

THE CHURCH'S FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES FOR GOVERNANCE¹

CHAPTER 1 HISTORIC UNDERSTANDINGS

Christ is Head of the Church

All power in heaven and earth is given to Jesus Christ by Almighty God, who raised Christ from the dead and set him above all rule and authority, all power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. God has put all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and has made Christ Head of the church, which is his body.

Christ calls the church into being, giving it all that is necessary for its mission to the world, for its building up, and for its service to God. Christ is present with the church in both Spirit and Word. It belongs to Christ alone to rule, to teach, to call, and to use the church as he wills, exercising his authority by the ministry of women and men for the establishment and extension of his Kingdom.

Christ gives to his church its faith and life, its unity and mission, its officers and ordinances. Insofar as Christ's will for the church is set forth in Scripture, it is to be obeyed. In the worship and service of God and the government of the church, matters are to be ordered according to the Word by reason and sound judgment, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In affirming with the earliest Christians that Jesus is Lord, the church confesses that he is its hope and that the church, as Christ's body, is bound to his authority and thus free to live in the lively, joyous reality of the grace of God.

The Faith of the Church

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) states its faith and bears witness to God's grace in Jesus Christ in the creeds and confessions in the *Book of Confessions*. The creeds and confessions of this church reflect a particular stance within the history of God's people. They are the result of prayer, thought, and experience within a living tradition. They serve to strengthen personal commitment and the life and witness of the community of believers, a people known by conviction as well as by action. They guide the church in its study and interpretation of the Scriptures; they summarize the essence of Christian tradition; they direct the church in maintaining sound doctrines; they equip the church for its work of proclamation.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) gives witness to the faith of the church catholic. The confessions express the faith of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church in the recognition of canonical Scriptures and the formulation and adoption of the ecumenical creeds, notably the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds with their definitions of the mystery of the triune God and of the incarnation of the eternal Word of God in Jesus Christ. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) seeks to manifest more visibly the unity of the church of Jesus Christ and is open to opportunities for conversation, cooperation, and seeks to maintain communion, community and common action

with all other branches of the one, catholic church, with other ecclesiastical bodies and with secular groups.

In its confessions, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) also identifies with the affirmations of the Protestant Reformation, which focuses on the rediscovery of God's grace in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures. The Protestant watchwords--grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone--embody principles of understanding which continue to guide and motivate the people of God in the life of faith.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) expresses the faith of the Reformed tradition. Central to this tradition is the affirmation of the majesty, holiness, and providence of God who creates, sustains, rules, and redeems the world in the freedom of sovereign righteousness and love. Related to this central affirmation of God's sovereignty are other great themes of the Reformed tradition:

1. The election of the people of God for service as well as for salvation;
2. Covenant life marked by a disciplined concern for order in the church according to the Word of God;
3. A faithful stewardship that shuns ostentation and seeks proper use of the gifts of God's creation;
4. The recognition of the human tendency to idolatry and tyranny, which calls the people of God to work for the transformation of society by seeking justice and living in obedience to the Word of God.

The confessions are subordinate standards in the church, subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to him. While these standards are subordinate to the Scriptures, they are, nonetheless, standards. They are not lightly drawn up or subscribed to, nor may they be ignored or dismissed. The church is prepared to counsel with or even to discipline one ordained who seriously rejects the faith expressed in them. Moreover, a more exacting amendment process is required to change the *Book of Confessions* than is required to change the remainder of the *Constitution*.

Yet the church, in obedience to Jesus Christ, is open to the reform of its standards of doctrine as well as of governance. The church affirms *Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*, that is, "The church reformed, always being reformed," according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit.

The Great Ends of the Church²

The great ends of the church are:

1. the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind;

2. the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God;
3. the maintenance of divine worship;
4. the preservation of the truth;
5. the promotion of social righteousness; and
6. the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

The Composition of the Church

The church universal consists of all persons in every nation, together with their children, who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and commit themselves to live in a fellowship under his rule. Since this whole company cannot meet together in one place to worship and to serve, it is reasonable that it should be divided into particular congregations. The particular church is, therefore, understood as a local expression of the universal church. The law and government of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) presuppose the fellowship of women and men with their children in voluntary covenanted relationship with one another and with God through Jesus Christ. The organization rests upon the fellowship and is not designed to work without trust and love.

Governance in the Body of Christ

Presbyterian governance seeks continuity with and faithfulness to the heritage that lies behind the contemporary church. This form of government is established in light of Scripture to give order to this church but is not regarded as essential to the existence of the church of Jesus Christ nor to be required of all Christians.

The Historic Principles of Church Government³

The radical principles of Presbyterian Church government and discipline are:

1. The several different congregations of believers, taken collectively, constitute one church of Christ, called emphatically the church;
2. A larger part of the church, or a representation of it, should govern a smaller, or determine matters of controversy which arise therein;
3. In like manner, a representation of the whole should govern and determine in regard to every part, and to all the parts united: that is, that a majority shall govern;
4. Consequently, appeals [here meaning requests, often termed overtures] may be carried from lower to higher governing bodies, till they be finally decided by the collected wisdom and united voice of the whole church.

For these principles and this procedure, the example of the apostles and the practice of the primitive church are considered as authority.

The Historic Principles of Order

In setting forth a form of government, worship, and discipline, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) reaffirms the historic principles of church order which have been a part of our common heritage in this nation and which are basic to our Presbyterian concept and system of church government, namely:

Right of Judgment

That “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men⁴ which are in anything contrary to his Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship.”⁵

Therefore we consider the rights of private judgment, in all matters that respect religion, as universal and unalienable: We do not even wish to see any religious constitution aided by the civil power, further than may be necessary for protection and security, and at the same time, be equal and common to all others.

Corporate Judgment

That, in perfect consistency with the above principle of common right, every Christian church, or union or association of particular churches, is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its communion, and the qualifications of its ministers and members, as well as the whole system of its internal government which Christ hath appointed; that in the exercise of this right they may, notwithstanding, err, in making the terms of communion either too lax or too narrow; yet, even in this case, they do not infringe upon the liberty or the rights of others, but only make an improper use of their own.

Officers

That our blessed Savior, for the edification of the visible church, which is his body, hath appointed officers, not only to preach the gospel and administer the Sacraments, but also to exercise discipline, for the preservation of both truth and duty; and that it is incumbent upon these officers, and upon the whole church, in whose name they act, to censure or cast out the erroneous and scandalous, observing, in all cases, the rules contained in the Word of God.

Truth and Goodness

That truth is in order to goodness; and the great touchstone of truth, its tendency to promote holiness, according to our Savior’s rule, “By their fruits ye shall know them.” And that no opinion can be either more pernicious or more absurd than that which brings

truth and falsehood upon a level, and represents it as of no consequence what a man's opinions are. On the contrary, we are persuaded that there is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty. Otherwise, it would be of no consequence either to discover truth or to embrace it.

Differences of Views

That, while under the conviction of the above principle we think it necessary to make effectual provision that all who are admitted as teachers be sound in the faith, we also believe that there are truths and forms with respect to which men of good characters and principles may differ. And in all these we think it the duty both of private Christians and societies to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other.

Election by the People

That though the character, qualifications, and authority of church officers are laid down in the Holy Scriptures, as well as the proper method of their investiture and institution, yet the election of the persons to the exercise of this authority, in any particular society, is in that society.

Church Power

That all church power, whether exercised by the body in general or in the way of representation by delegated authority, is only ministerial and declarative; that is to say, that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners; that no church governing body ought to pretend to make laws to bind the conscience in virtue of their own authority; and that all their decisions should be founded upon the revealed will of God. Now though it will easily be admitted that all synods and councils may err, through the frailty inseparable from humanity, yet there is much greater danger from the usurped claim of making laws than from the right of judging upon laws already made, and common to all who profess the gospel, although this right, as necessity requires in the present state, be lodged with fallible men.

Church Discipline

Lastly, that if the preceding scriptural and rational principles be steadfastly adhered to, the vigor and strictness of its discipline will contribute to the glory and happiness of any church. Since ecclesiastical discipline must be purely moral or spiritual in its object, and not attended with any civil effects, it can derive no force whatever but from its own justice, the approbation of an impartial public, and the countenance and blessing of the great Head of the church universal.

Interdependence

As members of the Body of Christ, ecclesiastical governance unites governing bodies (whether they have authority over one or many churches) in a pattern of shared

responsibilities, rights and powers as provided in the *Constitution*. Governing bodies are committed to the unity of the whole church, separate, interdependent, accepting mutual accountability under the *Constitution*. They are subject to review by more inclusive governing bodies. In the oneness of Christ's Body, by these means, the act of one governing body is the act of the whole church.

A Particular Presbyterian Church

A particular church consists of those persons in a particular place, along with their children, who, in voluntary covenanted relationship with one another and with God through Jesus Christ, profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and who have been gathered for the service of God as set forth in Scripture, subject to a particular form of church government. Each particular church of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall be governed by the *Constitution*. Its officers are ministers of the Word and Sacrament, elders, and deacons. Its government and guidance are the responsibility of the session. It shall fulfill its responsibilities as the local unit of mission for the service of all people, for the upbuilding of the whole church, and for the glory of God.

Presbyterian Polity

The governing bodies of this church are: the Session of a particular church; the Presbytery, the Synod and the General Assembly. Within the Church Universal each governing body maintains a special commitment to certain additional principles of Presbyterian polity.

This church shall be governed by presbyters (elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament (traditionally called ruling and teaching elders)); ordained only by the authority of a governing body.

Ecclesiastical jurisdiction is a power to be exercised jointly by presbyters gathered in governing bodies (traditionally called judicatories or courts). Presbyters are not simply to reflect the will of the people but rather to seek together to find and represent the will of Christ. Decisions shall be reached by vote, following opportunity for discussion, and a majority shall govern.

Governing bodies possess whatever administrative authority is necessary to give effect to duties and powers assigned by the *Constitution* of the church. A higher governing body shall have the right to review actions of a lower one, the right to direct that errors be corrected, and the power to determine matters of controversy upon reference, complaint or appeal.

Endnotes

1. This document was prepared in an attempt to draw from the Form of Government those understandings deemed foundational to our polity.

2. This statement of the great ends of the church, slightly edited here, came from the United Presbyterian Church of North America, which united with the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in 1958. The statement was then made a part of the *Constitution* of The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, as the united body was called. This now classic statement was adopted by the United

Presbyterian Church of North America in 1910, following various actions between 1904 and 1910 looking forward to the revision of that church's *Constitution*.

3. This section, with the exception of the first paragraph, was first drawn up by the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, and prefixed to the Form of Government as published by that body in 1788. In that year, the synod was divided into four synods and gave place to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, which held its first meeting the following year. The four synods formed were the Synod of New York and New Jersey, the Synod of Philadelphia, the Synod of Virginia, and the Synod of the Carolinas. The presbyteries of these four synods were represented in the first General Assembly, which met in Philadelphia on May 21, 1789. The general plan drawn up in 1788 became that by which the Presbyterian Church in the United States and The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America were subsequently governed.

4. The words "men" and "man's" throughout this quotation from the eighteenth century should be understood as applying to all persons.

5. This quotation may be found in The Westminster Confession of Faith, 6.109, in the *Book of Confessions*.

CHAPTER 2 THE CHURCH AND ITS MISSION

God's Activity and Covenant

God created the heavens and the earth and made human beings in God's image, charging them to care for all that lives; God made men and women to live in community, responding to their Creator with grateful obedience. Even when the human race broke community with its Maker and with one another, God did not forsake it, but out of grace chose one family for the sake of all, to be pilgrims of promise, God's own Israel.

God liberated the people of Israel from oppression; God covenanted with Israel to be their God and they to be God's people, that they might do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with the Lord; God confronted Israel with the responsibilities of this covenant, judging the people for their unfaithfulness while sustaining them by divine grace.

God in Christ

God was incarnate in Jesus Christ, who announced good news to the poor; proclaimed release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind; let the broken victims go free; and proclaimed the year of the Lord's favor. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost; in his life and death for others God's redeeming love for all people was made visible; and in the resurrection of Jesus Christ there is the assurance of God's victory over sin and death and the promise of God's continuing presence in the world.

The Holy Spirit

God's redeeming and reconciling activity in the world continues through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, who confronts individuals and societies with Christ's Lordship of life and calls them to repentance and to obedience to the will of God.

The Church as the Body of Christ

The church of Jesus Christ is the provisional demonstration of what God intends for all of humanity. The mission of the church is given form by God's activity in the world as understood through scripture, confessions and faith.

The church is called to be a sign in and for the world of the new reality which God has made available to people in Jesus Christ. This new reality revealed in Jesus Christ is the new humanity, a new creation, a new beginning for human life in the world. In that new creation sin is forgiven, reconciliation is accomplished and the dividing walls of hostility are torn down.

As the body of Christ, in its corporate life and in the lives of its individual members, the church is called to give shape and substance to this truth.

The Church's Calling

The church is called:

1. to tell the good news of salvation by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ as the only Savior and Lord,
2. proclaim in Word and Sacrament that the new age has dawned. and,
3. that our God, who creates life, frees those in bondage, forgives sin, reconciles brokenness, and makes all things new, is still at work in the world.

The church is called to present the claims of Jesus Christ, leading persons to repentance, to accept him as Savior and Lord, and to receive new life as his disciples.

Christ's Faithful Evangelist

The church is called to be Christ's faithful evangelist:

- ✦ going into the world, making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all he has commanded;
- ✦ demonstrating by the love of its members for one another and by the quality of its common life the new reality in Christ; sharing in worship, fellowship, and nurture, practicing a deepened life of prayer and service under the guidance of the Holy Spirit;
- ✦ participating in God's activity in the world through its life for others by:
 - healing and reconciling and binding up wounds,
 - ministering to the needs of the poor, the sick, the lonely, and the powerless,

- engaging in the struggle to free people from sin, fear, oppression, hunger, and injustice,
- giving itself and its substance to the service of those who suffer, and
- sharing with Christ in the establishing of his just, peaceable, and loving rule in the world.

Called to Risk and Trust

The church is called to undertake this mission even at the risk of losing its life, trusting in God alone as the author and giver of life, sharing the gospel, and doing those deeds in the world that point beyond themselves to the new reality in Christ.

CHAPTER 3 THE CHURCH: ITS UNITY & RELATIONSHIPS

The Unity of the Church In Mission

The unity of the church is a gift of its Lord and finds expression in its faithfulness to the mission to which Christ calls it. The church is a fellowship of believers which seeks the enlargement of the circle of faith to include all people and is never content to enjoy the benefits of Christian community for itself alone.

Oneness

There is one church. As the Bible speaks of the one body which is the church living under the one Spirit of God known through Christ, it reminds us that we have “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all.” (Ephesians 4:5-6)

Visible Oneness

Visible oneness, by which a diversity of persons, gifts, and understandings is brought together, is an important sign of the unity of God’s people. It is also a means by which that unity is achieved. Further, while divisions into different denominations do not destroy this unity, they do obscure it for both the church and the world. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), affirming its historical continuity with the whole church of Jesus Christ, is committed to the reduction of that obscurity.

The Church: Its Diversity

The church in its witness to the uniqueness of the Christian faith responds to diversity in both the church and the world. The fellowship of Christians, as it gathers in worship and in the ordering of all aspects of its life, is to display a rich variety of form, practice, language, program, nurture and service.

Openness to Others

Our unity in Christ enables and requires the church to be open to all persons and the variety of their talents and gifts, implementing policies and procedures which guarantee full participation and access to representation in the decision making of the church. Thus the church is called to affirm itself as a community of diversity in fact as well as in faith. The inclusion of all ages, races and conditions provides a visible sign of the new humanity.

Full Participation

In its call to witness to the richness and benevolence of God's creation, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and all its governing bodies shall give life to policies and procedures which enhance the church's commitment to diversity and inclusiveness in all aspects of its life. Persons of all racial ethnic groups, different ages, both sexes, various disabilities, diverse geographical areas, different theological positions consistent with the Reformed tradition, as well as different marital conditions (married, single, widowed, or divorced) shall be guaranteed full participation and access to representation in the decision making of the church.

CHAPTER 4 THE CHURCH AND ITS MEMBERS

The Meaning of Membership

The incarnation of God in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ gives to the church its understanding of membership. One becomes an active member of the church through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and acceptance of his Lordship in all of life.

Baptism and a public profession of faith in Jesus as Lord are the visible signs of entrance into the active membership of the church. Accepting the privilege and responsibility of membership in the church is a commitment to Jesus Christ that binds the individual to fulfillment of the obligations of membership. Members shall regularly review and evaluate the integrity of their commitment.

Inclusiveness

Each member shall seek the grace of openness in extending the fellowship of Christ to all persons. The congregation shall welcome all persons who respond in trust and obedience to God's grace in Jesus Christ and desire to become part of the membership and ministry of the Church. Failure to do so constitutes a rejection of Christ himself and causes a scandal to the gospel.

Preparation for Membership

The session has responsibility for preparing those who would become members of the congregation. It is left to the prudence of the session to judge, after appropriate instruction and

careful examination, the readiness of those who apply for active membership. No persons shall be denied membership for any reason not related to profession of faith.

Membership as Ministry

A faithful member accepts Christ's call to be involved responsibly in the ministry of his Church. Such involvement includes:

1. proclaiming the good news,
2. taking part in the common life and worship of a particular church,
3. praying and studying Scripture and the faith of the Christian Church,
4. supporting the work of the church through the giving of money, time, and talents,
5. participating in the governing responsibilities of the church,
6. demonstrating a new quality of life within and through the church,
7. responding to God's activity in the world through service to others,
8. living responsibly in the personal, family, vocational, political, cultural, and social relationships of life,
9. working in the world for peace, justice, freedom, and human fulfillment.

CHAPTER 5 THE CHURCH AND ITS OFFICERS

Christ's Ministry

All ministry in the Church is a gift from Jesus Christ. Members and officers alike serve mutually under the mandate of Christ who is the chief minister of all. His ministry is the basis of all ministries; the standard for all offices is the pattern of the one who came "not to be served but to serve." (Matthew. 20:28) The purpose and pattern of leadership in the church in all its forms of ministry shall be understood not in terms of power but of service.

Election by the People

The government of this church is representative. The members of a particular church voluntarily put themselves under the leadership of their officers, whom they elect. No person can be placed in any permanent office in a congregation or governing body except by election of that body. The right of God's people to elect their officers is inalienable. The Church offices mentioned in the New Testament which this church has maintained include those of presbyters (ministers of the Word and Sacrament and elders) and deacons. The existence of these offices in

no way diminishes the commitment of all members to the ministry of the church. Those called to office respond to the call of God; they must have the approval of God's people and the concurring judgment of a governing body of the church. Both men and women shall be eligible to hold church offices.

Freedom of Conscience - Individual and Corporate

It is necessary to the integrity and health of the church that the persons who serve in it as officers shall adhere to the essentials of the Reformed faith and polity as expressed in the *Book of Confessions* and the *Book of Order*. The decision as to whether a person has departed from essentials of Reformed faith and polity is made initially by the individual concerned but ultimately becomes the responsibility of the governing body in which he or she serves.¹

It is to be recognized, however, that in becoming a candidate or officer of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) one chooses to exercise freedom of conscience within certain bounds. His or her conscience is captive to the Word of God as interpreted in the standards of the church so long as he or she continues to seek or hold office in that body. So far as may be possible without serious departure from these standards, without infringing on the rights and views of others, and without obstructing the constitutional governance of the church, freedom of conscience with respect to the interpretation of Scripture is to be maintained.

Gifts and Abilities

In addition to possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, natural and acquired, those who undertake particular ministries should be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Officers are responsible for a quality of life and relationships that commend the gospel to all persons and that communicate its joy and its justice.²

Ministers and Presbytery

The Lord has set aside through calling and training certain members to perform a special ministry of the Word and Sacrament and has committed to them a variety of work to do. While the ministry is one, there may be forms of ministry in which primary emphasis is given to proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Sacraments, forms that stress deeds of love and mercy, forms that are primarily educational, administrative, legislative, or judicial, and forms that are primarily prophetic. The church through the presbytery calls them to the responsibility and office of ministers of the Word and Sacrament, receives them as members of the presbytery, and designates them to such work that may be helpful to the church in mission, in the performance of which they shall be accountable to the presbytery.

Elders and Deacons

As there were in Old Testament times elders for the government of the people, so the New Testament church provided persons with particular gifts to share in governing and ministry.

Elders, together with ministers of the Word and Sacrament, exercise leadership, government, and discipline and have responsibility for the life of a particular church as well as the church at large, including ecumenical relationships. When elected to service in higher governing bodies, elders participate and vote with the same authority as ministers of the Word and Sacrament, and they are eligible for any office.

The office of deacon as set forth in Scripture is one of sympathy, witness, and service after the example of Jesus Christ.

Continuation in Office

As long as an officer is in good standing as a member of a congregation or presbytery, the elder, deacon, or minister of Word and Sacrament, continues to bear the responsibilities of the office. While they are active members of any particular church of this denomination, elders or deacons not in active service on a session or board of deacons continue to bear the responsibilities of the office(s) to which they have been ordained.

Election Provisions

Every congregation shall elect men and women from among its active members to office. Nominations for office shall be made by a representative nominating committee of active members of the church, subject to principles of participation and representation.

Ordination for Church Office

Ordination is the act by which the church sets apart persons elected to office. The minister or moderator shall ask those preparing to be ordained or installed to stand before the congregation or presbytery and to give affirmative answer to the questions prescribed by the *Constitution*. Prayer and the laying on of hands shall follow. Ordination to the office of minister of the Word and Sacrament is an act of the presbytery. Ordination to the offices of elder and deacon is an act of the session.

Endnotes

1. Very early in the history of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, even before the General Assembly was established, the plan of reunion of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia contained the following sentences: "That when any matter is determined by a major vote, every member shall either actively concur with or passively submit to such determination; or if his conscience permits him to do neither, he shall, after sufficient liberty modestly to reason and remonstrate, peaceably withdraw from our communion without attempting to make any schism. Provided always that this shall be understood to extend only to such determination as the body shall judge indispensable in doctrine or Presbyterian government." His. Dig. (P) p. 1310.) (Plan of Union of 1758, par. II.)

2. In 1997 a statement regarding faithfulness in marriage and chastity in singleness, along with a specification that officers be repentant of all behaviors the confessions call sin, was appended to this foundational statement.

CHAPTER 6 THE PARTICULAR CHURCH

Definition

A particular church in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is organized by a presbytery as part of the universal church, and shall function under the provisions of the *Constitution*. Particular churches serve as essential mission partners with the presbytery and the larger church. In the particular church, God's people perform ministries to persons, neighborhoods, and communities, without which no significant ministry of the whole church is possible.

Government

Congregations carry out their assigned governmental responsibilities to elect officers, call pastors, approve matters concerning property, and hear reports, under the provisions of the *Constitution*.

Pastoral Relations

Every particular church shall have pastoral services, either installed or temporary, according to the provisions of the *Constitution*. When a church is without a pastor the congregation shall, with the guidance and permission of the presbytery, proceed to elect a pastor according to the provisions of the *Constitution*.

The presbytery shall install the minister of Word and Sacrament in a service of worship.

Incorporation and Property

Whenever permitted by civil law, each particular church shall cause a corporation to be formed and maintained. This corporation shall carry out such duties as are required by the *Constitution* and by civil law. The power and duties of congregational or corporate trustees shall not infringe upon the power and duties of the session or the deacons. In conducting corporate business separate from the actions of the session and congregation, civil law shall be adhered to.

All property held by or for a particular church, a presbytery, a synod, the General Assembly, or the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), whether legal title is lodged in a corporation, a trustee or trustees, or an unincorporated association, and whether the property is used in programs of a particular church or of a more inclusive governing body or retained for the production of income, is held in trust nevertheless for the use and benefit of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

CHAPTER 7 GOVERNING BODIES

General Definition

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall be governed by representative bodies composed of elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament. These governing bodies shall be called Session, Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly. Officers of each of the governing bodies shall be a moderator and a clerk. Governing bodies may provide additional officers as required.

Governing bodies of the church have no civil jurisdiction or power to impose civil penalties. They have only ecclesiastical jurisdiction for the purpose of serving Jesus Christ and declaring and obeying his will in relation to truth and service, order and discipline.

All governing bodies have authority, power, and responsibility, in conformity with the Great Ends of the Church, the Historic Principles of Church Order, the Historic Principles of Church Government and the Principles of Presbyterian Government. They have authority to frame symbols and speak on issues of faith and doctrine, give counsel in matters of conscience, and decide issues properly brought before them. They have the power to establish plans and rules for the worship, mission, government, and discipline of the church and to do those things necessary to the peace, purity, unity, and progress of the church under the will of Christ. They have responsibility for the leadership, guidance, and government of that portion of the church which is under their jurisdiction, with particular attention to implementing the church's commitment to inclusiveness and participation.

All governing bodies of the church are united by the nature of the church and share with one another responsibilities, rights, and powers. The jurisdiction of each governing body is limited by the express provisions of the *Constitution*, with powers not mentioned being reserved to the presbyteries, and with the acts of each subject to review by the next higher governing body.

All meetings of governing bodies shall be opened and closed with prayer.

Any member of a governing body has the right to dissent or protest any action of that body.

Presbyterian Polity is based on the interdependence of governing bodies, which is given life through active consultation with representatives of higher and lower governing bodies in matters of planning and implementing the mission and administration of each governing body.

A governing body may delegate particular aspects of its task to councils, boards, agencies, commissions, and committees, but always on the basis of accountability to the governing body.

Minutes and all other official records of church sessions, presbyteries, synods, and General Assemblies are the property in perpetuity of said governing bodies or their legal successors.

If a higher governing body learns at any time of any irregularity or delinquency by a lower governing body, it may require the governing body to produce any records and take appropriate action.

Commissions and Committees

Commissions appointed by governing bodies may be either administrative or judicial, except in the case of sessions, which may appoint only administrative commissions.

A commission is empowered to consider and conclude matters referred to it by a governing body.

A commission has absolute discretion and may employ additional procedural process such as that afforded in cases of judicial process, either when requested by parties to the case or on its own initiative.

A committee is appointed or elected either to study and recommend appropriate action or to carry out directions or decisions already made by a governing body.

SPECIFIC GOVERNING BODIES

THE SESSION

The session of a particular church consists of the installed ministers of the Word and Sacrament and the elders in active service, all of whom are entitled to vote. An installed minister of the Word and Sacrament shall be the moderator of the session and the session shall not meet without the consent of the moderator.

The session is responsible for the mission and government of the particular church and has the responsibility to maintain regular and continuing relationship to the higher governing bodies of the church. It has such additional responsibilities as are assigned in the *Constitution*.

Session is fully responsible for all funds and financial transactions of the particular church.

THE PRESBYTERY

Presbytery is a corporate expression of the church, with such ecclesiastical, pastoral, and programmatic responsibilities as are assigned by the *Constitution*. A presbytery consists of all ministers of the Word and Sacrament who are its members, and all the particular churches within a certain district.

A presbytery shall determine the ministers of the Word and Sacrament who shall be its continuing members. When the presbytery meets as a governing body, the particular churches are represented by such elder commissioners as are assigned by the provisions of the *Constitution*.

Preparation for the Office of Minister of the Word and Sacrament

Those who are to be ordained as ministers of the Word and Sacrament prepare for their task under the direction of the presbytery. Presbyteries shall enter into, and shall dissolve if necessary, a relationship with those preparing to become ministers of the Word and Sacrament.

Ordination is an act of the whole church carried out by the presbytery, setting apart a person to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament. Ordination shall occur when all constitutional provisions have been met and a call for service to a church or other work in the mission of the church that is acceptable to the candidate and the presbytery has been received. Ordination takes place in a service of worship

Establishment and Dissolution of Pastoral Relationships

The pastoral relationship between an installed minister of the Word and Sacrament and a particular church shall be established and dissolved only by presbytery.

Every minister shall be a member of a presbytery, and under its jurisdiction.

THE SYNOD

Synod is a unit of the church's life and mission with such ecclesiastical, pastoral and programmatic responsibilities as are assigned by the *Constitution*. When the synod meets as a governing body, its presbyteries shall be represented by such elected minister and elder commissioners as are assigned by the provisions of the *Constitution*.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The General Assembly is the highest governing body of this church and is representative of the unity of the synods, presbyteries, sessions, and congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The General Assembly has such ecclesiastic, pastoral, and programmatic responsibilities as are assigned to it by the *Constitution*. When the General Assembly meets as a governing body, the presbyteries shall be represented by such elected minister and elder commissioners as are assigned by the provisions of the *Constitution*. The General Assembly constitutes the bond of union, community, and mission among all its congregations and governing bodies.

CHAPTER 8 REFORM BY AMENDMENT

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) seeks to be faithful to the Lordship of Christ and to its historic tradition of the Church reformed, always being reformed, by the Spirit of God. In this faith, amendment procedures follow specific procedures to assure that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) remains faithful to its call, and that the voices of its various constituencies can be heard and considered. These procedures are understood as a means to faithfulness as God breaks forth yet more light from God's Word.