



# PRESBYTERY of SANTA BARBARA

March 20, 2012

To: The members and leadership of the Presbytery of Santa Barbara.

From: Presbytery Council

Re: Recommendation to form a Union Presbytery with the Presbytery of the West of the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians.

Dear fellow members of the Presbytery of Santa Barbara,

Attached is a draft Plan of Union, which we are asking you to read, discuss, pray over, and think about as a way forward for the Presbytery of Santa Barbara.

This past year has seen a change in our beloved denomination. What has held us together for work and mission in the past seems to some as insufficient to hold us together into the future. We are faced with the reality that at least 6 congregations of the Presbytery of Santa Barbara have initiated internal discussions about leaving the PCUSA. Aware that such an event would threaten the very mission and vitality of the presbytery which we all hold dear, and in discussion with the leadership of those churches, a Union Presbytery with the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians has emerged as a reasonable and realistic way to keep us together for the mission we care about, while doing the least harm to congregations.

The Plan of Union ensures the viability of the presbytery. It also provides stability for all our congregations and mission work. It especially provides economic stability for the one-third of our congregations with loans guaranteed by the presbytery. It is Missional in that together we are able to provide significant leadership and program support to our congregations, as well as keep our New Church Development effort focused, our University Ministry active and our IMPACT mission-sending program empowered.

The Union Presbytery falls under the following section in the Form of Government:

*Page 66 Book of Order 2011/2013*

## **G-5.04 UNION PRESBYTERIES**

A presbytery of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) may unite to form a union presbytery with one or more comparable councils or governing bodies each of which is a member of another Reformed body, with the approval of the synod or comparable council or governing body of which each is a part.

*G-5.0401 Constitutional Authority*

The union presbytery shall be subject to the constitution of each denomination represented in the union. Wherever the constitutions of the denominations differ, any mandatory provisions of one shall apply in all cases where the others are permissive. Where there are conflicting mandatory provisions, the union presbytery shall overture the highest council or governing body of the denominations involved to resolve the conflict either by authoritative interpretation or by constitutional amendment.

*G-5.0402 Plan of Union*

A union presbytery shall be created by the adoption of a plan of union by two-thirds vote of each presbytery or governing body that is party to the union. The synod and/or governing body having jurisdiction over each of the uniting bodies shall approve the plan of union.

We have chosen to be union with the new reformed body of the Fellowship of Presbyterians, known as ECO, which stands for Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians. We have chosen this body for several reasons. They have the same theological core in their Book of Confessions as the PCUSA. They have standards regarding preparation for ministry and ordination that are congruent with the historic and current practice of our presbytery. They hold high the importance of churches working together. They celebrate the full inclusion of women and racial-ethnic people in ministry and work to encourage young people to consider leadership in the church. They believe that congregations and pastors need to be in covenant relationship with one another, providing accountability, support, prayer and encouragement for one another. They are committed to a new Missional understanding of the church's mandate to reach the local community with the gospel, as well as the deep commitment to social justice we hold dear.

For more information go to their website:  
<http://www.fellowship-pres.org/eco>

For presentations under video: click on John Ortberg's sermon for a view of their vision.

We know of course that this is an imperfect solution. Yet we feel that a Union Presbytery as envisioned could be a positive witness to our denomination and other presbyteries and congregations. For us the Union Presbytery will maintain the current stability, collegiality and viability of the presbytery. How the presbytery and committees function in a month-by-month, day-by-day will not change. How we relate to one another will actually improve through several of the tools ECO has developed. Our organization structure will not change. The Union Presbytery will maintain the existing balance and dialog in our presbytery during this charged and somewhat chaotic time. We hope and pray that there might even be a building of trust and a reduction in fear within the presbytery.

(continued)

**What Comes Next:**

March 19-April 22, 2012: This is the time for feedback to Presbytery Council. Pray with your friends, talk with your church sessions, and send your ideas or revisions to the presbytery office (mholmes@sbpres.org) to be considered as Council works on Draft #2 on April 23. Draft #2 will be sent to the Presbytery membership on April 24th.

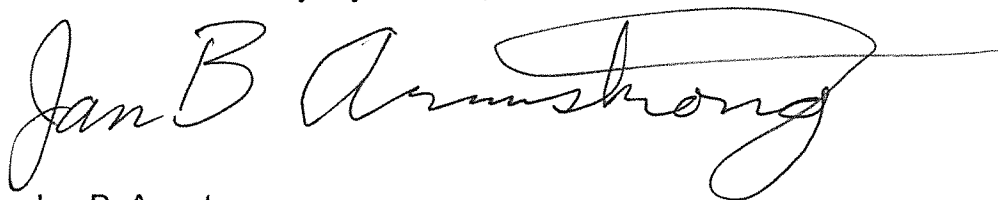
May 5, 2012: Regular presbytery meeting in San Luis Obispo, we will have our first reading and discussion of the pros and cons of Union, and discernment of any changes needed for the document or the plan. The result of this will be the Final Draft of the document, which will be distributed following the Presbytery meeting. The Final Draft will also go to the Presbytery of the West of ECO for their final review and consideration.

June 2, 2012: A special called Presbytery meeting (9:30-noon in the central part of the presbytery) to debate and vote on the motion and the Plan of Union. A 2/3s vote is needed to adopt the Plan of Union.

Following the presbytery vote, the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii will need to vote a simple majority to approve the Union. This will take place either November 3 at Synod Assembly or if warranted at a special called meeting.

As a Council, we decided we wish to vote on this before General Assembly, so that this is not perceived as being a reactionary response to anything at GA2012.

On behalf of Presbytery Council,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jan B. Armstrong". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jan B. Armstrong  
Executive Presbyter