

Attachment A: AI on Dismissal

Item 07-13. Transfer of Ministers and Congregations to Transitional Presbyteries-From the General Presbyter/Stated Clerk, Presbytery of Charlotte.

[The assembly approved Item 07-13, Recommendation 1. See pp. 14, 15.]

1. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution recommends that the 218th General Assembly (2008) answer Item 07-13 with the following recommendation:

With respect to the first question presented, the Advisory Committee on the Constitution finds that the question presents a matter in which interpretation of G-11.0103i and G-15.0203a and b is advisable. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution recommends that the 218th General Assembly (2008) respond to the question with the following interpretation:

“Presbyteries may dismiss congregations to other ecclesiastical bodies of this denomination, and to denominations whose organization is conformed to the doctrines and order of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). No congregation may be dismissed to independent status, or to the status of a nondenominational congregation. It is the responsibility of the dismissing presbytery to determine whether the receiving body meets these standards, and this responsibility cannot be delegated to any other entity within the presbytery (such as an administrative commission). Thus the General Assembly may not determine in advance whether a particular denomination or its constituent bodies qualify under these standards.

“The provisions of G-15.0203 a and b do, however, require that the General Assembly, as the highest governing body of this denomination, advise its presbyteries in this matter. The 218th General Assembly (2008) therefore advises the presbyteries that they must satisfy themselves concerning the conformity with this denomination of a transitional presbytery of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) in matters of doctrines and order. Presbyteries may facilitate the exploration of conformity by means of an administrative commission, although such commissions may not be empowered to approve the dismissal of the congregation. In exploring this matter, presbyteries should consider such questions as whether the receiving EPC presbytery is

- “• doctrinally consistent with the essentials of Reformed theology as understood by the presbytery;
- “• governed by a polity that is consistent in form and structure with that of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.);
- “• of sufficient permanence to offer reasonable assurance that the congregation is not being dismissed to de facto independence.

“Failure on the part of the presbytery thoroughly to explore and adequately to document its satisfaction in these matters may thus violate, however unintentionally, the spirit of the polity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)”

Essential Tenets

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

II. Trinity and Incarnation: The Two Central Christian Mysteries

A. Trinity

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

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

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

B. Incarnation

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

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

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

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

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

III. Essentials of the Reformed Tradition

A. God's grace in Christ

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

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

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

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

B. Election for salvation and service

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

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

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

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

C. Covenant life in the church

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

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

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

D. Faithful stewardship of all of life

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

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

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

E. Living in obedience to the Word of God

Progress in holiness is an expected response of gratitude to the grace of God, which is initiated, sustained, and fulfilled by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. The first response of gratitude is prayer, and the daily discipline of prayer — both individually and together — should mark the Christian life. The life of prayer includes praise to God for His nature and works, sincere confession of our sin, and intercession for the needs of those we know and for the needs of the world. **As we practice the discipline of regular self-examination and confession, we are especially guided by the Ten Commandments.** We therefore hold one another accountable to:

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

3. eliminate from both speech and thought any blasphemy, irreverence, or impurity;
4. observe the Sabbath as a day of worship and rest, being faithful in gathering with the people of God;
5. give honor toward those set in authority over us and practice mutual submission within the community of the church;
6. eradicate a spirit of anger, resentment, callousness, violence, or bitterness, and instead cultivate a spirit of gentleness, kindness, peace, and love; recognize and honor the image of God in every human being from conception to natural death.
7. maintain chastity in thought and deed, being faithful within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman as established by God at the creation or embracing a celibate life as established by Jesus in the new covenant;
8. practice right stewardship of the goods we have been given, showing charity to those in need and offering generous support of the Church and its ministries;
9. pursue truth, even when such pursuit is costly, and defend truth when it is challenged, recognizing that truth is in order to goodness and that its preservation matters;
10. resist the pull of envy, greed, and acquisition, and instead cultivate a spirit of contentment with the gifts God has given us.

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

Attachment C: Adherence to “Essential Tenets”

PC(USA) constitutional question (W.4-4003c)

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

ECO ordination vow (ECO Polity 2.0103c):

Will you receive, adopt, and be bound by the *Essential Tenets* of ECO as a reliable exposition of what Scripture teaches us to do and to believe, and will you be guided by them in your life and ministry? (from 02/01/2013 update)

“Do you receive and adopt without hesitation the *Essential Tenets* of the ECO as reliable exposition of what Scripture teaches us to do and to believe, and will you be guided by them in your life and ministry?” (from “Open Letter to SC Synod”)

cf ECO Polity 1.0305

Each covenant partner (member) shall strive to be faithful to Christ by participating in the congregation’s worship, fellowship, and service on an ongoing basis. Faithfulness in Christ involves each covenant partner’s dedication of time and talents for the congregation’s mission and ministry, in accordance to the gifts that God has bestowed upon him or her. Faithfulness also involves the stewardship of finances. . . . Those who are invited to take significant leadership roles in the congregation shall be spiritually mature, agree with the *Essential Tenets* of ECO, be carefully selected, be trained and/or mentored, and be supervised, and should ordinarily be members for at least a year.

EPC ordination vows (Chapter G-14-1A.3-5)

3. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?
4. Do you promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with the system of doctrine as taught in the Scriptures and as contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this Church you will, on your own initiative, make known to your Presbytery the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?
5. Do you affirm and adopt the “Essentials of Our Faith” without exception?

cf EPC Book of Government Chapter 13-6

The candidate or transferring Teaching Elder shall provide a written statement of any exceptions to the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms of this Church, and the Presbytery must act to allow or disallow the exceptions. The Presbytery shall not allow any exception to “Essentials of Our Faith.” If the Teaching Elder develops exceptions to the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms after ordination, he or she must report those exceptions to the Presbytery and the Presbytery must act to allow or disallow these exceptions.



Understanding ECO: 11 Characteristics of Our Polity & Vision

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

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

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



December 3, 2012

Executive Presbyters
Stated Clerks
Presbyteries of the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing in response to the recent decision of the Permanent Judicial Commission of the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii in the case of the Session of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church vs. the Presbytery of Santa Barbara. The decision states that the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians' Presbytery of the West was mischaracterized as a Reformed body.

The decision, however, reflects a number of statements that are simply inaccurate since the time the complaint was initially filed on June 2, 2012. I'm writing today to address the inaccuracies in order to assure you that the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO) and its Presbytery of the West are indeed Reformed bodies, as our polity and theology clearly evidence.

Let me begin by addressing questions of theology and the Essential Tenets:

As most are aware, ECO adopted all 11 confessions from the Book of Confessions of the PC(USA). We believe these confessions still do guide our ministry in the name of Jesus Christ.

In order to clarify what we believe to be the core theology of these confessions from a distinctively evangelical perspective, a task force drafted the Essential Tenets. We believe that this document reflects a Reformed understanding of the Christian faith.

Individuals seeking membership in churches in the Presbytery of the West are **NOT** required to sign any document affirming the Essential Tenets. The only requirement of men and women joining ECO congregations is, "testimony of their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior" (ECO Polity, 1.0303). I am also attaching the ECO Polity document so you might verify my statement yourself. I am truly baffled as to how this misunderstanding about church membership arose, since our polity clearly states otherwise.

With regard to the role of the Essential Tenets for church leaders, the Presbytery of the West—along with the rest of ECO--requires its elders, deacons, and pastors to reply in the affirmative when asked in their ordination vows:

“Do you receive and adopt without hesitation the Essential Tenets of the ECO as reliable exposition of what Scripture teaches us to do and to believe, and will you be guided by them in your life and ministry?” (ECO Polity 2.0103c)

It is our expectation that, if a governing body together affirms the Essential Tenets document as a reliable doorway into scripture and the Confessions, then it is the job of that governing body to decide how to deal with any person within the governing body, or seeking membership in it, who does not agree with a particular aspect of the theological position. A governing body together makes an affirmation about how they believe on important matters. However, if a particular member of the governing body disagrees with a piece of that belief, the key question at hand is whether that person can submit to the decision of the whole and allow the governing body to function with that belief – even though privately they may have disagreement.

Finally, a consistent question has arisen regarding ECO’s membership in the World Communion of Reformed Churches. ECO missed last year’s deadline for application to the WCRC, so we submitted it this year and anticipate gaining membership in May, 2013. This appears to have become the litmus test for some presbyteries, so we patiently await our membership in that body.

Let me continue by addressing questions of polity and structure:

As of this writing, Presbytery of the West consists of 9 congregations who have been fully dismissed and received into our body. They are:

- First Presbyterian Church of Tacoma, WA
- First Presbyterian Church of Jerome, ID
- First Presbyterian Church of Colorado Springs, CO
- First Presbyterian Church of Monte Vista, CO
- Kirkwood Memorial Church of Penrose, CO
- United Presbyterian Church of Canon City, CO
- First Presbyterian Church of La Junta, CO
- First Presbyterian Church of Lamar, CO
- Advent Presbyterian Church of Spring, TX

Congregational membership in these churches totals just over 6,000 members.

In addition, the following churches have been received into the Presbytery of the West pending dismissal from their PC(USA) presbyteries:

- First Presbyterian Church of Sibley, IA
- Montesano Presbyterian Church of Montesano, WA
- First Presbyterian Church of Moses Lake, WA
- Gateway Presbyterian Church of The Dalles, OR
- Glenkirk Presbyterian Church of Glendora, CA
- First Presbyterian Church of Covina, CA

The Presbytery of the West has also assumed full ecclesiastical authority over the clergy serving the congregations whom we have received. We have 12 Teaching Elders and 2 Commissioned Ruling Elders serving within our bounds, as well as 3 Teaching Elders who serve ECO churches while retaining membership in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Those persons serving the churches whose memberships are still pending total 8 more Teaching Elders and another Commissioned Ruling Elder.

The Presbytery of the West employs no staff, though we call regularly upon the resources of our national ECO staff members.

Instead, the Presbytery of the West thrives on the volunteer commitments of its officers and committee members. At our first stated meeting of November 3, 2012, we elected our first Presbytery Governing Council, consisting of myself as Moderator, Rev. Andrea Messinger (pending her dismissal from San Gabriel Presbytery) as Vice Moderator, Rev. Rory Gillespie as Stated Clerk, and Elder Jim Brown as Treasurer. Minutes of the meeting are available upon your request. We're happy to share them.

The Presbytery of the West also elected members to our Ministry Partnerships Team (our equivalent of the Committee on Ministry), Pastoral Ministry Ordination Team (our equivalent of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry), and, finally, a Permanent Judicial Commission.

I am aware that some early concerns were expressed about the Presbytery of the West's leadership being "appointed" rather than nominated and elected to office. In the first few months of the Presbytery of the West's existence, I was indeed serving as Moderator at the request of ECO's board. This was a temporary arrangement, though, and I have since been duly elected, as noted above. No other such appointments have ever been made within the bounds of the Presbytery of the West.

The Presbytery of the West currently supports a number of programs for support of clergy, missional outreach, and benevolence. ECO nationally offers a comprehensive medical insurance, death and disability coverage, and a pension plan through Envoy Financial. We also have a nascent Ministers' Assistance Fund (small but growing!).

The Presbytery of West supports church planting efforts nationally, and we offer all ECO members access to RightNow Training, an online leadership and ministry training resource. Our regional and national gatherings focus on training and empowering our churches with nationally recognized speakers.

The Presbytery of the West, through ECO, is currently in full partnership with three mission agencies: The Outreach Foundation, Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship, and the Antioch Partners.

The Presbytery of the West also enjoys a strong relationship with Fuller Theological Seminary and Azusa Pacific University. Our Pastoral Ministry Ordination Team has already been in contact with over two dozen potential candidates, who will begin the ordination process with us as soon as our Ordination Manual is approved at our first national Synod meeting in January.

Finally, the decision of the Synod PJC's decision refers to the Presbytery of the West as a "non-geographical presbytery." This too is inaccurate. The boundary between the Presbytery of the West and Presbytery of the East is the Mississippi River, with the understanding that the whole of the state of Minnesota falls within the Presbytery of the West's boundaries, while the whole of the state of Louisiana falls within the Presbytery of the East's boundaries. Granted, it's a large piece of geography, but we are geographically bound.

I will not address further claims made in the Synod PJC's decision, as my purpose in writing today is only to address questions related to ECO and the Presbytery of the West as Reformed bodies. We are of a different flavor of the Reformed tradition, certainly, but I can assure you that we are nevertheless thoroughly Reformed in our polity and theology.

If you have any further questions or require further documentation, please do not hesitate to contact me. I'll be more than happy to supply whatever resources you might request.

Grace and peace,

Rev. Dr. MJ Romano
Moderator
Presbytery of the West
Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians
and
Pastor
First Presbyterian Church
La Junta, Colorado
719-384-2852 (office)
719-469-7717 (cell)
pastor@lajuntapres.org

Attachment F:
PERMANENT JUDICIAL COMMISSION OF THE
SYNOD OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA & HAWII
OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

| | | |
|--|---|---------------------------|
| Session of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church of Santa Barbara, CA, <i>et al</i> |) | Case Number 2012-3 |
| |) | |
| Complainants |) | Rationale & Findings |
| |) | |
| vs |) | |
| |) | |
| The Presbytery of Santa Barbara. |) | |
| |) | |
| Respondents |) | |
| |) | |

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

On June 21, 2012, the Clerk of the Synod of Southern California & Hawaii received a complaint from the above referenced Complainants. Ruling Elder Curtis McKee, Moderator of the Permanent Judicial Commission of the Synod was out of the jurisdiction for a period of days; Teaching Elder Daryl Fisher-Ogden, Clerk of the Commission, is a member of the Respondent presbytery and will therefore not participate in the case under the provisions of D-5.0205. Commission officers, Teaching Elder Michael Haggin, Vice-Moderator, and Teaching Elder Judith Hirsch-Fikejs, Clerk *pro tempore*, examined the papers filed with the Commission pursuant to D-6.0103b(1) of the Book of Order. On June 25, 2012, the above named Synod PJC officers determined that the Preliminary Questions had been answered in the affirmative. The Synod PJC received the Respondent's answer to the Complaint on August 9, 2012, and the Moderator and Clerk *pro tempore* again ruled on the Preliminary Questions in the affirmative and that the case should proceed to trial. The trial was held on November 9, 2012, at St. James Presbyterian Church, Tarzana, CA.

At the trial, both the Complainant and Respondent were represented by counsel. The Complainants presented a notebook containing all the documents that had been generated by the parties and entered them into evidence. The Respondents did not present a pre-trial brief or any additional documentation. The Complainants presented witnesses whereas the Respondent did not. Both parties presented opening and closing arguments. The Synod PJC went into recess in order to confer and deliberate. Findings were announced Saturday, November 10, 2012, at 11:00 AM.

FINDINGS AND RATIONALE

1. **Count One:** Conferring on a “special interest” group a veto over the constitutional governance of the church.
Sustained. By attempting to form a union presbytery with ECO, Santa Barbara Presbytery did indeed attempt to align itself with a “special interest group” and thus confer upon that entity the status of an equal council, thus giving that group veto authority over the governance in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

2. **Count Two:** Promotion of division and schism in the church.
Sustained. While schism and division may not have been the specific intent of those approving the Plan for Union, the effect of that action did indeed bring about schism in the presbytery. Adoption of the Plan for Union did indeed loosen the collective ties between the presbytery and its churches and disrupted the sense of community whereby a fulsome discernment process could be implemented in order to resolve divergent views.
3. **Count Three:** Mischaracterization of ECOP as a “Reformed” body.
Sustained. In spite of evidence that the history of the Reformed Tradition did involve adherence to “essential tenets” and required signed affirmation of same for short periods of time, it is the current understanding that the Reformed Tradition rests on a clear understanding that Jesus Christ alone is Lord of the conscience, and this assertion not only appears in the Form of Government but is supported by the guidance of the Theological Declaration of Barmen. It is also a Reformed affirmation that membership in any worshipping body that claims the label “Reformed” has as its only membership requirement one's personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The preponderance of the evidence demonstrates that the requirements of ECO are otherwise, and by requiring a signed agreement of like belief, exist beyond the boundaries of what it is understood to be Reformed.
4. **Count Four:** Mischaracterization of the “Presbytery of the West” as a “comparable” council or governing body.
Sustained. A preponderance of the evidence as of June 2, 2012, indicates that the Presbytery of the West does not meet the criteria as to membership churches with duly constituted and ordained Sessions or the requisite number of teaching elders. Thus it cannot be considered a comparable council with which another presbytery can form a union.
5. **Count Five:** Mis-use of our constitutional provisions for union presbyteries.
Sustained. The provisions in the Book of Order are intended to encourage ecumenical initiatives and the specifications are deliberately designed to give enormous latitude. However, they are given this latitude in order to promote reconciliation between councils, reduce unnecessary expense because of overlapping ministries, and to encourage and implement common mission and purpose. This Santa Barbara Presbytery Plan for Union does not do this but has been formed to serve as a “shield” to the denomination's action and judicial decision.
6. **Count Six:** Disregard of important constitutional requirements for union.
Sustained. Answered in findings for No. 5.
7. **Count Seven:** Violation of our constitutional guarantee of respect for biblically-formed conscience.
8. **Count Eight:** Conditioning congregational membership on more than a profession of faith.
9. **Count Nine:** Infringing congregations’ right to elect, and sessions’ responsibility to assess the fitness of, congregational leaders.
10. **Count Ten:** Violation of presbytery’s obligations in assessing its congregations’ choices of pastoral leadership.
Counts 7, 8, 9, 10 Sustained. Councils do not have the right to bind the conscience of either pastors or members to a pro-forma set of essentials. While teaching elders' consciences are free within the confines of the church's polity interpretation of Scripture as put forth in the Constitution, members have the right of conscience to a greater degree as well as freedom of conscience to determine the fitness of their own leaders, both at the congregational level as well as the level of the presbytery. The “litmus test” for ordination is given in the Book of Order and provides presbyteries with the freedom to examine candidates on a case by case basis and determine whether or not they meet those standards and are judged by a particular presbytery to be fit for pastoral leadership.
11. **Count Eleven:** Defiance of the church’s discernment that categorical exclusion of gay and

lesbian Presbyterians is improper.

Sustained. The GA PJC has ruled that presbyteries must examine their candidates for ordination on an individual basis and may not impose exclusionary rules beforehand in order to discourage candidates who espouse a particular theological persuasion or understanding of ministry fitness (*Parnell vs Presbytery of San Francisco, GA PJC, 2012; Larson vs Presbytery of Los Ranchos, GA PJC, 2012;*). Thus, the standards imposed by ECO and contained in the Plan for Union as a means of circumventing the stated ordination standards in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) constitute a failure to consider each candidate individually and are a way of imposing categories of persons who may or may not be considered for ordination to pastoral ministry.

12. **Count Twelve:** Denial of our commitment to remain open to God’s continuing reformation of the church.

Sustained. The preponderance of the evidence shows that by imposing the necessity of adhering to specific “essential tenets” as put forth by ECO and incorporated in the Plan for Union, the processes of dialogue and discernment whereby divergent views may be examined with the goal of discovering common ground for agreement have been inhibited significantly so that a body of “like minded” persons becomes the norm rather than seeking fellowship and common ministry that can be supported by all members of the Presbytery and its member churches.

13. **Count Thirteen:** Violation of presbytery’s duty to exercise genuine, good-faith discernment in providing for dissident congregations.

Sustained. A preponderance of the evidence shows that the Plan for Union and Santa Barbara Presbytery's plan to “routinely dismiss dissident congregations” in the future abdicates their trusteeship, a privilege that enables them to serve the entire church. They also abdicated their responsibility to be faithful to their adherence to the Reformed Tradition in insuring that churches which are dismissed move into fellowships that conform to the church's understanding of church order, theology and practical ministry as viewed through the prism of the Reformed Tradition.

14. **Count Fourteen:** Undermining of the property trust provisions in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Sustained. The Plan for Union clearly provides a far different standard for dismissing churches and undercuts the trusteeship of the presbytery in assuring the continuance of Reformed ministry presence when congregations feel it is necessary to part ways with the council and its member churches. As trustees for the whole church, adopting a divergent standard as laid out by the ECO puts the Santa Barbara Presbytery clearly at odds with the polity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

15. **Count Fifteen:** Violation of obligations to congregations and members who remain exclusively loyal to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Sustained. A preponderance of the evidence shows that no provision has been made in the Plan for Union for those congregations who decide not to become a part of the proposed union presbytery, thus insuring isolation from other congregations in that geographical area, putting the livelihood and employment of pastors at risk, and literally setting these congregations adrift from the guidance and fellowship of the presbytery.

16. **Count Sixteen:** Deprivation of full rights of membership in the presbytery.

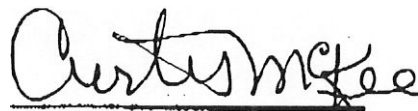
Sustained. A preponderance of the evidence shows that the Plan for Union and the rules of the ECO would remove from full participation by vote in the union presbytery those who are not serving as church pastors, thus eliminating those who are serving in validated ministries for no other reason than the polity of the union presbytery is no longer that of the Book of Order, contrary to assertions otherwise.

17. **Count Seventeen:** Violation of presbytery's duty to pursue ministry, and to establish ecumenical relationships, within its geographic bounds.
Sustained. By seeking the formation of non-geographical presbyteries at the General Assembly and by aligning with a non-geographical presbytery, namely the Presbytery of the West, the Santa Barbara Presbytery has put theological affinity ahead of doing ministry in a geographical location and to work to develop and strengthen ecumenical relationships with believers of other denominations as a sign of the unity of Christ's church.
18. **Count Eighteen:** Failure to conduct business decently and in order.
Sustained. While those supporters placing the Plan for Union before the presbytery membership observed the letter of the law, the spirit of open dialogue, using every avenue available to share information, using gatherings to answer questions, responding appropriately to written requests for information, allowing open discussion without time constraints – all were clearly missing. Both written documentation and trial testimony confirm this. While the plan was clearly laid out and a timeline presented, members felt excluded and their concerns given little importance. While the process may have been orderly, a significant portion of members did not feel that they were treated decently.
19. **Count Nineteen:** Establishment of union before receipt of requisite synod approval.
Not sustained. There is no evidence to support this allegation. The minutes of June 2, 2012, state that it is the intent of the Santa Barbara Presbytery to request approval of the Synod for its Plan for Union at a stated meeting of that council.

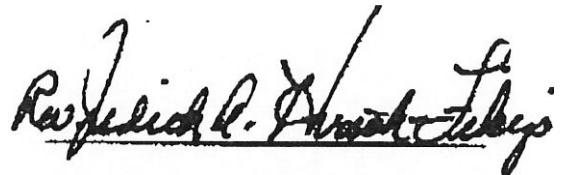
REQUEST FOR RELIEF

1. The Permanent Judicial Commission of the Synod of Southern California & Hawaii hereby declares null and void the actions taken by Santa Barbara Presbytery at their called meeting of June 2, 2012 wherein the Plan for Union was approved.
2. It is further ordered that the Stated Clerk of the Santa Barbara Presbytery report this Commission's decision and order to the presbytery at its first meeting following this order, to enter the full decision and order in its minutes and to send an excerpt of those minutes showing entry of the decision and order to the Stated Clerk of the Synod.

Dated this tenth day of November, 2012



R. Curtis McKee, Moderator
Permanent Judicial Commission
Synod of Southern California and Hawaii



Judith Hirsch-Fikejs, Clerk
Permanent Judicial Commission
Synod of Southern California and Hawaii

**Dissenting Opinion of Rev. Michael D. Haggin
and (in part) Rev. Paul B. Chun and Elder R. Curtis McKee**

I completely concur in the unanimous decision of the Commission that the action of the Presbytery of Santa Barbara to create a union presbytery together with the Presbytery of the West of the ECO is irregular and unconstitutional. This could have been a single point of complaint and would, by itself, justify the remedial action ordered in this case. Complainants, however, allege a large number of additional points of complaints which appear to impute unnecessarily negative motives to the Respondent. Accordingly I cannot concur with my colleagues in their decision on several of the counts of the Complaint:

Count Two: Promotion of division and schism in the church

The evidence shows that the moving actors in Respondent presbytery sought to form a union presbytery in the belief, hope, or expectation that it would hold the Presbytery of Santa Barbara together and prevent a number of the member congregations from seeking dismissal. By prompting this Complaint, their action gave rise to divisions in the Presbytery community, but it would be a sheer speculation to say that the divisions and schisms resulting from one course of action were greater or less than those resulting from another course of action. The Commission has found that the action of the Presbytery was unconstitutional. I do not endorse Complainant's desire to mark it as malevolent as well.

Count Three: Mischaracterization of ECOP as a "Reformed" body

The Form of Government (G-5.04) authorizes a presbytery to unite "with one or more comparable councils or governing bodies, each of which is a member of another Reformed body." Accordingly, on June 2, 2012, Respondent presbytery voted "to recognize ECO: a Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians as a Reformed body." This Commission has effectively found that ECOP is not "another" body and that Presbytery of the West is not a "comparable council." In this count, Complainant asks us to deny that ECOP is "Reformed." Witness testimony was presented to indicate that ECOP fails a particular theological 'litmus' test. I believe that it is at least equally legitimate to classify as "Reformed" bodies whose theological witness descends historically from the central preachers and teachers of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, including Huldrych Zwingli, John Calvin, Heinrich Bullinger, Zacharius Ursinus, Thomas Cranmer, John Knox, and others of that 'school.' When any individual seeking ordination is examined, the ordaining council has the responsibility of determining whether or not the candidate has departed from essentials of Reformed faith and polity (G-2.0105). In this case, Respondent presbytery exercised its analogous responsibility responsibly and defensibly.

Count Twelve: Denial of our commitment to remain open to God's continuing reformation of the church

Complainants believe themselves to be distinguished from the majority in the Presbytery of Santa Barbara in part because of their greater 'openness to God's continuing reformation of the church' on a theological point in recent (and continuing) contention. It does not follow from this that the Presbytery's members voting in the majority on June 2, 2012, must be closed to God's continuing reformation of the church on other points of Gospel teaching or even at other times. Since this count appears to charge Respondent with doing something improper in the future, I cannot concur with the Commission decision here. The Rev. Paul B. Chun joins me in this dissent.

Count Eighteen: Failure to conduct business decently and in order

The evidence presented in support of this count spoke largely to the limitations placed on length of speeches and total time of discussion on June 2, 2012. Complainant also objected to “confused, inchoate, and unconstitutional premises that misled presbyters.” The length of time on June 2, 2012, for individual speeches and for the entire discussion was set by the presbytery itself in adopting a rule for this business. It followed upon several months of consideration in which there were other public discussions and there was ample opportunity for the members of the presbytery to influence their fellow presbyters. The presbytery was ready to proceed to a decision on June 2, 2012, even if the Complainants felt themselves to be ‘behind the pace’ in the competition of ideas. Respondent presbytery’s actions were (as we have found) mistaken and irregular, but they were not indecent or disorderly. The Rev. Paul B. Chun and ruling elder R. Curtis McKee join me in this dissent.

Attachment G: AI on Synod PJC Decisions

Item 05-27 Request 06-5. Interpretation Regarding Authority of Synod Permanent Judicial Commission Decisions--Stated Clerk, Synod of the Covenant.
[The assembly approved Item 05-27. See pp. 38, 40.]

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution recommends that the 217th General Assembly (2006) answer Item 05-27 (ACC Request 06-5) with the following interpretation:

“Decisions of the permanent judicial commissions of synods and presbyteries are binding on the parties to the particular cases in which the decisions are rendered unless overturned on appeal. No synod or presbytery permanent judicial commission is able to make its decisions binding beyond the parties to the particular case by simply declaring it to be so.

“At the same time, decisions of synod permanent judicial commissions are precedent setting for that synod, its presbyteries, members of the presbyteries, sessions, and members of the particular churches in the synod. Likewise, decisions of presbytery permanent judicial commissions are precedent setting for that presbytery, members of that presbytery, sessions, and members of the particular churches within that presbytery. That is to say, governing bodies and members in the same jurisdiction and a lower jurisdiction below the one rendering a decision should be aware that the permanent judicial commission will render similar decisions in cases on the same issues and with like fact situations. *Wefer v. Synod of Pennsylvania* (Minutes, UPC, 1957, Part I, pp. 18893). Therefore, the conduct of such governing bodies and members should be governed accordingly in matters relating to ecclesiastical law.

“Only the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission has the power to render decisions that are authoritative interpretations binding on the entire church, because the Book of Order so provides (G-13.0103r; now G-3.0501c).”

Attachment H: Comparison of Ordination Vows for Pastors/Teaching Elders

EPC (G-14-1.A)

1. Do you reaffirm your faith in Jesus Christ as your own personal Lord and Savior?
2. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, totally trustworthy, fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, the supreme, final, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
3. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?
4. Do you promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with the system of doctrine as taught in the Scriptures and as contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this Church you will, on your own initiative, make known to your Presbytery the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?
5. Do you affirm and adopt the "Essentials of Our Faith" without exception?
6. Do you subscribe to the government and discipline of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church?
7. Do you promise subjection to your fellow Presbyters in the Lord?
8. Have you been induced, as far as you know your own heart, to seek the office of the holy Ministry from love to God and a sincere desire to promote His glory in the Gospel of His Son?
9. Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in promoting the truths of the Gospel and the purity and peace of the Church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise unto you on that account?
10. Will you seek to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of all your duties as a Christian and a Minister of the Gospel, whether personal or relative, private or public; and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your manner of life, and to walk with exemplary piety before the flock of which God shall make you overseer?
11. Are you now willing to take the charge of this Church, agreeable to your declaration when accepting their call? And do you, relying upon God for strength, promise to discharge to it the duties of a Pastor?

PCUSA (W-4.4003)

- a. Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
- b. Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?
- c. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?
- d. Will you fulfill your ministry in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?
- e. Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit?
- f. Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?
- g. Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?
- h. Will you pray for and seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?
- i. Will you be a faithful teaching elder, proclaiming the good news in Word and Sacrament, teaching faith and caring for people? Will you be active in government and discipline, serving in the councils of the church; and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

ECO (2.0103)

- a. Do you believe in One God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and do you boldly declare Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and acknowledge Him Lord of all and Head of the Church?
- b. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the Word of God, and, inspired by the Holy Spirit, the unique witness to Jesus Christ and the authority for Christian faith and life?
- c. Will you receive, adopt, and be bound by the *Essential Tenets* of ECO as a reliable exposition of what Scripture teaches us to do and to believe, and will you be guided by them in your life and ministry?
- d. Relying on the Holy Spirit, do you humbly submit to God's call on your life, committing yourself to God's mission, and fulfilling your ministry in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture and guided by our confessions?
- e. Will you be governed by ECO's polity and discipline? And will you be accountable to your fellow elders, deacons, and pastors as you lead?
- f. Do you promise to be faithful in maintaining the truth of the Gospel and the peace, unity, and purity of the Church?
- g. Will you pray for and seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?
- h. Will you be a faithful minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by proclaiming the good news, teaching the faith, showing the people God's mission, and caring for the people?