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**Plan of Union for the
Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara**

Approved by the Presbytery of Santa Barbara June 2, 2012

It is resolved:

1. that the Presbytery of Santa Barbara request the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii for approval to become a union presbytery with the Presbytery of the West of ECO: a Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians [hereinafter ECO] and to approve the following Plan of Union pursuant to G-5.04;
2. that the congregations of the Presbytery of Santa Barbara become congregations of the Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara [hereinafter also referred to as Union Presbytery or presbytery] with the exception of any congregations that do not desire to affiliate with the Union Presbytery;
3. that the teaching elder members the Presbytery of Santa Barbara become teaching elders of the Union Presbytery;
4. that the Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara hold a worship service and create a liturgy to welcome congregations into its body;
5. that the Presbytery of Santa Barbara adopt the following *Plan of Union* and incorporate it in its entirety as part of this resolution; and
6. that the Presbytery of Santa Barbara adopt the following *Memorandum of Understanding* and incorporate it in its entirety as part of this resolution.

Plan of Union

In order to enable greater efforts in the Mission of the Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara to:

- A. Provide elder training and leadership preparation;
- B. Engage in worldwide mission, medium and long term mission activities, until the whole world knows of Christ our King;
- C. Carry out new church planting and starting new initiatives; and
- D. Recruit and train young men and women for the rolls of elder in the church, especially being pro-active to identify young people for the call to ministry as teaching elders. Particular regard should be given to marginalized groups and people for whom leadership and the educational requirements appear insurmountable.

The current Presbytery of Santa Barbara hereby becomes the Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara and will abide by these provisions:

1. The Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara shall welcome congregations from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) [hereinafter PC(USA)] and the Presbytery of the West of ECO as full members of the Union Presbytery.
2. The Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara will routinely grant, after a fair and reasonable process, congregations within the Union Presbytery permission to

- 46 transfer their denominational membership to ECO. Any financial compensation
47 (other than repayment of any existing loans or financial commitments) required
48 will follow the presbytery's dismissal policy. The presbytery will consider the
49 continued participation of a congregation in the Union Presbytery as satisfying
50 the financial guidelines for dismissal. (Dismissal policy and financial guidelines
51 are currently being developed by presbytery committees and Council.)
- 52 3. Congregations which transfer under this Plan of Union provision may not
53 transfer or leave ECO for five years, except to return to the PC(USA), or by
54 two-thirds vote of the Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara.
- 55 4. Provisions will be made for congregations who do not believe they can, in good
56 conscience, participate in the new Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara and
57 abide by the presbytery standards of conduct.
- 58 5. Individual members of PC(USA) congregations whose congregations transfer
59 to ECO may retain their PC(USA) membership, which shall be held at the
60 presbytery level. They shall continue to receive pastoral care and welcome at
61 their local congregations, and such rights as the bylaws of the local
62 congregation grants them.
- 63 6. All congregations in the Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara will be requested to
64 contribute an annual contribution to the presbytery, based on their active
65 membership, equal to the amount of ministry share approved annually by the
66 presbytery. Each congregation will individually be responsible for other fund
67 requests from their higher councils per existing policies.
- 68 7. All teaching elder members of the Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara shall be
69 considered to be engaged in a validated ministry, within the meaning of the
70 PC(USA) G-2.0503a. The presbytery shall routinely grant Teaching Elders
71 permission to serve across denominational lines between the PC(USA) and
72 ECO.
- 73 8. All Teaching Elders either being ordained for service or entering the presbytery
74 will be examined by the full Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara for
75 membership.
- 76 9. Meetings of the Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara will begin with a joint
77 meeting for all presbytery business. The first meeting shall establish
78 appropriate committees, including ones to oversee teaching elders,
79 congregations and candidates for ministry. Committee membership shall be
80 proportionate to the ratio of PC(USA) and ECO congregations. The first
81 meeting of the Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara shall elect a moderator,
82 vice-moderator and Presbytery Council members-at-large; and shall establish a
83 schedule for plenary meeting for the next 12 months.
- 84 10. The committees with the responsibility to oversee teaching elders,
85 congregations and candidates for ministry shall appoint committees or
86 commissions made up in entirety of persons from the denomination of the
87 congregation which is receiving specific care in cases which involve the
88 following:

- a. Any authority to appoint an administrative commission with original jurisdiction.
- b. Any authority to remove an installed pastor.
- c. Any authority to prosecute remedial and disciplinary proceedings.
11. The Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara shall meet in plenary session. The Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara shall have a Presbytery Council to oversee the day-to-day activities and needs of the Union Presbytery. The Presbytery Council shall consist of all committee chairpersons, moderator, vice-moderator, immediate-past moderator, and 4 members-at-large. The member-at-large positions shall be used to ensure that the Presbytery Council has a ratio of membership proportionate to the ratio of PC(USA) and ECO congregations. The number of member-at-large positions may be changed by the Union Presbytery at any regularly scheduled plenary meeting.
12. The Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara shall continue to employ the present staff of the current Presbytery of Santa Barbara. A personnel committee shall be established by the Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara to make recommendations concerning salaries, benefits, hiring, annual reviews, and dismissal of all Union Presbytery employees.

Memorandum of Understanding

1. What does union mean?

This union is the joining of the Presbytery of Santa Barbara with another comparable body within the Reformed tradition for the purpose of shared ministry. This plan seeks to manifest more visibly the unity of the body of Christ. It will seek to initiate, maintain, and strengthen relationships with another Reformed body as encouraged in the Book of Order (G-5.0101).

2. What is the goal or aim of being a union presbytery?

Within the current environment of the PC(USA) some churches in our presbytery have expressed their desire or intention to leave the PC(USA) while simultaneously wishing to remain part of the Presbytery of Santa Barbara. This plan seeks to allow individual churches to follow their conscience while staying in union with the presbytery and partners in its mission and ministries. The alternative, as seen nationally, is a contentious separation causing damage to congregations, breaking of relationships, and threatening the viability of congregations, presbyteries and their mission. Our goal is to avoid this.

3. Why bother?

Our vows as elders require us to work for the peace, unity, and purity of the church. This plan of union is a concrete effort to fulfill this promise. The loss of congregations from the presbytery will call into serious question the viability of the presbytery as a mission outpost. This plan is an intentional effort to keep churches in vital relationship with the presbytery and its mission.

4. Why now?

Major changes within the PC(USA) since the last general assembly have led some of our member churches to feel they can no longer remain in the denomination. Some have been actively preparing to leave. Some are exploring options and wondering how best to move

forward. The presbytery council is seeking to proactively lead all its member churches into greater unity and vitality in this time of great upheaval and chaos. This is an urgent issue in which action by the presbytery is necessary to insure its viability in ministry prior to further actions by the GA in July.

5. Is this legal?

Yes, it is legal. Union presbyteries have existed successfully through the history of the Presbyterian Church. Provision for this plan may be found in the Book of Order, G-5. We are working with the synod governing body relations committee to ensure the plan is the best it can be, and have been actively putting questions before them for assistance.

6. Does it mean the presbytery and its member churches are under two forms of government?

Yes. According to G-5.0401 the union presbytery shall be subject to the constitution of each denomination represented in the union. Pastors shall hold their ordination in one or the other denomination, they are not required to be members of both. At union congregations will remain as PC(USA) or ECO congregations, and will not normally be members of both, unless they initiate the process of becoming a union congregation, or implement item 8 below.

7. What happens when the constitutions involved are in conflict?

The Book of Order requires mandatory provisions within each constitution take priority over permissive. Where mandatory provisions conflict appeal is made to the two highest governing bodies for resolution. G-5.0401

8. What are options for churches that do not want to be part of the union presbytery?

(a.) The plan calls for the provision of a relief of conscience for those who do not wish to be part of the union presbytery. (b.) A session, as the council of the church (G-3.0201), may vote to be either under the constitution of the PC(USA) only, or the ECO only. (c.) There is also provision for nuanced and sensitive presbytery-pastoral (G-2.0601 and G-3.0307) care for congregations, candidates and pastors relating to their specific identification. (d.) Under the current restrictions of non-geographic presbyteries there are no options for churches that do not desire to be part of the union presbytery to transfer to another presbytery. There is hope that this will change at the next General Assembly as it takes up the idea of non-geographic presbyteries and the GA Mid-Council Commission report encouraging experiments. The intention is to advocate that current restrictions be changed and churches be granted the opportunity to associate with the presbytery of their choice.

9. Could we/Will we have two CPMs and two COMs?

Not as part of this plan of union. The union presbytery will have one CPM and one COM for all its member churches. These committees will be sensitive to and respectful of the unique culture, values, and theology of the presbytery's member churches and will not force the values or theology of one denomination upon a congregation of another. This plan does not preclude the possibility of alternate CPM, COM or other ways to fulfill G-2.0601 and G-3.0307.

10. Were other alternatives considered? What are they? What pluses and minuses of these?

Yes. The first effort and alternative was to become a non-geographic presbytery. While this had a promising start and the plan was approved by presbytery in the Spring of 2011 it was declared impossible under current constitutional standards. While these standards may be changed at the next GA this course is currently not allowed. The easiest option is to simply do nothing. Such a course would inevitably lead to the loss of a number of the presbytery's member congregations and great damage to the presbytery's life and mission. In the end, the forming of the union presbytery is the best and only course available for keeping the presbytery united and working together.

11. Will I be forced to be under a more restrictive standard?

The presbytery will follow the constitutional standards of both denominations. While some of the standards of ECO are more restrictive than those of the PC(USA) they are not any more restrictive than current policies and practices long held within the current Presbytery of Santa Barbara. It may be best to say that current practice will not become more restrictive nor will they become less.

12. In the union presbytery will a church be able/allowed to call and ordain a pastor/teaching elder who is a practicing homosexual living in a same gender covenant relationship?

No. The union presbytery is responsible for approving calls and pastors into its membership, and that right and responsibility of the presbytery as the union council remains unchanged.

13. Will the Union Presbytery take in ECO Churches that are not within the geographic borders of the Presbytery of Santa Barbara?

The Union will be with the Presbytery of the West of the ECO so it is not up to us to make a decision that they will make as a denomination. ECO Churches from outside our geographic boundaries that desire to become part of the Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara would need to be admitted in the normal manner. However it is unlikely that a congregation that has experienced a difficult and costly fight to leave its current Presbytery for the ECO will look to reconnect with the PC(USA) under the Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara.

14. Will Retired Teaching Elders lose voice and vote in presbytery meetings in accordance with the ECO Polity?

Retired teaching elders who are members of the PC(USA) will continue to have voice and vote at meetings of the Union Presbytery. Retired teaching elders who are members of ECO will not have voice and vote in accordance with the polity of the ECO.

(end)