemblies and will expire on December 31, 2021.

STRATIGRAPHY: The study of strata or layers, used here not in the geological sense, but to note the changing nature of the church through time.

THEOLOGICAL FRIENDSHIP: A concept suggested by Barry Ensign George which suggests that trust is built across ideological lines through the transformative work of shared theological reflection. In communities of theological friendship, diversity and compatibility are held together in creative tension.

WEB 2.0: Internet applications based on participation and collaboration. Blogging and social media like Facebook and Twitter are prime examples of Web 2.0.

WIKI CULTURE: A wiki is a website whose content can be created and modified by users. Wiki culture is the sense of participation, collaboration, and shared ownership that is generated by this technology. Wikipedia is a prime example of wiki culture.

WORSHIPPING COMMUNITIES: A distinct community that gathers around the Word and Sacraments, is under the authority of a council, practices patterns of mutual accountability, is engaged in mission, and is self-sustaining or moving toward it.

Appendix #3

Cultural Proficiency: What Is It?

Cultural proficiency is a way of being that allows individuals and organizations to interact effectively with people who differ from them. It is a developmental approach for addressing the issues that emerge in diverse environments. In 1989, Terry Cross, executive director of the National Indian Child Welfare Association, in Portland, Oregon, published a monograph that changed many lives. *Toward a Culturally Competent System of Care* provides several tools for addressing the responses to diversity that we have encountered in our work. Although Dr. Cross addressed the issues of difference in mental health care, his seminal work has been the basis of a major shift in responding to difference in organizations across the country.

We like this approach for several reasons: it is proactive; it provides tools that can be used in any

setting, rather than techniques that are applicable in only one environment; the focus is behavioral not emotional; and it can be applied to both organizational practices and individual behavior. Most diversity programs are used to explain the nature of diversity or the process of learning about or acquiring new cultures. This is an approach for responding to the environment shaped by its diversity. It is not an off-the-shelf program that an organization implements through training. It is not a series of mechanistic steps that everyone must follow. It is a model for shifting the culture of the organization—it is a model for individual transformation and organizational change. There are four tools for developing one's cultural proficiency.

THE CONTINUUM: Language for describing behaviors and situations. Use the continuum to describe both healthy and nonproductive policies, practices, and individual behaviors.

THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS: Five behavioral standards. Use the essential elements as standards for planning and evaluating growth toward cultural proficiency.

THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES: Underlying values of the approach. Use the guiding principles to integrate with the core values of your organization.

THE BARRIERS: Caveats that assist in responding effectively to resistance to change. Use the barriers to determine appropriate interventions.

The Continuum Explained

There are six points along the cultural proficiency continuum that indicate unique ways of seeing and responding to difference:

Cultural destructiveness: See the difference, stomp it out. The elimination of other people's cultures.

Cultural incapacity: See the difference, make it wrong. Belief in the superiority of one's culture and behavior that disempowers another's culture.

Cultural blindness: See the difference, act like you don't. Acting as if the cultural differences you see do not matter or not recognizing that there are differences among and between cultures.

Cultural pre-competence: See the difference, respond inadequately. Awareness of the limitations of one's skills or an organization's practices when interacting with other cultural groups.

Cultural competence: See the difference, understand the difference that difference makes. Interacting with other cultural groups using the five essential elements of cultural proficiency as the standard for individual behavior and organizational practices.

Cultural proficiency: See the differences and respond effectively in a variety of environments. Esteeming culture; knowing how to learn about individual and organizational culture; interacting effectively in a variety of cultural environments.

The Essential Elements

The essential elements of cultural proficiency provide the standards for individual behavior and organizational practices:

- Name the differences: Assess Culture
- Claim the differences: Value Diversity
- Reframe the differences: Manage the Dynamics of Difference
- Train about differences: Adapt to Diversity
- Change for differences: Institutionalize Cultural Knowledge

The Guiding Principles

These are the core values, the foundation upon which the approach is built. Culture is a predominant force; you cannot NOT be influenced by culture. People are served in varying degrees by the dominant culture—People have group identities that they want to have acknowledged. Cultures are not homogeneous; there is diversity within groups. The unique needs of every culture must be respected.

The Barriers

The Presumption of Entitlement: Believing that all of the personal achievements and societal benefits that you have, were accrued solely on your merit and the quality of your character.

Systems of Oppression: Throughout most organizations are systems of institutionalized racism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, and ableism. Moreover these systems are often supported and sustained without the permission of and at times without the knowledge of the people whom they benefit. These systems perpetuate domination and victimization of individuals and groups.

Unawareness of the need to adapt: Not recognizing the need to make personal and organizational changes in response to the diversity of the people with whom you and your organization interact. Believing instead, that only the others need to change and adapt to you. In our experience, the most effective and productive approach to addressing cultural diversity within an organization is cultural proficiency.

In an organization it is the policies-and practices, in an individual, it is the values and behaviors that enable that organization or person to interact effectively in a culturally diverse environment. In a culturally proficient company or organization, the culture promotes inclusiveness and institutionalizes processes for learning about differences and for responding appropriately to differences. Rather than lamenting, "Why can't they be like us?" managers and staff welcome and create opportunities to better understand who they are as individuals, while learning how to interact positively with people who differ from themselves.

Cultural proficiency is an inside-out approach, which focuses first on those who are insiders to the company or organization, encouraging them to reflect on their own individual understandings and values. It thereby relieves those identified as outsiders, the members of the excluded groups, from the responsibility of doing all the adapting. Cultural proficiency as approach to diversity surprises many people, who expect a diversity program to teach them about others. This inside-out approach acknowledges and validates the current values and feelings of people, encouraging change and challenging a sense of entitlement without threatening one's feelings of worth.

Cultural proficiency prizes individual culture while focusing on the organization's culture, which has a life force beyond the individuals within the company or organization. This focus removes the needs to place blame and to induce feelings of guilt. The approach involves all members of the community in determining how to align policies, practices, and procedures in order to achieve cultural proficiency. Because all of the stakeholders are deeply involved in the developmental process, there is broader based ownership, making it easier for them to commit to change. This responds to the issues that emerge when there is diversity among managers, staff and clients at a systemic level.

Building cultural proficiency requires informed and dedicated staff, committed and involved managers, and time. Employees cannot be sent to training for two days and be expected to return with solutions to all of the diversity issues in their company or organization. This approach does not involve the use of simple checklists for identifying culturally significant characteristics of individuals, which may be politically appropriate, but socially meaningless. The transformation to cultural proficiency requires time to think, reflect, decide, and change.

The culturally proficient organization closes the door on tokenism and stops the revolving door through which highly competent, motivated people enter briefly and exit quickly because they have not been adequately integrated into the organization's culture. Culturally proficient managers can confidently deliver programs and services, knowing that their staff and clients genuinely want it and can readily receive it without having their cultural connections denied, offended, or threatened. Culturally proficient organizations can also be sure that their community perceives them as a positive, contributing force that substantively enhances the community and the organization's position in it.

Definitions

Read the definitions for these commonly used and misused terms. Reflect on the definition comparing it to how you use the term. Note whether the definition affirms, helps to clarify, or challenges your thinking.

Culture. Everything you believe and everything you do that identifies you as a member of a group and distinguishes you from other groups. You may belong to more than one cultural group. Cultures reflect the belief systems and behaviors that are informed by ethnicity as well as other sociological factors like gender, age, sexual orientation, and physical ability. Both individuals and organizations are defined by their cultures.

Diversity. A general term for indicating that many people with many differences are present in an organization or group. Diversity refers to ethnicity, language, gender, age, ability, and sexual orientation and all other aspects of culture.

Tolerance. Putting up with differences with which one disagrees. Tolerance is first in a progression of steps that may lead to valuing diversity. Teaching tolerance is a good way to get beyond genocide or cultural destructiveness. It is the beginning of a process that moves toward cultural proficiency.

Multiculturalism. The preservation of different cultures or cultural identities within a society or nation, holding each as equally valuable to and influential upon the members of society. The educational term, multicultural refers to teaching about different cultures. Multiculturalism differs from cultural proficiency in that it reflects a state of being, whereas cultural proficiency is a process or a way of being.

Cultural Competence. A term created by Terry Cross that means interacting with one's clients, colleagues, and community using the essential elements of cultural competence: assessing culture, valuing diversity, managing the dynamics of difference, adapting to diversity, and institutionalizing cultural knowledge.

Cultural Proficiency. The policies and practices of an organization, or the values and behaviors of an individual, which enable that organization or person to interact effectively in a culturally diverse environment. Cultural proficiency is a way of being reflected in the way an organization treats its employees, its clients, and its community.

Affirmative Action. A legally mandated approach to increasing the diversity of an organization. Focuses on having a proportional representation of all the people in the community in the organization. The intention is to have qualified people; the implementation often results in a focus on counting numbers rather than assessing qualifications.

Politically Correct. A term used to describe language that reflects sensitivity to the diversity of a group. People can act as if they are culturally proficient by using politically correct language. A culturally proficient person may be perceived as politically correct, but in reality that person is culturally correct.

Read more about the concept and its applications in Cultural Proficiency by Randall B. Lindsey, Kikanza Nuri Robins, and Raymond D. Terrell (Corwin Press, 1999, 2003), and Culturally Proficient Instruction by Kikanza Nuri Robins, Randall B. Lindsey, Delores B. Lindsey, and Raymond D. Terrell (Corwin Press, 2001) ©2003 THE CULTURAL PROFICIENCY GROUP 8306 Wilshire Blvd. #7019 Beverly Hills CA 90211 323.939.1034.

Appendix #4

(For the Full Data Reports from Presbyterian Research Services, see attachments)

SUMMARY OF THE DATA FOR THE SYNOD CONSULTATIONS

Based on the summaries of the sixteen Synods

Question Number One: What needs to be preserved in our current middle governing body system?

Comment	Number of summaries
Our connectionalism, networking, shared resources and ministries	11
PJC, accountability	8
Leadership development by synods or presbyteries	7
Support for racial ethnic ministries	7
Cross presbytery missions	6
Supporting pastors	3
Accountability	3

Balance between pastors and laity	2
Ecumenism and relationships with other institutions	2
Financial, personnel, administrative functions	2
Geographic presbyteries	2
Scholarships	2
NCD	2

Summary: The shaded areas are the most frequent responses to these questions. There is strong and clear support for maintaining a sense of connectionalism and collaboration among levels of the church. The focus of that collaboration is particularly strong in support of racial ethnic groups, leadership development, and common mission and ministry.

Question Number Two: What needs to be changed in our current middle governing body system?

Comment	Number of summaries
Better communication and interpretation with congregations	10
Less administrative structure in the Synod	6
Get back to mission and ministry; reduce "governance"	6
Less legalism and more flexibility	5
Either redefine or eliminate synods	5
Need smaller presbyteries	4
Need more racial diversity	4
Need more support from synod; use resources for mission	3
Less bureaucracy in the presbytery	3
The problem is General Assembly and the presbyteries	3
Emphasis needs to be on local congregations, not on MGBs	2
Get rid of things that do not meet today's needs	2
Synods should be focused on the needs of the presbyteries	2
Use technology to lower costs	2
Need to be bottom up instead of top down	2

Summary: While connectionalism is highly valued, there is also a sense that the communication between the governing bodies is a major problem. Clearly, the governance structure is seen as a hindrance. Respondents want more focus on mission; less on rules.

Question Number Three: What is working well in your experience with middle governing bodies?

Comment	Number of summaries
"Nothing" or blank	5
Racial ethnic ministries	4

Presbyteries that focus on church needs	3
Clergy colleague groups	3
Presbytery Executive Forums	3
COM/CPM	3
PJC	2
Presbytery partners groups (instead of synod)	2
PW	2
Camps/conferences	2
Leadership development	2
Collaboration, not competition	2
Support from synod for presbyteries	2
Communications	2

Summary: It is significant that respondents struggled for consensus on what is working well. As with question one, there is support for racial ethnic ministries and programs/processes that support pastors, both in the call process and in their ministry.

Question Number Four: What is NOT working in your experience with middle governing bodies?

Comment	Number of summaries
Synod, as currently functioning	9
Communication between and within MGBs	8
The relationship between the synod and presbyteries	6
Too much staff, too much duplication of effort	5
Leadership	4
Too much governance/politics; not enough mission/relationships	4
Connections to congregations	3
Lack of racial ethnic representation	2
We're better at closing churches than planting them	2
Blanks or "nothing"	2
The financial burden of PJCs	2

Summary: Nine of sixteen synod consultations identified that synods, as currently functioning, are not working, and it would seem that, as with question two, the big problem is relationships and communication. The comment, "We're better at closing churches than at planting them," seemed to sum up the frustration with rule-based processes vs. the messy work of evangelism and relationships. There is frustration with presbyteries that care more about their projects than they do their congregations.

Appendix 5

Selected Sections translated from:

BORIQUÉN PRESBYTERIAN SYNOD IN PUERTO RICO
ASSEMBLY #46
STATED, BI-ANNUAL MEETING
NOVEMBER 10, 11 AND 12, 2011
EL GUACIO CHRISTIAN SERVICES CAMP
SAN SEBASTIÁN, PUERTO RICO

PARTICIPATION AND DIALOGUE WITH THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE FOR ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW FOR SYNOD BORIQUÉN IN PUERTO RICO (SCARB) IN THE PC(USA) AND THE COMMISSION ON MIDDLE GOVERNING BODIES (Cm-MGB) IN THE PC(USA).

Rev. Mauricio Chacón, Member and President of SCARB under the General Assembly PC(USA), and Rev. José Olagues, Member of the General Assembly Commission on Middle Governing Bodies, bring greetings to the Synod Assembly.

Rev. Mauricio Chacón presents a draft of SCARB's report, which will be presented and discussed at the next meeting of the General Assembly Commission on Middle Governing Bodies (see Attachment).

The Moderator opens the dialogue on this item. The Moderator concedes several speaking turns for commissioners to express themselves on the matters referred by the said committee.

Rev. Mauricio Chacón and Rev. José Olagues are thanked for their presence at this Assembly.

* * * * *

AGREEMENTS ON THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE "FUTURE"

Rev. Rubén Ortiz Rodríguez, President of the said committee, presents the recommendations of the Report of the Committee on the "Future" (see Attachment).

The Synod Assembly considers the Report of the Committee on the "Future" and takes the following actions:

ACTION OF THE SYNOD ASSEMBLY ON RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING MISSION: the Synod approves the adoption of the Declaration of Mission and Vision, and the Goals and Objectives in accordance with the Great Ends of the Church as presented. It is also approved that the documents on the Declaration of Mission, Financial Principles and Mission Initiatives be received for study and possible adoption in the future.

ACTION OF THE SYNOD ASSEMBLY ON RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING THE RELATIONSHIP OF BODIES IN PUERTO RICO AND WITHIN THE PC(USA): a line is modified so that it reads—to fulfill our ordination vow and/or membership commitments (reception and confirmation). The recommendations are approved.

ACTION OF THE SYNOD ASSEMBLY ON RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING THE ADMINISTRATION: a line is modified so that it reads – more than half of its real members. The recommendations on the administration are approved.

ACTION OF THE SYNOD ASSEMBLY ON RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING THE MODELS STUDIED:

1. On the Recommendation that a ballot be used including all the models and that there be a vote on only one model

SYNOD AGREEMENT: it is unanimously approved that the debate rules be suspended to hold a question and answer period on the matter of the Ballot and the rules to vote on the models. There will be a committee of the whole for fifteen minutes (it is 3:10 p.m.).

REPORT OF THE SYNOD COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE: There were questions and answers on the matter of the rules to vote on the models and the Ballot.

The work of the Synod continues at 3:35 p.m.

MOTION ON THE BALLOTS: that the Ballot be done in the following manner: Two options: Option A to contain models 1 and 2 related to the PC(USA) and Option B to contain models 3-a through 3-d

related to the PC in Puerto Rico.

It is properly seconded.

Ammendment to the Motion: that it contain Option C (an additional option) saying "None of the above."

It is properly seconded.

Action of the Synod: It is NOT approved.

Ammendment to the Motion: so that the Ballot reads: Model A (Option 1 with models 1 and 2) regarding the PC(USA) (current relationship) and Model B (Option 2 with models 3-a through 3-d) regarding the PC in PR with a sister relationship with the PC(USA).

It is properly seconded.

There is oposition. The Moderator gives speaking turns in favor and against. The vote is taken.

Action of the Synod: The Ammendment is approved.

AGREEMENT OF THE SYNOD: the ammended motion is approved.

RECESS AND CONTINUATION OF THE SYNOD ASSEMBLY

The Moderator declares a ten-minute recess (it is 4:10 p.m.) to prepare the ballot. The work is continued at 4:30 p.m.

Prior to the voting a prayer is offered by Rev. Jorge D. Zijlstra Arduin (PSJ).

Vote on the Alternatives (for the Ballot):

The Moderator appoints the following persons as the Tallying Committee: Elder Sandra Marcial Ramírez (PSO), Rev. Juan Marcial Feliciano (PNO) and Elder Raúl Santiago Rivera (PSJ). The Ballot will be as follows:

Model A: Regarding the Presbyterian Church (USA) as it is presently constituted

Model B: Regarding the Presbyterian Church in Puerto Rico in a fraternal relationship with the Presbyterian Church (USA)

Voting by roll call begins.

Synod action: 33 votes for Model A and 30 votes for Model B. Model A is approved.

2. That provision be made so that the implementation of the selected model allows for the participation of all the bodies affected by the selected model.

Motion calling for the vote on Model 1 and Model 2. It is properly seconded.

There is opposition. The Moderator gives speaking turns in favor and against.

The Question is called for. It is approved.

Substitute motion: Refer to a special committee Options 1 and 2 (models) for study, analysis and netotiation; call a special synod assembly to present the report. It is properly seconded.

Synod action: In favor 30 and against 22. The Substitute Motion is approved.

SYNOD ACTION: The Substitute Motion is approved.

Motion: for the Moderator to appoint the special committee. It is properly seconded.

Ammendment to the Motion: that the members be named by the presbyteries (two by each presbytery) and the Synod (appointed by the Moderator). It is properly seconded.

SYNOD ACTION: The ammendment is NOT approved.

SYNOD ACTION: it is approved that the Moderator appoint the special committee.

SYNOD ACTION REGARDING THE COMMITTEE ON THE "FUTURE": The Committee is congratulated for its excellent work and the committee is dissolved.

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Endnotes

1. Book of Order, G-1.0101. "The congregation is the church engaged in the mission of God in its particular context. The triune God gives to the congregation all the gifts of the gospel necessary to being the Church. The congregation is the basic form of the church, but it is not of itself a sufficient form of the church. Thus congregations are bound together in communion with one another, united in relationships of accountability and responsibility, contributing their strengths to the benefit of the whole, and are called, collectively, the church."
2. When Presbyterians were surveyed about the things that are valued and should be preserved in our structure, the synod-related responses were about programs and connections, not about ecclesiastical processes. It seemed to the commission that there was very little support for "oversight" and polity functions at the synod level and stronger support for those synods that collaborated with their presbyteries to find common mission, ministry, and support.
3. See Ronald L. Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); ix, 104ff.
4. <http://www.cityclassis.org/>.
5. <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/> "A [fresh expression of church](#) is a new form of church

for a fast-changing world that serves those outside the existing church, listens to people and enters their culture, makes discipleship a priority and intentionally forms Christian community.”

6. Steven Johnson, *Where Good Ideas Come from: The Natural History of Innovation* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2010), Kindle locator 494–496: “What kind of environment creates good ideas? The simplest way to answer it is this: innovative environments are better at helping their inhabitants explore the adjacent possible, because they expose a wide and diverse sample of spare parts—mechanical or conceptual—and they encourage novel ways of recombining those parts.”
7. See Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011) 129–30.
8. “Trends continue in church membership growth or decline, reports 2011 Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches,” National Council of Churches USA, February 14, 2011, <http://www.nccusa.org/news/110210yearbook2011.html>; David A. Roozen, “A Decade of Change in American Congregations: 2000–2010” (Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2011), <http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/decade-change>.
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11. Marcum, “Comparative Statistics 2009,” 3.
12. Marcum, “Comparative Statistics 2008,” 3.
13. *Ibid.*, 4.
14. Marcum, “Comparative Statistics 2010,” 4.
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16. Marcum, “Comparative Statistics 2009,” 4.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. Marcum, “Comparative Statistics 2010,” 3.
20. Marcum, “Comparative Statistics 2008,” 8.
21. Joseph D. Small, “The Travail of the Presbytery,” 4. This work was given to the commission in essay form, and references refer to that essay. It is also available in *A Collegial Bishop? Classis and Presbytery at Issue*, ed. Alan J. Janssen and Leon van den Broeke (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2010).
22. In addition to Small’s essay, see Craig Dykstra and James Hudnut-Beumler, “The National Organizational Structures of Protestant Denominations: An Invitation to a Conversation,” in *The Organizational Revolution: Presbyterians and American Denominationalism*, ed. Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992) for a discussion of the development of bureaucratic professionalism as a result of institutional isomorphism.
23. Small, “The Travail of the Presbytery,” 6–7.
24. Daniel Burke, “Mainline moves to trim bureaucracy,” *The Christian Century*, December 5, 2011, <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2011-12/mainline-protestants-look-reforms-stir-anger>.
25. Small, “The Travail of the Presbytery,” 2–3.
26. *Ibid.*, 5–6.
27. See Barry Johnson, *Polarity Management: Identifying and Managing Unsolvable Problems* (Amherst: HRD Press, 1992).

28. For a recent discussion of this question by a Presbyterian theologian, see John R. Franke, *Manifold Witness: The Plurality of Truth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009).
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35. Marcum, "Comparative Statistics 2010," 2.
36. Guder, "A Missiological Context" 7.
37. From a forthcoming essay by Barry Ensign George, "Denominations," with thanks from the commission for the author's generosity in sharing it with us.
38. Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching Among Exiles* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).
39. Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 39–57.
40. *Ibid.*, 39.
41. Jack Haberer, "Pastors call for denomination to be 'radically transformed,'" *The Presbyterian Outlook*, February 2, 2011, <http://www.pres-outlook.com/news-and-analysis/1-news-a-analysis/10946-pastors-call-for-denomination-to-be-radically-transformed.html>.
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47. See Steven Johnson, *Where Good Ideas Come from*; Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown, *A New Culture of Learning: Cultivating the Imagination for a World of Constant Change* (Lexington: Self Published, 2011).
48. Doug Pagitt, *Church in the Inventive Age* (Minneapolis: Sparkhouse, 2010).
49. *Ibid.*, 30–31.
50. Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008). Tickle identifies the "Rummage Sales of History" as: 1st century: Jesus and the Early Church, 6th century: Gregory the Great, 11th century: The Great Schism, 16th century: The Great Reformation, 21st century: The Great Emergence.
51. An analogous development in literary studies called deconstruction suggested that truth is also relative and dependent on the act of interpretation. At the same time, historical critical approaches to the Bible were calling into question what we can and cannot know about the foundational texts of

our faith. Philosophically and theologically, this led to a crisis of authority.

52. Ibid., 77–117.
53. Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 136–39.
54. Ibid., 150–53. For an innovative treatment of how network theory, crowd sourcing, and wiki culture might impact the church, see Landon Whitsitt, *Open Source Church: Making Room for the Wisdom of All* (Herndon: Alban Institute, 2011). See Also Tony Jones, *The Church Is Flat: The Relational Ecclesiology of the Emerging Church Movement* (JoPa Productions: 2011)
55. Ibid., 158–59. See also Doug Pagitt, *Community in the Inventive Age* (Minneapolis: Sparkhouse, 2011).
56. Ibid., 159–61.
57. Tony Jones, *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 8.
58. Ibid., 20.
59. Ibid., 52.
60. Ibid., 75.
61. Ibid., 78.
62. Ibid., 81.
63. Ibid., 111.
64. Ibid., 115.
65. Ibid., 153.
66. Ibid., 163.
67. Ibid., 180.
68. Ibid., 204.
69. Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional Church in Perspective*, 129-130.
70. With thanks to Darrell Guder, for his generous contribution of an unpublished chapter from “The Presbytery as a Missional Context”. This chapter was the result of a funded research project addressing the ways in which the presbytery could serve the missional transformation of congregations. It was carried out in a cluster of presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) from 1998 to 2008. This essay served as the theological orientation for the various findings generated by the project. It was, however, not published and is distributed with the permission of the author.
71. See Darrell Guder, “The Presbytery as a Missional Context” where this quote and these key missional sources are provided: Newbigin’s thought is documented especially in *The Other Side of 1984: Questions for the Churches*, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983; *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986; and *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987. The Missional Church discussion has been shaped by the publications of the *Gospel and Our Culture Network*: Darrell Guder, ed., et al., *Missional Church: A Theological Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, Grand Rapids; Wm. B. Eerdmans 1998; Darrell Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000; Lois Barrett, ed., et al., *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002; Craig van Gelder, ed., *Confident Witness—Changing World: Rediscovering the Gospel in North America*, Grand Rapids; Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999; Craig van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2007; George Hunsberger, ed., *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America*, Grand Rapids; Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996; George Hunsberger, *Bearing the Witness of the Spirit: Lesslie Newbigin’s Theology of Cultural Plurality* Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998; James Brownson, *Speaking the Truth in Love: New Testament Resources for a Missional Hermeneutic*, Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998; James Brownson, ed., et al., *StormFront: The Good News of God*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003.
72. See Craig Dykstra and James Hudnut-Beumler, “The National Organizational Structures of

Protestant Denominations: An Invitation to a Conversation," in *The Organizational Revolution: Presbyterians and American Denominationalism*, ed. Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992). The Commission also thanks Steven Toshio Yamaguchi for sharing with us an essay, "How Did We Get This Bureaucratic Model? or What Kind of Presbytery Do We Really Want?" <http://www.losranchos.org/wp-content/uploads/Odyssey-WhitePaper-v7.pdf> .

73. See Ronald L. Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); Gil Rendle, *Journey in the Wilderness: New Life for Mainline Churches* (Abingdon Press, 2010), Kevin Ford, *Transforming Church* (David C. Cook, 2008) Jim Osterhaus, Joseph Jurkowski and Todd Hahn, *Thriving Through Ministry Conflict* (Zondervan, 2005) Osterhaus, et. al. offers this definition specifically for pastors, "Adaptive leadership for the pastor involves creating an environment in which the congregation can wrestle with the competing values and implications associated with this problem."

74. Emil Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953).

75. [http://gamc.PC\(USA\).org/ministries/1001/vision/](http://gamc.PC(USA).org/ministries/1001/vision/).

76. For one example, see *The City Classis of the Reformed Church of America*, a non-geographical classis (akin to our presbytery) that is formed of all urban, church-planting churches with a focused mission. <http://www.cityclassis.org/>.

77. Book of Order, F-1.0404 "As it participates in God's mission, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) seeks:...a new openness in its own membership, becoming in fact as well as in faith a community of women and men of all ages, races, ethnicities, and worldly conditions, made one in Christ by the power of the Spirit, as a visible sign of the new humanity."

78. Steven Johnson, *Where Good Ideas Come From: the Natural History of Innovation* (Kindle Edition: Penguin Publishing, 2008) "The history of life and human culture, then, can be told as the story of a gradual but relentless probing of the adjacent possible, each new innovation opening up new paths to explore." Kindle loc. 393–394.

79. For an insightful look at enormous value of trial-and-error approaches to innovation, see Tim Hartford, *Adapt: Why success always starts with failure* (Kindle Edition: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011).

80. Ibid, Kindle locator 494–496, "What kind of environment creates good ideas? The simplest way to answer it is this: innovative environments are better at helping their inhabitants explore the adjacent possible, because they expose a wide and diverse sample of spare parts—mechanical or conceptual—and they encourage novel ways of recombining those parts."

81. For more information on Cultural Proficiency see: "Working for Justice," *Horizons*, Jan./Feb. 2004, pp. 4–7; Lindsey, Randall B., Kikanza Nuri Robins and Raymond D. Terrell. *Cultural Proficiency: A Manual for School Leaders*, 2nd Ed. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, Inc., 2003; Nuri Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey, Terrell. *Culturally Proficient Instruction: A Guide for People Who Teach*, Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, Inc., 2003; Cultural proficiency initiatives have been implemented at GAMC and OGA staffs, as well as the other entities comprising PC(USA)'s General Assembly. (See report from Climate for Change to the 220th General Assembly (2012) Need link See appendix for more resources.

82. Barry Ensign George, "Cultivating Communities of Theological Friendship," 12 (author's emphasis). "Theological friendship is friendship in which the triune God is both the object of and an expected participant in our conversation and relationship. Theological friendship with one another is a way of naming what we are called to in Jesus Christ. Theological friendship: ministers and elders and deacons and teachers together engaged in conversation about and with the living God, is one element of the best wisdom and lifeblood of our Reformed, Presbyterian tradition." Available at [http://www.PC\(USA\).org/resource/theological-friendship-paper/](http://www.PC(USA).org/resource/theological-friendship-paper/).

83. Ensign-George, "Cultivating Communities of Theological Friendship." "Communities of theological friendship flourish through diversity and a wise attention to compatibility. Pastoral ministry is carried out in the midst of multiple spectra of diversity. Friendship happens in the space-between created by differences. Communities of theological friendship flourish when there is plenty of space-between. ...At the same time, a community of theological friendship can only be built among people who are willing to participate in this particular community of theological friendship, with this particular group of people. This is an extension of the practice of friendliness. There are those who, for whatever reasons, are unable or unwilling to befriend or to be befriended. There are pairs of people who, again, for whatever reasons, are unable to serve as friends to one another. Communities of theological friendship will both be open to investigating such situations, asking whether friendship might

be built together; and at the same time communities of theological friendship will have a collective wisdom in discerning when the community must move forward with those who are willing to make this journey together.

Mention of "compatibility" will be a complete non-starter for some, fearing that it is no less than a covert rejection of diversity. This anxiety can become something a bit odd. After all, the PC(USA) itself is a community that insists on a significant level of compatibility from its pastoral leaders in particular. Those leaders are asked to commit to a particular way of living out the Christian faith (a specific form of the presbyterian way) that separates us from the vast majority of Christians. Those not open to such commitment are welcome to seek pastoral leadership elsewhere. Communities of theological friendship recognize the need for diversity that genuinely stretches and the importance of willingness to join in a shared journey with a particular group of people."

84. The Book of Confessions, 9.37.

85. With thanks to Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons, Moderator Cynthia Bolbach, Eileen Lindner, Joe Small, Paige McRight, general presbyter of Central Florida Presbytery; Dan Saperstein, executive presbyter, Presbytery of Peaks and Plains; Paul Hooker, executive presbyter, St. Augustine Presbytery; Graham Hart, executive presbyter, Peace River Presbytery; Scott Lumsden, executive presbyter, Seattle Presbytery; Peter Nord, executive presbyter, Baltimore Presbytery; Steve Yamaguchi, presbytery pastor, Presbytery of Los Ranchos; Alan Thames, executive presbyter, Whitewater Valley Presbytery; Nancy Kahaian, interim synod executive, Synod of Mid America; Rick Melin, stated clerk, Synod of Alaska-Northwest.

86. Because all these data were collected between March and June of 2011, prior to the passage of 10a and nFOG, the conversations that have ensued since the summer of 2011 are not reflected in our data. It is an interesting example of how quickly our context is changing and how important it is to find structures and a church "culture" that can respond to these changes.

87. Guder, "The Presbytery as Missional Context," p. 3 "Perhaps the most pervasive and powerful reduction made in the course of the western church's gradual establishment, as it became more dominant in its social and political context, and as the assumption took hold that everyone born and reared in this territories was Christian, was the fact that the essential character of mission in the biblical sense gradually faded away. Mission is not needed if everyone is already a Christian!...The contemporary exploration of the church's essentially missional vocation challenges unquestioned attitudes formed over centuries that the church is to be defined more in terms of its maintenance than its mission. What is meant is, of course, the concern for the maintenance of the church as an institution. That concern turns the church inward, centers its attention upon itself and its members, upon its survival and their religious needs. The institutional inwardness of western church contradicts the clearly missional calling of the church in the New Testament defined by Jesus on the Mount of the Ascension: 'You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8). Thus, Newbigin's question can be paraphrased: How does the church truly regain its understanding of itself as called and sent, remembering that the term mission means, in fact, 'sending' (see John 20:21)? How does the church move beyond the idea that Christian identity is basically a geographical or cultural or organizational concept?"[emphasis ours].

88. This definition is from Darrell Guder, "The Presbytery as Missional Context."

* All key terms appear the first time with an underline and are featured in the glossary in the appendix.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

Item 05-12, Recommendation 03, 2013: \$19,190; 2014: \$11,525 (per capita - OGA)

Recommendation 04, 2013: \$19,190; 2014: \$11,525 (per capita - OGA)

Recommendation 05, 2013: \$19,070; 2014: \$22,440 (per capita - OGA)

Recommendation 07, 2013: \$15,050; 2014: \$9,855 (per capita - OGA)

Recommendation 08, 2013: \$15,050; 2014: \$9,855 (per capita - OGA)

COMMENT

ADVICE FROM THE ACC

The report of the General Assembly Mid Council Commission contains eight numbered recommendations for assembly action, each containing one or more specific action items. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution will address each enumerated recommendation separately, noting connections between particular recommendations.

1. General Notes on Recommendations 1–4:

These first four recommendations relate to the future of synods. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advises that they address complementary aspects of the same question, so that to approve any of them without approving the other three would create the potential for significant constitutional confusion. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution (ACC) therefore advises that if the assembly wishes to accomplish the intent of Recommendation 1 to eliminate synods as councils of the church, that it consider the first four recommendations as a single motion with multiple parts.

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution (ACC) notes that the recommendations presume a number of constitutional amendments that are not yet before this assembly (cf. Recommendations 3 and 4). There is considerable risk in committing to a course of action on the assumption that the proposed action can be accomplished constitutionally without having the opportunity to evaluate the merits of the proposed mechanisms for implementation.

In addition, the ACC advises the assembly to review carefully the time frame for implementation of the recommendations so as to avoid the possibility of a lapse in constitutional authority to fulfill essential functions currently provided by synods prior to the full implementation of the recommendations.

The Advisory Committee on the Committee therefore advises the assembly that it would pose fewer constitutional risks to delay approval of Recommendation 1 until the assembly has also had full opportunity to review the amendments envisioned in Recommendations 3 and 4 for its implementation. If the assembly nevertheless wishes to fulfill the intent of Recommendation 1 it could answer the recommendation by instructing the Moderator to appoint a task force to bring to the 221st General Assembly (2014) the necessary constitutional amendments and a timeframe to accomplish Recommendations 1, 3, and 4 together. The Advisory Committee on the Committee also advises the assembly to consider carefully the merits of alternative strategies to accomplish similar ends, such as that proposed by Item 05-02 from the Presbytery of St. Andrew.

2. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution submits the following advice to the assembly regarding Recommendation 1:

Recommendation 1 contains two action items: The first action item would strike section G-3.04 in its entirety. This section of the Form of Government addresses matters relating to the synod, and would have the effect of eliminating synods as a council of the church. The second action item would amend language in G-3.03 (dealing with presbyteries) to reframe the function of presbyteries and to eliminate references to synods.

The history of the synod as a council pre-dates that of the assembly itself, the first synod having been established in 1717. The modern synod dates to 1972, when large regional synods supplanted the previous statewide synod model. Synods perform important functions in the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): they facilitate the work of the church on a regional level; they have been the primary denominational contact with particular ministries in higher education; they have played an important role in advocacy and oversight of the denomination's commitment to racial ethnic diversity and inclusiveness. While the particular mission functions of synods vary, many perform significant mission support both financially and in direct mission endeavors. In regards to governance, synods perform an important role as an intermediate level of administrative review and judicial process between the 173 presbyteries and the General Assembly. Synods are also uniquely empowered to form non-geographic presbyteries to support the mission of racial ethnic and immigrant communities (Book of Order, G-3.0403c).

However, there is nothing in the history or foundational principles of Reformed polity that

requires the existence of synods. From a polity perspective, the benefits of a four-tiered system of governance versus a three-tiered system are pragmatic and logistical rather than theological.

While Recommendation 1 would strike section G-3.04 describing the purpose, mission, functions, responsibilities, and composition of synods, and amend G-3.03, regarding the presbytery, it does not identify substitute language to identify which purposes, functions, and responsibilities of the synod should be preserved, or how they would be preserved. The process for identification of these purposes, functions, and responsibilities is addressed in Recommendation 3. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution is unable to provide definitive advice regarding the elimination of a whole section of the Book of Order in the absence of language to replace current structures.

These two items, if approved, are intended to take effect at the end of the 222nd General Assembly (2016). Section G-6.04e specifies the date on which an amendment becomes effective and mandates that an amendment receiving the necessary affirmative votes "shall become effective one year following the adjournment of the assembly transmitting the proposed amendment." This provision supersedes and controls the proposals of the Mid Council Commission, and would accelerate the date on which synods would cease to be councils of the church ahead of a complete plan for how the ecclesiastical responsibilities of synods would be handled.

The intention to postpone the effective date of the proposed amendments is in conflict with the clear procedures for amending the Book of Order in G-6.04, which begins "Amendments to the Book of Order shall be made only if all the following steps are completed :..." In other words, the amendment is to become effective either on the date specified in G-6.04e or not at all. If the assembly wishes to make the amendment to G-3.04 effective on a different date, it would be necessary to approve as an amendment to the Form of Government itself a provision establishing the date on which the provisions establishing the synods as a council of the church would cease to have effect (i.e., a "sunset clause").

3. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution submits the following advice to the assembly regarding Recommendation 2:

Recommendation 2 would require existing synods to bring to the 221st General Assembly (2014) plans for the transfer of assets, funds, projects, and programs of the synod. The language of the recommendation suggests that these plans would be presented to the assembly, but would not necessarily require approval by the assembly. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advises the assembly that the Form of Government would require assembly approval of such plans. Section G-3.0502 states,

The General Assembly has responsibility to maintain relationships with presbyteries and synods by:

- a. consulting with and providing resources for presbyteries and synods as they execute their constitutional responsibilities;
- b. overseeing the work of synods;
- c. reviewing the records of synods, taking care to ensure that they conform to this Constitution;
- d. organizing new synods, or dividing, uniting, or otherwise combining previously existing synods or portions of synods; ...

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advises that the constitutional responsibility of the General Assembly for "dividing, uniting, or otherwise combining previously existing synods," extends to the approval of plans for the distribution of assets and continuation of programs of dissolved synods. A particular assembly may advise a future assembly of its design for how that future assembly should regard such plans, that is, with greater or lesser latitude for synod autonomy, but it may not bind the future assembly from exercising its responsibility of oversight and approval.

In addition to the above constitutional issues, there may be constitutional implications raised by the plans of particular synods when they are brought to the assembly for approval. It should be noted that the process of reallocating church property (both real and personal) is governed by G-4.02. There are tensions within this section between the missional and fiduciary functions of

councils as they relate to property. Whatever processes may be proposed under Recommendation 3 for the review and approval of such plans should seek to resolve such tensions equitably and consistently.

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advises the assembly that the time frame proposed in Recommendation 2 relies upon the delegation of assembly authority to approve synod plans to the commission envisioned in Recommendation 5, and/or to the regional administrative commissions envisioned in Recommendation 3, should a synod present an insufficient, unsatisfactory, or disputed plan to the 221st General Assembly (2014). Even so, it is possible that such a synod might be delayed in the approval or implementation of its plan beyond the 2016 deadline, requiring the synod to continue to function after the provision establishing synods has been removed from the Constitution.

4. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution submits the following advice to the assembly regarding Recommendation 3:

Recommendation 3 seeks to address the absence of specific constitutional language in Recommendation 1 by instructing the Moderator to appoint a committee to work with the Stated Clerk to present necessary amendments to the Constitution and The Manual of the General Assembly, to create five regional administrative commissions of the General Assembly for specified purposes of mission facilitation, boundary alignment, and preservation of historic racial ethnic ministries. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advises the assembly that the charge for these commissions may be too limited in prospect. Essential functions currently exercised by synods, such as administrative review, and the power to enforce the church's commitment to racial ethnic diversity and inclusion, are not identified in the charge for these commissions. While all constitutional functions pertaining to oversight of councils would devolve to the General Assembly following the elimination of synods, it would seem prudent to allow for the assembly to delegate to regional commissions additional powers that may be necessary for the timely and effective review and remediation of issues at the presbytery level. Failure to do so may have the effect of increasing the need to resort to judicial process as a means of remediation of issues.

In addition, the Advisory Committee on the Constitution advises the assembly that it seems unwise to adopt an action in Recommendation 1 that would mandate the elimination of an entire level of governance without having had the opportunity to evaluate proposed amendments and structures to ensure the continuation of essential functions of governance.

5. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution submits the following advice to the assembly regarding Recommendation 4:

Recommendation 4 seeks to address how judicial process would function in the absence of synod permanent judicial commissions. It proposes empowering the Moderator to appoint a committee (evidently distinct from that in Recommendation 3) to propose amendments to the Constitution and The Manual of the General Assembly to create "the necessary number" of judicial commissions "rooted in the various regions" to perform the functions currently performed by synod PJs. As with Recommendation 3, this recommendation is sparse in detail, and leaves several important questions unanswered, among them:

a. The relationship of regional GAPJCs to the national GAPJC. How will the regional judicial commissions function as commissions of the General Assembly distinctly from the General Assembly's own PJC? Section F-3.0202 provides as a foundation of our polity that "... presbyters shall come together in councils in regular gradation." By assigning two levels of judicial review to a single council (the General Assembly, through regional and national judicial commissions), the principle of regular gradation is challenged. Will there be provision that regional commissions be comprised of persons drawn from the region under jurisdiction of each commission? It is implicit in the principle of regular gradation that those exercising ecclesiastical jurisdiction over a particular part of the church be drawn from that part of the church, except where conflict of interest or rotation of service may exclude a lower council from representation.

b. The power of authoritative interpretation. Section G-6.02 provides for

authoritative interpretation of the Constitution "through a decision of the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission in a remedial or disciplinary case." If regional commissions are permanent judicial commissions of the General Assembly, will they be empowered to establish authoritative interpretations of the Constitution? Would provision be made for decisions in one region to be binding on that region and not on others, pending a decision by the national GAPJC, as with U.S. Circuit Courts of Appeal?

c. The adjudication of cases in process. At some point, synod PJs would cease to function and their responsibility for cases in process transferred to regional judicial commissions. How would issues arising out of this transition be addressed concerning obtaining stays of enforcement, determinations on preliminary questions, and agreements or settlements at pretrial conference?

As with Recommendation 3, the Advisory Committee on the Constitution notes that this recommendation requires the assembly to act on the elimination of structures without a clear understanding of what will replace them.

6. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution submits the following advice to the assembly regarding Recommendation 5:

Recommendation 5 would instruct the Moderator to appoint a commission to work in consultation with the Stated Clerk to act as the General Assembly for purposes of organizing, dividing, uniting, or combining synods, and approving the organization, division, union or combination of presbyteries (per G-3.0502) between the meetings of the General Assembly, until regional administrative commissions have been constituted. This would effectively continue some of the existing powers of the Mid Council Commission under a newly formed commission. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advises the assembly that these powers constitutionally belong to the assembly, and that the assembly may delegate them to one or more commissions if it chooses. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution also advises the assembly that the approval of various non-geographic presbyteries as envisioned in Recommendation 5 would give considerable latitude to this commission to authorize significant departures from the historic practice of the church. These will be discussed more fully in the advice regarding Recommendation 6. Since a commission is empowered to act as the assembly, a liaison from the Advisory Committee on the Constitution should be appointed to advise the commission, consistent with Standing Rule E.3.f in The Manual of the General Assembly.

7. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution submits the following advice to the assembly regarding Recommendation 6:

Recommendation 6 consists of two action items that propose amendments to the Constitution to provide for two experiments in Presbyterian polity on a time-limited basis. The first action item would allow for synods to form non-geographic presbyteries within their bounds for "particular missional purposes" in addition to the existing power to create them to support racial ethnic and immigrant congregations, with certain specific presbytery powers shared jointly with a congregation's presbytery of origin. The second would allow the transfer of individual congregations to presbyteries (either geographic or non-geographic) in the same or adjoining synods, while retaining an "affiliate" relationship with the presbytery of origin, which would also share with the receiving presbytery certain rights regarding church property and congregational division or dismissal. Section G-3.0106 states clearly that "mission determines the forms and structures needed for the church to do its work." The proposals are consistent with this constitutional affirmation. In addition, the proposals include enabling constitutional amendments that are adequately specific so as to preserve the unity of constitutional authority. The advice on each of these proposals will be addressed separately.

a. The first proposal, regarding non-geographic presbyteries, concerns a topic on which the Advisory Committee on the Constitution has advised the assembly on several occasions. Our advice on related proposals is attached to Items 05-01, 05-05, 05-08, and 05-10). The Advisory Committee on the Constitution has consistently expressed its concern over the creation of non-geographic presbyteries. They challenge the foundational principle of the unity of the church

expressed in F-1.0302a, may intentionally or unintentionally compromise the church's commitment to racial and ethnic inclusivity, and risk the division of the church into communities of the like-minded, with the effect of excluding the voice of God as God may speak through those with whom we are in disagreement. This particular proposal, in distinction from others, mitigates some of these concerns through the time-limited nature of the amendment, the requirement of the consent of the affected presbyteries, the sharing of certain powers with the presbyteries of origin during the period of experimentation, and the requirement of a valid mission rationale.

Nevertheless, the Advisory Committee on the Constitution notes that there are no constitutional restrictions on the ability of congregations with similar mission purposes to unite in common mission without the requirement of establishing a common structure of governance. It also advises the assembly that establishing temporary and fluid structures of governance creates issues related to their dissolution, such as the disposition of common assets and the membership of newly ordained members which are not addressed in the recommendation.

If the assembly chooses to approve this recommendation, the Advisory Committee on the Constitution raises the concern that churches seeking permission to sell property or be dismissed to another Reformed body would require the permission of their presbyteries of origin, but those churches would not be guaranteed voice or vote in that decision. Fundamental fairness would dictate that some accommodation be made to grant voice, if not vote, in these decisions.

b. The second proposal concerns transfer of individual congregations to other presbyteries (either geographic or non-geographic) in the same or an adjoining synod. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution raises the same concerns regarding the unity of the church and the value of diversity as with the first proposal. In addition, the Advisory Committee on the Constitution finds this proposal erodes the essential unity of the church as expressed in F-3.0201 and F-3.0202 by regarding congregational mission as somehow disconnected from that of other churches in its geographic vicinity, or of the shared mission of the geographical presbytery. This proposal has the added protection, however, that either presbytery could rescind the new relationship and restore the church to its original presbytery after consultation with the congregation. It should be noted that such "affiliate congregations" would have voice (and, in some cases, vote) in the presbytery of origin, whereas those dismissed (potentially) to the same (non-geographic) presbytery under the first proposal would lack that voice.

8. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution submits the following advice to the assembly regarding Recommendation 7:

Recommendation 7 would establish a task force to review the nature and function of the General Assembly Mission Council and the Office of the General Assembly with respect to their relationship and support of mid councils. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advises the assembly that such a task force is within the power of the assembly to create.

9. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution submits the following advice to the assembly regarding Recommendation 8:

Recommendation 8 recommends that the Moderator be empowered to appoint a national Racial Ethnic Ministries Task Force to address various concerns expressed to the commission during its research. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advises the assembly that it is within the power of the assembly to create such a task force.

COMMENT

ACREC ADVICE AND COUNSEL

The Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns advises that the 220th General Assembly (2012), in response to Item 05-12, to approve an alternate resolution to read as follows:

"1. Instruct the Moderators of the 218th, 219th, and 220th General Assemblies (2008, 2010, 2012) to appoint a Racial Ethnic Ministry Commission.

"2. Empower the appointed commission to develop strategies to address the questions raised in the reports noted above, and to be granted adequate budget for this work.

"3. Direct the commission, in consultation with representative groups, to develop strategies toward the path forward for the PC(USA)

"a. for the development and support of ministries and structures that support and grow established and emerging racial ethnic congregations;

"b. for the development and support of ministries and structures that support and grow multicultural congregations;

"c. for the development and support of ministries and structures that support new immigrant congregations;

"d. for the growth of understanding of the issues race, culture, and ethnicity raise within the Christian community, including development of churchwide strategies to raise consciousness of white privilege.

"4. Provide commission staffing from both the Office of the General Assembly and the General Assembly Mission Council.

"5. Give representation on the commission to the following groups:

"a. racial ethnic caucuses

"b. new immigrant congregations and ministries

"c. racial ethnic congregations

"d. multicultural congregations

"e. Women of Color Joint Working Group

"f. mid council staff

"g. ACREC

"h. GACOR;

"and that all decisions would be made by consensus in order to ensure voice for all commission members.

"6. Direct the commission to consult with other groups as needed, both within and outside the PC(USA), to develop workable and sustainable strategies.

"7. Bring recommendations to the 221st General Assembly (2014)."

Rationale

Due diligence has not been brought to bear in discerning the way forward in restructuring the church for mission and ministry. In particular, the elimination of synods creates difficulty for racial ethnic Presbyterians, who have often turned to synods for assistance and support for racial ethnic ministry, resourcing, and, when needed, judicial cases.

Additionally, the recommendation supporting the formation of nongeographic presbyteries based on agreement has no historical precedent and cannot be supported by Scripture, our theological tradition, or our confessions.

The Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns hears echoes of voices from across the church in the report's Recommendation 8, which calls for the formation of a National Racial Ethnic Ministry Task Force. Specifically in reports to this General Assembly, calls have been made for:

- a national consultation to develop strategies and collaborate on growing new and existing African American congregations and communities of faith in the PC(USA)(Item 16-03, African American Church Growth Strategy Report, Recommendation 1);
- the development of a national strategy for Hispanic/Latino Church Growth, and infrastructure built to support this new strategy (Item 10-17, Hispanic/Latino/a Leadership Conversation Group Report, Recommendation e.);
- a national consultation to develop strategies and policies to support racial ethnic, multicultural, and new immigrant church growth in the PC(USA) (Special Task Force to Study Racial Ethnic and New Immigrant Church Growth, Recommendations 1–6);
- recommendations to develop effective strategies for the development of racial ethnic and new immigrant worshipping communities; train seminary students in emerging cultural realities, and develop strategies within our seminaries to work toward curricular and faculty reform and change, that we might train racial ethnic and new immigrant leaders more effectively; develop multilingual resources and translation capacities to better witness within our increasingly diverse society; explore disparities in compensation between those of more and less represented groups in our church; develop resources to support the growth of new immigrant ministries and congregations, and increase the understanding among Presbyterians of white privilege that we might repent and be renewed and empowered for more faithful service (Item 16-07, Report of the Special Committee on the Nature of the Church in the 21st Century, Recommendations 1.c., 3.a., d., e., 4., 5., 6.b., c., f., and 8, respectively).

These, in addition to the recommendation from the Mid Council Commission to develop a National Racial Ethnic Ministry Task Force, make it clear that while Presbyterians have been thinking about racial ethnic and new immigrant ministries for over a century—and while many faithful ministries have been launched in many contexts that have borne much fruit—we know and are voicing in many arenas our awareness that there is still much work to do. Race, culture, and language still divide us, marring the image of Christ we share with a world in need and blunting our witness to the good news. The current excitement about developing “1001 New Worshipping Communities” will not be realized without the engagement and investment of racial ethnic Presbyterians. To date, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has not addressed issues of race and culture sufficiently to ensure either that the needed engagement would happen, or that the voices of racial ethnic Presbyterians would be heard in the conversation.

Therefore, to faithfully steward the resources entrusted to us by taking a proactive approach to a number of overlapping initiatives and recommendations, the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC) advises the 220th General Assembly (2012) to answer all the recommendations noted above with the approval of this recommendation.

ACSWP ADVICE AND COUNSEL

This report proposes major changes in the newly adopted Form of Government and related manuals to replace synods with five regional commissions (in the short-term), and to allow non-geographical presbyteries defined by their own mission emphases, with the use of at least five Moderator-appointed commissions, committees, and task forces, the last of which to be a national task force to address racial-ethnic concerns.

The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy advises that Item 05-12 be disapproved.

Rationale

Sometimes the cure is worse than the disease. In this case, a massive set of changes is being proposed that affect not only the structure of the church but its ethos of mutual accountability within a Presbyterian system. Under the goal of “flattening” the denomination’s structure, the Mid Council report would invest enormous authority in five commissions and committees to be appointed by the General Assembly Moderator. Synods, in consultation with their constituent presbyteries but not the General Assembly, would develop plans to disburse their assets. Under the banner of experimentation in governance, a basically congregational emphasis seems invited with

limits placed on both the role of the General Assembly and the presbyteries. And while it is good to encourage missional combinations of congregations, the recommendation of non-geographic presbyteries threatens to balkanize the church into covenants of the like-minded. In the current climate, while claiming to want more “trust” and even “mutual submission” (p. 23), this proposal seems likely to weaken connectionalism and exacerbate division further.

Little analysis is presented as to the size and costs of these commissions and committees, how their decisions might be reviewed or appealed, and how their funding is to be drawn from a church-wide structure that is to be partially dissolved. Item 05-02 from the Presbytery of St. Andrew would wisely refocus the original intent of the assignment given to this Commission on Mid Councils and proposes the formation a new committee. There is a big difference between a focused plan to redesign regional coordination in a cost-effective way by restructuring or eliminating synods and a theologically narrow but administratively expansive desire to restructure the denomination at unknown cost.

In historic Presbyterian polity, there is a representative structure of mutual accountability running from the congregation to the General Assembly with policy set by the most church-wide deliberative process. Just as individual congregations are accountable to presbyteries and hold their properties in trust for the whole church, so presbyteries have been accountable through synods, which are in turn reviewed by the General Assembly. The functions of synods are not solely review and judicial process; they have performed a range of regional mission functions not treated fully in the report that are not specified in the general assignments given to the regional administrative commissions. The non-geographic presbytery recommendations would dramatically change the balance between local autonomy and national unity, and would replace our organic connectionalism with a voluntary-association model.

The report makes much of the “disestablishment” of mainline Protestantism, yet does not address the original Reformed theological purposes for the church’s unity—independence from the state and other forces. The strength of Presbyterian polity was to help it resist cultural trends as well as expand its witness to God’s sovereignty over all of life. Historian Lefferts Loetscher, in analyzing the explicit property trust provision put into the Book of Order in 1980, summarized the theological purposes of our form of conciliar governance: “Calvin did not seek disestablishment of the church, but he did seek to build up the church’s internal self-government to the point where it could resist corrupting pressures from civil government or from other sources. [this is to see] ... the church’s ecclesiastical government as a protection of its spiritual ideals and as a means of fulfilling them” (Lefferts Loetscher, “Presbyterian Church Property,” *The Presbyterian Outlook*, Feb. 11, 1980, p. 5).

The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy is particularly concerned with the nature of the “missional” church that is to be recreated in the absence of significant attention to economic constraints and any corporate social witness or education. In the past, in fact, one of the functions of synods not mentioned in the report was their support for campus ministries to educational institutions. But the “Financial Realities” of what some have called our “lesser depression” are not mentioned until page 31, and only receive significant attention when the work of particular presbyteries is described near the end. There is much organizational and corporate consultant language, but the basic assignment to the church of caring for others and supporting our weaker members goes unmentioned. A generally idealized picture of the economy, globalization, and the “emergent frontier” is presented on pages 18–19, for example, while the major employment challenges for young people go unmentioned. As for the “flatter” world, it is one of enormously centralized corporate, medical, and research university bureaucracies that concentrate large amounts of wealth and political power.

The attitude of the report toward administrative structures and the social-ethical commitments of the church seems broadly dismissive whenever “bureaucracy,” “regulation,” and “social proclamations” are mentioned. One would not know that the church had a public role in civil rights, caring for the earth, resisting wars, advancing women, and addressing a host of human needs, while producing liturgies, resources, and programs to present the Gospel to people at all stages of the life cycle. Those denominational efforts to present a comprehensive set of programs are not

fairly termed “top down enforced alignment,” nor was it primarily “regulatory.” Yet for this report, the post-WWII denomination seems to have been primarily about “complex and cumbersome bureaucracies” (13).

True, in a “less resourced” church, it is harder to sustain programs of any kind, but congregations (and presbyteries) sometimes also shift resources away from the “bureaucratic mid councils” because they prefer to disengage from some activities of the larger church. The majority of congregations that provide some level of support to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) clearly share a vision of what constitutes a fuller definition of the church and of how the councils, including the General Assembly mission agencies, complement each other in being a whole church. The impression conveyed—without representative data of any kind—is of a disdain for any structure beyond the congregation. Ecumenical cooperation and organization is not mentioned at all. How one frames the problem and how one uses the words says a lot about the basic assumptions behind the report’s “discipleship in a post-Christendom context.”

Only when we get to the unavoidable matter of the racial ethnic ministries sustained by synods does the report ever use the word “injustice” (the word, “justice,” is never used). Then we have a proposed “task force” that would cover all racial matters, but without the status or power of the “commissions” recommended elsewhere. Yet it is here that demographic realities intrude more on the report’s management consultant language, and this is not only about the need to reach out to a growing racial ethnic population (though how well do those communities trust our “transformative leadership?”).

The demographic data and analysis in Robert Putnam and Dennis Campbell’s thorough new book, *American Grace* (2011), raises questions about the repeated and formulaic language about “missional” that only generalizes negatively about social issues. Putnam and Campbell show that young people in increasing numbers are leaving the mainline denominations and the Roman Catholic Church because they take religion to be intolerant, a viewpoint influenced disproportionately by messages from the Religious Right. Social issues—which the report admits do not cause loss of members generally—create what the report calls “divisive debates and polarizing votes.” Its implicit answer: don’t have them. Yet of all the issues the church has struggled with, it is ironically acceptance of homosexuality that most marks young people in our culture. For them to hear, “God loves everyone—except them,” accelerates the weakness of mainline Protestantism even when we [as PC(USA)] are no longer the ones officially saying those words.

Putnam and Campbell also look at the danger of some congregations to become “echo-chambers” of the views of their leaders. A similar danger could lie in the strengthening of “echo-chamber” presbyteries, further from church-wide values and closer to gated communities.

Thus the report, while condemning the “political, regulatory, and institutional approaches to problem solving,” is a very political document. One does not need to agree with all General Assembly positions, or celebrate the operation of all agency offices, to know that “to get back to mission and ministry” will still require the church to honor the relationships, memories, and hopes that are part of our current organizational life. It is also pretty clear from the 2008 credit crash that “de-regulation” in itself is not a solution; nor is the Reformed tradition in general terribly libertarian.

Finally, the report’s attack on “bureaucratic mentality” is questionable when the report states, “As a commission, our deep desire is to see the whole church engaged in a wholesale process of reinvigorating congregations through reinventing presbyteries” (p. 34). Some of the report’s review of management consultant theories is probably helpful, but it is not theologically solid enough a vision and its multiplicity of commissions sound like an uncertain trumpet to dubious and repeated restructure, rather than a means to reinvigorate congregations.

COGA COMMENT

The Committee on the Office of the General Assembly respectfully urges the 220th General Assembly (2012) to refer Recommendations 1.b., and 6.a.–b. in Item 05-12 (Mid Council Commission Report).

Rationale

The Committee on the Office of the General Assembly (COGA) expresses its deep gratitude to the members of the Mid Council Commission for the faithfulness and imagination with which they engaged their important work. The Mid Council Commission Report to the 220th General Assembly (2012) offers a bold and welcome call to “reinvigorating presbyteries as locus of support for missional congregations.” Such a call holds bright promise in strengthening the witness of the church in the world and the commission has brought forward an important contribution in placing these issues before the General Assembly. The very boldness of the report’s recommendations regarding non-geographic presbyteries, however, requires a careful and deliberate consideration of our collective understanding of both the function and the ecclesial character of presbyteries.

With such important matters at stake, and because the report does not fully include adequate recommendations for guidelines, processes, and practices for addressing the administrative and ecclesial issues raised by a decision to undertake such extensive structural and institutional change, COGA believes that a more measured approach is required.

Moreover, COGA has raised questions about the long-term consequences (or implications) of the report’s recommendations regarding non-geographic presbyteries that would impact the essence of the church’s life together, including

- the prospect of like-minded presbyteries that sacrifice a vital witness to the reconciling grace of God in Jesus Christ, which is made possible by unity within a context of diversity;
- the potential of realigned presbyteries configured in ways that result in stark disparity between those with access to substantial human and financial resources and those lacking such access;
- the unintended consequence of the erosion of existing patterns of missional activity across presbytery boundaries;
- a disruption of the very fellowship that prompts the church in its obligation to discern together God’s will for our lives; and
- the potential compromising of the church’s witness to issues of justice and unity within the church and society, contributing to the further polarization of both.

Therefore, COGA urges the assembly to refer the above listed recommendations to a task force to further discuss, refine, and bring to the 221st General Assembly (2014) recommendations that consider the composition and organization of the presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in ways that reinvigorate their capacity to support missional congregations, and advance the ecclesial nature and character of those presbyteries, within the unity of the church. The Moderator of the 220th General Assembly (2012) will name the task force. It will be composed of an equal number of persons from the Mid Council Commission, COGA, and commissioners to the 220th General Assembly (2012). The optimal size of such a task force is twelve-to-fifteen persons. The Office of the General Assembly, including the coordinator of Mid Council Relations, will provide staff support to the task force.

GACOR COMMENT

The General Assembly Committee on Representation (GACOR) respectfully advises that the 220th General Assembly (2012) approve Recommendation 8 of Item 05-12 and offers the following comments:

Background

The General Assembly Committee on Representation (GACOR) has been a keen observer of this item of business before the members of the commission were appointed to service. The GACOR designated a member to attend and observe all of the Mid Council Commission meetings

because the scope given to them by the 219th General Assembly (2010) was so critical to the ways they anticipated the PC(USA) would organize itself for ministry and mission going forward. That decision was confirmed at several points along the way and continues. The GACOR commends the members of the commission for their diligent work, their loving care, and their faithful engagement with one another and the larger church for the entire two years they met. Gaining an appreciation for their work and perspective we respectfully offer these comments in hopes that they will provide context and uncover unanticipated consequences of the directions pointed to in their recommendations.

The church has met in councils long before there were bishops and diocese—in fact, Presbyterians trace councils to the account in Acts 15 of the Council of Jerusalem. Councils provide “the mutual interconnection of the church” and that interconnection is “a sign of the unity of the church” (Book of Order, G-3.0101). The Body of Christ, the church is held together in our Reformed understanding by the sinews of councils. In the Bible, 1 Corinthians 12 is a powerful Scripture in the ministry and life of committees on representation and reminds us of the essential metaphor of church as embodied (connecting all human diversity, in all its myriad parts for the glory of the One God to create a singular Church). Councils are an essential part of our witness, not merely a way we decide and govern. Synods are not merely a place where marginalized communities yearning for justice find some remedy and support, they also “nurture a covenant community of disciples of Christ” and “help congregations and the church ... to be faithful participants in the mission of Christ” (Book of Order, G-3.0101). Councils are found at every level of the church—congregation (session), presbytery, synod, and general assembly.

It is in setting the context and content (flesh and bone) of what it is to be councils of the church that the functions of committees on representation are given in G-3.0103, the section titled Participation and Representation.

The Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC) has written an extensive comment on Item 05-12 (as well as responding to Items 16-07, 10-17, and 16-03 as they share similar shared disaffection and disappointment with the current state of affairs, as well as shared diagnoses of the church from the perspectives of particular communities of color within the larger church). The GACOR supports their innovative recommendation that may more efficiently address the shared concerns while strengthening the impact of their gifts of new sight for the larger church. All of these actions came independent of one another and each strikes a note that harmonizes when seen together. We are at time of great convergence and schism within the life of the PC(USA). It is all around us. The GACOR commends for your consideration the comment written by ACREC and should the assembly approve of its recommended action, GACOR commits itself to supporting that body.

The changes to the Book of Order recommended in this report, if approved by the assembly and sent **to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes, will take effect at the close of the 222nd General Assembly (2016). They will have profound effect on the ways the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) organizes its life and ministry in councils. The GACOR respectfully offers the following comments and recommendations:**

Comment 1—Recommendations 1and 2

The very first recommendation makes two radical changes to the councils of the church. Each impacts committees on representation in mid councils and at the assembly.

- Removing council status from synods, in Recommendation 1.a., has severe ramification for committees on representation. The GACOR receives reports from the sixteen synods (the next lower council) as its way of reviewing their work and maintaining relationships of mutual support. The removal of synods means that the next lower council becomes the 173 presbytery committees on representation. With an annual report from each council, the review and relational work of the GACOR has expanded just shy of 1,100 percent. This will necessarily require adjustments to the way these elected leaders spend their time and demands a more traditional role of reviewing reports at the exact time that the GACOR is exploring less regulatory means to fulfill its functions and seeking ways to be encouraging the assembly level and the church’s lower councils to be

equipped and equipping for giving “full expression,” and providing “full participation and access to representation in decision-making and employment practices” (Book of Order, G-3.0103). The work has to be re-imagined and reconfigured if sixteen elected members who meet twice a year are going to be able to stay in relationship (providing accountability and encouragement) with 173 other councils.

Synods are constituted from the selection of commissioners from their presbyteries. The membership is selected by its lower councils and its leadership is nominated from that same community. Synods connect their neighboring councils. Perhaps the number of synods is no longer serving the needs of today’s church, but we respectfully question the removal of them all together as having deep consequences upon the connection and relations among the councils themselves. The changes to G-3.03 to connect presbyteries with the assembly in a post-synod reality are profound. Included at Recommendation 1.b. is the insertion of a new section at G-3.0302, which creates a new function for presbyteries to connect with other presbyteries (but not necessarily through the next higher council, the assembly) and the assembly. While the commission reported hearing strong value placed on synod by communities of color, GACOR reminds the assembly that persons of color are not the only persons who experience systemic discriminatory practice, suffer disparities, and have outcomes and options for ministry circumscribed simply because they are part of that community. There are other groups who share experiences of being “othered” and excised from community. The specificity of the inserted responsibility of “a. consulting with other presbyteries in their region about creating regional mission partnerships for racial ethnic advocacy and support, mission, and ministry projects, and other programs of shared life, diversity, and connection to the larger church”(proposed insertion at G-3.0302 in recommendation 1.b.) does not expressly cover persons with disabilities, women, youth, or the other categories of persons mentioned in F-1.0403. The constituencies extended promises by synods as councils who attend to this work are not included with this new responsibility.

- Recommendation 2 concerns itself with the stewardship of “assets, funds, projects, and programs” and gives a deadline for that work.

Comment 2

- Recommendations 3 and 4 concern themselves with the creation of interim bodies (committees) to plan and recommend the creation and composition of five regional administrative commissions (Recommendation 3) and five regional judicial commissions (Recommendation 4) respectively. The committees will guide the transition from synods to those regional commissions. Recommendation 5 empowers the moderator to create a commission and outlines its powers given by the assembly to work with the Stated Clerk to realign boundaries of presbyteries and synods and organize new synods and presbyteries until such time as the regional commissions are comprised. No less than three bodies are created to make this transition. Appointed by only one person, power and privilege are dangerously concentrated in this interim period. What is being dismantled? It is the connective tissues of the sixteen synod councils in the Body of Christ, and in their place five regional administrative commissions “empowered to consider and conclude matters referred to it by a council. The designating council shall state specifically the scope of the commission’s powers and any restrictions on those powers” (G-3.0109). Once created, they act within their scope in place of the council that created them (in this case the assembly). These recommendations (3–5) do not specify the powers or limits of the final ten regional commissions, but instead create further committees appointed by the moderator to recommend to a subsequent assembly (the council creating them) what powers the commissions will have. There’s a lot of opportunity to create very small groups who will have tremendous power and influence. One strength of councils is how they function as corporate bishop (remaining constituted by election of its lower councils), discerning in that community derived from below, the will of God for the Church. Commissions are created from above (a higher council) and empowered so as to not require returning to their creator council except as specifically limited by that body to do so at their creation.

- What is troubling is that this commission has been given a council function without the accountability of a council to its higher and lower council. How does a commission administer for a

region and also provide for the functions of G-3.0103? The GACOR is skeptical and the commission has not attempted to answer. Commissions are empowered to act and not require check, how then does it monitor itself and provide accountability for the councils above (assembly) and below (presbytery)?

- How shall these commissions have their leadership selected? That is yet to be determined but the bodies that will suggest their details are moderator-appointed and as a commission of General Assembly the higher council with authority, it seems reasonable that regular aspects of leadership selection might be retained with either moderator(s) appointments or by trusting the nominating process of the council, or another solution not yet imagined but whose likely source is the assembly. Instead of the bottom up model of councils in subsequent levels of authority, the commissions disrupt this structure and usurp it. Instead of connection, relying on mutual support, the councils of presbyteries (are tasked with connecting as it pleases with other presbyteries) and is held separate from assembly by the imposition of the assembly empowered but independent commissions (two for each region—one administrative and one judicial). This new structure will surely shift power. Any shift away from shared power should raise a concern in the Body of Christ disrupting the connections regional commission of General Assembly will likely select regional persons from some persons or bodies of the assembly (national council) level.

Comment 3

- Enabling the creation of non-geographic presbyteries, in Recommendation 6, holds the possibility for the contraction of those 173 or more likely the expansion from that number. The minimum being only ten congregations fractures the current communion into smaller, separate components, now allowed to organize around affinity for ministry and mission. Fewer sinews and more bones and muscles, how is this body to stay intact? Shall ten teaching elders be enough to hold the faithful into a community of mutual accountability, ministry and shared mission?

Comment 4

- Recommendation 7 intends to create a task force in order to review the General Assembly Mission Council and the Office of the General Assembly "with respect to their relationship with and support of mid councils as they serve the vitality and mission of congregations in our changing context." They have now redefined the purpose of the council to be valued "as they serve the vitality and mission of congregations." This is a radical reversal of how councils related in Body of Christ with many parts. Now it seems that indeed the neck serves the foot.

Comment 5

- Where the commission has responded to racial ethnic constituencies who highly value synods as councils and mourn their loss and their value for supporting the ministries, holding presbyteries accountable to the shared principles and administering justice when persons are harmed, is with Recommendation 8 and the establishment of a National Racial Ethnic Ministries Task Force. The GACOR is happy to be able to designate a leader to serve in this body. The task force will support concern for loss of justice work at synod for racial ethnic communities.
- The GACOR is troubled that the expression in this recommendation is in disappointment in the substance and direction of racial ethnic ministries rather than the councils and their ministries that fail to secure necessary resources and support.

The General Assembly Committee on Representation is made up of sixteen persons, elected by the General Assembly, who are drawn from ruling and teaching elders from across the church. Its mandate and functions are described in G-3.0103 of the Book of Order (Form of Government).

GAMC/OGA COMMENT

The General Assembly Mission Council recognizes the important role that many synods have played in the lives of racial ethnic persons in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). At the synod level, racial ethnic leaders received training in evangelism and church growth; institutes were offered to train and equip racial ethnic youth and young adults, and Women of Color events were held. In

synods, racial ethnic people were able to find allies to help them with issues in presbyteries and communities that were too large for a few to address, and they engaged in leadership development designed to empower them to witness in communities that were socio-politically and economically disenfranchised. Finally, it was at the synod level where racial ethnic people could gather and address policies of councils that significantly impacted them. In other words, synods represented the platform from which the disciples were nurtured, equipped, and empowered.

Historically, African American Presbyterians, for example, who have the greatest number of racial ethnic congregations and worshiping communities in the PC(USA), received nurturing, mentoring, training, leadership development, networking, assistance with vocational placements, and shared community through synods. At one time in the history of the church, All Black governing bodies existed. It was through these governing bodies that congregations and individuals received education, nurturance, enlivened spirituality, acceptance and recognition of what it meant to be "Black and Presbyterian."

When the Presbyterian Church reunited and became the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), "All Black" governing bodies were dissolved, and the Articles of Agreement of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (Articles 8.2 and 8.3 of Appendix B, PCUSA Constitution, Book II, Book of Order) read:

Racial ethnic members in the United States (Presbyterians of African, Hispanic and Asian descent and Native Americans) shall be guaranteed full participation and access to representation in the decision-making of the Church, and shall be able to form caucuses.

The historic caucuses in the PC(U.S.A.) include the National Black Presbyterian Caucus (NBPC), the Native American Consulting Committee (NACC), the National Hispanic-Latino Presbyterian Caucus (NHLPC) and the National Asian Presbyterian Council (NAPC). When the Racial Ethnic Caucuses & Councils (formerly The Cross Caucus) met at the Big Tent in 2011, the gathering also included representatives from the National Council of Korean Presbyterian Churches (NCKPC), the National Middle Eastern Presbyterian Caucus (NMEPC), and representatives from networks of new immigrant groups from Africa, South Asia and Portuguese-speaking countries.

The General Assembly Commission on Mid Councils recognizes that synods have played a unique and particular role for racial ethnic Presbyterians. In the commission's report there is a desire to maintain, protect and even expand a platform for racial ethnic and immigrant Presbyterians should synods no longer exist as ecclesiastical councils. "The Outlines of Possibilities: Synods as Multi-Presbytery Missional Partnerships," section of the report reads as follows:

Many members of the racial ethnic Presbyterian community have contributed greatly to the history and vibrancy of the PC(USA); initiating and modeling leadership, guiding the church to more socially and theologically responsible posture in its witness to the world, creatively enhancing the form and substance of worship, sensitizing and educating the church regarding manners of race, and providing a unique Presbyterian witness of the ministry of Jesus Christ. The call for the church to review and reorganize its commitment and approach to racial ethnic ministry is significant both within and beyond the notion of a Presbyterian reality that removes the ecclesiastical functions from synods. The need to discover a posture from which genuine ministry partnership can thrive is vital to the current health and future relevance of the church.

Recommendation 8 of the G.A. Commission on Mid Councils Report calls for the Moderator of the 220th G.A. (2012) to appoint a National Racial Ethnic Ministries Task Force to review, assess and explore the call to, responsibility in, and vision for racial ethnic ministry within the PC(USA). In the recommendation, this task force is charged, specifically to address the issue of language access, sensitivity, and resourcing (particularly as relates to the Spanish and Korean languages) within the existing frame of council operation, as well as within the context of any regional administrative structure that might emerge as a result of the repurposing of synods. Furthermore, the recommendations reads that this task force will develop a new mechanism to review the models in mid councils and congregations of racial ethnic ministries that are operating successfully in the denomination and explore the viability of a nationally organized racial ethnic ministry advocacy model on the local and/or cluster congregation level.

The GAMC supports the exploration of determining models for language access, sensitivity, resourcing and advocacy of racial ethnic persons in new structures, should synods no longer exist as ecclesiastical councils. While attending to "language access, sensitivity, and resourcing" are

important concerns in cross cultural contexts, hearing directly from racial ethnic Presbyterians, who would be most affected should synods no longer exist as ecclesiastical councils, about the role that the synod holds in the lives of racial ethnic Presbyterians and what future support might likely be, is equally important.

The conclusion of the Report of the G.A. Mid Council Commission Racial Ethnic Strategy Task Force reads as follows:

At the end of the day the boundaries of our charge as a commission limited the degree to which we could prescriptively address these matters. Additionally, all of the primary stakeholders were not present at the table of our discussion. ...With this aim in mind, we conclude that it would be most productive for all of the primary stakeholders in the PC(USA) frame of racial ethnic ministry to be convened and focused on an agenda of reflection, assessment, and imaginatively bold visioning—for the purpose of forging an effective and historically responsible model for moving forward in the effort to revitalize racial ethnic ministry on the national and congregational level.

The GAMC is eager to play an even stronger role in resourcing this important area in our denomination's life. Thus, this input might better be received by a consultation held across the denomination within the first year following this decision, jointly sponsored by the existing synods and the GAMC, specifically the Office of Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries, including representation from the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns. The purpose of this consultation would be to talk directly with racial ethnic and new immigrant leaders about what they believe would be most needed and helpful. As each synod may individually begin to respond to its new status, if the synod is eliminated as a council, it will be vitally important that the needs of racial ethnic leaders and members not get lost. A consultation would also present an arena for discussions to occur with young racial ethnic and immigrant Presbyterians about their needs, which may differ from those of other generations.

The GAMC is eager to work actively and intentionally with the church to share ideas on how to provide future service and ministry that equips and supports racial ethnic Presbyterians in regions throughout the church. We see this as an opportunity to partner even more closely with the racial ethnic communities and individuals whom we serve.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Survey Results

[MCC Survey Results.pdf](#)