

General Council Report to the Presbytery
March 14, 2015 ~ Western Presbyterian Church, Palmyra, NY

FOR PRESBYTERY'S ACTION

The General Council VOTED to recommend that the presbytery:

(Proposed Amendment to the *Book of Confessions* – Confession of Belhar 14-1)

1. **Approve** including the Confession of in the *Book of Confessions*?

[NOTE: Inclusion of the Confession of Belhar in the *Book of Confessions* will require: (1) approval of 2/3 of the presbyteries in the Presbyterian Church USA) **and** (2) approval by the 221st General Assembly (2016, Portland, OR).]

(Proposed Amendments to the *Book of Order*)

2. **Approve** the following proposed amendments to the *Book of Order*.

[NOTE: Action will be taken on these proposed amendments as a whole, unless a motion is made to lift one or more of them for separate consideration.]

(14-A. Renunciation of Jurisdiction)

Amend G-2.0509 of the Form of Government by adding the following new paragraph at the end of that section. [Text to be added or inserted is shown in italic.]

“Whenever a former teaching elder has renounced jurisdiction in the midst of a disciplinary proceeding as the accused, that former teaching elder shall not be permitted to perform any work, paid or volunteer, in any congregation or entity under the jurisdiction of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).”

(14-B.1. Final Assessment)

Amend G-2.0607 of the Form of Government as follows. [Text to be deleted is show with strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown in italic.]

“A candidate may not enter into negotiation for his or her service as a teaching elder without approval of the presbytery *of care*. The presbytery shall record when it has certified a candidate ready for examination *by a presbytery* for ordination, pending a call. Evidence of readiness to begin ordered ministry as a teaching elder shall include:

“a. [Text in a.–c. remains unchanged.]

“d. ~~satisfactory grades, together with the examination papers~~ *examination materials, together with evaluations that declare those materials satisfactory* in the areas covered by any standard ordination examination approved by the General Assembly. Such examinations shall be prepared and administered by a body created by the presbyteries.”

(14-B.2. Accommodations)

Amend G-2.0610 of the Form of Government as follows. [Text to be deleted is show with strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown in italics.]

~~“G-2.0610 Exceptions-Accommodations to Particular Circumstances~~

~~“By a three-fourths vote, a presbytery~~ *When a presbytery concludes there are good and sufficient reasons for accommodations to the particular circumstances of an individual seeking ordination, it may, by a three-fourths vote, waive any of the requirements for ordination in G-2.06, except for those of G-2.0607d. If a presbytery judges that there are good and sufficient reasons why a candidate should not be required to satisfy the requirements of G-2.0607d, it shall approve by three-quarters vote some alternate means by which to ascertain the readiness of the candidate for ministry in the areas covered by the standard ordination examinations. A full account of the rea- sons for exception- any waiver or alternate means to ascertain readiness shall be included in the minutes of the presbytery and communicated to the presbytery to which an inquirer or candidate may be transferred.”*

(14-C Child Protection Policy)

Amend the fourth paragraph of G-3.0106 as follows. [Text to be added or inserted is shown in italic.]

“All councils shall adopt and implement a sexual misconduct policy and a child protection policy.”

(14-D Minimum Composition of a Presbytery)

Amend the second paragraph of G-3.0301 of the Form of Government as follows. [Text to be added or inserted is shown in italic.]

“The minimum composition of a presbytery is ten duly constituted sessions and ten teaching elders, unless an exception is approved by its synod and the General Assembly giving consideration to the responsibilities assigned to presbyteries in G-3-01 and G-3.03.”

(14-E Interreligious Stance)

Amend G-5.0102 of the Form of Government as follows. . [Text to be deleted is show with strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown in italics.]

“The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at all levels ~~seeks new~~ will be open to and will seek opportunities for conversation and understanding-respectful dialogue and mutual relationships with non-Christian entities and persons from other religious [entities] traditions. It does this in the faith that the church of Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is a sign and means of God’s intention for the wholeness of all humankind and all creation.”

3. Approve the following Proposed Amendment:

(14-F Marriage)

Amend W-4.9000 by striking the current text and replacing it with the following: [Text to be added or inserted is shown in italic.]

“Marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being of the entire human family. Marriage involves a unique commitment between two people, traditionally a man and a woman, to love and support each other for the rest of their lives. The sacrificial love that unites the couples sustains them as faithful and responsible members of the church and the wider community.”

“In civil law, marriage is a contract that recognizes the rights and obligations of the married couple in society. In the Reformed tradition, marriage is also a covenant in which God has an active part, and which the community of faith publicly witnesses and acknowledges.”

“If they meet the requirements of the civil jurisdiction in which they intend to marry, a couple may request that a service of Christian marriage be conducted by a teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), who is authorized, though not required, to act as an agent of the civil jurisdiction in recording the marriage contract. A couple requesting a service of Christian marriage shall receive instruction from the teaching elder, who may agree to the couple’s request only if, in the judgment of the teaching elder, the couple demonstrate sufficient understanding of the nature of the marriage covenant and commitment to living their lives together according to its values. In making this decision, the teaching elder may seek the counsel of the session, which has authority to permit or deny the use of church property for a marriage service.”

“The marriage service shall be conducted in a manner appropriate to this covenant and to the forms of Reformed worship, under the direction of the teaching elder and the supervision of the session (W-1.4004–.4006). In a service of marriage, the couple marry each other by exchanging mutual promises. The teaching elder witnesses the couple’s promises and pronounces God’s blessing upon their union. The community of faith pledges

to support the couple in upholding their promises; prayers may be offered for the couple, for the communities that support them, and for all who seek to live in faithfulness.

“A service of worship recognizing a civil marriage and confirming it in the community of faith may be appropriate when requested by the couple. The service will be similar to the marriage service except that the statements made shall reflect the fact that the couple is already married to one another according to the laws of the civil jurisdiction.”

“Nothing herein shall compel a teaching elder to perform nor compel a session to authorize the use of church property for a marriage service that the teaching elder or the session believes is contrary to the teaching elder’s or the session’s discernment of the Holy Spirit and their understanding of the Word of God.”

(Synod of the Northeast / Revised By-Laws)

3. **Approve** lines 85 – 110 of the Revised By-Laws for the Synod of the Northeast:

NOTE: The Synod of the Northeast requests all constituent presbyteries to vote on the recommended changes by May 28, 2015.

2.000 SYNOD ASSEMBLY

2.100 Membership

2.101 Commissioners: The Synod Assembly shall consist of one teaching elder, one ruling elder, two members at large and one young adult member (age 17-22) elected as Commissioners by each presbytery within the bounds of the Synod for the purpose of voice and vote. Their term shall be two years, commencing at their first Assembly meeting and continuing for all Stated and Called meetings until their successor’s first meeting.

2.102 Alternate Commissioners: Each presbytery shall also elect one presbyter or active church member to serve as alternate commissioners. The alternate commissioner shall serve when the commissioner is unable to attend a particular Synod Assembly meeting, and may complete the unexpired term of the Commissioner when so designated by the presbytery.

2.103 Additional Members at Large: In order that the Synod Assembly may be a diverse community of gracious welcome, it may provide in its standing rules for additional members at large.

2.200 Unexpired Terms: In the event that commissioners’ or alternates’ terms conclude prematurely, their presbytery shall elect someone to fill the remainder of the unexpired term.

2.300 Conduct of Elections: The Synod Standing Rules shall govern the conduct of elections.

2.301 Eligibility for Re-Election: Members of the Synod Assembly are eligible for re-election at their presbyteries’ discretion, for not more than three consecutive terms.

Background:

A New Way Forward: new, leaner design of Synod Government effective October 2014. The 2014 Synod Assembly marked the end of the transition year for the New Way Forward.

The New Way Forward includes a commitment to support and facilitate programs and initiatives that encourage and resource our young leaders who are under the age of 40. A working group met over the last 18 months culminating in the first retreat with emerging leaders across the Synod and beyond. The retreat was a time of conversation, connection, movement building and finding new partners in ministry. The group will hold at least one additional large gathering. In the meantime, they will organize through social media and meet in smaller groups locally. While they do not know yet how this group will manifest itself within the Synod, they do know they will

engage with each other and with the Synod with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love.

Starting with this fall, the Synod Assembly will meet every two years. During the alternate years, the Synod will plan an event similar to the Big Tent in which presbyteries will share innovative programs as well as the progress of the Synod networks. A tentative month for the 2015 meeting is May – location is being determined.

The Synod Leader, Stated Clerk, and Treasurer will stand for election by Synod Assembly for a term of four years. The following were elected: Synod Leader - TE Harold Delhagen, Stated Clerk - TE Nancy Talbot, and Treasurer – RE Alan Ford.

Synod Council's name has changed to Synod Mission and Ministries Commission to reflect the value that mission is at the center of our work. The Mission and Ministries Commission is to have one member from each presbytery (total of 22 presbyteries). The Commission will meet four times each year. The Commission will have three working groups: Mission, Networks, and Administrative. Each working group will do the detailed work and discussion required before bringing recommendations to the Commission for action and vote.

- **Mission** – articulate the Synod's common mission – including diversity, emerging leaders, leadership, innovation, collegiate ministries, and special projects
- **Networks** – develop and coordinate networks, or groups of individuals, churches, and/or presbyteries recognized by the Commission and committed to gathering and working together with a common purpose that embodies the overall mission of the Synod. The Synod Networker will assist with development and coordination
- **Administrative** – carrying out administrative functions of the Commission – with respect to finance, insurance, legal affairs, management of capital assets, sponsoring training events for presbyteries, etc.

The By-Laws create a leaner organization which should be quicker to respond to ideas and projects from congregations or a group of people with similar interests and goals.

The By-Laws require a simple majority of presbyteries to vote for Lines 87 – 110 which describe presbytery representation at the Synod Assembly. The vote must be taken by May 28, 2015. Each presbytery will have four commissioners (as well as one alternate) – one Teaching Elder, one Ruling Elder and two Members at Large who may or may not be TE or RE. Preferably, one of these commissioners will be under the age of 35. It is expected that the Members at Large will encourage participation by younger people than is typical now.

- Each presbytery will have one Young Adult Member, 17 – 22 years old at time of Synod Assembly, who will have voice and vote.

(2015 Presbytery Budget

The General Council VOTED to recommend that the presbytery:

4. **Approve** the 2015 Presbytery Budget, as presented for second reading.

(Mission Trip to West Virginia)

5. **Commission** the workers participating in the April Mission Trip to West Virginia.

ITEMS FOR PRESBYTERY'S INFORMATION

The General Council VOTED to:

(Cluster Training)

1. **Approve** the recommendation that the presbytery organize cluster training, using the "Theo-Academy for Elders." Deb Lind-Schmitz will organize the training through the Committee on Ministry.

(Director of Camp Whitman)

2. **Approve** hiring Lea Kone as Director of Camp Whitman, effective March 1, 2015 at the following terms:
- \$25,000 salary and pension

(Camp Whitman Operating Team)

3. **Extend** the life of the Camp Whitman Operating Team from July 1, 2015 through December 31, 2015.

(Hedgesville Administrative Commission)

4. **Approve** up to \$500 for the expenses of a lawyer for property transactions related to the Hedgesville building.

5. **Provide** insurance for the Hedgesville building at a cost of \$425.00 per year.

Rationale for the two actions:

Terry Waite has contacted the Administrative Commission for Hedgesville with an offer to “take over” the building and pay some legal fees. The concern continues to be the salability of the property, which has no water service, is land-locked, and is “in the middle of nowhere.”

(West Virginia Mission Trip)

6. **Approve** the Presbytery Mission Trip to West Virginia, April 19-25, 2015. Paul Salisbury and crew will be going to West Virginia to work on more projects affected by flooding.

(Designated Accounts)

7. **Divide** the \$140,000.00 Camp Whitman bequests into (1) a \$15,000.00 restricted fund, and (2) a \$125,000.00 open fund (which encompasses the Vidum donation).

Rationale:

This item, which does not require presbytery action, is a result of contacting the donors to determine the intent of their donations, and the decision was made accordingly.

(Study Leave Fund)

8. **Move** the funds in accounts for pastors who have retired and/or moved out of the Presbytery Study Leave Account and into the Study Leave Continuing Education Fund.

9. **Send** letters to those pastors who still have money in the Presbytery Study Leave Account, (1) requesting them to use that money for study leave by December 31, 2015; and (2) informing them that funds which remain unused at that date will be transferred to the Study Leave Continuing Education Fund.

(Board of Pensions Representative)

10. **Appoint** the Rev. Deb Lind-Schmidt as representative to the Board of Pensions for the Presbytery of Geneva.

(Waterloo)

11. **Authorize** the Waterloo Presbyterian Church to proceed with the masonry repair project.

(Hector)

12. **Authorize** the Hector Presbyterian Church to proceed with Phase I of their building renovation project (exterior sanctuary repairs).

Background

A Facilities Planning Team was formed in 2011 to explore options and make a recommendation to the session. They proposed a two-phase project. On February 11, 2015, the session met and passed a motion to proceed with Phase I – Church Exterior Renovation Project at an estimated cost of \$135,000 to be funded through a capital campaign, grants, and loans with the balance, if needed, from our unrestricted Schuleen Plus Fund.

(Arkport)

13. **Authorize** the Arkport Presbyterian Church to proceed with sale of their manse.

(Ovid)

14. **Approve** the sale of the Ovid Thrift Shop by the Ovid Federated Church. The United Methodist Church conference has approved the sale.