



PRESBYTERY of SANTA BARBARA

Special Called Meeting of the Presbytery of Santa Barbara

9:30am on Saturday – June 2, 2012

Santa Ynez Valley Presbyterian Church
1825 Alamo Pintado Road, Solvang, California

TO: All Ministers, Elder Commissioners and
Clerks of Sessions

FROM: Michelle Holmes, Stated Clerk

DATE OF THIS NOTICE: May 22, 2012

Rev. Janet Loughry, Moderator and Elder Ruric Nye, Chair of Presbytery Council have called a special meeting of the Presbytery of Santa Barbara on Saturday, June 2, 2012 at 9:30am at Santa Ynez Valley Presbyterian Church, 1825 Alamo Pintado Road, Solvang, California.

Purpose: The purpose of this Called Meeting is as follows:

1. To hear and act upon a recommendation from the presbytery's Nominations Committee to set aside Standing Rule 7.71A and elect Rev. Jeff Holland to the Committee on Ministry, Class of 2015 and to serve as chair;
2. To vote on a recommendation from Presbytery Council to recognize of ECO: a Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians as a Reformed body and to recognize the Presbytery of the West as the comparable council to the Presbytery of Santa Barbara.
3. To vote on the Plan of Union for the Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara.

The agenda and all supporting documents are included. The Consent Agenda consists of our normal guidelines for discussion and debate at presbytery meetings. Childcare will not be offered at this meeting; lunch will not be served.

Directions to the church:

Exit Highway 154 at Baseline Road, proceed west to the church.

*"...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near."
(Hebrews 10:25)*

Special Called Meeting
Presbytery of Santa Barbara
Rev. Janet Loughry, Moderator
Saturday, June 2, 2012 — 9:30am

Santa Ynez Valley Presbyterian Church
1825 Alamo Pintado Road
Solvang, California 93463
Church telephone (805) 688-6323

AGENDA

- 9:00am **Registration and Coffee**
- 9:30am **Presbytery Constituted** — Rev. Janet Loughry, Moderator
 Convene with prayer
 Adoption of Agenda
 Adoption of Consent Agenda
 Introduction of first-time ruling elders
 Motion to grant privilege of floor
 Seating of Corresponding Members
- 9:40am **Worship**
- 10:00am **Report of Executive Presbyter**
- 10:25am **Report of the Nominations Committee**
- 10:30am **Debate and vote on ECO and Union Presbytery proposals**
- 11:45am **Adjournment**

Next regular Presbytery Meeting
Saturday, September 22
Registration 9:00am – Meeting 9:30am
(southern location)

PRESBYTERY PREVIEW

Presbytery of Santa Barbara – Special Called Meeting
Saturday – June 2, 2012 – 9:30am
Santa Ynez Valley Presbyterian Church

Consent Agenda is included in this packet on pages 6-7. The Consent Agenda consists solely of the Stated Clerk's report and includes the guidelines we will follow during our discussion and debate. You will be asked to approve the Consent Agenda at the beginning of our meeting.

Professional Registered Parliamentarian To assist at this meeting, we have engaged a Professional Registered Parliamentarian. Kim Goldsworthy will advise me (as Stated Clerk, I am also your parliamentarian) as needed on the finer points of parliamentary procedure, and I will advise the moderator as needed. Mr. Goldsworthy has been a member for about 25 years in the two major parliamentary organizations, the *National Association of Parliamentarians*, and the *American Institute of Parliamentarians*. He has earned the level of achievement of *Professional Registered Parliamentarian* and *Certified Parliamentarian*. Mr. Goldsworthy has had more than 25 articles published in the parliamentary journal and has served as a judge in parliamentary procedure contests for four organizations. He lives in Rosemead, California and will be introduced to you at the beginning of the meeting.

Worship We will have a short time of worship – prayer, hymns and scripture as we prepare for the work of the day.

Our Executive Presbyter Jan Armstrong will introduce **Rev. Emily McColl**, Temporary Associate Pastor at Laguna Niguel Presbyterian Church in the Presbytery of Los Ranchos. Emily is a member of the Polity Workgroup for ECO and is Moderator of our Synod's Polity and Records Committee. Previously she served on the Synod's Executive/Stated Clerk search committee, has been a member of Synod Council, Moderator of Los Ranchos' Polity Committee and a member of Los Ranchos' Permanent Judicial Commission. At our May 17 Q&A gathering, a number of folks asked if we would have someone representing ECO at our presbytery meeting, and we have asked Rev. McColl to be with us.

We have also asked **Rev. Graham Baird** to speak briefly about the next steps in his Call to ministry and what's next for Highlands Church in Paso Robles. Many of you received the May 15 e-mail from Graham about his Call to serve as Pastor at First Presbyterian Church of Colorado Springs.

Nominations Committee Report: We inadvertently removed Jeff Holland from COM. He's only been on the committee for three years, and he has been serving as chair. The presbytery's Standing Rule 7.71A reads

The [Committee on Ministry] shall consist of fourteen members, seven ministers and seven elders. Its quorum shall be a majority of the membership of the committee.

We have a full committee of 14 members (the Class of '15 was elected at the May 5 presbytery meeting):

Rev Stuart Bond	'13	Thousand Oaks	Elder Larry Lindsay	'14	Newbury Park
Rev Bruce Lethbridge	'13	Orcutt	Elder Ruric Nye	'14	Ojai
Elder Nan Allen	'13	Cambria	Elder Jim Gravitt	'14	Los Alamos
Elder Carol Ohman	'13	SB El Montecito	Rev Jarrett Johnson	'15	Carpinteria
Elder Meg Linhardt	'13	Solvang	Elder Mickey Stueck	'15	Moorpark
Rev Warren Einolander	'14	Los Alamos	Rev Brett Becker	'15	SB St. Andrew's
Rev Dale Paulsen	'14	Morro Bay	Rev Jessica Vaughan Lower	'15	At Large

(continued)

Nominations Committee Report (continued)

In order to rectify this, and ensure continuity on the committee, Nominations Committee will make the following three motions:

- 1) to set aside Standing Rule 7.71A and increase the size of the Committee on Ministry to 15 people, until June 30, 2015;
- 2) to elect Rev. Jeff Holland to serve on the Committee on Ministry, Class of 2015; and
- 3) to elect Rev. Jeff Holland as the chair of the Committee on Ministry.

Our debate and vote on the ECO and Union proposals will consist of two separate motions:

- 1) Presbytery Council will move that the Presbytery of Santa Barbara recognize ECO: a Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians as a Reformed body and recognize the Presbytery of the West as the comparable council to the Presbytery of Santa Barbara.
- 2) Presbytery Council will move that the Presbytery of Santa Barbara adopt the "Plan of Union for the Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara."

The following documents are included in this packet in this order and are identified in the bottom right corner of each page.

Regarding the motion from Presbytery Council concerning **ECO as a Reformed body, and the Presbytery of the West as the comparable council to the Presbytery of Santa Barbara**, several documents are included in this packet. This motion requires a majority vote (more than half of the votes cast).

Report from Presbytery Council concerning whether ECO meets the standards for Reformed bodies

Letters concerning ECO's theology and polity from

Rev. Eunice McGarrah (who worked in the Office of Theology and Worship at GA for several years)

Richard Mouw (President of Fuller Theological Seminary); and

Wayne Darbonne (Pastor in Denver Presbytery and Professor of Presbyterian Polity at Denver Seminary).

Report from Presbytery Council concerning whether the Presbytery of the West (ECO) is the comparable council to the Presbytery of Santa Barbara

Union Presbytery proposal Following the Q&A meeting on May 17, a number of minor corrections were suggested and have been made:

- Lines are numbered consecutively throughout document rather than starting over on each page, to facilitate discussion at the June 2 presbytery meeting.
- Corrected *Santa Barbara Presbytery* to *Presbytery of Santa Barbara* in #12, 3rd page of the Plan of Union; and in #1 in the Memorandum of Understanding.

(continued)

Union Presbytery proposal (continued)

- Corrected the name of ECO from the *Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians* to *ECO: a Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians*.
- Eliminated repetitive use of the names of the two denominations throughout, using instead "PC(USA)" and "ECO"; eliminated repetitive use of "Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara" throughout, using instead "Union Presbytery" and "presbytery" as appropriate.
- Changed PCUSA to PC(USA) throughout Memorandum of Understanding.

Adoption of the Union Presbytery proposal requires a two-thirds vote, per Book of Order G-5.0402.

Venn Diagram is included, showing how the Union Presbytery would look with pastors, elder commissioners and the chartered churches.

Michelle Holmes, Stated Clerk

CONSENT AGENDA – Special Meeting June 2, 2012

Note: The Consent Agenda will be presented for approval on one motion, however any item may be removed for discussion and separate vote. Questions, please call Presbytery Center prior to 6/2/12.

Report of: Stated Clerk, submitted by Elder Michelle Holmes

The Stated Clerk recommends the presbytery adopt the following **GUIDELINES** to be used during discussion and debate.

1. Robert's Rules of Order shall be operative for the presbytery meetings.
2. We have allowed 1 hour and 15 minutes on our agenda for the discussion and debate on the ECO and Union Presbytery proposals. If we exhaust that amount of time, the moderator will entertain a motion to extend or end debate.
3. There is no longer a provision in the Book of Order for **Corresponding Members** (teaching or ruling elders in good standing in other councils of this church or in any other Christian church, who are present at any meeting of the presbytery). We have always welcomed these people to our presbytery meetings, and given them voice but not vote. Since this has been our normal practice, the presbytery will have the opportunity at this meeting to designate such visitors as Corresponding Members. Additionally, we normally give **presbytery committee members, inquirers and candidates** privilege of the floor at our presbytery meetings and this will also be done at the beginning of the meeting. At the time we move into discussion and debate on our motions, however, the Moderator will ask for a motion to restrict debate to teaching and ruling elder commissioners to the meeting.
4. For the discussion, debate and vote,
 - (a) We will alternate speakers, pro and con.
 - (b) Persons who wish to speak must obtain the floor and be recognized by the moderator before beginning to speak.
 - (c) Each speaker shall identify themselves by giving their name and church or relationship to the presbytery.
 - (d) Each speaker must state clearly whether they are speaking for or against the motion, or if they are simply asking a question.
 - (e) No one person may speak for more than two (2) minutes; speakers will alternate pro and con; no one may speak twice until all have had an opportunity to speak once.
 - (f) Any motion made from the floor must be submitted to the Stated Clerk in writing at the time the motion is made.
 - (g) During the debate, speakers will address the moderator and speak to the motion; speakers must be courteous; cross-talk between members is not allowed.
 - (h) It is inappropriate to applaud.
 - (i) Meeting attendance shall be totaled prior to voting.

(continued)

Consent Agenda (continued)

- (j) For a ballot vote, we will use paper ballots.
- (k) If a majority vote is required, it is more than half the votes cast by persons legally entitled to vote, excluding blanks or abstentions.
- (l) If a two-thirds vote is required, it is at least two thirds of the votes cast by persons legally entitled to vote, excluding blanks or abstentions. For example,
 - If 30 votes are cast, a two-thirds vote is 20
 - If 31 votes are cast, a two-thirds vote is 21
 - If 32 votes are cast, a two-thirds vote is 22
 - If 33 votes are cast, a two-thirds vote is 22
- (m) To be included in the packet of information for presbytery commissioners: a copy of the front page of "Seeking to be Faithful Together: Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement."

Seeking To Be Faithful Together: Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement Adopted by the 204th General Assembly (1992) of the PC(USA)

In a spirit of trust and love, we promise we will:

1. Treat each other respectfully so as to build trust, believing that we all desire to be faithful to Jesus the Christ:
 - we will keep our conversations and communications open for candid and forthright exchange;
 - we will not ask questions or make statements in a way that will intimidate or judge others.
2. Learn about various positions on the topic of disagreement.
3. State what we think we heard and ask for clarification before responding, in an effort to be sure we understand each other.
4. Share our concerns directly with individuals or groups with whom we have disagreements in a spirit of love and respect in keeping with Jesus' teachings.
5. Focus on ideas and suggestions instead of questioning people's motives, intelligence, or integrity; we will not engage in name-calling or labeling of others prior to, during, or following the discussion.
6. Share our personal experiences about the subject of disagreement so that others may more fully understand our concerns.
7. Indicate where we agree with those of other viewpoints as well as where we disagree.
8. Seek to stay in community with each other though the discussion may be vigorous and full of tension; we will be ready to forgive and be forgiven.
9. Follow these additional guidelines when we meet in decision-making bodies:
 - urge persons of various points of view to speak and promise to listen to these positions seriously;
 - seek conclusions informed by our points of agreement;
 - be sensitive to the feelings and concerns of those who do not agree with the majority and respect their rights of conscience;
 - abide by the decision of the majority, and if we disagree with it and wish to change it, work for that change in ways that are consistent with these guidelines.
10. Include our disagreements in our prayers, not praying for the triumph of our viewpoints, but seeking God's grace to listen attentively, to speak clearly, and to remain open to the vision God holds for us all.

1 **Report from Presbytery Council of the Presbytery of Santa Barbara concerning**
2 **whether the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians meets the standards**
3 **for Reformed bodies as it relates to creation of a Union Presbytery**
4

5 **Introduction:**
6

7 The Presbytery's Council has sought in all of its efforts to display the grace and
8 truth of our Lord and to live out the following commitment in our Constitution:
9

10 **G-5.0101 Ecumenicity**
11

12 "The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at all levels seeks to manifest more visibly the
13 unity of the body of Christ and will be open to opportunities for conversation,
14 cooperation, and action with other ecclesiastical groups. It will seek to initiate,
15 maintain, and strengthen relations with other Reformed and Christian entities. "
16

17 **Background:**
18

19 Council appointed two of its members, Reverend Doctor Jan Armstrong and
20 Reverend Jeff Bridgeman to research this matter. Two meetings were held to
21 discuss Reformed Bodies and comparability specifically, to answer questions
22 related to: G-5.04 " ...comparable councils or governing bodies, each of which is a
23 member of another Reformed body." The range of this discussion is whether ECO
24 is a "Reformed body." A separate document covers the "comparable council" issue.
25

26 While no specific instruction for determining Reformed bodies, exists in the
27 constitution of the PC(USA), contact was made with the office of the Stated Clerk
28 of the General Assembly, Gradye Parsons, regarding a ruling on ECO as a
29 Reformed body. Stated Clerk Parsons informed the Presbyteries of the Synod of
30 Southern California and Hawaii that such determination is the responsibility of the
31 presbyteries as the result of an Authoritative Interpretation by the 218th General
32 Assembly.
33

34 The PC(USA) Book of Order places the authority for dismissing congregations to
35 other Reformed Bodies into the hands of individual presbyteries. The 218th
36 General Assembly (2008), upon recommendation of the Advisory Committee on
37 the Constitution ("ACC"), identified three questions that should be examined by
38 the presbytery to determine the suitability of a potential receiving denomination.
39

In Union we are not dismissing any churches to a Reformed body, rather we are creating a Union, with a Reformed body. Specifically, the Authoritative Interpretation (“AI”) counsels that our presbytery should consider whether the denomination is:

- doctrinally consistent with the essentials of Reformed Theology as understood by our Presbytery;
- governed by a polity that is consistent in form and structure with that of the PC(USA); and
- of sufficient permanence to offer reasonable assurance that the congregation is not being dismissed to de facto independence.

The AI created a framework for determining a Reformed body's suitability, for dismissal. The same counsel can reasonably be applied to a Reformed body for Union.

Considering ECO: a Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians

The Fellowship of Presbyterians established ECO in January 2012. The denomination is incorporated in the state of Colorado. Brenda Smith is currently the president of the Presbytery of the West, and Chief Operations Officer of ECO. ECO is religious tax-exempt under IRS rules and has applied for their group IRS religious non-profit status. They are scheduled to have their application to the World Council of Reformed Churches considered in Spring of 2013. Because it is so new, particular care was given to our research and analysis of this denomination. Recently Pueblo Presbytery in Colorado, Central Florida Presbytery, and Olympia Presbytery in Washington, all presbyteries in the PC(USA), approved ECO as an acceptable Reformed denomination for churches to be dismissed to within its bounds. The current estimate is that approximately 200 churches nationwide are presently at some stage in the process of coming into ECO. This is five times the number of churches involved in starting the Presbyterian Church of America (formed in 1973), thus addressing the permanence question.

ECO comports the most closely in its theology with the PC(USA) compared to two other denominations, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) to the PC(USA). It has adopted the same

Book of Confessions as the PC(USA) as its confessional standard. In an effort to both clarify the teachings of these confessions and nurture practical application of Reformed Theology, ECO has created a shorter document that identifies essential tenets drawn from and citing both scripture and the confessions and is designed to foster continuing theological dialogue.

ECO has written and published a Book of Order that draws heavily from the PC(USA) Book of Order and includes a form of government and a section on the rules of church discipline.

ECO Polity was created drawing on the strengths of both the current and previous Forms of Government within the PC(USA). ECO polity draws upon the gifts and leadership of deacons, elders, and pastors with similar parity to the PC(USA). ECO has streamlined mid-council polity to three levels; session, presbytery, and synod. ECO affirms the local congregation as the generative source of mission. ECO does not have a trust clause for church property.

All of these documents are available on the ECO website,
www.fellowship-pres.org/eco/

ECO can only dismiss a congregation to another Reformed body. Under the ECO Book of Order, a congregation can elect “union congregation” status with both ECO and the PC(USA).

ECO has developed a Union Presbytery section modeled closely to our PC(USA) section. ECO is composed of presbyteries and a national Synod. The Presbytery of Santa Barbara will be in union with the Presbytery of the West. The ECO Synod will meet annually with commissioners from the various presbyteries.

ECO has solicited three letters from leaders in the PC(USA) concerning their theology and polity. These letters, from Rev. Eunice McGarrah (who worked in the Office of Theology and Worship at the G.A. for several years), Richard Mouw (President of Fuller Theological Seminary) and Wayne Darbonne (Pastor in Denver Presbytery and Professor of Presbyterian Polity at Denver Seminary), are attached.

The Presbytery Council has determined that ECO meets or exceeds the first two criteria regarding being a Reformed Body. However, there is concern among some members of the Council, given the newness of the ECO, concerning the

118 third criteria: "Does the denomination to which a church is being dismissed have
119 enough permanence to ensure that the local congregation is not being dismissed
120 to de facto independence?"

121
122 In terms of permanence: From an organizational standpoint, ECO has established
123 a comprehensive medical and pension benefits plan for all of its teaching elders
124 and lay employees of its churches. From a structural standpoint, ECO is
125 incorporated and has been created around covenantal commitments that are
126 designed to preclude de facto independence. The structure of ECO is dependent
127 upon a form of connectionalism and peer accountability. From a missional
128 standpoint, those seeking dismissal to ECO are being asked to commit to deeper
129 levels of theological and practical ministry conversation, the multiplication of
130 worshiping communities of faith, and the establishment of partnerships in
131 mission including application to the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

132
133 Permanence is of less significance for our union purposes, as if one partner in the
134 union fails, the union is dissolved. Since the Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara
135 will still be intact and connected to the PCUSA, there is no risk for a congregation
136 to be abandoned.

Dear Brad,

In response to your e-mail, here is my quick assessment of the theology and polity of the New Reformed Body. I wish I had more time to work on this, but I am heading out of town for the next ten days to visit my mother in Florida and then to participate in the Religion and Science colloquy at Union Seminary in Richmond, VA.

As presbyteries face the possibility of dismissing congregations to the *New Reformed Body* (working title), they need to know whether this new body is Reformed in its theology and polity. In the past, when congregations have been dismissed to the Presbyterian Church in America and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, those *bona fides* were accepted on the basis of the PCA's and the EPC's membership in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC). In order to be a member of WARC, a denomination must meet these requirements in order to be considered reformed:

ARTICLE II - MEMBERSHIP 1. Any church shall be eligible for membership:

1.1 Which accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour; 1.2 Which holds the Word of God given in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the supreme authority in matters of faith and life; 1.3 Which acknowledges the need for the continuing reformation of the Church catholic; 1.4 Whose position in faith and evangelism is in general agreement with that of the historic Reformed confessions; 1.5 And which recognizes that the Reformed tradition is a biblical, evangelical, and doctrinal ethos, rather than any narrow and exclusive definition of faith and order.¹

Clearly, the *New Reformed Body* (NRB) has not yet applied for membership in WARC, but in its polity and theology documents, it meets the requirements to be considered a part of the worldwide fellowship of Reformed churches.

With respect to polity: Reformed churches are generally presbyterial or congregational in their form of government. The NRB retains a presbyterial form of government, but in a more streamlined form than that of the PCUSA. Instead of sessions, presbyteries, regional synods and a national General Assembly, the NRB proposes sessions, presbyteries and a national Synod. At the heart of the NRB's polity proposal is a recovery of purpose at the presbytery level and a working connectionalism among sessions and congregations through re-visioned roles of presbyteries. The NRB envisions all governing bodies as more missional than regulatory and one of the major functions of gatherings would be the sharing of ministries and 'best practices' in those ministries. The proposed polity structure flattens the organization of the church and shares more fully ministerial functions throughout the three ordered ministries of the church (teaching elder, ruling elder and deacon). Presbyteries still fill the vital functions of ordaining and calling Ministers of Word and Sacrament. Ministerial and missional work is to occur within a framework of encouragement and accountability.

In many ways, this flattening and missional direction recovers the purpose of presbyteries as intended by John Calvin in Geneva. His Venerable Company of Pastors met regularly for study of scripture and for evaluation of the preaching ministry in the various churches. Meetings of The Company were a time for equipping and accountability. Without hesitation, while the NRB polity

¹ http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/side.jsp?news_id=315&navi=9

looks slightly different from that of the PCUSA, one can say that the NRB is Reformed and Presbyterian in its form of government. While more streamlined, it is consistent in form and structure with that of the PCUSA.

With respect to theology: The quick answer to the question "Is it doctrinally consistent with the essentials of Reformed theology?" is "Yes." One must make this assessment on the basis of three theology documents that have been drafted: *The Confessional Standards*, *The Essential Tenets*, and *The Forward*. First, the NRB has adopted the very same *Book of Confessions* that is the standard for the PCUSA. In doing so, it has also proposed a more dynamic relationship with those confessions. It encourages the NRB to see the confessions as something more than what the church believed at one time. Rather, the confessions are dynamic witnesses to the faith that we must hear if we, too, are to learn how to be faithful witnesses. They are not museum artifacts. The NRB's document on Confessional Standards is useful reading for all confessional bodies, not just the NRB. From the last paragraph of *Confessional Standards*:

The Fellowship/New Reformed Body cannot imagine that it should or could disavow the confessional heritage of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Whatever the church's confessional and theological failings may be, they are the failings of all of us. The task now is not to be "non-PC(USA)," but rather to embody faithful ways of being Presbyterian. The most appropriate footing for a new venture is the faithful doctrinal and theological foundation provided by the creeds, confessions, and catechisms of the Presbyterian Book of Confessions.

Although all ordained officers of the PCUSA are asked to affirm that they receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith, there has been an ages-long reluctance to state what they are. Some presbyteries of the PCUSA have done just that and the result has been several lists of varying number of doctrines that are held to be 'essential.'

The *Essential Tenets* document of the NRB avoids that line of addressing this issue. Instead, it begins with stating its reliance on Scripture as its authority. It continues by describing what doctrines it holds in common with all Christians everywhere (Trinity and Incarnation). As it then sets out distinctly Reformed doctrines (what it describes as Christian doctrines spoken with a Reformed 'accent'), it does so in an almost narrative fashion. The document travels from creation through the fall, to redemption and covenant life. It is Reformed in its emphasis on election for salvation *and* service, on the stewardship of all of life and on living according to the Ten Commandments out of gratitude rather than obligation. It affirms Reformed doctrines such as the sovereign grace of God, the inability of humanity to contribute to its own salvation, participating in the sacraments of the covenant community and living under the authority of scripture for the good of the church, justice in the community and the glory of God. Given these affirmations, one can say that the NRB is clearly within the bounds of Reformed doctrine.

Respectfully,

Rev. Eunice McGarrah, M.Div, Th.M. (H.R.)
Office of Theology and Worship (1997-2002)
Associate Pastor, The National Presbyterian Church (2002-2011)

January 17, 2012

Dear Sisters and Brothers:

As many of you will know, I have been involved in many of the discussions that have led to the founding of the Fellowship and its efforts to establish "a new Reformed body." In all of this I have paid special attention to the conversations and planning on the part of the Fellowship's leadership with regard to both theology and polity. Those topics have been of great concern to me throughout my own pilgrimage as a Reformed Christian, and I have had many occasions to explore the application of our Reformed-Presbyterian convictions to contemporary ecclesiastical and cultural realities. One of my recent involvements in such conversations, for example, was made possible by my service for six years, as a representative of the PC(USA), as co-chair of the official Reformed-Catholic Dialogue.

I have read with great interest, then, the Fellowship documents dealing with Reformed "essential tenets" and church polity. I find the theological formulations to be firmly grounded in our Reformed confessional tradition—a creative effort to flesh out in contemporary terms, our fundamental commitment as Reformed Christians to a theological framework characterized by a clear understanding of our shared sinfulness, our hope in God's electing grace offered to us in Jesus Christ as our only home for redemption, and the Lord's call to us to show forth the sovereign Reign of Christ in our active pursuit of justice, peace, and the common good.

I offer the same assessment regarding the polity formulations. There is an obvious commitment here to a fleshing-out of a vision of the ordering of our church life the honors our historic insistence on both a healthy connectionalism, along with a firm desire to promote the unity of the universal church.

In short, I am encouraged by the Fellowship's genuine efforts to preserve the integrity of our Reformed tradition in both its teachings and practice.

Be assured of my good wishes, and my gratitude for your own service to the Body of Christ.

Warmly in Christ,



Richard J. Mouw

Richard J. Mouw
President

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Reformed Assessment of the Fellowship/ECO of Presbyterians' Theology and Polity

By Wayne Darbonne

I. Introduction

As an introduction to this brief assessment of the Reformed nature of the Fellowship/ECO of Presbyterian's theology and polity, let me start by saying that it is profoundly Reformed. Whatever one might think or feel about the movement as a whole, one cannot read its documents nor listen to its official presentations without being convinced of its intentional pursuit of being a movement that is defined and lives out of a Reformed understanding of the Christian life. In some ways, one might argue, the movement itself attempts to reclaim a clarity to its theology and polity rooted in our Reformed heritage that many feel has been lost in the theological ambiguity of the current PC(USA). One example of this pursuit of theological clarity is the Fellowship/ECO's commitment to identify essential tenets in their Reformed theology, which the PC(USA) has resisted. This statement is a brief assessment of the Reformed nature of the Fellowship and ECO's theology and polity.

II. Theology

The theology document of the Fellowship of Presbyterians and ECO provides a Reformed theological framework in three ways. The first task is to root their theology in our Presbyterian and Reformed confessional heritage. The current Book of Confessions of the PC(USA) are "not seen in our rear view mirrors as road markers of where the church has been; they are seen through our windshield as faithful and sure guides for our perilous road ahead" (pg. 1). The three things necessary for the movement's theology and ministry to flourish are the "adoption of theological confession with utmost sincerity, articulation of the confession with great clarity, and forming structures that sustain those convictions" (pg. 2).

The movement's understanding of the confessions is one of faithful standards that ground us in the rootedness of the church, providing nourishment for the church to continue to flourish. "The confessions are not final authorities; Scripture is the authority that measures all doctrinal, confessional, and theological expression. The Reformed tradition has always understood that while confessional standards are subordinate to the Scriptures, they are, nonetheless, standards" (pg. 4).

The second task of the theology document identifies the essential theological tenets of the movement. The theology document of the Fellowship and ECO acknowledges that there are 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" (pg. 5). The tenets must be consistent with the confessions, as the confessions serve as reliable expositions of Scripture. One distinctive of the

movement is its insistence to name essential tenets as cairns on the faithful journey of ministry in the Reformed tradition.

Identified essential tenets are:

- I. God's Word: The Authority for Our Confession
- II. Trinity and Incarnation: The Two Central Christian Mysteries
- III. Essentials of the Reformed Tradition
 - A. God's grace in Christ
 - B. Election for salvation and service
 - C. Covenant life in the church
 - D. Faithful stewardship of all life
 - E. Living in obedience to the Word of God

The theological document can be reviewed for the theological intricacies of each. The statements are deeply Reformed, drawing extensively from traditional Calvinist interpretations.

The third task of the theological document is to identify theological practices preserve, sustain and advance the identified theological confessions and tenets in fulfilling the church's Missional callings. These practices are to be rooted in theological friendships and conversations, drawing from some of Calvin's original concepts of Reformed theological practices. "Sustained conversation is characterized by prayerful and rigorous study of the Scripture with attention to clarifying the Reformed theological lens through which we read the Scriptures, by grateful listening to the voice of the church around the world and through the ages, and application of theological wisdom to every part of life before God and for the world" (pg. 9).

Structures are necessary to foster healthy theological friendships and conversations. Teaching and ruling elders are to actively participate, connecting one another locally, regionally and nationally. The communities unite for worship and witness through transformed lives and ministry, sustained over years, with diverse participation across gender, age, ethnic and global communities, other Reformed churches in addition to other orthodox and evangelical traditions.

III. Polity

The polity of ECO states:

The Church is visible whenever two or more are gathered in Jesus' name. The congregation is composed of members of the body of Christ who have covenanted together to engage in the mission of God in their particular context, with Jesus Christ as Head. Each congregation should strive to be a tangible, if provisional, demonstration of the Kingdom of God. Congregations exist in a variety of forms yet have these ends in common: sharing the Good News of reconciliation to God in and through Jesus Christ, gathering people for divine

worship and nurturing relationships for spiritual accountability and mutual ministry, all the while preparing disciples to be the sent people of God in the world. (1.0101)

As the polity relates to our Reformed tradition, it is built on a covenantal foundation. In practice this is most demonstrated through the systems of Reformed theological friendships and communities within and between congregations for mutual encouragement and accountability. One dramatic expression of this is the requirement of an organizing congregation to “craft a covenant which reflects their desire to be bound to Christ and one another as part of the body of Christ according to the Essential Tenets and government of the ECO.” This organizing practice built on a covenant rather than other types of organizing documents is a significant expression of the Reformed heritage.

Similarly, membership of individuals within a congregation is defined and described as a *covenant partner*. This understanding (and reframing) of membership has deep roots in our Reformed tradition. This Reformed covenantal understanding of the community of believers is a significant move from common institutional understandings and practices of church membership.

The polity document provides a minimalist structure that attempts to simultaneously provide for order and freedom to serve churches across a variety of contexts in a distinctively Reformed manner. In my opinion, the polity defined for congregations, sessions, presbyteries, synods, ECO nationally and for the church’s discipline attempts to live into our Reformed heritage in ways that transcends other current institutional ecclesiastical structures.

1 *“A presbytery must determine whether the council or governing body of the Reformed*
2 *body being considered is “comparable” to that of the presbytery.”*

3 The comparable council or governing body of the ECO to be considered by the
4 Presbytery of Santa Barbara is the Presbytery of the West. The areas of comparison
5 are arrived at by considering the relationships of churches within our current presbytery.
6 The area of the Presbytery of Santa Barbara is geographically, ethnically, economically,
7 demographically and theologically diverse as it covers more than three politically
8 determined counties in California. Any one church in the presbytery is distinct to any
9 other on many of these characteristics regardless of their physical proximity. Our
10 de facto membership in the PC(USA) is expressed in very different ways, with differing
11 levels of commitment and allegiance. Therefore a closer look is required to discover our
12 truly comparable qualities.

13 **First**, each church shares a common polity and structure for governance within
14 the presbytery; and **secondly**, we share a common mission as agreed upon together as
15 a presbytery, to which we give our support in varying degrees. Comparing ourselves
16 with the Presbytery of the West on these grounds reveals the following.

17 **Polity and Structure**

18 The Presbytery of the West exists as a legally incorporated, tax-exempt body as
19 is the Presbytery of Santa Barbara. Its offices are in Colorado Springs. It has a Board
20 President and a staff.

21 On the organizational level, the Presbytery of the West, which is the proposed
22 council of Union, is comparable as it ensures the care of its employees with a
23 comprehensive medical and pension benefits plan. Structurally, is dependent upon a
24 similar form of connectionalism, which is grounded in covenantal commitments and
25 extensive peer review.

Its responsibilities as defined by the Constitution of its denomination are comparable to ours, as is the definition of membership. The difference here is that the Presbytery of Santa Barbara is an established, historical entity within a long established denomination, with a fairly stable number of congregations as members. The Presbytery of the West is a growing entity that is actively receiving member churches and whose size will potentially exceed that of our presbytery. Its boundaries are not limited by geography as are those of all PC(USA) presbyteries.

Thus while our structures as presbyteries are similar and particular to our expression, it is logical that this is the comparable portion of the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians to which we relate in terms of governance.

Mission

The Presbytery of Santa Barbara's mission is comparable with the mission values of the Presbytery of the West. The Presbytery of Santa Barbara's mission is reasserted in the proposed Plan for Union, page 1:

- 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 role 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 Mission/Vision of the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians is found on their website under the by-line "**ECO is committed to growing and planting flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ**" which is further expressed in their expanded vision which is expressed in their name.

54 **Covenant**

55 Connect leaders in accountable relationships

56 Encourage collaboration

57 Minister out of God's unrelenting grace and covenant with His people

58 **Order**

59 Commit to a shared way of life together

60 Unite around a shared theological core

61 Gather regularly to encourage discipleship

62 **Evangelical**

63 Advance the gospel of Jesus Christ

64 Plant new missional communities

65 Develop gospel-centered leaders

66 **Presbyterians**

67 Stand on our Reformed heritage

68 Affirm education and the life of the mind

69 Serve our communities and the world in Jesus' name

70
71 These elements are comparable to the mission convictions of our presbytery with
72 some going well beyond our vision and expectations. All of our mission values appear
73 fit under one or more of their distinctives.

74 **In Summary**

75 In the same way the congregational members of the Presbytery of Santa Barbara
76 are distinct yet comparable, in their common polity and in their joint mission, so too the
77 Presbytery of the West is appropriately comparable with the polity and mission of our
78 Presbytery. There are grounds within this summary to find the two governing bodies
79 comparable.

1 **Plan of Union for the**
2 **Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara**
3
4

5 Be it moved:

- 6 1. that the Presbytery of Santa Barbara request the Synod of Southern California
7 and Hawaii for approval to become a union presbytery with the Presbytery of the
8 West of ECO: a Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians [hereinafter ECO]
9 and to approve the following Plan of Union pursuant to G-5.04;
- 10 2. that the congregations of the Presbytery of Santa Barbara become congregations
11 of the Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara [hereinafter also referred to as Union
12 Presbytery or presbytery] with the exception of any congregations that do not
13 desire to affiliate with the Union Presbytery;
- 14 3. that the teaching elder members the Presbytery of Santa Barbara become
15 teaching elders of the Union Presbytery;
- 16 4. that the Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara hold a worship service and create a
17 liturgy to welcome congregations into its body;
- 18
19 5. that the Presbytery of Santa Barbara adopt the following *Plan of Union* and
20 incorporate it in its entirety as part of this motion; and
- 21
22 6. that the Presbytery of Santa Barbara adopt the following *Memorandum of*
23 *Understanding* and incorporate it in its entirety as part of this motion.
24

25 ***Plan of Union***
26

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

- 29 A. Provide elder training and leadership preparation;
- 30 B. Engage in worldwide mission, medium and long term mission activities,
31 until the whole world knows of Christ our King;
- 32 C. Carry out new church planting and starting new initiatives; and
- 33 D. Recruit and train young men and women for the rolls of elder in the
34 church, especially being pro-active to identify young people for the call to ministry
35 as teaching elders. Particular regard should be given to marginalized groups and
36 people for whom leadership and the educational requirements appear
37 insurmountable.
38

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

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

transfer their denominational membership to ECO. Any financial compensation (other than repayment of any existing loans or financial commitments) required will follow the presbytery's dismissal policy. The presbytery will consider the continued participation of a congregation in the Union Presbytery as satisfying the financial guidelines for dismissal. (Dismissal policy and financial guidelines are currently being developed by presbytery committees and Council.)

3. Congregations which transfer under this Plan of Union provision may not transfer or leave ECO for five years, except to return to the PC(USA), or by two-thirds vote of the Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara.
4. Provisions will be made for congregations who do not believe they can, in good conscience, participate in the new Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara and abide by the presbytery standards of conduct.
5. Individual members of PC(USA) congregations whose congregations transfer to ECO may retain their PC(USA) membership, which shall be held at the presbytery level. They shall continue to receive pastoral care and welcome at their local congregations, and such rights as the bylaws of the local congregation grants them.
6. All congregations in the Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara will be requested to contribute an annual contribution to the presbytery, based on their active membership, equal to the amount of ministry share approved annually by the presbytery. Each congregation will individually be responsible for other fund requests from their higher councils per existing policies.
7. All teaching elder members of the Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara shall be considered to be engaged in a validated ministry, within the meaning of the PC(USA) G-2.0503a. The presbytery shall routinely grant Teaching Elders permission to serve across denominational lines between the PC(USA) and ECO.
8. All Teaching Elders either being ordained for service or entering the presbytery will be examined by the full Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara for membership.
9. Meetings of the Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara will begin with a joint meeting for all presbytery business. The first meeting shall establish appropriate committees, including ones to oversee teaching elders, congregations and candidates for ministry. Committee membership shall be proportionate to the ratio of PC(USA) and ECO congregations. The first meeting of the Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara shall elect a moderator, vice-moderator and Presbytery Council members-at-large; and shall establish a schedule for plenary meeting for the next 12 months.
10. The committees with the responsibility to oversee teaching elders, congregations and candidates for ministry shall appoint committees or commissions made up in entirety of persons from the denomination of the congregation which is receiving specific care in cases which involve the following:

- * * * * *

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?**

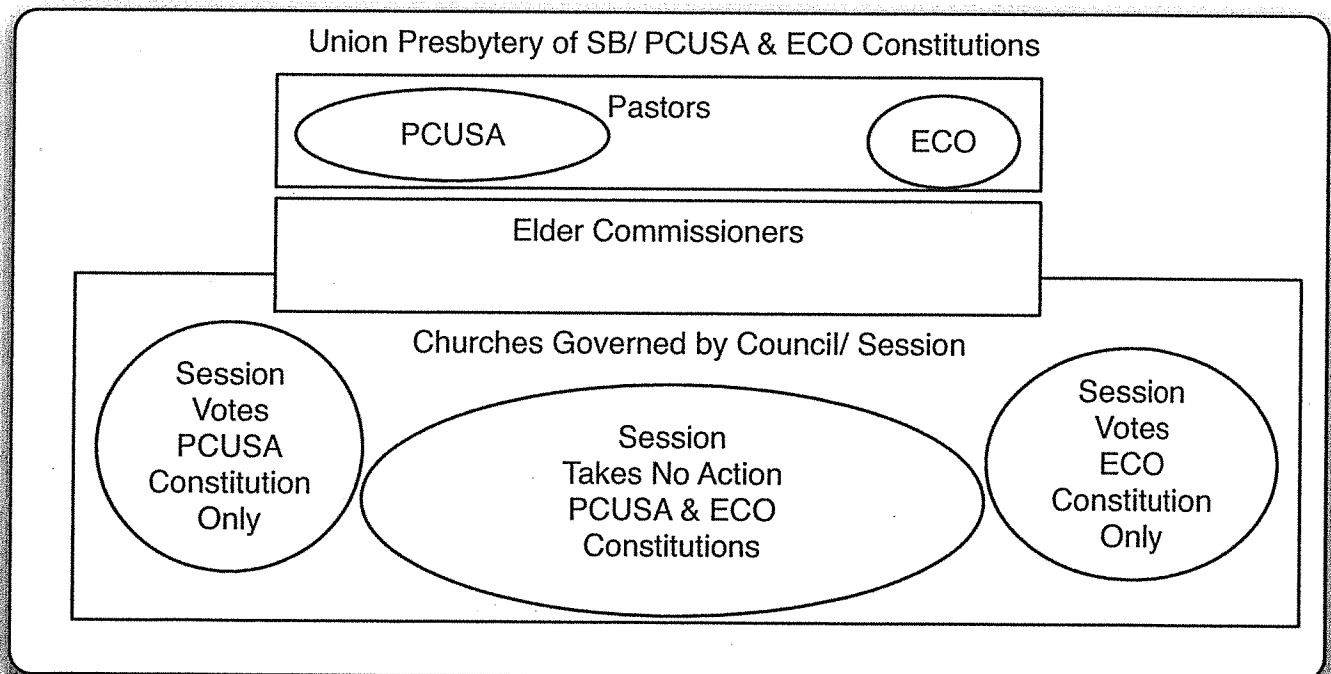
The Union will be with the Presbytery of the West of the ECO so it is not up to us to make a decision that they will make as a denomination. ECO Churches from outside our geographic boundaries that desire to become part of the Union Presbytery of Santa Barbara would need to be admitted in the normal 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)

Below is a diagram of how the Union Presbytery would look with Pastors, Elder Commissioners, the chartered churches. It shows that Sessions have responsibility for their mission and may vote to be under one constitution rather than under the union constitutions for congregational life. Pastors may choose to hold their ordination in PCUSA and ECO. Presbytery life is guided by the union of the constitutions as provided in each.



Key

ECO...Evangelical Covenant Order
ML...More Left
MR...More Right

