

COORDINATING COUNCIL

J. D. Waldrop, Chair

April 26, 2011

The Coordinating Council of the Presbytery makes the following recommendations:

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- OM**
- 1. THAT the following person be elected to serve on the Nominating Committee:
Rev. Michael Sears (Olney) D Class of 2013**
 - 2. THAT the Coordinating Council, acting on behalf of the Presbytery (pursuant to items IV.C.6 & 13 of Presbytery's Standing Rules, relating to a congregation's exercising its property rights and allowing immediate action in urgent matters), approve the planned transaction between the NC Department of Transportation and the Micaville Presbyterian Church regarding the sale of some of its land and the relocation of its manse, contingent on a favorable vote of the Micaville congregation.**
 - 3. THAT the Presbytery approve the recommended process for voting on General Assembly Proposed Amendments for the Belhar Confession and the new Form of Government (nFOG) at the April 26, 2011 Presbytery Meeting. (Coordinating Council Attachment 1)**
 - 4. THAT the Presbytery approve receiving a special offering during the Worship Service at this Presbytery meeting for the Malawi Mission Team for building materials to repair houses for medical personnel in remote villages. The homes are being repaired so that the medical personnel can live in the villages full time and give on site care at the village clinics.**

FOR INFORMATION:

- 5. THAT a list of upcoming events of the Presbytery can be found on the back of the Presbytery Docket.**
- 6. THAT copies of the Proposed Amendment to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) proposed new Form of Government (Part 1 of 3), and Belhar Confession (Part 2 of 3) approved by the 219th General Assembly (2010) were distributed at the January 29, 2011 Presbytery Meeting, to be voted on at the April 26, 2011 Presbytery Meeting. These documents can also be downloaded from the PCUSA website:**

http://oga.pcusa.org/pdf/proposed_amendments.pdf (proposed new Form of Government)

http://oga.pcusa.org/pdf/proposed_amendments2.pdf (Belhar Confession)

7. **THAT a Presbytery Stewardship Event, "Creating a Spiritual Culture of Generosity," presented by Kevin Garvey, Board of Pensions, will be held on Saturday, June 11, 2011, at the First Presbyterian Church, Morganton.**
8. **THAT the following dates have been set for Youth Events in 2011:**
May 20-21, 2011 ~ Senior High LEAP ~ Asheville
9. **THAT a training event for adults and youth, "Let's Celebrate," will be held on Saturday, August 20, 2011, at the First Presbyterian Church, Morganton. The emphasis of this event will be: Evangelism, Revitalization and Transformation.**
10. **THAT Seminar 5 for the Acts 16:5 Initiative will be held on Saturday, September 17, 2011, at the First Presbyterian Church, Morganton and the cost will be \$10 per person.**
11. **THAT the following dates have been set for the Spring and Fall Gatherings for the Presbyterian Women:**
April 30, 2011 ~ Trinity Presbyterian Church
September 24, 2011 ~ Waldensian Presbyterian Church
October 1, 2011 ~ Grace Covenant
April 21, 2012 ~ First Presbyterian Church, Hickory
12. **THAT the following dates have been set for 2011 and 2012 Presbytery Meetings:**
2011
April 26, 2011 ~ Montreat Conference Center
July 26, 2011 ~ First Presbyterian Church, Gastonia
October 21-22, 2011 ~ Lake Junaluska Conference Center
2012
January 28, 2012 ~ TBA
April 24, 2012 ~ Montreat Conference Center
July 31, 2012 ~ Black Mountain Home for Children, Youth & Families
October 26-27, 2012 ~ Lake Junaluska Conference Center

COORDINATING COUNCIL ATTACHMENT 1

PROCESS FOR CONSIDERATION OF AMENDMENTS

I. Proposed New Form of Government

- A. Gene Witherspoon introduces Report from Task Force and moves Recommendation 1. (5 min.)
- B. Paula Wallace speaks for the motion (referring to the Majority Report) (5 min.)
(Coordinating Council Attachment 2)
- C. Carolyn Poteet speaks against the motion (referring to the Minority Report) (5 min.)
(Coordinating Council Attachment 3)
- D. Open Debate (up to 2 min. per commissioner) (30 min.)
- E. Silent Prayer
- F. Standing Vote, counted by Tellers & announced by Moderator
- G. Gene Witherspoon moves Recommendation 2 of the Majority Report
- H. Open Debate
- I. Standing Vote (not counted, unless close)

[Bible Study with President Brian Blount]

II. Proposed Inclusion of Belhar Confession

- A. Richard Boyce introduces Report from Task Force and moves its Recommendation (5 min.)
- B. Bill Lowe speaks against the motion (5 min.)*
- C. Richard Boyce speaks for the motion (5 min.)*
- D. Open Debate (up to 2 min. per commissioner) (30 min.)
- E. Silent Prayer
- F. Standing Vote, counted by Tellers & announced by Moderator

Hymn of Praise

(*The actual order of these two speakers will be determined by a coin toss)

COORDINATING COUNCIL

ATTACHMENT 2

MAJORITY REPORT

to the Presbytery of Western North Carolina

from its Task Force on the

Proposed New Form of Government

April 2011

PREFACE

At its October 2010 meeting, our Presbytery appointed a Task Force to review the proposed “Foundations of Presbyterian Polity” and new “Form of Government” (hereinafter “n-FOG”), and make appropriate recommendations to Presbytery. Its members were Bert Sigmon, chair; James Aydelotte; Carolyn Poteet; Paula Wallace; and Gene Witherspoon. Luke Harkey, who was originally named a member of the task force, was unable to participate due to pastoral duties but he consulted with the group as did Bobbi White. The Task Force has met several times. Four of its members submit this report; the fifth is submitting a separate report.

I. BACKGROUND

Within living memory, the “Form of Government” (FOG) in the Book of Order (Part II of the PCUSA’s Constitution) was a relatively short document, stating our church’s polity in broad principles and leaving many organizational details to the individual governing bodies. This was even more true of the FOG in the PCUSA’s two predecessor denominations’ Book of Order (UPCUSA) and Book of Church Order (PCUS).

But since the 1983 reunion, virtually every year has seen several amendments (some extensive) to the FOG, mandating and detailing procedures. Whereas the other two documents in the Book of Order (“Directory for Worship” and “Rules for Discipline”) have been totally revised since reunion, the FOG has not – except for a careful, modest reworking of Chapter XIV in 2006. Instead, the FOG has steadily gotten ever larger (over 300 amendments since 1983) and more prescriptive.

By the 1990s, many were advocating a return to a briefer, more flexible FOG – particularly one that did not mandate precise procedures for all presbyteries, regardless of size or circumstances. Several attempts failed. Finally in 2006, the General Assembly (GA) appointed a task force to draft a revised FOG. This draft was submitted to the 2008 GA, but because many commissioners expressed misgivings about the rather extensive changes, as well as the short time for review, that GA, in effect, postponed the matter to the 2010 GA. In fact, our Presbytery, along with others, requested this action.

In the interim, the membership of the task force was slightly altered and, after the review of numerous suggestions, many minor alterations were made before a new draft was offered. The 2010 GA also

made a number of small revisions before adopting the n-FOG (468 to 204, 69%) and submitting it to the 173 presbyteries for their study and vote, by no later than May 2011.

II. WHY A NEW FORM OF GOVERNMENT?

1. Our historic affirmation, “the church reformed, always being reformed according to the Word of God,” has never been more needed than it is today. The church must change and adapt if it is to continue to proclaim God’s Word into the 21st century. The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity and Form of Government are designed to provide the polity framework that enables change and adaptability.
2. In proclaiming our witness, the Presbyterian Church needs ways to effectively explain who we are and what we believe. The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity is an effort to lay out in a single, well-organized document the basic ecclesiological (what the church is called to be and do) and historical principles on which our polity rests. This revision, like the first four chapters of the current Form of Government, can provide an excellent teaching tool for our children and individuals new to the Presbyterian understandings of our life together. Also, the n-FOG firmly supports our church’s confessions, noting that “they appeal to the universal truth of the Gospel” and “affirm a common faith tradition.” (F-2.01) It also states that they “express the faith of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church,” “uphold the affirmations of the Protestant Reformation,” and “express the faith of the Reformed tradition.” (F-2.03, .04 & .05)
3. Those called to ordered ministry (deacons, ruling elders, and teaching elders) can find in the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity and Form of Government training that is unified and more clearly focused on the core shared values and standards that shape the life and mission of the church, no matter the size of their congregation or presbytery.
4. The revision clarifies standards for large and small churches, presbyteries, and synods so all can work within given parameters with a constitution that can be more easily read and understood. It is not often realized that approximately 40% of the presbyteries have fewer than 50 congregations, and approximately 10% have fewer than 25 congregations. The Presbytery of Western NC is one of the larger presbyteries with 112 congregations, although many of them are very small.
5. The revision is less regulatory in nature so it permits large or small churches and presbyteries to establish policies and procedures for carrying out the work that better enables them to pursue God’s mission for their own church or presbytery situations. As reported by the Association of Stated Clerks (who offered arguments both for and against adoption), “By specifying broad principles of governance as a constitution does, rather than specific practices and rules as a rule book or procedures manual does, nFOG allows councils to adapt practices, procedures and structures to the particular needs of their mission contexts. This provides the opportunity for them to be more flexible and creative in their mission and governance.” We agree that the n-FOG is no guarantee that this denomination will be more “missional,” but we think a less regulatory, more flexible FOG offers a better opportunity for the church to concentrate more on fulfilling its mission from Christ.
6. Congregations are “the basic form of the church” and are “bound together in communion with one another.” (n-FOG G-1.0101) Presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly provide

resources and assistance to strengthen and support the congregations in God's mission in the world.

7. Some may be troubled by the silence of issues not addressed in the new Form of Government that are addressed in our present Book of Order. This speaks to the trust factor in the new permission-giving Form of Government. How much do we trust other Presbyterians in our Presbytery; in the other 172 presbyteries; in our synods; across our whole General Assembly and its offices? Both the current Book of Order (G-7.0103) and the n-FOG (G-1.0102) state, "The organization rests on the fellowship and is not designed to work without trust and love."

III. CONCERNS AND RESPONSES

The Task Force recognizes that many church leaders have some concerns about the New Form of Government (n-FOG). The Task Force offers its response to some of these concerns, while recognizing that the whole Presbytery must interpret and implement the n-FOG, should it be adopted.

1. Adherence to the Reformed Tradition

Concern: "God unites persons through baptism regardless of. . . theological conviction." (n-FOG: F-1.043). This phrase has raised concerns because it deleted a significant qualifying phrase from the current FOG: ". . . different theological positions consistent with the Reformed tradition. . ." (G-4.0403)

Response: The writers of the n-FOG were clear that all parts of the Book of Order should be used to interpret the others, and the Reformed Tradition is clearly stated throughout our Constitution. Baptismal vows and membership vows demonstrate required members' beliefs. In addition, leaders are held to a higher standard. The ordination questions for ordained officers shall continue to be the defining standard for their theological convictions (W-4.4003), including (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?" Admittedly, some statements in the n-FOG could have been more carefully phrased. A future amendment will probably and rightly restore "within the Reformed tradition" to n-FOG: F-1.0403. It is fair to note that the current FOG also has statements that, taken literally and out of context, can lead to strange conclusions. Neither the current FOG nor the n-FOG is a perfect document, but improvements can be made.

2. Definition of "Fair Hearing" in Administrative Commission Decisions

Concern: Prior to the 2010 GA, the Permanent Judicial Commission (PJC) of the General Assembly (GA) listed this matter as one of the reasons it did not then support the GA's adoption of the n-FOG. Specifically, n-FOG merely mentioned the necessity of a "fair notice" for all affected persons before an administrative commission made a final decision (G-3.0109). But the current FOG has two paragraphs of precise definition of "fair hearing" (G-9.0505.b (1)(2)), which the GAPJC deemed important should there be any challenges to the final decision of an administrative commission.

Response: In order to ensure a complete "fair hearing", our Presbytery should follow the current FOG requirements.

3. Required Committees

Concern: In order to afford flexibility to 173 presbyteries of greatly different sizes, the n-FOG does not require a presbytery to have any committee, other than a Committee on Representation.

Response: The Task Force strongly recommends that our Presbytery maintain, as a minimum, its Committee on Ministry, Committee on Preparation for Ministry, and Nominating Committee. It also recommends that the Committee on Representation meet simultaneously with our Nominating Committee, where it can best achieve its purpose.

4. Advisory Handbooks

Concern: The n-FOG states that “Councils higher than the session may provide examples of policies and procedures that may be gathered into advisory handbooks” (G-3.0106). Many have asked about such handbooks, where are they and how are they to be used.

Response: These would be optional supplements to the procedures mandated in our Presbytery’s Standing Rules, which is periodically reviewed by the Council which then may propose amendments for Presbytery approval. Generally, only the GA creates handbooks, and most of the necessary ones are already available. The current FOG already requires all presbyteries and synods to “develop a manual of administrative operations” (G-9.0405), which vary considerably. The only new provision is that sessions would now have to develop a manual (n-FOG: G-3.0106), which we do not see as very difficult, especially since our Presbytery will provide a “model manual” for sessions to adapt for local use. In addition, the GA provides basic handbooks for presbytery committees, which presbyteries can modify for their local needs. Currently, our Presbytery has handbooks in place for the Committee on Ministry, the Committee on Preparation for Ministry, the Nominating Committee, and the Committee on Representation. As recommended by PCUSA Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons, in places where additional information or guidance is needed and is not available in other Constitutional documents, members can use the Book of Order 2009-2011 as the rule. Such handbooks should be subject to annual committee review, with any significant changes (such as requirements for candidates for the ministry) approved by our Presbytery.

5. Docket at Special Presbytery Meetings

Concern: Although the current FOG states that when a special (i.e. non-stated) meeting of a presbytery is summoned, “the notice shall set out the purpose of the meeting, and no other business than that listed in the notice shall be transacted: (G-11.0201), the n-FOG simply states that a presbytery “may call special meetings in accordance with its own rules” (G-3.0304).

Response: It is recommended that our Presbytery follow the current rule.

6. Relationship between Foundations and the rest of the Book of Order

Concern: With this revision of our Book of Order, the current FOG has been divided into two sections, the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity and the n-FOG. These would join the current Directory for Worship and Rules of Discipline to make up four parts of a new Book of Order. Several questions have arisen regarding how to resolve possible conflicts between the Foundations section and the rest of the Book of Order – such as: does Foundations have a superior status over the other three documents?

Response: The Task Force does not anticipate that this will be a problem, but if an issue does arise, our Presbytery should strive to use the whole Constitution to interpret its parts, including all parts of the Book of Order and the Book of Confessions. When further advice is needed, members should consult the Book of Order 2009-2011. If this does not settle the issue, the matter will be answered by a majority vote of Presbytery.

7. Nomenclature

Concern: Many may be disconcerted by the new titles, e.g. teaching elder, ordered minister, etc.

Response: The Task Force feels that it will be perfectly acceptable to continue to use the older titles, such as minister, etc., as well as the new ones.

8. Different Procedures by Other Presbyteries

Concern: Given the greater flexibility afforded by the n-FOG, ministers and candidates may be coming into our Presbytery in the future with significantly different training and standards.

Response: The Task Force feels this can be well handled by a somewhat more diligent and careful examination by our committees, especially the Committee on Ministry and its Examinations Sub-Committee.

9. Interim and Associate Pastors

Concern: The n-FOG (G-2.0504) permits Interim and Associate Pastors to become the next Installed Pastor of the same congregation, provided that the presbytery determines that its mission strategy supports this move and it is approved by a three-fourths majority.

Response: The Task Force feels that this will happen only rarely in our Presbytery and only when there is a general consensus that this is best for the congregation, which of course must be willing to agree to such a call.

10. Manuals of Operation

Concern: The n-FOG states that “each council [governing body] shall develop a manual of administrative operations that will specify the form and guide the work of mission in that council.” (G-3.0106).

Response: Since many Sessions have not compiled such a document before [the current FOG required this only for governing bodies above a Session], your Presbytery plans, if n-FOG is adopted, to distribute a “model manual” in the future that Sessions can modify to suit their congregations.

11. GAPJC Position on Authoritative Interpretations and Judicial Rulings

Concern: The potential adoption of n-FOG without prior reconciliation of authoritative documents and GAPJC rulings may deprive us of interpretive history and invalidate important precedents developed over decades.

Response: The record of our reunion in 1983 shows that the authoritative and interpretive statements and policies of the two uniting predecessor denominations (popularly known as Northern and Southern Presbyterians) were simply adopted en masse. It was only after reunion that the careful process of sifting them out for retention, modification, replacement or elimination began, with the new GA making the final decisions. If n-FOG is adopted, this same process will begin again immediately. But this time preparations for this process are already underway, as the Special Committee on Existing Authoritative Interpretations has been working on this task since last January. Its recommendations will be submitted to the Advisory Committee on the Constitution, who will then make recommendations to the 220th General Assembly for a vote. We believe this will be an improvement over 1983. In any event, it is the Constitution (Books of Confessions and Order) that must rightly take precedence. If the church changes the FOG, then Authoritative Interpretations must adjust, as they will.

12. Changes in Ordination Examinations

Concern: The removal from the Form of Government of topics used to standardize ordination exams will weaken our connectionalism and dilute our united identity within the denomination.

Response: Despite the potential for changes to the underlying topics on which ordination exams are designed, the language in the proposed n-FOG requiring candidates to take “any standard

ordination examination approved by the GA” will ensure that all candidates take a common exam “prepared and administered by a body created by the presbyteries.” (n-FOG: G-2.0607d)

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Presbytery vote in favor of the Amendment 10-1 from the General Assembly to strike the entire “Form of Government” in the current Book of Order and insert in its place two documents: “Foundations of Presbyterian Polity” and a new “Form of Government.”
2. That, if the Presbyterian Church (USA) adopts this amendment so that it comes into force in July 2011, our Presbytery
 - A. Agree that the following bodies continue to operate, following the provisions in the 2009/2011 Book of Order:
 1. General Council (Coordinating Council)
 2. Committee on Ministry
 3. Committee on Preparation for Ministry
 4. Committee on Representation and Nominating Committee (meeting jointly)
 5. Permanent Judicial Commission
 - B. Agree that all other committees/subcommittees listed in the current edition of Presbytery’s Standing Rules continue to operate, following provisions in those Rules (and where applicable, the 2009/2011 Book of Order);
 - C. Agree that Presbytery continue to follow the provisions for its membership, quorum, special meetings, moderators and other like matters as they are contained in the current edition of Presbytery’s Standing Rules (and where applicable, the 2009/2011 Book of Order);
 - D. Agree that the General Council (Coordinating Council) appoint soon a comprehensive committee to recommend appropriate revisions in Presbytery’s Standing Rules (manual of administrative operations) in the light of the adopted amendment and with a view to a reasonably similar simplification of procedures – such revisions to be submitted to Council and to Presbytery for approval in 2011;
 - E. Agree that all Sessions and Congregations continue to operate in accord with the 2009/2011 Book of Order, but also carefully study the “Policies and Procedures Guide for the Work of the Session” in the “Advisory Handbook for Councils,” and plan appropriate changes for Presbytery’s later review, along with the annual review of Session minutes.

COORDINATING COUNCIL ATTACHMENT 3

MINORITY REPORT of the Special Task Force on the New Form of Government

Respectfully Submitted by Rev. Carolyn V. Poteet
First Presbyterian Church, Hendersonville, NC

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few months as we have gathered, the members of the Special Task Force on the new Form of Government (nFOG) often commented that if we as a group could amend either the nFOG or the current FOG, we could quickly reach consensus. We all agree that items need to change, and we all agree that the denomination would benefit greatly from “a polity that empowers the church to engage effectively in the mission of God in the twenty-first century,” as the nFOG committee set out to do. Unfortunately, we disagree on one point: whether or not the nFOG does indeed accomplish this task. Does it, beyond reasonable doubt, give us a better Form of Government than the one we already have in place? I have come to the conclusion that it does not.

The primary reasons for this conclusion are threefold:

- 1. We have no guarantee that the nFOG would allow us to be more missional than the current FOG.** The current FOG fully allows us to do church well, and the few benefits within the nFOG could be easily brought to the current FOG through our well-ordered process of amendments.
- 2. The GAPJC has recommended that the nFOG *not* be supported,** and their concerns have never been adequately corrected. These have to do with loss of precedents and Authoritative Interpretations, due process language, and the enormous new burden added by additional Manuals of Operation by all sessions and presbyteries.
- 3. Theological language** in the nFOG begins to compromise the strength of the Book of Confessions and the Reformed faith.

Many smaller concerns can be found in the nFOG, but for the sake of clarity, this minority report will focus on the problems within these three points.

CONCERNS

CONCERN #1 - We have no guarantee that the nFOG would allow us to be more missional than the current FOG.

The first and most important question is, “Will the nFOG truly be better than the current FOG at enabling us to serve the Kingdom of God?” At the 219th General Assembly, no one ever said why they thought the current Form of Government was preventing the Church from being missional. The burden of proof, in this case, should be on the side of the new document. Let us weigh the evidence.

- a. **The Mission of God within Western North Carolina:** The original nFOG mandate was to develop a “polity that empowers the church to engage effectively in the mission of God in the twenty-first century.” Here in Western North Carolina, we have recently heard many stories of churches reaching out, growing, serving, and thriving in ways they had not been able to do before. These are churches being missional within their local contexts, within the structure of the current FOG. The nFOG would not in any way change how we are doing that ministry here in WNC. Similar stories and videos were shared at General Assembly as we heard about *Growing Deep and Wide*. When we offer ourselves and our congregations to Christ, we can be and are the empowered, missional Church already.
- b. **Counting the Cost – Mission vs. Administration:** As the nFOG moves procedures out the Book of Order, each of the 173 presbyteries and each of the 10,650 congregations will have to develop handbooks and manuals of operation. The issues these must cover can be found in pages 69-85 of the nFOG Amendment booklet. Sessions must cover at least 40 questions, and presbyteries must cover at least 50. As sessions, presbyteries, and synods each develop their own versions of these manuals of operations, it is clear to see that there will be an exponential growth in rules and regulations governing the PC(USA). Presbyteries must also review the manuals of sessions, just like they do session minutes. Each step of this process will create an extra drain on the time allotted for the actual mission of the Church. Is the nFOG truly easier to use if one shorter document creates thousands of new, longer documents?
- c. **Counting the Cost to Our Connectionalism:** The cost of this freedom, the way it is introduced in the nFOG, is an enormous strain on our connectionalism. The Association of Stated Clerks raised the concern that “what recognizable identity and unity the PC(USA) now has may be diluted, and [it will] seem less connectational.” As we become less connected with one another, wrote the Stated Clerks, polity becomes more fragmented and accountability becomes a concern. In a climate of trust and unity, we could operate with maximum flexibility around common core commitments. Unfortunately, though, we are divided and struggling, and our theological divisions are borne out in our ministries and missions. By decentralizing our polity, our differences will be magnified and become a disconnect between governing bodies.

One example of this is that the requirements for candidates for ordination have been removed from the nFOG. This includes *removing the five ordination exam topics* that help standardize the education of all of our ministers. If our ministers are not even examined on the same topics across the country, how will we maintain a united identity within the denomination?

This disconnect is a specific issue that the GAPJC has raised, because they will have to adjudicate cases between presbyteries when their various manuals of operations are in conflict. We will consider this further in the next section.

CONCERN #2: The GAPJC has recommended that the nFOG *not* be supported.

In their advisory report presented to the 219th General Assembly, the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission wrote that it did not support the nFOG for several specific reasons. These issues have not been adequately addressed either by the 219th GA or by actions taken since then. The GAPJC’s concerns are as follows (quotes from the advisory report are in italics):

- a. **Loss of the current interpretive history of the Form of Government:** *Authoritative Interpretations (AIs) are interpretations of specific wording. If one or more words are changed in the text, it may no longer be said that a prior AI authoritatively interprets the new wording – such an interpretation would require either a new General Assembly action or a new GAPJC decision. The interpretive history of the Book of Order represents decades of work on the part of*

the church working out procedures for pastoral call processes, Freedom of Conscience rights, Committee on Ministry authority, etc., which will be called into question by new wording.

Changing a significant part of our Constitution does not change our Constitution alone. It also changes all of the case law and interpretations that are behind it. Before the vote for Reunion in 1983, all parties agreed that these precedents would remain in effect, until such a time that the GA could determine which were still in effect and which were not. However, this time, no such agreement has been made. Different PC(USA) leaders have contradicted each other, some saying all interpretations and case law remains in effect until it is removed, and others saying that if the words have changed in the Book of Order, the interpretations and case law changes with it. Basically, this means we will not know which Authoritative Interpretations are still in effect until *one year* after the vote for the nFOG has been certified.

The GAPJC specifically mentioned the loss of due process requirements as an example of the kind of language, Authoritative Interpretations, and case law that will be lost if the nFOG is passed. Their report states, “The current G-9.0505(b) 1 and 2 of the *Book of Order* contain very precise constitutional language ensuring process rights for pastors in termination processes, in part as an attempt to meet civil court standards for due process and keep such matters within our system.” In some places where language has been simplified or shortened, we are not only opening ourselves up for misinterpretation, we are opening ourselves up for lawsuits in the civil courts.

In January 2011, the Office of the General Assembly formed a Special Committee on Existing Authoritative Interpretations. According to their own press release, “This committee has no authority of its own.” It will make recommendations by August 2011 to the Advisory Council on the Constitution (ACC), and the ACC will bring its recommendations to the 220th General Assembly in 2012. At that point, the recommendations will be voted on, and we will learn which AIs will be kept or lost – a full year after the voting on nFOG is over.

- b. *Impact of shifting constitutional language and requirements to ‘Manuals of Operations’:*** *The proposal’s approach of moving material from the constitution to Manuals of Operations will result in an increased burden on permanent judicial commissions as they will be required to interpret and apply not only the constitution itself, but the Manuals of the Councils within their jurisdictions. Since Manuals of Operations will not be uniform from Council to Council, rulings of the GAPJC (although authoritative) will in some cases be rulings that apply to only the particular Council whose Manual is being interpreted, rather than the whole church.*

The GAPJC points out that their job, as with all of the judicial commissions in the denomination, will greatly increase when each of the 173 presbyteries and 10,650 congregations have their own sets of manuals of operations. They will have to make decisions between the various manuals, and then decide which of those interpretations are specific only to one local manual and which should be required for all manuals. Far from solving our problems of too many lawsuits, this will bring our church courts to a whole new level of entangled and overlapping cases and decisions.

CONCERN #3: Theological Changes

In a number of places, theological language in the new Foundations of Presbyterian Polity and the new Form of Government begins to compromise the strength of the Book of Confessions and the Reformed faith. While these are small modifications at this point, they may open up greater divisions in the church in the future. The following are some of the examples of this issue:

- a. **“God...redeems...all people.” (F-1.01).** Does God in fact redeem and transform all people? Without a doubt, God loves all the world, but some are not redeemed, having rejected God’s salvation. The quote stops short of its full context in Colossians 1, which goes on to shed light on how we are to understand God’s reconciliation, saying, God “has reconciled you... if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel” (Col. 1:23). God’s redemption is certainly open to all, but it is not necessarily accepted by all.
- b. **All persons are welcomed into membership “regardless of... theological conviction... The PC(USA) shall guarantee full participation and representation in its worship, governance, and emerging life to all persons or groups within its membership” (F-1.0403).** As discussed in the Task Force Report, we were all disappointed that the words “within the Reformed Tradition” have been removed from the similar sentence in the current FOG.

The next sentence seems to guarantee the right to ordination to any member, regardless of whether they are called by God and the congregation, whether they could assent to their ordination vows, whether they are currently living a life of unrepentant sin, or any other issues. This would seem to invite confusion within the life and leadership of the local congregation, particularly when compared with the right of corporate judgment (F-3.0102) whereby a congregation (or council above) “is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its communion, and the qualifications of its ministers and members...” Does the mandatory non-discrimination category of “theological conviction” mean a congregation cannot require certain theological standards of its officers?

Also, guaranteeing participation and representation of *groups* as well as individuals raises many issues for local churches. We come before Jesus Christ as individuals in need of salvation—we do not come as groups.

- c. **The Confessions express the truth of the gospel “within the social and cultural assumptions of their time” (F-2.01).** This new wording weakens and relativizes our *Book of Confessions*. It suggests that the *Confessions* reflect the social and cultural assumptions of any given time in history rather than act to express the eternal truth set forth in Scripture. It may cause a contradiction for ordained officers as they state in their ordination vows that they believe the Confessions are “authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do” (W-4.4003c).

As the nFOG Task Force, we lamented the fact that we could not have separate votes on the Foundations section and the nFOG. The first four chapters of our current Book of Order have hardly ever had amendments, and most people find them to be beautifully written and inspiring language about our church. If these chapters had been left in place, indeed most of these theological issues would not have arisen.

CONCLUSION

The PC(USA) is at a crossroads of its ministry to our nation. We need renewal within our hearts and within our congregations to serve God and our neighbor with love and courage. We have seen signs of renewal in Western North Carolina as we have embraced the Acts 16:5 Initiative, and as we have sought to worship and do mission together. We have the tools we need now to do what God has called us to do. We are grateful for the hard work that has been done by the men and women who have put together the Foundations and new Form of Government, and many good ideas have been brought out by their work from which we can learn a great deal. However, this is not a document that will empower the church to

be more missional than our current Form of Government. The new Form of Government will draw the Church away from its mission, as congregations and councils must spend valuable time learning a new polity and developing new policies and manuals that already exist in a workable form. It will damage our connectionalism, as greater mistrust and greater differences of identity will likely build between governing bodies. It will cause divisiveness through our court system as our judicial commissions try to make decisions between all of the new manuals and determine new authoritative interpretations. Yes, we need to make a few changes to our current Form of Government, but those changes are easily made within our current structure. Even with those changes, our current Form of Government is still easier to use, stronger theologically, and better for the denomination as a whole than the new Form of Government. Please vote no on replacing the current Form of Government.