

**“White Paper” #1
from the Odyssey Group**

**“How Did We Get This Bureaucratic Model?”
or
“What Kind of Presbytery Do We Really Want?”**

Some historical background to frame our exploration
of what can be the next model of our life together.

From the PC(USA) Constitution, from the *Book of Order*, from the Form of Government:

*The presbytery is responsible for
the mission and government of the church
throughout its geographical district.
It therefore has the responsibility and power*

- a. to develop strategy for the mission of the church in its area...*
- b. to coordinate the work of its member churches,
guiding them and mobilizing their strength
for the most effective witness
to the broader community for which it has responsibility... (G-11.0103)*

*The church is called ... to a new openness
to the possibilities and perils of its institutional forms
in order to ensure the faithfulness and usefulness of these forms
to God’s activity in the world. (G-3.0401c)*

We believe that a presbytery should be a relational and missional gathering.. We believe that we have good biblical and theological reasons for this view of a presbytery. Yet, very many people have experienced the presbytery as a baffling bureaucracy, with cumbersome committees, seemingly committed to preserving the past rather than being a creative force for discerning and living into God’s future.

This “white paper”¹ seeks to provide some historical background and understanding so that we might understand how we got into this bureaucratic condition, especially so that we might be fully informed as we imagine what God wants the presbytery to be in this 21st century.

The Evolution of Presbyterian Organizational Culture

Craig Dykstra and James Hudnut-Beumler² illuminate the historical progression of American Presbyterianism that has led to our current bureaucratic burden. They trace the evolution of the model of American denominations from “Constitutional Confederacy” to “Corporation” to the “Regulatory Agency” of the last 40 years. Understanding this progression may give us clues to untying today’s bureaucratic knot. It can also frame for us the question of what the next model might best be.

Constitutional Confederacy

Out of the earliest years following the American Revolution arose a new crisis for churches. Whereas ministers had been trained and deployed from the colonialists' European churches of national origin, the colonies could no longer look to their lands of origin for leadership and governance. There was a need for new ministers to be trained and placed in churches. This training and assignment had to take place on the western side of the Atlantic.

Churches that shared European national origins now shared a common heritage that made it natural for them to band together to organize in this newly independent nation. Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler describe these organizations as "constitutional confederations" because they were formed around constitutions – but this type of constitution was quite limited in its scope of responsibility. The constitutional standards were doctrinal or confessional statements that were received from their ecclesiastical history. For Presbyterians this constitutional standard was the Westminster Confession, adopted, with some new-world modifications, as the standard of faith and a Form of Government by the Synod of New York and Philadelphia in 1789. "This was the beginning of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and of its General Assembly."³

These new confederations were denominations in a very different sense from what denominations have become today. They were not bureaucracies or program agencies.

With all these developments it is crucial to recognize, nonetheless, that the formation of national-level church bodies in the earliest years of the republic did not involve the formation of large-scale bureaucratic denominations as we know them today. They responded to the ecclesiastical problems of ministerial succession, guidance, and governance brought on by the fact of America's emergence as a separate nation, but the forms they used were not bureaucratic; they were constitutional. Churches became national bodies by constituting themselves as confederations.⁴

The motivating issues were primarily "*ministerial succession, guidance, and governance.*" Churches expected no other resources from their new confederations of churches. Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler make the interesting observation about American constitutional development at the same time, i.e. that while the U.S. Constitution created the permission and framework for strong governmental agencies, none were formed, e.g. no one imagined to create either a Department of Health, Education & Welfare or a national board of home missions or Christian education.⁵

The constitutional confederacy model met the practical needs of a newly independent nation but it was a minimalist structure. This would yield during the next century to a two stage evolution leading to the rise of a corporate model of the robust and programmatic American denomination.

Rise of the Corporation Model

The first stage in the evolution toward the corporate model was the rise of religious voluntary associations in the 19th century. These associations were not denominations but were rather societies gathered around perceived societal needs that the American Protestant church was not meeting through its denominations.⁶ The

organizing loci were issues such as opposition to slavery, prohibition of alcohol, distribution of tracts and Bibles, and the propagation of home and foreign missions. These societies were not tied to a particular denomination and the members of the society may have come from a variety of faith traditions.⁷ “Thus the ecclesiastical form of choice in the antebellum period was a weak central church government with a modest set of responsibilities coupled with a wide range of loosely related societies for Christian endeavors.”⁸ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler note the lack of a nationally embraced central bank system.⁹ The lack of a trend toward national standardization is also seen in the absence of a nationally standardized time system until the railroads implemented the first system in 1883. Resistance continued into the early 20th century and the U.S. Standard Time Act was not adopted until 1918. The early 20th century rise of industrialization and improved travel and communication across American society spurred a trend toward centralized national standards and supply systems in many fields of commerce, industry, and government.

Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler employ the theory of institutional isomorphism described by Princeton sociologist Paul DiMaggio.¹⁰ As isomorphism in biology or math identifies similarities in form or analogies in structure and operation, DiMaggio suggests that “institutions developed in different fields within a culture in the same period will assume remarkably similar shapes.”¹¹ Alban Institute consultant Dan Hotchkiss observes a number of ways in which church is often shaped more by cultural influences than biblical influences:

None of these familiar traits of congregational life is mandated by the Scriptures. Religious institutions borrow organizational forms from the society around them: the early church was organized like a Hellenistic mystery cult, the medieval church resembled monarchy, New England Puritans cloned the structure of an English town. The most important influences on the structure of the contemporary American church or synagogue date from the 19th century, when the nonprofit corporation emerged as an all-purpose container for benevolent work. But while other nonprofits have changed, too many congregations still live in the Victorian world of Robert’s Rules.¹²

Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler apply the theory of institutional isomorphism to their observations about the changes in structure and operation of government and business in the mid 19th and early 20th centuries. Referring to these changes at the turn of the century, they reflect: “This was the age of trusts, collectives, and, above all, vertically integrated corporations. Is it surprising that religious denominations, led by clergy and business elites accustomed to thinking in the organizational categories of their time, should reorganize themselves on lines parallel to the worlds of business and government?”¹³ DiMaggio’s theory raises interesting questions as to why these institutional isomorphisms appear, and these questions will be explored later in an effort to understand what future metaphor might best help guide the shaping of a denomination.

Changes in communication, transportation, and production gave rise to national systems of centralized production and distribution. Radio, telegraph, telephone, railroad, and mass production were societal shapers that also became available to the church. American society was increasingly inclined to look for national solutions to the problems of regional inconsistencies, e.g. the standardization of time zones across the transcontinental railway system. The cultural stage was set for the development of religious denominations as corporations.

As Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler summarize the situation: "...by 1900, for both practical and ideological reasons, the die had been cast for a corporate bureaucratic form of organization that would characterize American Protestantism at the national level for most of this century. Corporations were in the business of providing goods and services, and the modern denomination was no exception to this rule."¹⁴ Denominations began to bring the work of various independent voluntary associations under a centralized national control. Products such as Sunday School curricula, denominational periodicals, and national resources for church architecture, insurance, and pension programs became centralized and administered through national offices.¹⁵

The management of substantial foreign mission dollars was an economic motivation for this centralization of all programs.¹⁶ As is often still true today, dollars for foreign missions were easier to raise than dollars for domestic programs, so centralizing all denominational programs, including foreign missions, provided a consolidated income base to fund the growing spectrum of denominational services.¹⁷

Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler characterize the early 20th century denominational assemblies and national conventions as "stockholders' meetings"¹⁸ where the "stockholders" would vote on materials already prepared by denominational staff.¹⁹ National boards and councils were served by male pastors and lay leaders of the large and wealthy congregations,²⁰ very much analogous to the boards of directors of corporations in the business world.

This corporate model of providing goods produced through a centralized control and delivered through a vertically aligned corporate structure was well received and appreciated by the church across the denomination.²¹ Many inspiring missionaries were deployed and their stories were well reported in denominational publications. "Colorful Christian Education materials with colorful pictures of happy children" satisfied the masses.²² In the mid 1950s the paid subscription list of *Presbyterian Life* magazine exceeded one million, surpassing even that of *Newsweek* magazine.

Decline of the Corporation Model

In the 1960s began the decline of the corporate model's effectiveness, although those who ran the corporate model were slow to realize the implications of the sea changes going on in society and in the national church. The general satisfaction and trust on the part of the churches and consumers and citizens of the land was eroded by the major questions and turmoil that swept American society beginning in the 1960s. Several major factors contributed to this decline.

Patterns in mission activity, particularly global mission activity, began to change in the 1960s as American denominational missions became increasingly aware of their history of a tendency toward cultural imperialism in their relations to other countries and cultures. Self-determination by Christian nationals in other lands was increasingly valued and the "sending" of traditional missionaries in the style of early 20th century American missions was reduced. The positive side of this was the potential for more honest and equitable partnerships between American mainline churches and the churches in other countries. In some of these countries the vitality and growth of the church has far exceeded that of the American mainline denominational church. The negative impact of this trend on this denomination accustomed to the corporation model was the reduction

of one of the most inspiring and glamorous products that the denomination had known – the foreign missionary doing good and providing inspirational stories which motivated people to give more mission dollars.²³

Another major factor in the 1960s was the end of the postwar baby boom. Mainline churches began a forty year decline in the period 1965-1966. Sunday School attendances hit their peaks; membership levels began a steady decrease. Consequently religious giving began to decrease at a time when denominational bureaucracies had swelled in the wake of the robust and enthusiastic growth of the 1950s when the church was so popular that it received “increases in religious giving that far exceeded the rate of growth in a very robust postwar economy.”²⁴ But beginning in the late 1960s, with fewer people in churches giving fewer dollars to churches, the corporate denomination had to “cut back the scope of goods and services it was able to offer.”²⁵ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler characterize this as a “vicious cycle of cuts of popular services and greater membership dissatisfaction.”²⁶

Two factors contributed to the rise of special interest consultants and advocacy organizations. First was the reduction of services provided by the national denominational offices. Second was the precipitous decline in a national consensus over what types of services should be offered. In the face of more open conflict over ideological and theological agendas, post-1960s Presbyterians saw “a tremendous rise in the number and kinds of affinity and special-interest groups” in American society in general ... Among members of the denominations, such groups also caught on.”²⁷ Within the Presbyterian Church, some of these groups organized to meet perceived needs not met by the denomination’s program, but other groups were formed purposely in opposition to the denomination’s programs and positions.²⁸

The Rise and Fossilization of the Regulatory Agency Model

The national denominational structure had come into competition with the special interest groups for a limited and declining pool of financial resources. The national structure, during its robust era of the corporation model, had grown to be a larger and more expensive bureaucracy than the church had ever known before. (This was not only true at the national level but also regionally in Southern California; the history of Southern California will be discussed in detail at the end of this paper.)

While the denominational bureaucracy could no longer offer robust programs, resources, and staff support to the churches, the bureaucracy was still left with the task of apportioning shrinking resources in a just manner among the competing voices and interests across the national church. Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler explain that “*when denominational leaders find they no longer have adequate educational resources or persuasive powers to influence social and ecclesiastical change, they attempt to mandate it through regulation.*”²⁹ Conflict and disappointment were bred when, in an increasingly pluralistic world, denominational policies reflected political and theological agendas that represented the desires and values of some particular segments but not the whole church. Conflict and frustration reached even higher heights when the regulatory agency mandated practices that neither the grassroots nor the agency could afford. The unfunded mandate eventually becomes a sign of the failing of the regulatory model.

The bureaucratic infrastructure was also staffed with bureaucrats charged with managing a system that was failing to adapt to changing market conditions. The bureaucrats themselves often failed to understand the changes in the environment. Large sections of the national system continued to operate with an expectation of loyalty from the grassroots and a sense of entitlement to funds expected to flow from the grassroots up into the denominational system. The “institutional habit”³⁰ of regulation was presided over by bureaucrats in a bureaucracy that took on a life of its own and sought to preserve itself as an institution. Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler offer this chilling description of this phenomenon:

... there has arisen during the period of corporate and regulatory bureaucratization a virtual profession of “denominational executive.” Often without meaning to or even wanting to, these executives find themselves pursuing an agenda relatively independent of local churches and even of the aggregate interests of the church on a national level. Members of this more or less permanent group of denominational officials often move from position to position within the national agency. Their primary colleagues are their peers in the bureaucracy and in other like organizations. And their interests tend to be focused on issues internal to the survival of the bureaucratic organization itself.³¹

The persistence of this kind of bureaucratic professionalism can be better understood by, once again, engaging DiMaggio’s theory of “institutional isomorphism.” DiMaggio argues that cultural patterns exert a shaping pressure on the culture’s institutions.³² Some of these pressures are coercive (e.g. through laws), some are mimetic (i.e. imitative when models and practices proliferate through employee migration or professional consultants) and some are normative (e.g. through licensing standards, educational requirements within a limited educational pool, professional networks and industry standards).³³ DiMaggio’s theory suggests one of the sources for the institutional inertia that perpetuates the denominational bureaucracy and the bureaucrats who staff it. DiMaggio explains:

We argue that the causes of bureaucratization have changed. The bureaucratization of the corporation and the state have been achieved. Organizations are still becoming more homogeneous and bureaucracy remains the common organizational form. Today, however, structural change in organizations seems less and less driven by competition or by the need for efficiency. Instead, we will contend, *bureaucratization and other forms of organizational change occur as the result of processes that make organizations more similar without necessarily making them more efficient.* (emphasis mine)³⁴

The Presbyterian desire for legitimization in the eyes of the ambient culture goes back to the very first days of Presbyterianism in colonial America in the early 1700s. Even in that era of “constitutional confederacy” the most dominant conflict in the confederation of Presbyterians was over the legitimacy of ministers and their educational standards. While it was framed as an educational issue from the side of those advocating formal education at legitimate colleges, it was weighed as a revivalist zeal issue on the side of those advocating for the approval of ministers who displayed fervor and piety but lacked formal education. This conflict led to the first major American Presbyterian split in the Old Side – New Side controversy of the 1740s. Presbyterians struggled to form an identity as a church with legitimizing standards in an environment of new world religious toleration. Unlike Anglicans in Virginia, Presbyterians in the middle colonies had eschewed the legitimizing factor of being an established church. The

desperate longing for legitimization led them to rancor and public excoriation of one another within the Presbyterian fellowship.

If isomorphic pressure is at play helping to shape the bureaucratic regulatory agency of the Presbyterian Church, the question cries out: *How can the denomination be free of this mimetic and enervating bureaucracy in order to creatively and effectively pursue its mission?* The crisis is described in this sobering and indicting observation by Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler:

Those who have taken up positions in the denominational headquarters have done so precisely in order to minister with integrity in and for the sake of the larger church and world. They go there not to regulate but to provide essential resources and services and to exercise leadership. What they find, however, is an organization whose very structure and momentum virtually prohibit them from doing what they themselves often most want to do. Rather than producing valued and valuable goods and services, they find their time and energies consumed by participation in meetings and consultations internal to the bureaucracy itself, by engagement in conflicts among various parties in the larger system, and by the production of policy papers, regulations, sanctions and inducements designed to keep the organization in a state of controlled equilibrium. When these activities dominate the lives of persons who go into this work with different intentions in mind, the effect on morale and perhaps even health is predictable.³⁵

The model of the regulatory agency has run its course. An excellent critique of the centralized, vertically aligned delivery system and the regulatory business model is provocatively articulated by journalist Thomas Friedman in *The World is Flat*.³⁶ He identifies a profound shift in how effective organizations and leaders work today and he captures it in the phrase “From Command and Control to Collaborate and Connect.”³⁷ The world that Friedman describes and in which the church does mission today is a world that does not need much of the infrastructural encumbrance of the regulatory system. People of all ages, in the wake of a sweeping wave of technological and globalizing change, are finding new ways to collaborate and connect outside of the increasingly irrelevant regulatory infrastructure. And if properly invoked, the radical foundations of Presbyterian tradition can speak directly to this new collaborative and connectional world in which we are called to engage in God’s mission.

Radical Presbyterian Values for Structure and Mission

Structure and Our Reformed Tradition

The corporation structure (centralized and vertically aligned) as expressed in American culture during the early 20th century bears an intrinsic conflict with a fundamental Reformed and Presbyterian value. This value is mutual accountability, born of a deep theological conviction about human nature being inclined to sin and selfishness. This theological conviction about the human proclivity to sin is evidenced in human history but its theological weight comes from the belief that God has revealed this truth about human nature in the Bible, as the Bible has been interpreted by Presbyterian forebears.

Our “Reformed” tradition is summarized in the *Book of Order*^{38]} in this way:

G-2.0500.a 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.³⁹

Two clear radical Reformed and Presbyterian values are expressed here: the first is human sinfulness and the second is God's sovereign holiness.

Because of human sinfulness there needs to be a keen vigilance against tyranny, the abuses of which the prime Protestant reformers encountered most palpably in the unbridled power of a hierarchical church that emerged from the middle ages inextricably wed to the systems of military and political hierarchy and power.

This fundamental belief is expressed in Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) polity as we trust God to work in and through the disciplined covenant community that is ordered such that ecclesiastical power is not exercised through unilateral hierarchy. The covenant community exercises power together through elected representative governing bodies. In the Presbyterian Church there is intentionally no episcopal function for a bishop, but rather many of the functions that would be invested in a bishop in an episcopal system (such as ordaining, installing, moving and removing ministers) are the responsibility of no individual but rather of the elected governing body. While this theologically inspired system of church order is designed to prevent the abuse of any individual hierarch, it is also designed to prevent the isolation and autonomy of any single pastor or congregation. Every Presbyterian congregation is accountable to its regional governing body (the presbytery in which it is a member) for all of its major decisions. Major actions such as calling, ordaining, or dismissing a minister, buying, selling or encumbering property, must always be done with the consultation and approval of the presbytery. No pastor or personality in a congregation may decide unilaterally to perform these actions. In the *Book of Order* the presbytery is described in this way:

G-11.0103 The Presbytery: Responsibilities

The presbytery is responsible for the mission and government of the church throughout its geographical district. It therefore has the responsibility and power

- a. to develop strategy for the mission of the church in its area consistent with G-3.0000;
- b. to coordinate the work of its member churches, guiding them and mobilizing their strength for the most effective witness to the broader community for which it has responsibility;⁴⁰

The current reality is that in most presbyteries this espoused presbytery model, based on Reformed theological principles, has in real life taken on a regulatory function and stigma, consistent with the trend of denominational bureaucracy increasingly evidenced since the late 1960s.

The governing body described above is the presbytery, which is the regional body overseeing the ministries of congregations. But all together there are four levels of governing bodies: 1) the session, elected by the congregation to serve as its ruling board; 2) the presbytery, composed of the region's ministers plus commissioners sent by sessions of the churches in the region; 3) the synod, composed of a regional cluster of presbyteries; and 4) the General Assembly, composed of commissioners (an equal number of clergy and lay elders) sent from the presbyteries. The confusion over the relative and changing roles of presbytery, synods, and the general assembly is at the heart of the crisis that I seek to address in this project.

Reformation Principles

The basic Reformation principle of using the Bible as the primary authority is also invoked by the PC(U.S.A.) in its constitutional description of the church's mission. The *Book of Order* makes this statement:

The church affirms: "*Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*," that is, "The church reformed, always reforming according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit."⁴¹

The key phrase translated in English, "according to the Word of God" has not been included in the Latin quote, but it is important to remember that the Reformation principle was the whole phrase, *Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda, secundum verbum dei*, i.e. the church reformed, always reforming, according (or subject to) the Word of God. This fundamental principle of allowing scripture rather than church tradition be the primary authority is very important in the church's statement on mission in Chapter III of the Form of Government in the *Book of Order*.

Mission

Chapter III of the *Book of Order* is titled "The Church and Its Mission." This is the chapter in which we find the license and mandate to think creatively and counter-traditionally because of the application of the principle of "*reformed, always reforming according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit*." Chapter III on Mission begins with the statement: "The mission of the Church is given form by God's activity in the world as told in the Bible and understood by faith." Then the chapter unfolds in brilliant fashion to recall the mighty works of God throughout history in creation, calling a chosen people, sending a savior who came to proclaim and demonstrate God's love and justice, and sending the Holy Spirit who confronts the evil powers of the world and longs to fulfill God's intention for all of humanity.⁴² The chapter continues to describe the work of the church as "Christ's Faithful Evangelist" in a remarkably holistic and compelling description of the church going into the world, demonstrating God's love in human relationships, and participating in God's activity in the world through healing, reconciling, struggling for justice, giving its substance to serve those who suffer, and "sharing with Christ in the establishing of his just, peaceable and loving rule in the world."⁴³

This chapter on mission then goes on to make one of the two statements which I take as both license and mandate to think in revolutionary ways about the structure and mission of the PC(U.S.A.):

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.⁴⁴

This statement is followed by a declaration of God's call to the church:

The church is called ... to a new openness to the possibilities and perils of its institutional forms in order to ensure the faithfulness and usefulness of these forms to God's activity in the world;⁴⁵

These constitutional declarations are keys to my increasing sense that leaders in the PC(U.S.A.) are called by God to think in new ways that go beyond institutional maintenance. The call is for spiritual leadership for generative governance, two concepts that will be described in the next chapter.

The Presbytery of Los Ranchos in the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii

The history of the Presbytery of Los Ranchos is relatively brief and must be viewed in light of how denominational history played out in California.

Since the late 1800s, in the wake of the Gold Rush, California was a promising mission field for the Presbyterian Church. Until 1967 this field was managed by the Board of National Missions. Mission workers were deployed from East Coast headquarters. Supervision and salaries for these workers came from the national headquarters in the east. Until the General Assembly meeting of 1967 there was one Synod of California (which included a small part of Nevada) run by National Mission staff deployed from New York who worked out of two field offices, one in San Francisco and one in Los Angeles. Churches in California grew and multiplied with the robustness that characterized the era of the rise of the corporation model. By the mid 1960s Sunday Schools were swelled with baby boom children and new church planting had demonstrated a pattern of proliferation that had been rising dramatically for more than a decade. Until 1968 there was a Presbytery of Los Angeles that had become a seat of much influence as it oversaw the expansion of many Presbyterian churches in that robust post-war baby boom era. But quite unlike today, program leadership for the Presbytery of Los Angeles was nationally hierarchized, funded by the national missions system, and administered through the Synod of California. The churches in the expanding Los Angeles Presbytery provided significant funding for the denomination and the denomination in turn provided funds, programs, and staff for Southern California. The presbytery had grown so large that during the 1960s a plan was designed to create a separate Synod of Southern California and to divide the one Presbytery of Los Angeles into four distinct presbyteries. The expectation was that each of those presbyteries would continue to grow into robust regional bodies, but that all of the presbyteries' programming would be planned by the national staff working through the Los Angeles based synod office. Presbyteries were only to implement the program designed by the synod.

Two trends of seismic proportions were not perceived (or at least not taken seriously) during those years of planning the division of the Presbytery of Los Angeles. First, the planners did not perceive that the booming of American Protestantism (as expressed in the corporation model era) had peaked and a decline had begun in the mid 1960s just as their expectations for growth were at an all time high. Second, the planners did not appreciate the significance of the trend in the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (the former UPCUSA)⁴⁶ that was leading to the

1968 “Design for Mission” which called for more regional synods “to decentralize denominational programs, bringing them closer ‘to the grass roots’.”⁴⁷ In 1969 the 181st General Assembly formalized this trend in the national legislative action called Overture H⁴⁸ which prescribed that mission should be overseen and administered by the governing body at the lowest possible level closest to the mission work.⁴⁹ This trend eventually led to the General Assembly’s 1973 creation of larger presbyteries which were intended to allow presbyteries to be able to afford to hire their own program staff.

Ironically, in January 1968 Southern California had implemented a new design that created smaller presbyteries with the intention that mission programming would be run by the synod, such that presbyteries would only have “ecclesiastical” responsibilities.⁵⁰ This idea that the higher governing body, i.e. the synod, should control mission in the region was a hard idea to give up for some. Some synod staff and some leaders of special interest groups under the old system were loath to yield control, in spite of the direction that the General Assembly was heading.

It was into this vision of centralized synod program control and weak presbytery staffing that Los Ranchos was born. The idea of the presbytery having its own executive was not part of the original plan in 1968 but was rather an accommodation to the General Assembly’s directives set in motion (ironically, and almost simultaneously) by Overture H. Out of that ecclesiastical ethos came the first three Executive Presbyters of Los Ranchos. The first Executive Presbyter had recently chaired the team that designed the synod’s new strongly centralized system for synod program management. His model of governing body leadership was hierarchical command and control; he is remembered for executing his work in this way. (It is important to remember that denominational leaders functioned well in that style in that time; the predecessor Presbytery of Los Angeles is remembered to have been run by a reputedly iron fisted Stated Clerk.) The second Executive Presbyter was a church planter (ordained as an evangelist) and an accomplished leader. He was an inspiring speaker and an exemplary pastor to pastors in many ways; he is also remembered as a forceful executive. The third Executive Presbyter came from a career somewhat like the model Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler refer to as “denominational executive,”⁵¹ described as a product of the era of the regulatory agency model. Prior to coming to this presbytery executive role he served as a Synod Executive. After his tenure, an interim Executive Presbyter served for three years with a strong hand for order and a penchant for executive orders. Each of these Executive Presbyters served very well in the era in which they were called. Their style left a legacy of expectations – a “mental model” – regarding the behavior of the Executive Presbyter and the presbytery.

During those thirty four years of hierarchical denominational and presbytery culture the local churches came to view the presbytery as a regulatory agency because that is how they experienced it. The presbytery enforced the denomination’s rules and tried to ensure that things were done “decently and in order.”⁵² Congregations tended to be isolated from each other and from the presbytery. Some efforts were made at regional clusters for regional ministry, but these efforts were largely ineffective at mitigating the trend toward congregational autonomy. The presbytery offered some programs to train and invigorate churches, but increasingly pastors and sessions realized that they could receive higher quality conferences and training from independent specialist organizations or neighboring mega-churches. For most younger pastors and leaders the presbytery was becoming much less relevant. Older Presbyterians who had some memory of their glory days at the tail end of the

corporation model era still gave to the presbytery their time and loyalty but they did not know how to make the presbytery more relevant for younger Presbyterians. Some pastors and sessions harbored perceptions of the presbytery as adversarial or hostile, particularly a few of the most theologically conservative churches who had opposed the General Assembly on many of the social and political positions taken by the General Assembly during the era of the regulatory agency model. The fourth Executive Presbyter of Los Ranchos began his ministry in March of 2003.

During the first five year term of the fourth Executive we have been working toward a vision in which building collaborative connections within the presbytery will create a spiritual network for supporting creative mission. The vision at this point is not simply to restructure the presbytery, but to become a learning community that can be “always reforming” according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit.

The Compelling Question Before Us: What is the Next Model?

We have in scripture a vision of the body of Christ (as in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4) but we wonder how to live this out as a presbytery.

The first three models (Constitutional Confederacy, Corporation, and Regulatory Agency) have run their course. There is widespread agreement that the primarily regulatory model is dead.

The question before us, a challenging question full of exciting possibilities, is: *What new mental model will help shape our life together for Christ’s mission in this time and place?*

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¹ This “White Paper” is extracted from the Doctor of Ministry thesis titled *A Model of Spiritual Leadership for Reinventing the Presbytery of Los Ranchos*, written by Steve Yamaguchi, Executive Presbyter of the Presbytery of Los Ranchos. (This paper is the bulk of Chapter 2.)

² Craig Dykstra and James Hudnut-Beumler, “The National Organizational Structures of Protestant Denominations: An Invitation to a Conversation,” in *The Organizational Revolution: Presbyterians and American Denominationalism*, ed. Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 321-22.

³ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 310.

⁴ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 309-11.

⁵ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 312.

⁶ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 313.

⁷ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 313.

⁸ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 313.

⁹ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 313.

¹⁰ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 314.

¹¹ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 314.

¹² Dan Hotchkiss, “A Discerner’s Guide to Congregational Governance,” *Congregations*, Spring 2007, 16.

¹³ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 315.

¹⁴ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 318.

¹⁵ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 317.

¹⁶ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 316-17.

¹⁷ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 316-17.

¹⁸ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 317.

¹⁹ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 317.

²⁰ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 318.

²¹ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 318.

²² Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 318.

²³ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 318-19.

²⁴ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 319.

²⁵ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 319.

²⁶ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 319.

²⁷ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 320. “These groups crossed political spectrum and included everything from anti-war to pro-life groups. Affinity groups for gay and lesbian Christians as well as “twelve-step” self-help associations for those struggling with dependency patterns in their lives emerged.”

²⁸ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 320-21.

²⁹ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 323.

³⁰ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 326. They cite the work of Theda Skocpol (“Political Response to the Capitalist Crisis – Neo-Marxist Theories of the State and the Case of the New Deal,” *Politics and Society* 10/2, 1980) who was the first to note the importance of a bureaucracy’s intrinsic pursuit of its own agenda for understanding the interaction of conflicting bureaucracies that represent opposing ideologies (e.g. Soviet Communism and the U.S. government in Marxian analysis).

³¹ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 326-27.

³² Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, “The Iron Cage Revisited,” *American Sociological Review* 48 (April 1983), 147.

³³ DiMaggio and Powell, 147.

³⁴ DiMaggio and Powell, 147.

³⁵ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 328.

³⁶ Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

³⁷ Friedman, 212-13.

³⁸ The constitution of the PC(U.S.A.) has two parts, part one being the *Book of Confessions*, an anthology of historic creedal statements. Part two of the constitution is *The Book of Order*.

³⁹ *Book of Order, 2005-2007*, G-2.0500.a.

⁴⁰ *Book of Order, 2005-2007*, G-11.0103.

⁴¹ *Book of Order, 2005-2007*, G-2.0200.

⁴² *Book of Order, 2005-2007*, G-3.0101.a-c.

⁴³ *Book of Order, 2005-2007*, G-3.0300.c.

⁴⁴ *Book of Order, 2005-2007*, G-3.0400.

⁴⁵ *Book of Order, 2005-2007*, G-3.0401.c.

⁴⁶ The current Presbyterian Church in the (U.S.A.) [PC(U.S.A.)] is the result of the 1983 reunion/merger of the former UPCUSA and the former PCUS [the Presbyterian Church in the United States]. The separation had occurred during the era of the Civil War. The PCUS was primarily composed of churches in the Southern and border states.

⁴⁷ Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Pre-Assembly Report to the Committee on Church Polity* (3), 212th General Assembly, 2000, re. *1993 Referral: 26.240-258*.

⁴⁸ United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, *Minutes of the General Assembly, 1969* (New York: Office of the General Assembly), Part I, 523ff.

⁴⁹ This principle remains in the *Book of Order* today as G-9.0402.b “The administration of mission should be performed by the governing body that can most effectively and efficiently accomplish it at the level of jurisdiction nearest the congregation.”

⁵⁰ Heer, *Personal papers*. Ray Heer was the first Executive Presbyter elected to the new Presbytery of Los Ranchos. From 1962 to 1967 he was the chair of the synod’s Long Range Planning Committee which was charged to study the mission and structure of the Southern Area of the Synod of California.

⁵¹ Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, 326-27.

⁵² “Decently and in order” is a phrase often used by Presbyterians and others to describe the Presbyterian predilection for orderliness (and committee work). The phrase is not found at all in the *Book of Order*, although many Presbyterians may guess that it is. It is rather from the common English translation of εὐσχημόνως καὶ κατὰ τάξιν found in 1 Corinthians 14:40. The Apostle Paul wrote this not as a general directive for ecclesiastical culture but rather as a specific corrective to the chaos that resulted from misunderstandings and abuses of the gift of speaking in tongues during worship services in Corinth. This phrase is used only twice in the entire *Book of Confessions*. In the Second Helvetic Confession (5.216) it also refers to worship, but in this case specifically with regard to ornamentation in sanctuaries. The Scots Confession (3.20) does use the phrase to refer to general ecclesiastical order, but the phrase is immediately followed with the wise disclaimer quoted here: “... as in the house of God, it becomes all things to be done decently and in order. Not that we think any policy or order of ceremonies can be appointed for all ages, times, and places; for as ceremonies which men have devised are but temporal, so they may, and ought to be, changed, when they foster superstition rather than edify the Kirk.”