

A Report to the 220th General Assembly from the General Assembly Commission on Mid Councils

“How are those governing bodies best organized to be responsive both to the Spirit of Christ and the changing opportunities for discipleship? Are the structures of history the best platforms for carrying our mission into the future?”

—from the rationale of the charge to the General Assembly Commission on Middle Governing Bodies

Our Charge

The Assembly Committee on Middle Governing Body Issues recommends that the 219th General Assembly (2010) direct the Moderators of the 218th and 219th General Assemblies (2008 and 2010), in consultation with the General Assembly Nominating Committee, to appoint twenty-one persons to a General Assembly Commission on Middle Governing Bodies with the understanding that the Moderators, as they make their appointments, shall make an intentional effort for theological diversity. The commission shall have the following focus and powers:

1. The commission will consult with sessions, presbyteries, synods, and the wider church on the mission and function of middle governing bodies. Such a process should include:
 - a. current diversity in the role and functions of middle governing bodies.
 - b. demographics and financial realities that affect the role and function of synods and presbyteries.
 - c. the role of each governing body in its oversight role--presbyteries of congregations, synods of presbyteries, and General Assembly of synods--both historically and in present experience.
 - d. relationships with General Assembly agencies in role and function.
2. The commission will develop models that reflect the roles of middle governing bodies in our polity and the changing context of our witness in the United States and their relationships with other governing bodies.
3. The commission will prepare a report to the 220th General Assembly (2012) of its findings and any recommended Book of Order changes. Recommendation for future roles and responsibilities will also be made to the 220th General Assembly about changes in middle governing bodies that may best serve the in the 21st century.
4. The commission will implement, within the powers granted it, any decisions forwarded from the 219th General Assembly (2010) and approved by presbyteries regarding the form and function of middle governing bodies with a report to the 220th General Assembly (2012).
5. By direction of the 219th General Assembly (2010), or upon a majority affirmative vote of the affected presbytery or presbyteries or a majority affirmative vote of the presbyteries in the affected synod or synods, the commission is authorized to act as the General Assembly according to
 - a. G-13.0103m: "to organize new synods and to divide, unite, or otherwise combine synods or portions of synods previously existing;"
 - b. G-13.0103n: "to approve the organization, division, uniting, or combining of presbyteries or portions of presbyteries by synods."
6. The commission will supervise the Special Administrative Review Committee on Puerto Rico and act on any recommendations they may make within the powers given to the commission.
7. The actions of the commission shall require a two-thirds majority for approval

The Commission

Reverend Tod Bolsinger, Moderator, Los Ranchos Presbytery, Synod of Southern California and Hawaii

Reverend José Manuel Capella-Pratts, Presbiterio de San Juan, Sínodo Presbiteriano Borinquén

Elder Warren B. Cooper, Philadelphia Presbytery, Synod of the Trinity

Reverend Karen E. Dimon, Cayuga-Syracuse Presbytery, Synod of the Northeast

Elder Miriam Dolin, San Francisco Presbytery, Synod of the Pacific

Reverend Lemuel Garcia-Arroyo, Salem Presbytery, Synod of Mid-Atlantic

Reverend James B. Harper, Greater Atlanta Presbytery, Synod of South Atlantic

Elder Robert Hay, Jr., Greater Atlanta Presbytery, Synod of South Atlantic

Reverend Liza Hendricks, Western Reserve Presbytery, Synod of the Covenant

Elder Viola Hickson Lee, Mission Presbytery, Synod of the Sun

Elder J. Roger Lee, Seattle Presbytery, Synod of Alaska-Northwest

Elder Kelli Lowe, Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery, Synod of Mid-America

Reverend Terry Newland, Sheppards & Lapsley Presbytery, Synod of Living Waters

Reverend José Olagues, Grand Canyon Presbytery, Synod of the Southwest

Elder Barbara Ranta, Seattle Presbytery, Synod of Alaska-Northwest

Reverend Sam Roberson, Charlotte Presbytery, Synod of Mid-Atlantic

Reverend Richard H. Rojas Banuchi, Presbiterio de San Juan, Sínodo Presbiteriano Borinquén

Elder David Seung-Il Rue, M.D., Sacramento Presbytery, Synod of the Pacific

Elder Jane D. Smith, Riverside Presbytery, Synod of Southern California and Hawaii

Elder William L. Stafford, Milwaukee Presbytery, Synod of Lakes and Prairies

Reverend Laura Stellmon, Utah Presbytery, Synod of the Rocky Mountains

Reverend John W. Vest, Chicago Presbytery, Synod of Lincoln Trails

Staff to the Commission:

Reverend Jill M. Hudson, Associate Stated Clerk

Reverend Dan Saperstein, Advisory Committee on the Constitution

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Recommendations to the 220th General Assembly

1 1. That the 220th General Assembly (2012) direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed
2 amendments to the *Book of Order* to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes
3 to take effect at the close of the 222nd General Assembly (2016):

4 a. Striking section G-3.04 *The Synod* (including sections G-3.0401 through G-3.0406)

5 b. Amending section G-3.03 *The Presbytery* with the following additions (underlined) and
6 deletions (strikethroughs):

7 **G-3.03 THE PRESBYTERY**

8 *G-3.0301 Composition and Responsibilities*

9 The presbytery is the council serving as a corporate expression of the church within a certain district and
10 is composed of all the congregations and teaching elders within that district. The presbytery shall adopt
11 and communicate to the sessions a plan for determining how many ruling elders each session should
12 elect as commissioners to presbytery, with a goal of numerical parity of teaching elders and ruling
13 elders. This plan shall require each session to elect at least one commissioner and shall take into
14 consideration the size of congregations as well as a method to fulfill the principles of participation and
15 representation found in F-1.0403 and G-3.0103. Ruling elders elected as officers of the presbytery shall
16 be enrolled as members during the period of their service. A presbytery may provide by its own rule for
17 the enrollment of ruling elders serving as moderators of committees or commissions.

18 The minimum composition of a presbytery is ten duly constituted sessions and ten teaching elders.

19 The presbytery is responsible for the life, ministry and government of the church throughout its district,
20 and for assisting and supporting the witness of congregations to the sovereign activity of God in the
21 world, so that all congregations throughout its region become communities of faith, hope, love, and
22 witness. As it leads and guides the witness of its congregations, the presbytery shall keep before it the
23 marks of the Church (F-1.0302), the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed communities have
24 identified themselves through history (F-1.0303) and the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304).

25 (The remainder of this section to remain the same)

26 *G-3.0302 Relations with the Church and Synod and ~~Synod and General Assembly~~*

27 The presbytery has a responsibility to maintain regular and continuing relationship with other
28 presbyteries and to synod and ~~the~~ General Assembly by:

29 a. consulting with other presbyteries in their region about creating regional mission partnerships for
30 Racial Ethnic Advocacy and Support, mission and ministry projects, and other programs of shared life,
31 diversity and connection to the larger church

32 b. electing commissioners to synod and General Assembly and receiving their reports;

- 1 c. electing ruling and teaching elders to be readers of standard ordination examinations;
- 2 d. seeing that the guidance and communication of ~~synod~~ and General Assembly are considered and that
3 any binding actions are observed and carried out;
- 4 e. proposing to ~~synod~~ or General Assembly such measures as may be of common concern to the mission
5 of the church; and
- 6 f. sending annually to ~~synod~~ and General Assembly statistical and other information according to the
7 requirements of those bodies.

- 8 **2. That the 220th General Assembly (2012) instruct the Synods, in consultation with their**
9 **constituent presbyteries, to develop and bring to the 221st General Assembly (2014) plans to**
10 **transfer assets, funds, projects and programs to the appropriate trusts, foundations or**
11 **entities of their choice for implementation by the Synods by the close of the 222nd General**
12 **Assembly (2016).**
- 13 **3. That the 220th General Assembly (2012) instruct the Moderator to appoint a committee to**
14 **work in consultation with the Stated Clerk and to bring to the 221st General Assembly (2014):**
- 15 a) Recommendations, including any necessary changes in the *Manual of the General*
16 *Assembly* for the appointment of 5 Regional Administrative Commissions to facilitate
17 churches and presbyteries to fulfill their missional objectives when realignment is
18 necessary and also to support the presbyteries and regions in promoting the full
19 expression of rich diversity in membership, participation and decision-making (G-
20 3.0103);
- 21 b) Recommendations , including any necessary changes in the *Book of Order* and the
22 *Manual of the General Assembly in order to continue to facilitate and support the racial*
23 *ethnic ministries that have historically been supported by the Synods.*
- 24 c) Any additional editorial changes to the *Book of Order* which will be made necessary by
25 the action of recommendation 1.
- 26 **4. That the 220th General Assembly (2012) instruct the Moderator to appoint a committee to**
27 **work in consultation with the Stated Clerk and to bring to the 221st General Assembly (2014)**
28 **recommendations, including any necessary changes in the *Book of Order* and the *Manual of***
29 ***the General Assembly* to create the necessary number of regional judicial commissions, rooted**
30 **in the various regions, to serve as courts of appeal to decisions of presbytery PJC's and as**
31 **courts of original jurisdiction in remedial cases against presbyteries or upon reference from**
32 **presbytery PJC's.**
- 33 **5. That the 220th General Assembly (2012) instruct the Moderator to appoint a commission to**
34 **work in consultation with the Stated Clerk to:**

- 1 a. By direction of the 220th General Assembly (2012), or upon a majority affirmative vote
2 of the affected presbytery or presbyteries or a majority affirmative vote of the
3 presbyteries in the affected synod or synods, the commission is authorized to act as the
4 General Assembly to:
- 5 i. organize new synods and to divide, unite, or otherwise combine synods or
6 portions of synods previously existing;
- 7 ii. and to approve the organization, division, uniting, or combining of presbyteries
8 or portions of presbyteries by synods."
- 9 b. Report to the 221st General Assembly (2014) and to the 222nd General Assembly (2016)
10 all actions taken on its behalf.
- 11 c. To cease existence and transfer all authority to the Regional Administrative
12 Commissions as soon as the Regional Administrative Commissions have been
13 constituted.

14 **6. That the 220th General Assembly (2012) direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed**
15 **amendments to the *Book of Order* to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes.**

16 *Add the following new section to G-3.0403:*

17 d. Approving the formation of provisional non-geographic presbyteries for particular missional
18 purposes, upon petition of ten or more congregations and ten or more teaching elders within its
19 bounds, with the concurrence of existing presbyteries. The petition shall include a plan outlining the
20 missional purposes of the proposed presbytery and continuing covenant relationships with existing
21 presbyteries. Such presbyteries shall have all the rights and powers of presbyteries, except that they
22 shall not have the authority to dissolve, dismiss, or divide congregations or to approve the sale,
23 mortgage, lease, or transfer of the real property of its constituent congregations without the consent of
24 the congregation's presbytery of origin. This provision shall expire December 31, 2021, at which time all
25 presbyteries formed under this provision shall be dissolved and their congregations and teaching elder
26 members dismissed to their presbyteries of origin.

27 *Add the following new section to G-3.0303:*

28 g. to approve the temporary dismissal of congregations for particular missional purposes, to
29 another presbytery within the synod or to another geographically contiguous synod, subject to G-
30 3.0403c and G-3.0502e, with the following conditions: (1) the congregation shall continue to affiliate
31 with the presbytery of origin for the purpose of mutual blessing, and shall have voice at presbytery
32 meetings, except in matters related to conditions (2) and (3) in which they shall have voice and vote; (2)
33 the congregation may not sell, mortgage, transfer, or lease its real property without the consent of the
34 presbytery of origin; (3) the congregation may not be dissolved, divided, or dismissed without the
35 concurrence of the presbytery of origin; (4) distribution of per capita or mission funds remitted may be
36 divided according to a covenant between the presbytery of membership and the presbytery of origin; (5)

1 all relationships established under this provision shall be rescinded December 31, 2021, and may be
2 rescinded at any time by vote of either presbytery in consultation with the congregation.

3 **7. We call on the 220th General Assembly to establish a task force to review the nature
4 and function of the General Assembly Mission Council and the Office of the General
5 Assembly specifically with respect to their relationship with and support of mid
6 councils as they serve the vitality and mission of congregations in our changing
7 context.**

8 **8. In light of what we have heard in our conversation with the church identifying a
9 critical condition concerning lack of confidence in the substance and direction of racial
10 ethnic ministry, we recommend:**

11 a. that the Moderator of the 220th General Assembly be empowered to appoint a National
12 Racial Ethnic Ministries Task Force exclusively to review, assess and explore the call to,
13 responsibility in, and vision for racial ethnic ministry within the PC(USA), reporting its findings
14 for implementation to the 221st General Assembly; and

15 b. that this Task Force be comprised of representatives from:

- 16 - Racial ethnic church leadership;
- 17 - Racial ethnic caucus leadership;
- 18 - The Advisory Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC);
- 19 - Presbytery leadership; and
- 20 - The Committee on Representation; and

21 c. that this Task Force be independent from the OGA Task Force in recommendation 3 above;
22 and

23 d. that this Task Force be charged specifically to address the issue of language access, sensitivity
24 and resourcing (particularly as relates to the Spanish and Korean languages) within the existing
25 frame of council operation, as well as within the context of any regional administrative structure
26 that might emerge as a result of the repurposing of synods.

27 Furthermore, in our conversations with the church we found significant interest in developing a
28 new mechanism:

- 29 1) to review the models in mid councils and congregations of racial ethnic ministry that
30 are operating successfully in the denomination with particular focus on, but not limited
31 to, those noted in the Report of the Racial Ethnic Strategy Task Force; and
- 32 2) to explore the viability of a nationally organized racial ethnic ministry advocacy
33 model on the local and/or cluster congregation level.

1 While it is not within our charge formally to recommend so, the Assembly may nevertheless wish to
2 consider assigning these additional responsibilities to the National Racial Ethnic Ministries Task Force
3 recommended above.

4

Rationale: An Executive Summary

A Season of Experimentation for Adapting to a Rapidly Changing World

The changing cultural context, the shifts that middle governing bodies are themselves already making, and a new domestic mission frontier all make this the right time, God's time for us to examine the role, function and form of presbyteries and synods. —from the rationale of the charge to the General Assembly Commission on Middle Governing Bodies

At the heart of the eight formal recommendations the ***Mid Council Commission**** has offered to the General Assembly is a two-fold proposal that necessitates the constitutional changes suggested above:

- 1. The flattening of denominational hierarchy and bureaucracy by repurposing synods as *Multi-Presbytery Missional Partnerships*. This will be accomplished by eliminating the ecclesiastical responsibilities of synods as councils of the church, referring Permanent Judicial Commission functions to another created structure, and creating Regional Administrative Commissions of the General Assembly to offer ecclesiastical accountability for boundary decisions between presbyteries and to facilitate the church's commitment to diversity.**
- 2. The reinvigorating of presbyteries as the locus of support for missional congregations by allowing more flexibility in the formation of connectional relationships. In order to do this, we call the church to engage in a designated *Season of Reflective Experimentation* that will last until December 31, 2021. Among the possibilities to be explored during this season of experimentation are the creation of provisional non-geographic presbyteries and provisional presbytery realignments for specific missional purposes.**

We live in a rapidly changing world and the Presbyterian Church (USA) is not the same denomination it was sixty or thirty years ago, when the structural framework of our current version of Presbyterianism was developed and implemented. As we have envisioned what the Presbyterian Church of our ***post-Christendom*** world may look like, our Commission has assumed the role of those who prepare the space, invite the artists, and affirm the creativity that already resides in our ***mid council*** system.

* All key terms appear the first time in bold italic and are featured in the glossary in the appendix.

1 Based on a deep examination of our rapidly changing contexts for mission in the world, our
2 recommendations create the conditions for **adaptive change** with a clear focus:

3 ***The stimulation of creative collaboration within and among presbyteries to strengthen the***
4 ***vitality of missional congregations in a post-Christendom world.***

5 The foundational ecclesiological principle behind our recommendations is articulated in our
6 new Form of Government: *the congregation—in covenant relationships called presbyteries—is*
7 *the ‘basic form’ of the mission of God to the world.*¹

8 In order to develop our recommendations:

- 9 • *We listened deeply* to the church by means of surveys, conference calls with key
10 constituents, and numerous conversations in every synod, at every major gathering of
11 the church, and with key leaders in every level of the church’s life. (See the report,
12 “Listening [and Looking] Deeply: Data and Discussions”)
- 13 • *We learned* from experts in theology, history, and sociology, as well as from the most
14 respected leaders in our current system about the urgency, necessity, and process of
15 deep transformation. (See the section, “Changing Contexts and Adaptive Change”)
- 16 • *We initiated a transparent and public conversation* using social media, blogs, articles,
17 and conversations about our recommendations while they were still in “draft” stages.
- 18 • *We developed a set of Guiding Principles* that reaffirm the recently adopted new Form
19 of Government, setting us on our way to more missional and contextual decision
20 making, and more flexibility and freedom to experiment. (See the report in Appendix 1,
21 “Guiding Principles”)

22 Our recommendations were not developed in a vacuum. Throughout our process of listening,
23 we discovered a variety of mid councils that are already producing new and creative
24 expressions of **connectional** mission. To document these findings, our full report *lifts up models*
25 *of exemplary mid councils and suggests key attributes* embodied in healthy councils. (See the
26 report, “The Colors of Vitality: Models and Attributes of Healthy Presbyteries”)

27 We bring our recommendations with *confidence* that there is already significant capacity for
28 transformation within our system that only needs to be shared and harnessed for creative
29 change.

30

31

1 Repurposing Synods

2 Our first recommendation is to **flatten** the hierarchy and bureaucracy of our church by
3 eliminating one level of *ecclesiastical structure*. We seek to stimulate structural change from
4 the ground up. In doing so, we affirm and support multi-presbytery missional projects and
5 programs that have been the traditional jewels of our synods and call for a commitment to
6 reaffirm the longstanding tradition of mid council partnership for Racial Ethnic Ministries.²

7 We have recommended Regional Administrative Commissions as organizational “**safe holding**
8 **environments**”³ for experimentation and collaboration that insure wise, constitutionally
9 consistent decision making in a larger geographic area. These Administrative Commissions will
10 have the authority of the General Assembly in regards to boundary issues within and between
11 presbyteries and to facilitate the church’s commitment to diversity.

12 The recommendation to repurpose the synods into multi-presbytery **partnerships** (and remove
13 ecclesiastical status) responds to what we heard from the church: a call for structures that
14 prioritize the vitality and mission of *congregations*. This recommendation separates out the
15 three traditional functions of a synod—ecclesiastical oversight of presbytery boundaries,
16 judicial appeal, and shared ministry and mission—into three different arenas:

- 17 • Ecclesiastical oversight will now be accomplished through five Regional Administrative
18 Commissions of the General Assembly whereby representatives of the constitutive
19 presbyteries within a region will gather *as needed* and have the authority necessary for
20 responding quickly and constitutionally to petitions to change presbytery boundaries
21 and transfer of churches. These commission will also have the responsibility to insure
22 our church’s commitment to diversity within each region
- 23 • A committee will work with the Office of the General Assembly to discern a more
24 effective “appellate court” system that is separate from these Regional Administrative
25 Commissions.
- 26 • Relationships and programs for shared ministry and mission across greater regions can
27 continue or be developed through the initiative of the presbyteries within those regions.
28 The works of ministry that have been supported by the mission giving of a synod can be
29 retained in whatever forms the affected presbyteries determine will most effectively
30 support their mission.

31 These *multi-presbytery missional partnerships* will become arenas for more connectional life as
32 congregations and presbyteries decide to support and engage in relationships that are the most
33 fruitful expressions of congregations in mission. This proposal to repurpose synods is the larger

1 canvas in a secure constitutional frame that is meant to stimulate widespread collaborative
2 creativity for the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ.

3 **A Season of Reflective Experimentation**

4 We propose a designated season of reflective experimentation with new models of missional
5 governance, through the adoption of two significant temporary changes in our *polity*:

- 6 • We propose that the church amend the Constitution to permit synods to organize
7 provisional non-geographic missional presbyteries, upon petition of sessions and
8 teaching elders, with the concurrence of affected councils.
- 9 • We further propose that during this season of reflective experimentation presbyteries
10 may dismiss congregations, with the concurrence of all affected councils, to another
11 presbytery (either provisional or currently constituted).

12 We propose that this season of reflective experimentation expire December 31, 2021, and
13 recommend that the 222nd General Assembly (2016) be charged with designing and making
14 provision for the evaluation of the season of experimentation.

15

16 These proposals are intended to *entrust presbyteries* with the flexibility and responsibility of
17 working together to discern and create mid council structures and relationships that will enable
18 their missional congregations to thrive and adapt.

19 We envision this season of reflective experimentation to stimulate engagement, learning, and
20 missional collaboration within every context of the broader church. We envision churches that
21 are given—within the proper relational and constitutional bounds—the flexibility and freedom
22 to create new presbyteries or to become members of existing presbyteries within their larger
23 region for achieving specific missional purposes. We envision presbyteries being formed
24 through shared calling, shared commitments, and with a shared conviction to continue to build
25 relationships, partnerships, and understanding both within and among various presbyteries.
26 This will naturally require more cooperation, more collaboration, and more trust (of which we
27 will have more to say later in this report).

28 We envision churches in conversations within their presbyteries of origin creating covenants of
29 shared life and “mutual blessing” even while they create new provisional presbyteries or
30 provisionally become members of other presbyteries.

31 We envision churches being committed to both their local neighborhoods and to a growing
32 network of relationships and missional opportunities in a world where communication allows
33 more creativity and opportunity for change.

1 We envision possibilities like those of the City Classis of the Reformed Church of America⁴ that
2 has created a mid council for the express purpose of planting new urban congregations and
3 developing urban church planting leaders. We envision possibilities like the Fresh Expressions
4 of the United Kingdom that has called for both “neighborhood” and “network” church
5 structures.⁵ We envision the potential for much deeper engagement by the emerging leaders of
6 our church as a new generation that is fluent in the language and mores of our flat and
7 **networked** world are given the trust and freedom to create and share in the accountability and
8 oversight of new forms of ministry and covenanted life.

9 We dream of the creation of provisional presbyteries formed to express different deeply held
10 missional callings of congregations and their leaders.

11 We envision different presbyteries in the same larger geographic area (perhaps even sharing
12 the same staff) that come together with a special call for urban ministry, suburban ministry,
13 rural ministry, reconciliation ministry, revitalizing congregations, or planting new congregations.

14 We envision churches free to move from one presbytery to another in a particular region in
15 order to better live out their calling. We envision that some will want to be in smaller, more
16 localized presbyteries; while others will want larger, more programmatic presbyteries; still
17 others will choose to be part of “virtual” presbyteries that are spread across larger geographic
18 areas.

19 Mostly, we envision a new generation of emerging leaders—who are most at home in what
20 Doug Pagitt calls the **Inventive Age**—to become more personally involved in the reinvention of
21 missional congregations supported by thriving, focused presbyteries in a denomination that is
22 fully embracing the challenges of our rapidly changing world.

23 We offer these recommendations in the hope that they will energize the whole church to a
24 season of more engaged partnership, collaboration, and creativity for bringing the mission of
25 the God’s kingdom into diverse and rapidly changing local contexts.

26 ***These proposals shift the focus of our connectional structures to presbyteries and***
27 ***congregations; refocus the church on mission, discipleship, and shared covenants; and train***
28 ***our focus on the post-Christendom cultural landscape, the future before us, and a new***
29 ***generation of leadership that is already emerging.***

30 **Further Work**

31 From the beginning of our work, the commission understood that our charge was limited to
32 mid councils. However, our data collection, which was one of the largest listening projects ever
33 conducted in the PC(USA), provided a broad and deep look at the perspectives of session

1 members, presbytery and synod leaders, focus groups of racial ethnic constituencies, young
2 pastors, large and small presbytery moderators and executive staffs, and a substantial “at
3 large” representation of Presbyterians, all of whom rated and commented on our ecclesial
4 structures. After a sustained and thorough time of listening to the church, it became clear to us
5 that at least two issues beyond our focus on mid councils need to be lifted up for further work,
6 expressed in recommendations 7 and 8.

7 Our data clearly shows that many Presbyterians are calling for a shift from the top-down model
8 of our current structure to a model that is characterized by a church-wide commitment to build
9 up and support local congregations. Generally, congregations do not feel well supported by
10 General Assembly agencies. Only 26% of session-level respondents rated the Office of the
11 General Assembly (OGA) "excellent" or "very good" and only 33% gave those ratings to General
12 Assembly Mission Council (GAMC). There is a significant disconnect between local
13 congregations and the agencies of the General Assembly. We therefore call for the creation of a
14 task force to review the nature and function of the General Assembly Mission Council and the
15 Office of the General Assembly, specifically with respect to their relationship with and support
16 of mid councils as they serve the vitality and mission of congregations in our changing context.

17 The response throughout the church to our recommended change in the ecclesiastical status of
18 synods heightened our awareness that there is need for a longer, more thorough examination
19 of the conditions and possibilities of racial ethnic ministry in the context of changing ecclesial
20 structures. The Commission created its own task force to consult with leadership across the
21 church and offers a report of its findings (see *Report from the Racial Ethnic Strategy Task*
22 *Force*). In response to these concerns, we recommend the creation of a National Racial Ethnic
23 Ministries Task Force to insure that the advocacy for racial ethnic ministries, which has been
24 traditionally located in synods, continue in the new ecclesial structures that emerge in the
25 PC(USA).

26 Lastly, we offer the church some observations of underlying issues identified in our research
27 that go beyond structural concerns of mid councils but are vital to the health and
28 transformation of the PC(USA).

29 **Conclusion**

30 Our report and recommendations invite the church to live into what has been called the
31 “*adjacent possible*”.⁶ It invites us to be a people who together take wise, deliberate, and
32 *provisional steps*; who *experiment* with ways of being together; who “*try on*” relationships; who
33 make *temporary* covenants without fully leaving behind the historical and geographical
34 connections that have shaped our denomination to date.

1 **Our proposal does not require change at the congregational or presbytery level, but allows**
2 **for flexibility, freedom, and authority** for those who endeavor to work out our connectional
3 convictions in developing strategies, creating structures, initiating ministries, and sharing
4 projects, all while being protected by the constitutional oversight of a Regional Administrative
5 Commission and a clear expiration date for what—God willing—will be a bold season of
6 experimentation for a changing church in a changing world.

7

Changing Contexts and Adaptive Change

“How can we have enough freedom to imagine and articulate a real historical newness in our situation?” Walter Brueggemann

Our Vision

We envision a larger geographic canvas, a secure frame of constitutional accountability, and creative, collaborative leaders experimenting in creating missional communities for sending disciples into to the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We envision elders and congregations in thoughtful, bold experiments within and across presbyteries having as much flexibility as they need to create new models of “covenant communities of missional congregations.”

We envision presbyteries as “learning communities” committed to a constant process of examining what works and adapting the organization to meet ever-changing needs.

*We envision a growing commitment to **cultural proficiency**, enriching and expanding each others’ cultural experiences, and demonstrating the gospel of Christ which calls us all to be participants.*

*We envision innovative, practical expressions of **parity** between teaching and ruling elders, a cornerstone of Reformed polity, by encouraging experiments where churches and elders willingly take the steps necessary to discover what elder-led councils look like in a world full of demands.*

*We envision a growing number of specific, covenanted communities made up of churches that are uniquely called to the risks, experimentation, and leadership capacity that will be required to develop new churches and “**worshipping communities**” and support young congregational experiments.*

We envision even more established congregations who join together either permanently or provisionally for a season of time to fulfill a call to nurture small or struggling congregations in bold and generous acts of partnership.

*We envision “**network**” presbyteries existing alongside “**neighborhood**” presbyteries that better express and respond to the multiple ways that we live and build relationships in our world today.⁷*

We understand that one commission cannot possibly envision all the ways that Presbyterian connectionalism can be expressed in intentional, covenantal life together.

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We believe that the church is longing:

- *for a revitalization of healthy missional congregations,*
- *to see more diverse, gifted, passionate, and engaged leadership collaborating for the mission of Jesus Christ,*
- *to stimulate the creation of new worshipping communities to live out the gospel to a world in need,*
- *to strengthen the bonds of congregational covenants,*
- *to exercise creativity for developing new models of a shared life of discipleship in a post-Christendom context,*
- *to trust one another more.*

Toward a Vibrant Picture of Post-Christendom Presbyterianism

We want to catalyze the church to see with new eyes. We want to encourage faithful ruling and teaching elders to engage in collaborative works of missional artistry. We call upon the Spirit to inspire new visions of vibrant missional congregational life that faithfully witnesses to the gospel of Jesus Christ in a post-Christendom world. We invite ruling and teaching elders to converse and experiment around two pivotal questions of our time:

- *What does a vital missional congregation in a post-Christendom context really look like?*
- *What leadership, structures, and covenant relationships will enable those missional congregations to flourish?*

In this report, we see ourselves as “stretching a larger canvas”, creating a “strong frame” of constitutional oversight and inviting congregations and presbyteries to engage in collaborative, contextual, and *provisional* creative experimentation. In addition, we have provided the ‘colors’ of vibrancy that are already being used in the church—models that have been given generously to all of us from different places where experimentation is already occurring and have drawn attention to the spaces in the canvas where more work is needed.

We have listened to the church. We have learned from experts. We have talked and prayed long. We have discovered much to share. In addition to two significant recommendations, we offer reports, raise issues, and make five additional recommendations to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church in a world that is rapidly changing—which is where we begin.

Presbyterians in a Post-Christendom World: The Changing Context of Mission in the 21st Century

The changing cultural context, the shifts that middle governing bodies are themselves already making, and a new domestic mission frontier all make this the right time, God's time for us to examine the role, function and form of presbyteries and synods. —from the rationale of the charge to the General Assembly Commission on Middle Governing Bodies

In such a situation of profound change, it is no surprise that the ecclesial structures developed for Christendom appear to have less relevance after Christendom. Darrell Guder

1 Like all **mainline Protestant** denominations in the United States, the PC(USA) feels like a church
2 in crisis. For at least four decades our numbers have diminished at a steady rate. We
3 desperately hold on to dying congregations and yet fail to see the imperative need to plant new
4 communities of faith. What we now call mid councils—presbyteries and synods—feel like relics
5 of the past. Created for a different time, we are incapable of supporting their lumbering
6 bureaucracies today. Our biennial General Assemblies are locked in endless battles over
7 regulations and persist in making social proclamations that no one seems to pay much
8 attention to. We wonder if it is possible to maintain unity in the midst of great diversity, and we
9 have no clear sense of what that unity might actually look like.

10 Christianity is like a river with many branches. Like others before it, the Presbyterian stream
11 could run its course. It could disperse into nothing. Its water could run dry. But, it is just as likely
12 that this stream will experience a resurgence of living water. For many, this is a time of hope
13 and new life. It is a time of emergence and the birthing of new ways of being Christian—
14 perhaps even new ways of being Presbyterian.

15 **A Denomination in Decline**

16 It is well known that practically every mainline Protestant denomination—and increasingly,
17 many of the evangelical denominations—has experienced a significant decline in membership
18 and overall strength since the middle of the 20th century.⁸ The experience of the PC(USA) is
19 consistent with this overall trend. The membership of the PC(USA) is now half of what its
20 predecessor denominations were in 1965, a loss of over 2,000,000 members.⁹

21 In 2008, as the PC(USA) celebrated the 25th anniversary of Reunion, the denomination had
22 experienced a net loss of almost 1,000,000 members since the 1983 merger, from 3,131,228 to
23 2,140,165. By 2010, our membership had further dropped to 2,016,091—a decrease of almost

1 36% over the course of 27 years.¹⁰ Though the rate of decline is less severe, the number of
2 PC(USA) congregations has also dropped from 11,662 in 1983 to 10,560 in 2010, a loss of nearly
3 9.5%. In every year since Reunion, we have lost more congregations than we have gained.¹¹

4 For the congregations that remain, the situation is often dire. We are an increasingly aging
5 denomination, with a median age of 61. The average size of PC(USA) congregations has been
6 significantly reduced over the past quarter century. It is now the case that half of all
7 congregations have a membership of 100 or less.¹² During this same time, average worship
8 attendance has also dropped significantly.¹³ The percentage of these shrinking congregations
9 that can afford to employ an installed pastor has decreased dramatically. In 2010, 44% of
10 PC(USA) congregations had no installed pastor.¹⁴

11 The reasons for this overall decline in church membership are often debated. Though a
12 widespread assumption persists that denominational controversies cause people to leave their
13 local congregations, research has long demonstrated that this is not the case.¹⁵ Membership
14 losses among all mainline Protestant denominations have been steady and consistent for half a
15 century, regardless of particular leaders or particular controversies.

16 Presbyterian statistician Jack Marcum has suggested a variety of explanations for the decline of
17 the PC(USA), all of which ultimately come down to the fact that every year we lose more
18 members than we gain. Low birth rates are a significant cause.¹⁶ It is also the case that we lose
19 more members to transfers than we attract.¹⁷

20 Most significantly, however, is the reality that we are not reaching out to newcomers or
21 investing in new church development.¹⁸ As a denomination, across all geographic areas, we are
22 not planting enough new faith communities. Between 2000 and 2010, only 226 new churches
23 were chartered.¹⁹ This is simply not sustainable. The Presbyterian Church of the 21st century
24 must be a denomination that encourages and nurtures new church development.

25 **Diminishing Resources**

26 What the membership decline of our denomination means for mid councils is clear. Though
27 individual financial giving to congregations has steadily increased since Reunion,²⁰ the sharp
28 decline in membership has created significant funding problems for presbyteries and synods.
29 For years, we have depended on human and financial resources from local congregations to
30 fund and provide leadership for these middle judicatories. As both types of resources are
31 increasingly strained at the local level, it is obvious that there is less and less available to sustain
32 the older bureaucratic models of church governance.

33 **Unsustainable Bureaucracies**

1 The evolution of presbyteries as the characteristic feature of Presbyterian polity in the United
2 States is an important element of our contextual understanding. Presbyteries as we know them
3 today developed from *ecclesial institutions* in Calvin’s Geneva that were responsible for church
4 order, discipline, ordination of ministers, continuing education, mutual encouragement, and
5 missionary work. Joseph Small notes that while order, discipline, ordination, and mission have
6 prevailed as the major responsibilities of presbyteries, theology and mutual encouragement are
7 no longer central. “Without the corporate engagement of pastors and elders in biblical,
8 theological, and ecclesiological inquiry, ecclesial order is easily bureaucratized while discipline is
9 either ignored or factionalized.”²¹

10 Small goes on to describe how church judicatories became *governing bodies*, which were
11 quickly bureaucratized in parallel with the bureaucratization of American society in the middle
12 of the 20th century.²² In the 1970s, presbyteries were further transformed into *mission agencies*
13 and were expected to carry out mission of their own, rather than function primarily as support
14 for the mission of local congregations. Over time these bodies became complex and
15 cumbersome bureaucracies.²³ Synods became equally bureaucratized and program driven. At
16 both levels, the demand for professional staff—predominantly drawn from teaching elders—
17 contributed to the gradual clericalization of the church as the role of teaching elder eclipsed the
18 role of ruling elder.

19 This approach to mid councils made sense and actually worked quite well for an American
20 society that valued bureaucracy and the organizational models of the corporate business world.
21 At the time of these developments, the church had enough members to sustain such complex
22 structures. But in today’s globalized world of flatter organizational structures, and with the
23 realities of a much smaller and less resourced church, these bureaucratic and program driven
24 mid council models are anachronistic, burdensome, and unsustainable. In response, most
25 mainline Protestant denominations are moving away from centralized bureaucracies to flatter,
26 more fluid structures.²⁴

27 **The Quest for True Parity**

28 A central element of John Calvin’s *ecclesiology* was the rejection of *clericalism*. By instituting
29 the ecclesial offices of elder and deacon, Calvin broke down the distinction between “clergy”
30 and “laity”.²⁵ It follows, then, that the basic structure and polity of Presbyterianism in the
31 United States demands parity between what have traditionally been called *teaching elders* and
32 *ruling elders*. At the time of Reunion, these traditional titles were changed to *minister of the*
33 *Word and Sacrament* and *elder*. This change in language, along with the gradual
34 bureaucratization of middle governing bodies, led to the very kind of clericalism that Calvin
35 intended to avoid—pastors were considered true ministers and elders were relegated to
36 supporting roles.²⁶

1 The return to the traditional titles of teaching elder and ruling elder in the new Form of
2 Government represents a desire within the church to reverse this clericalizing trend. However,
3 without accompanying structural changes to bureaucratic mid councils, the idealism of parity
4 between teaching elders and ruling elders will remain impractical.

5 Ruling elders must balance their ecclesial commitments with the demands of their careers and
6 the general busyness of contemporary life. Many functions of mid councils are being carried out
7 by volunteers instead of paid staff because of diminishing resources and budget cuts. This
8 means longer and more frequent meetings in already tight schedules. Additionally, taking time
9 off from work for church meetings is much less acceptable in today's culture than it was in the
10 past. Does true parity exist when participation in mid councils is understood as part of the job
11 description of teaching elders but ruling elders are forced to either take time off from work or
12 not participate at all? Are we able to ensure representation from younger professionals, hourly
13 wage workers, and single parents?

14 As we will see, parity between teaching elders and ruling elder is consistent with the values of
15 emerging generations. Can we develop structures and practices that move this parity from a
16 professed ideal to a lived reality?

17 **Differences, Divisions, and Conflicts**

18 As we have already noted, research demonstrates that denominational controversies are not,
19 as many often assume, the primary cause for membership losses in mainline Protestant
20 denominations like the PC(USA). Nonetheless, we must consider the realities of the "**post-10-A**"
21 world in which we now live. After decades of conflict, congregations dissatisfied with recent
22 changes in ordination standards are leaving the denomination and/or considering the creation
23 of new Reformed bodies.

24 When the process of Reunion formally concluded in 1991, rumblings of discontent were quick
25 to surface when a 17-member Special Committee on Human Sexuality produced a controversial
26 report called "Keeping Body and Soul Together: Sexuality, Spirituality and Social Justice."
27 Although the General Assembly did not approve this report, its reverberations were felt across
28 the denomination. While this was not the first time human sexuality was addressed by the
29 General Assembly, it did mark the beginning of a long and sustained season of open conflict
30 about the issue. Six years later, when the "fidelity and chastity" clause was added to the *Book*
31 *of Order*, the matter was far from settled. Division and dissension increased with every
32 subsequent debate and vote on ordination standards, leading up to and including the 2010
33 General Assembly approval of Amendment 10-A, which replaced the "fidelity and chastity"
34 clause, and its eventual ratification by a majority of presbyteries in 2011.

1 Two realities of this 20-year period of conflict and constitutional maneuvering need to be
2 reckoned with. First, while faithful Presbyterians were engaged in meaningful mission and
3 ministry to a broken and hurting world, the success of these endeavors was often
4 overshadowed by persistent denominational controversies. Second, as our denomination
5 experienced significant declines in membership, it has been difficult to address new ways of
6 approaching ministry in a rapidly changing world while being continually engaged in internal
7 theological conflict. As a result, polarized factions within the church are now ill-equipped to
8 work together as an effective church for the 21st century.

9 Our biblical and theological traditions exhort us to dwell together in Christian unity. This unity
10 should serve as a witness to the world, pointing people to Christ's vision of God's kingdom.
11 Unfortunately, discord and disunity are more typical characteristics of our public witness.
12 Though our theology and polity encourage unity, we are increasingly incapable of sustaining
13 significant relationships across party lines.

14 Nonetheless, it may be that our discord more accurately reflects *failed institutional practices*
15 than a disregard for Christian unity. Our polity is guided by parliamentary procedure and the
16 processes of constitutional emendation, both of which rely on divisive debates and polarizing
17 votes. This approach assumes that it is possible and desirable for the church to arrive at a single
18 conclusion that will resolve a given conflict. We have relied on *conflict resolution* rather than
19 *polarity management*.²⁷

20 This method has not served us well. Resolving differences on important, complex, and
21 controversial matters is not accomplished through parliamentary procedures. Biblical and
22 theological discernment has become a competitive and political process in which there are
23 always winners and losers.

24 Denominational structures and practices aimed at achieving a singular stance on a controversial
25 issue is a remarkably mono-cultural approach during an era marked by commitments to
26 multiculturalism, diversity, and pluralism. Is it possible for a multiplicity of Christian
27 perspectives on controversial issues to exist within a single church?²⁸ Is it possible to develop
28 structures and practices that allow Presbyterians to express with integrity diverse biblical and
29 theological commitments?

30 When it comes to theological differences within our denomination, human sexuality is only the
31 tip of the iceberg. Some have even argued that these differences constitute distinct religious
32 traditions and cultures that cannot be reconciled. Whether that is true or not, without creative
33 and flexible structures and practices, we will continue to wage battles designed to decide
34 winners and losers. In the end, we will all lose.

35 **Multiculturalism and Racial Ethnic Representation**

1 Diversity and multiculturalism are professed values of the PC(USA), but it is clear that this is still
2 not our reality. Even though, in relative terms, racial-ethnic minorities are growing while the
3 white majority is decreasing,²⁹ we are still an overwhelmingly white church in terms of
4 membership and culture. In this respect, the church is not keeping up with demographic and
5 cultural shifts within the wider American society. Census Bureau projections indicate that by
6 2050 current minorities will become the majority in the United States.³⁰

7 Is our church capable of adapting to this new reality? How can we be intentional in the
8 development of ministries that reflect the multi-ethnic and multicultural composition of the
9 United States? What kinds of structural models can be developed in order to ensure the full
10 participation of racial ethnic constituencies in all the councils of the church? How can we grow
11 as a multicultural church that ministers effectively to and with first generation immigrants as
12 well as second and third generations whose language, cultural characteristics, and worldviews
13 are becoming different from their predecessors?

14 Beyond racial diversity, religious diversity is also becoming more and more pronounced in
15 American society. Yet Robert Wuthnow has exposed how poorly American Christians are doing
16 at engaging this growing pluralism.³¹ At macro-levels of Christian theology and in local
17 expressions of Christian communities, it seems that inter-religious dialogue and cooperation
18 have been more idealistic than experienced in reality. While our laws protect against religious
19 discrimination and promote religious freedom, our cultural engagement with diversity has been
20 superficial at best and mired in ignorance at worst. Christian leaders and congregation
21 members have survived, in part, by burying their heads in the sand and ignoring the diversity
22 that is growing around them. Yet this is becoming less and less possible as populations of non-
23 Christians grow ever more numerous and involved in public discourse. Wuthnow challenges
24 religious leaders, especially those in the dwindling Christian majority, to develop more effective
25 and meaningful ways of interacting with the religious diversity of our culture.

26 Expanding our focus to global realities, Philip Jenkins has chronicled how the historical locus of
27 Western Christianity in Europe and North America is being supplanted by the exponential rise
28 of Christianity in the global South, especially in Africa, Latin America, and Asia.³² The long held
29 dominance of Europeans and North Americans in global Christianity is a thing of the past and,
30 given trends in both the Western world (in which Christianity is waning) and the developing
31 world (in which Christianity is flourishing), this seems unlikely to change in the future. The post-
32 Christendom reality of Christianity in the United States, about which we will say more below, is
33 no longer simply a matter of the *disestablishment* of mainline Protestantism and the dwindling
34 sense of influence and relevancy the church has in public discourse. Rather, our post-
35 Christendom status has been reduced even further. Not only has mainline Protestantism lost its
36 place in American culture, we have lost our dominance in Christianity around the world. A

1 telling reality check in this regard is the 2011 vote of the National Presbyterian Church of
2 Mexico to end its 139-year mission relationship with the PC(USA).³³

3 In addition to getting its own house in order, the PC(USA) needs to figure out its identity as a
4 minority communion within the wider body of global Christianity.

5 **Living in the “Posts”**

6 Human beings have a tendency to view our history chronologically. More specifically, we tend
7 to think of history *diachronically* (that is, through time) rather than *synchronically* (one period
8 at a time) or *synoptically* (all at once). We most often consider our present with respect to our
9 immediate past. We outline history as a succession of periods, realizing, of course, that the
10 boundaries between periods are often fuzzy. Living in the midst of massive cultural change, it is
11 now common to understand ourselves as living in a variety of “posts”.

12 **Post-Christendom**

13 For centuries, Christian religion and culture dominated the Western world. This was especially
14 true in American culture up through the middle of the 20th century. But this is no longer the
15 case. Christianity in general—and, for Americans, Protestantism in particular—is no longer the
16 definitive center and shaper of culture. “Christendom”—the triumphal reign of Christianity in
17 Western culture—is over.

18 Theologian Douglas John Hall provides a concise summary of cultural shifts that help us
19 understand this development.

20 *“Many influences have brought about this historiographic change: the decline of Christianity in*
21 *the West; the decline of the West itself; the failure of the modern vision; the new consciousness*
22 *of their own worth on the part of non-European people; a critical perception of the technological*
23 *society on the part of many who have experienced its most advanced forms; the impact of*
24 *religious and cultural pluralism, especially perhaps in North America; and (not least of all) the*
25 *self-criticism of serious Christianity, its recognition of its own questionable triumphalism, of*
26 *patriarchalism, of the equation of the Christian mission with Euro-American imperialism and so*
27 *forth.”³⁴*

28 For mainline Protestant churches like the PC(USA), this means that we are no longer part of the
29 cultural “establishment”. We must struggle for visibility and battle numerous competing
30 institutions and elements of popular culture for the interest, time, and resources we used to
31 take for granted in our membership. Sunday morning is no longer sacred time in American
32 society. Across the country, Presbyterians rarely represent a significant percentage of local
33 populations.³⁵ Our influence in the public square is greatly diminished. When our General

1 Assemblies make bold public statements about social issues, we wonder if anyone is paying
2 attention.

3 Missional theologian Darrell Guder helps us understand the structural implications of these
4 shifts for a denomination like the PC(USA).

5 *“In such a situation of profound change, it is no surprise that the ecclesial structures developed
6 for Christendom appear to have less relevance after Christendom. Whereas at one time it was
7 the task of presbyteries, as one expression of a Christendom structure, to ensure that the church
8 carried out all its duties in a region, there may now be better ways of doing that.”³⁶*

9 Like all mainline Protestant denominations, the PC(USA) must come to terms with what it
10 means to be a post-establishment, post-Christendom church in the 21st century.

11 **Post-Denominational**

12 At the same time as Protestantism in general has lost its cultural cachet, the appreciation of
13 distinct denominational identities has become less critical to the average American Protestant.
14 The great variety of Protestant denominations in the United States is the result of both
15 theological and ethnic differentiation among European peoples who settled on this continent.
16 As these groups continued to develop with time, as cultures mixed, as people moved
17 throughout the country, and as populations shifted from the relative isolation of rural
18 communities to highly concentrated urban centers, denominational identity has become less
19 and less important. In the contemporary marketplace of religious options, in which there are
20 negligible costs—financial or cultural—for switching between congregations and faith
21 communities, denominational affiliation is no longer the primary reason people choose a
22 particular church. “Brand loyalty” is no longer a compelling factor in the growth or success of a
23 congregation.

24 In his compelling essay on the theology of denominations, Barry Ensign-George reminds us that
25 *denomination* is a “middle term between congregation and church” that “binds congregations
26 together in formal patterns of mutual life.” Ensign-George defines *denomination* as “a
27 *contingent, intermediary, partial and permeable embodiment of the church which binds together
28 multiple congregations in a shared commitment to live together in a particular pattern of common life
29 which is built on shared decisions about theological adiaphora and essentials.*”³⁷ While previous
30 generations may have balked at words like “contingent” and “permeable”, it is exactly this more fluid
31 understanding of larger church life that must be at the center of any discussion about the PC(USA)’s self-
32 understanding as a denomination in a changing world.

33 What does it mean to be a Presbyterian *denomination* in this larger **post-denominational**
34 cultural context? Are there in fact distinctive features of our form of Christianity that will—or

1 should—persist in this era? How much can we change and adapt before we stop being
2 Presbyterian? Does that even matter anymore?

3 **Postmodern**

4 Perhaps the most misunderstood “post” in which we find ourselves is the radical shift from
5 modernism to **postmodernism** that characterized the 20th century and continues to shape the
6 21st. In fact, this monumental “post” is at least in part responsible for the other “posts” we have
7 considered. In the postmodern era, the multifaceted ways in which Western culture was
8 transformed by the Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment have been called into
9 question. New ways of perceiving the world and our place in it have taken root. As a waning
10 fixture of a Western culture that is being dramatically reshaped, the church must come to terms
11 with what postmodernism means for our expression of the gospel.

12 **Embracing the Pathos of Our Situation**

13 Having surveyed a variety of ways in which the context of mission and ministry is rapidly
14 changing, we must recognize that this is a **kairotic** moment for the Presbyterian Church (USA).
15 Walter Brueggemann, who has suggested that *exile* is a fitting metaphor for the situation in
16 which the US church now finds itself,³⁸ describes the *embrace of pathos* as a critical moment in
17 the exercise of prophetic imagination.³⁹ “How,” asks Brueggemann, “can we have enough
18 freedom to imagine and articulate a real historical newness in our situation?”⁴⁰ His answer lies
19 in the embrace of pathos and the willingness to engage the very real possibility of our own
20 demise.

21 Brueggemann notes that we have a remarkable propensity for numbness about death.
22 Apathy—the absence of pathos—characterizes our attitude toward the institutions that we rely
23 on for order, security, and meaning. We refuse to recognize failure. We cling to familiar
24 patterns and structures. We want to pacify our grief and reassure ourselves that everything is
25 going to be okay.

26 Prophetic imagination cuts through these tendencies and brings us face to face with the
27 realities of our situation. In order to move us into a place where we can envision new realities,
28 we must first confront the sobering realization that our current trajectory is leading us to death.

29 When some in our church suggested that our denomination is “deathly ill”,⁴¹ many reacted with
30 defensive protests that there is still plenty of life and vitality in the PC(USA). Anecdotal
31 evidence, drawn from positive experiences in thriving congregations and with faithful people, is
32 offered as a counter-narrative to the “deathly ill” diagnosis. We hold fast to evidence that God
33 is doing good things in our midst.

1 But we cannot let these legitimate signs of God’s Spirit moving throughout our church obscure
2 the equally evident reality of our slow but steady demise—a “doomsday scenario” based on a
3 statistical projection suggests that our membership could shrink to zero in just 20 years.⁴² We
4 must hold these realities together in creative tension. For all of our genuine vitality, there are
5 also critical indications of death. Our declining numbers, aging congregations, diminished
6 resources, and debilitating conflicts cannot be ignored any longer. We must not move too
7 quickly to obscure the grief of our situation with comfort or hope, as important as these are.
8 We must embrace the pathos associated with admitting that what we are doing is not working.
9 More bluntly, we must admit that we are dying in order to experience rebirth.

10 **A New World**

11 As it turns out, observers of both culture and religion have been eagerly reporting that now is in
12 fact an era of change, rebirth, and emergence throughout Western and global culture.

13 Change is happening to us, whether we initiate or not. The multi-faceted impact of
14 **globalization** has flattened our world in a way unprecedented in human history.⁴³ Networks of
15 innovation and adaptation we cannot see enmesh us in complex connections through such
16 systems as stock markets, gas prices, and global disease. The human condition cannot be
17 understood locally or nationally, but only globally.⁴⁴ **Web 2.0** and **wiki culture** have changed the
18 way we collaborate and innovate across the globe.⁴⁵ Hierarchies and bureaucracies are being
19 eclipsed by flat, decentralized, and egalitarian organizational models.⁴⁶ Within these emerging
20 networks of relationships and collaboration, imagination and experimentation drive innovation
21 in new and exciting ways.⁴⁷

22 Various suggestions have been made for how we might understand the intersection of these
23 cultural revolutions and the church. In a recent analysis of American Christianity over the past
24 200 years—a relatively short period of time that has seen remarkably quick and far-reaching
25 change—Doug Pagitt divides our history into four successive periods: the *Agrarian Age*, the
26 *Industrial Age*, the *Information Age*, and what he calls the *Inventive Age*.⁴⁸ Most pertinent to
27 our discussion is the transition from the Information Age to the Inventive Age, which Pagitt
28 describes as a shift from being *consumers* of information to *producers and participants*. If the
29 Information Age was characterized by television and the mass consumption of information on
30 the internet, the Inventive Age is typified by Web 2.0, wiki culture, and social networking. “The
31 Inventive Age is one in which inclusion, participation, collaboration, and beauty are essential
32 values. It is the age of ownership and customization and user-created content.”⁴⁹

33 Phyllis Tickle has developed an influential **stratigraphy** of Christian history which suggests that
34 every 500 years the church engages in a cultural and ecclesiastical “rummage sale” that sifts
35 through the dead and dying elements of the past en route to a new expression of life and faith.

1 The latest of these, in the midst of which we currently find ourselves, Tickle labels *the Great*
2 *Emergence*.⁵⁰

3 As Tickle narrates it, the Great Emergence began in the 20th century with the publication of
4 Albert Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity, followed by Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle.
5 These revolutionary concepts changed the way we think about the world by pointing out that
6 the very act of observation changes the object being observed.⁵¹ An analogous development in
7 literary studies called deconstruction suggested that truth is also relative and dependent on the
8 act of interpretation. All the while, rapidly accelerating technological advances and
9 unprecedented changes in family structures and gender roles were radically changing American
10 culture. In some respects, the hierarchal and centralized structures of midcentury Protestant
11 denominations grew in response to this destabilization of traditional American life. But as these
12 denominations experienced post-Christendom disestablishment, traditional religion was greatly
13 challenged. “Spiritual but not religious” became a popular alternative, an alternative that
14 Reformation Christianity was not prepared to engage.⁵² The world was changing. The
15 triumphant certainty of modernity gave way to the ambiguity, uncertainty, and humility of
16 post-Christendom life in a postmodern world.

17 **Emerging Church Responses to Our Changing World**

18 In some cases, the church has reacted to these shifts in defensive or fundamentalist ways.⁵³ In
19 other cases, the church has tried to change and adapt along with the rest of the world,
20 recognizing that these changes are not threatening or challenging, but liberating and life-giving.

21 Hierarchal and bureaucratic forms of ecclesial structures are giving way to *network theory* and
22 *crowd sourcing*.⁵⁴ *Bounded-set* understandings of church membership are being replaced with
23 *center-set* approaches.⁵⁵ Philosophically and theologically, narrative is taking priority over
24 logic.⁵⁶ All of these can be understood as Christian adaptations to the changing contexts of our
25 flat, networked, postmodern, post-Christendom world.

26 Theologian Tony Jones suggests a variety of ways in which the still developing *emerging church*
27 *movement* is reconciling Christian faith and practice with the changing world. In descriptive
28 statements that Jones calls “dispatches from the emergent frontier”, one can recognize specific
29 reflections, responses, and adaptations to the changing contexts of our world. Here are some of
30 the dispatches most pertinent to our inquiry, paired with concepts from the changing contexts
31 we have discussed.

Dispatch from the Emergent Frontier	Changing Contexts
Emergents find little importance in the discrete differences between the various flavors of Christianity. Instead, they practice a generous orthodoxy that appreciates the	Post-denominationalism Differences, Divisions, and Conflicts Multiculturalism

contributions of all Christian movements. ⁵⁷	
Emergents reject the politics and theologies of left versus right. Seeing both sides as remnant of modernity, they look forward to a more complex reality. ⁵⁸	Differences, Divisions, and Conflicts Embrace of complexity, ambiguity, paradox, and plurality Suspicion of certainty
The emergent movement is not exclusively North American; it is growing around the globe. ⁵⁹	Multiculturalism New global Christianity Post-colonial, post-Christendom
Emergents see God’s activity in all aspects of culture and reject the sacred-secular divides. ⁶⁰	Post-Christendom Quest for true polarity and anti-clericalism
Emergents believe that an envelope of friendship and reconciliation must surround all debates about doctrine and dogma. ⁶¹	Differences, Divisions, and Conflicts Suspicion of certainty Critique of objectivity Relativity
Emergents find the biblical call to community more compelling than the democratic call to individual rights. The challenge lies in being faithful to both ideals. ⁶²	Shift from individualism to community
Emergents believe that theology is local, conversational, and temporary. To be faithful to the theological giants of the past, emergents endeavor to continue their theological dialogue. ⁶³	Challenges to old assumptions and authorities Deconstruction Suspicion of certainty Embrace of complexity, ambiguity, paradox, and plurality
Emergents believe that awareness of our relative position—to God, to one another, and to history—breeds biblical humility, not relativistic apathy. ⁶⁴	Relativity Critique of objectivity
Emergents believe that truth, like God, cannot be definitively articulated by finite human beings. ⁶⁵	Suspicion of certainty Embrace of complexity, ambiguity, paradox, and plurality
Emergents embrace paradox, especially those that are core components of the Christian story. ⁶⁶	Suspicion of certainty Embrace of complexity, ambiguity, paradox, and plurality
Emergents believe that church should function more like an open-source network and less like a hierarchy or bureaucracy. ⁶⁷	Globalism and flattening Networking, Web 2.0, and wiki culture Shift from individualism to community
Emergents downplay—or outright reject—the differences between clergy and laity. ⁶⁸	Quest for true polarity and anti-clericalism Post-Christendom

- 1
- 2 What can Presbyterians learn from these innovations? To be sure, in pockets of the PC(USA) the
- 3 emerging church movement has already taken root and is yielding creative new ways of being
- 4 church. But how might this movement inform our project of reimagining the structure of our
- 5 denomination at the mid council level?

1 **Geography Isn't What It Used to Be**

2 In our flat and networked world, geography does not mean the same thing it once did.
3 Transportation, information, and communication technologies have redefined how we answer
4 the timeless question, “Who is my neighbor?”

5 As we consider what it means to be Presbyterian in a flat, networked, post-Christendom world, we must
6 be open to expressions of connectionalism that neither Calvin nor the founders of American
7 Presbyterianism could have possibly imagined.

8 Theologian and historian Craig Van Gelder addresses how this changing reality intersects with
9 Presbyterian polity.

10 *“A key turn in the missional church conversation has been its shift toward focusing mission on*
11 *every congregation’s immediate context rather than on some distant community. This remains a*
12 *pivotal impulse. Yet the geographical focus of the missional church on particular places in which*
13 *churches are located must be complemented by consideration of the non-geographical*
14 *character of community life today. The question, who is my neighbor? is now much more*
15 *complex. It is not enough merely to focus on an immediate geographic neighborhood. If one*
16 *does, one will likely discover that the neighbors’ tightest relational networks may span hundreds*
17 *of thousands of miles. Building relationships with neighbors and participating in their lives and*
18 *living spaces must engage virtual, as well as physical forms of community....The classic*
19 *Christendom pattern of the geographical parish must be rethought for churches in the west that*
20 *are inheritors of the state church traditions from Europe (Roman Catholic and mainline*
21 *denominations in particular). One the one hand, the parish concept points toward a particular*
22 *locale as a focus for missional participation... On the other hand, the natural flows of community*
23 *life are often no longer primarily neighborhood based...”⁶⁹*

24 According to Van Gelder, our polity must take into consideration the changing nature of our
25 relationships. What was once assumed—that neighbor meant proximity—is much more
26 complex in a flat and networked world. People of all generations now maintain relationships
27 across vast distances. Churches develop meaningful partnerships in countries around the world.
28 As the world becomes at once more connected and more distant, the church needs to live into
29 and help shape this reality for the cause of Christ.

30 **From Changing Contexts to New Models**

31 This section of our report has attempted to summarize as succinctly as possible the incredible
32 ways in which the contexts for mission and ministry in which we find ourselves are rapidly
33 changing. Perhaps never in the history of the PC(USA) or its predecessor denominations has so
34 much changed so rapidly, demanding new forms and methods of being church. As we move on

1 from our assessment of changing contexts to new models, we suggest the following questions
2 as guides and evaluative tools.

- 3 ○ Will our models help us reach **emerging generations**?
- 4 ○ Will our models support new church development?
- 5 ○ Will our models help us manage the polarity of our church?
- 6 ○ Will our models help us become a truly multicultural church?
- 7 ○ Will our models ensure representation and support of racial ethnic minorities?
- 8 ○ Will our models be flexible enough to adapt (reform) in anticipation of continuing, rapid
- 9 change?
- 10 ○ Will our models nurture connectionalism and relationships in a flat, networked world?
- 11 ○ Will our models enhance true parity between ruling and teaching elders?
- 12 ○ Do our models reflect a missional ecclesiology?
- 13 ○ Will our models enable participation, creativity, and innovation?
- 14 Our Commission offers a response to these questions arising from this changing context.

A Church (and a Commission) in a Rapidly Changing World

The American Protestant church is in a wholesale struggle about what it means to be a denominating group of Christian believers...Doing traditional functions in new ways is likely inadequate. Eileen Lindner

Beyond the congregation, however, mainline Protestant institutions are in a state of deep crisis and desperately in need of renewal. After this journey, I am more convinced than ever that if American religious institutions are to regain their spiritual grounding, they will need to listen to and learn from the spiritual practices of local congregations. Diana Butler Bass

How does the church truly regain its understanding of itself as called and sent, remembering that the term mission means, in fact, 'sending' (see John 20:21)? How does the church move beyond the idea that Christian identity is basically a geographical or cultural or organizational concept?⁷⁰ Darrell Guder

If western societies have become post-Christian mission fields, how can traditional churches become then missionary churches?⁷¹ Lesslie Newbigin

15 As we have already demonstrated, we are living in a moment of rapid, intense, global and
16 cultural change. Every sector of public and private life—every institution, every organization
17 and, for our purposes, every church—is facing a moment of intense transition. (Indeed, even our
18 Commission was renamed in the middle of our work because the denomination adopted a new

1 Form of Government.) In this report, the Mid Council Commission of the 219th General
2 Assembly sought to answer one looming question that was at the heart of our very formation:

3 *“How are governing bodies best organized to be responsive both to the Spirit of Christ and*
4 *changing opportunities for discipleship?”*

5 To answer this question, the Mid Council Commission offers two bold recommendations that
6 will require the engagement and assent of the whole church and changes to our constitution.
7 This is not a quick fix. Nor is it anything near a final or perfect answer. *But these*
8 *recommendations alter the way we address our deepest challenges and engage the church in*
9 *processes of learning and reinvention that could shape the church for decades to come.*

10 From our conversations, readings, and reflections, we offer a variety of perspectives and
11 recommendations for creating the conditions that will equip the whole church to create
12 councils and support congregations who winsomely proclaim and demonstrate the gospel and
13 mission of Jesus Christ in the world.

14 The rationale for the creation of our commission also asked a second question that guided us in
15 our pursuit of an answer to the first:

16 *“Are the structures of history the best platforms for carrying our mission into the future?”*

17 Our response is a clear “Yes and No.”

18 **Yes**, the theological, ecclesiological, missional, and relational *structures* that make up our
19 Presbyterian tradition and ethos are exactly the platforms we need for carrying our mission into
20 the future. Our commitment to the mission of Jesus Christ, our passion for collaborative and
21 relational connectionalism, our rich theological history, our hard-won wisdom for including all
22 voices and perspectives are the *cultural and identity structures* that indeed provide the
23 foundation for our mission.

24 **No**, after extensive listening to the church, consulting with experts from the fields of theology,
25 history, polity, and sociology, after reading both deep and wide in the lessons of change that
26 are coming out of every institution in the world today, and after considering the changing
27 contexts in which we live, we can say clearly that the structures of mid councils (formerly
28 middle governing bodies) and the institutional mental models that they have been based upon
29 (especially in the **regulatory** and *institutional* era of the just past century)⁷² are not adequate
30 for the “changing opportunities for discipleship” that engage and challenge us today.

31 We believe that the changing cultural contexts of our day require deep adaptation as opposed
32 to anxious striving for simple solutions. **Our proposal creates the conditions for adaptive**

1 **change at the mid council level—change that is consistent with our theological values and for**
2 **the express purpose of *revitalizing missional congregations in a post-Christendom world.***

3 Scholars and practitioners of adaptive change⁷³ call for an approach that has large scale, group
4 learning as the core practice. As disciples (literally, “learners”) of Jesus Christ, this is an
5 expression of our most treasured identity. Adaptive change requires creating organizational
6 “safe holding environments” where experimentation and risk taking can take place. As
7 members of communities founded on the grace and forgiveness of God, this is familiar terrain.
8 Adaptive change requires group transformation in order to address our greatest challenges. It
9 addresses underlying and competing values, and especially “giving the work back to the people
10 who are most affected” to experiment with new approaches for addressing their biggest
11 challenges.

12 If we can recapture our own conviction that, as theologian Emil Brunner stated, the *essence* of
13 the congregation is the fellowship of believers who are joined in love for the mission of God in
14 its local context,⁷⁴ then the essence of the presbytery is *the covenant relationship of those*
15 *congregations*, (which Darrell Guder helpfully defines—and will become our working
16 definition—as “***Covenant Communities of Missional Congregations***”).

17 ***Further, if the essence of the presbytery IS the covenant relationship of the churches that are***
18 ***joined together for missional ends, then exploring and experimenting with the practices and***
19 ***possibilities that arise from this understanding will be at the heart of any faithful and lasting***
20 ***adaptation.***

21 *In Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all creation, the Church seeks a new openness to*
22 *God’s mission in the world...As it participates in God’s mission, the Presbyterian*
23 *Church (U.S.A) seeks...a new openness to see both the possibilities and perils of its*
24 *institutional forms in order to ensure the faithfulness and usefulness of these*
25 *forms to God’s activity in the world (F-1.0404)*

26 As we have listened to the church, we heard considerable yearning in every layer of the
27 church’s life, from ordained officers to frustrated folk in the pews, to see these deeply shared
28 biblical convictions flourish once again:

- 29
- 30 • To discover practices and ways of being church in a post-Christendom context.
 - 31 • To engage in evangelism that sees people come to faith and be baptized as followers of
32 Jesus Christ.
 - 33 • To experience more relational and less regulatory ways of being connectional.
 - 34 • To focus on mission to the world not denominational fights.
 - To plant new congregations, to birth new worshipping communities.

1 We believe this is the voice of the Spirit in the church and we contend that if every structure of
2 our church is committed to the health and vitality of local congregations as the locus of God’s
3 mission in the world, then these convictions will become the practices that bring revitalization.

4 **So instead of affirming structures that only protect us from the dysfunction of a few, we offer**
5 **a proposal for the “*maturing, motivated, and the missional*”; that is, those who are willing to**
6 **work together to draw upon the historic values of our past and faithfully reinterpret them to**
7 **engage a far different world than any of our forbearers imagined.**

8 ***Maturing***

9 By this we mean that we need structures for lifetime learners, for continually adapting
10 disciples, for those who are restless to keep pressing on, growing, discerning, surrendering, and
11 humbly staying open to the word of God and the voice of the Spirit. We need structures that
12 give freedom to fail and encourage self and communal expression. We need structures that will
13 call us to live in mutual submission and growing trust as we grow in wisdom, understanding,
14 faithfulness and fruitfulness. We need structures that adapt to and accommodate those who
15 are committed to building trust through transparency, accountability, and congruence of belief
16 and life. We need structures that allow for both clearly communicated convictions and the
17 patience to respectfully be with others who we believe are in error. We envision many more
18 structures where the system honors, values, rewards, invests in and even adapts to those who
19 are willing to take responsibility for shaping the healthy and the good; permission-giving
20 structures that are built around shared agreements, covenants, values and convictions rather
21 than around top-down enforced alignment.

22 ***Motivated***

23 Creative people in presbyteries all over the country are experimenting and innovating – aligning
24 around shared missional passions and faith convictions – giving a fresh expression to their
25 deepest beliefs. We are constitutionally called to be an elder-led, context specific, collaborative
26 church. While we need regulations that enable us to fulfill our fiduciary responsibilities, provide
27 accountability and insure that all decisions that are made are consistent with our theology and
28 polity. We also need room to try new things, to affirm risk-taking and give space for
29 discernment. We need structures that reward passion and motivation; that generously
30 celebrate innovation; that respectfully collaborate in one creative leap of faith after another;
31 that encourage big risks, big failures and the deep learning that comes from them

32 ***Missional***

33 **Missional congregations are those where the central organizing principle is personal and**
34 **communal participation in the mission of God in Jesus Christ to redeem and heal all of**

1 **creation.** To be a missional congregation means that the discerned calling of a community of
2 believers to serve in the world as Christ’s witness is the result of their gathering, worship and
3 sending. To be a missional PC(USA) means that we live in the conviction that every structure
4 beyond the congregation exists so that *congregations* can fulfill *their* mission.

5 In today’s culture, many are weighed down by endless debates, issue politics, and suspicion of
6 other’s motivation. The church is hindered from being missional within this environment. As a
7 result, many congregations and councils are not thriving because they have turned inward,
8 focusing on survival.

9 If there is one clear missional conviction that is growing into a chorus of shared enthusiasm
10 throughout many diverse contexts in the church, it is *making a fundamental priority of new*
11 *church development.* A church-wide initiative envisions 1001 new worshipping communities.⁷⁵
12 We contend that number is way too low. Can we imagine mid councils that would enable us to
13 conceive birth, nurture and mature new generations of missional worshipping communities?
14 How would seminaries and other entities charged with the development of leaders support this
15 conviction?

16 At the heart of adaptive change is the requirement to “give work back to the people most
17 affected.” **We believe that the constitutional changes we propose are an expression of the**
18 **conviction that health and vitality, faithfulness and fidelity will only come about through**
19 **more congregational engagement, more personal responsibility-taking, more passionate**
20 **convictions, more freedom and creativity within safe, clear shared boundaries than ever**
21 **before.** We must have structures that encourage adaptation toward health and faithfulness,
22 toward those who are willing to keep *maturing*, who are *motivated* to take on the mantle of
23 calling and personal responsibility by continually re-engaging and re-committing to each other,
24 and who are from start to finish utterly committed to the *missional* principle of the local
25 congregation as the primary locus for participating in the mission of Jesus Christ in every
26 context.

27 To that end we offer these questions to encourage this larger conversation:

- 28 • What if presbyteries were formed and shaped by diverse and multi-dimensional
29 relationships and missional convictions with the purpose of serving missional
30 congregations?
- 31 • What would it look like, what would change, how would we reconfigure our presbytery
32 life if the very essence of it was relational, communal, and covenantal?
- 33 • What if the only purpose of regulations (which are indeed necessary) was to safeguard
34 those defining values?

- 1 • What would it look like if we had structures that encouraged each congregation to
2 discern whatever configuration of presbytery would nurture its unique and shared
3 missional calling as it lives its life in mutual submission to other congregations?
- 4 • What would be the possibilities for presbyteries shaped around specific callings,
5 including birthing new missional communities, the unique challenges of a particular
6 context, or shared partnership in specific mission endeavors?⁷⁶
- 7 • **What if we allowed change for our denomination to come NOT only from a centralized**
8 **strategy of a GA Commission, but instead from every locale of the missional frontier,**
9 **the congregations and presbyteries that are actively engaged in the mission of God in**
10 **particular contexts?**

11 In *To Change the World*, University of Virginia sociologist, James Davison Hunter wrote,

12 *“Change is often initiated outside of the centermost positions. When change is initiated in the*
13 *center, then it typically comes from outside of the center’s nucleus. Wherever innovation begins,*
14 *it comes as a challenge to the dominant ideas and moral systems defined by the elites who*
15 *possess the highest levels of symbolic capital.”*

16 For true lasting change to occur (even within an institution) those in the “center” and those
17 “outside of the center” must be engaged in the conversation.⁷⁷ It is the *interaction* of the
18 margins and the center that creates the new possibilities. ***And it is exactly that interaction—***
19 ***and the lively experiments that would come from it—that we recommend become the***
20 ***primary work of the church for the next season.***

21 For a generation of Presbyterians who were reared on political, regulatory, and institutional
22 approaches to problem solving, this recommendation will stretch us tremendously. We will
23 need to develop the capacity to learn from our rich diversity; to have hard conversations about
24 competing values and often unspoken issues that keep us from health and growth; and mostly
25 to ***trust each other*** enough to attempt innovative experiments—many of which will likely fail—
26 in order to find successful adaptations that will take us into our future together.

27 Historian and President Emeritus of Union Theological Seminary, Louis Weeks said, “No group
28 of Christians has adaptation more in their DNA than Presbyterians.” We concur. A tradition
29 that reconceived a communal function for what had been “bishops”; that adapted its polity
30 from the European church-state models to a completely new context in a then new country;
31 and rethought and reproduced its core values in numerous diverse contexts worldwide through
32 its mission endeavors, has the capacity to revitalize itself for a post-Christendom and
33 increasingly post-denominational context.

1 In his book on “the natural history of innovation,” Steven Johnson writes about the “adjacent
2 possible.”⁷⁸ The “adjacent possible” is the new innovation, the new discovery, that is only
3 possible by first taking one step, or making one decision. The only way to get from the
4 phonograph to the iPod is through a series of steps. Innovation does not come through giant
5 leaps, but through one trial-and-error attempt at a time.⁷⁹ That first step leads to more
6 possibilities that could not otherwise happen, like how opening one door into a hallway offers
7 more doors that could not be seen from the previous room. The “adjacent possible” also
8 always allows for the possibility of returning back through the one door we have passed
9 through and trying a different option.

10 Our proposal invites the church to live into the “adjacent possible”.⁸⁰ It invites us to be a people
11 who together take wise, deliberate “provisional” steps; who experiment with ways of being
12 together, who ‘try on’ relationships, who make temporary covenants without fully leaving
13 behind the historical, geographical connections that have shaped our polity to date.

14 Steven Johnson’s contention is that all innovation is “the story of a gradual but relentless
15 probing” of what could come next given the pieces and parts at our disposal. We advance, he
16 writes, “by taking available resources and cobbling them together to create new uses.” So,
17 while the condition we find ourselves in is dire, our capacity for change has never been greater.
18 As we will show you, not only is our situation urgently in need of all the wise creativity we can
19 express, but the “available resources” available to us are significant, indeed.

20 **Becoming a Community of Missional Artists, Architects, and Collaborative** 21 **Designers**

22 Perhaps the greatest capacity for transformation is our people. **Our proposal soberly affirms**
23 **and joyfully celebrates that the most important work necessary to reinvent the church for a**
24 **post-Christendom context will not be found in our structures.** It is sobering to know that we
25 cannot make the transition to a fully engaged, contextually effective, faithfully missional, post-
26 Christendom church through an act of a commission or even a General Assembly.

27 ***Transformation requires large numbers of people to begin to act differently.***

28 We have been privileged to be in a long, passionate and expanding conversation with
29 Presbyterians across the geographic, cultural, and theological spectrum. We joyfully contend
30 that there is a holy restlessness throughout the church—indeed a growing frustration—to
31 embrace the challenge of our changing context of our world as the calling of our generation.
32 We believe that restlessness and frustration is the work of the Spirit that is calling forth
33 “missional artists, architects, and collaborative designers” to work together to re-create the
34 church for the next generation.

1 To that end we offer these suggestions discerned from our Commission conversation with a
2 restless church.

3 **Reengage the Pew in Presbyterian Shared Life, Mission, and Governance**

4 Can we envision a day when a *presbytery* gathering might be the most valuable and anticipated
5 meeting in the life of a *congregation*? Can we envision what it would take for Presbyterians to
6 so *personally experience* the depth, vibrancy, and community of shared life with *other*
7 *congregations* in a presbytery that the most engaged, committed, and creative elders would
8 lobby to be in presbytery leadership? Can we envision a time when the jokes about
9 “committees” will fade into the background and Presbyterians will be known for our
10 commitment to a shared life that wisely combines mission, governance, and community in
11 effective and edifying ways?

12 We believe that we have the potential to see this kind of life and vitality if mid council leaders
13 would truly embrace, listen deeply, and reorganize their life together for a clear purpose: ***to***
14 ***reengage “the pew” in the shared life, mission and governance (in that order!) that is the***
15 ***Presbyterian tradition.***

16 Since most presbyteries are served and supported by an older generation of elders and pastors
17 who understand a shared obligation to “connectionalism,” there is indeed a crisis of leadership
18 and participation in many presbyteries across the country. Stories of the difficulties of finding
19 people to serve on committees, garnering volunteers to serve as representatives to General
20 Assembly, and “recruiting” younger elders and pastors to take on any role beyond the
21 congregation are legion. For a generation of Presbyterians who have used per capita,
22 mandatory meetings with roll call attendance, and mandated terms of committee service to
23 “fuel” the structures of mid councils, it will take significant amounts of creativity and
24 persistence to reinvent presbyteries as communities and gatherings that are valued for what
25 they bring to the congregation and how they stretch all of us to see beyond ourselves.

26 **We need presbytery life that offers both the wise fiduciary and ecclesiastical accountability**
27 **we require (and value the most according to our data!), as well as being “balconies” offering**
28 **those “on the ground” a greater perspective of Christ’s work in the world than any one**
29 **congregation can provide.** Presbyteries need to be understood and experienced as a
30 “covenant community” that shares the mission of mutually strengthening missional
31 congregations. Presbyteries need to reconsider every program, every project, and every asset
32 with one clear mandate: *Does it engage, equip, and serve the congregation as the expression of*
33 *the mission of God in its local context?*

34 We have long celebrated the beauty of shared leadership between “elders” and “ministers”.
35 With the adoption of the new Form of Government, the primacy of “elders”—both ruling and

1 teaching—as a genuinely collaborative and complementary form of shared leadership has been
2 reaffirmed. We concur wholeheartedly and believe that if presbyteries were to develop
3 practices, styles, and leadership functions that are shaped demonstrably and witness
4 completely to our deeply held value of *shared rule* by both teaching and ruling elders (indeed,
5 we long for the day when we will only speak of “elders” without having to distinguish between
6 the two!), we will see not only the development of wise structures of presbyteries but also
7 revitalized missional congregations.

8 In addition, even the Office of the General Assembly and the General Assembly Mission Council
9 need to be reviewed as to how their practices serve presbyteries in their mission to serve
10 congregations. Over and over again, stories were told about the pervasive distrust of General
11 Assembly, about the amount of resources that go into our six-part structure, the lack of an
12 effective and clear national strategy toward immigrant populations, and the ways in which the
13 GAMC “competes” with presbyteries and synods for giving dollars. A flatter hierarchy with a
14 focus on the congregation as the center of the mission of the church will not be complete until
15 the church reconsiders the bureaucratic structures of GAMC and eliminates any competition for
16 power or resources between the GAMC and OGA. **These conditions foster a bureaucratic
17 mentality at a time when we need to do get back to mission and ministry, doing “whatever it
18 takes” to revitalize local congregations.** It is not within the purview of Commission to make
19 such recommendations, so we call on the 220th General Assembly to establish a task force to
20 review the nature and functions of the General Assembly offices and departments in light of the
21 charge given to us.

22 **Growing in Cultural Proficiency to Engage an Increasingly Multi-Cultural Context**

23 *As it participates in God’s mission, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) seeks...a new openness in its own*
24 *membership, becoming in fact as well as in faith a community of women and men of all ages, races,*
25 *ethnicities, and worldly conditions, made one in Christ by the power of the Spirit, as a visible sign of the*
26 *new humanity...” F-1.0404*

27 Perhaps the greatest potential for church-wide transformation beyond a Christendom context
28 is the deep commitment to valuing the rich diversity of the church. Diversity is our strength.
29 We can and must develop and deploy this strength with wisdom and ability. Our proposal calls
30 for deliberate decision making about structures that will insure that our commitment to racial
31 ethnic advocacy and inclusion is strengthened in a less structured, less regulated era. In
32 addition, we call on the church to develop our “cultural proficiency” (a process that focuses on
33 organizational transformation and individual transformation) in every level of the church’s life.

34 Cultural Proficiency derives from the work of Terry Cross, a First Nation clinical social worker,
35 who observed that European American clinicians in the center where he worked were not
36 providing competent care to their Eskimo and First Nation clients because they were not taking

1 into account the cultural perspectives and experience of the people they were working with. As
2 a result, Cross developed a set of tools to help people understand and respond more effectively
3 to the differences between them,⁸¹ and some of those tools for understanding Cultural
4 Proficiency are in Appendix 3.

5 Thus, Cultural Proficiency is about valuing diversity in people for the gifts they bring to the
6 culture of an organization and the interactions between individuals. The tools of cultural
7 proficiency work towards better self-awareness, clear articulation of core values, and a process
8 that results in positive, effective interactions among the people and the systems of a diverse
9 environment.

10 Cultural Proficiency acknowledges that patterns of oppression are embedded in the structures
11 of organizations. Without direct intervention and intentional efforts to change, organizational
12 cultures perpetuate systemic patterns of oppression, even where individuals within the
13 organization do not intend to discriminate or marginalize those who do not belong or
14 participate in the dominant culture.

15 Cultural Proficiency also acknowledges that change does not happen overnight, that people and
16 organizations move on a continuum from highly exclusive and oppressive organizations and
17 behaviors to highly inclusive organizations and behaviors. It is built on a foundation that aligns
18 the principles of inclusivity in diversity with the core values and mission of the organization. It
19 also acknowledges that organizations are resistant to change and that the causes of resistance
20 must be taken into account and addressed openly in order to bring about cultural
21 transformation within an organization.

22 The goal of Cultural Proficiency Initiative is to transform the organizational culture integrating
23 the best of organizational practices and church values so that it becomes and serves as a model
24 for a healthy church.

25 As we grow in cultural proficiency, we envision that without exception, all of God's children will
26 be able to contribute their given gifts and talents thus leading to healthier, more faithful
27 expressions of the gospel of Christ in and through our congregations.

28 We envision that our facility to engage new immigrant communities and those communities
29 who have long been marginalized will be strengthened. We believe that we will better discern
30 practices and approaches to ministry and structures of governance, accountability, and support
31 that will enable us to engage an ever expanding mission field of possibilities.

32 We charge all sectors of the church to a commitment to grow in Cultural Proficiency to engage
33 a rapidly multi-cultural world into enriching and expanding each others' cultural experience. As

1 a result we shall be able to better express the beauty of the gospel of Christ which calls all of us
2 to be participants.

3 **Develop Capacity to Lead Congregational Transformation**

4 Perhaps the most crucial element to reinventing the church for a post-Christendom age is the
5 lack of *transformational* leadership capacity within the church as a whole. Over and over again,
6 the single biggest factor cited both positively and negatively focused around the ability and
7 strength (or lack) of leadership in local leaders. Most of us have been trained for stewardship
8 of Christendom congregations, but the changing conditions of the day require different
9 leadership capacities. The church needs to work with seminaries, Committees on Preparation
10 for Ministry, and General Assembly entities to transition the processes for leadership
11 preparation from a Christendom stewardship model to a post-Christendom leadership-as-
12 transformation model. Executive Presbyters (EP) need to become mentors in change
13 leadership. Ruling and teaching elders with gifts in congregational transformation need to be
14 identified and called into roles as EPs, mentors, and advisors. We need to avail ourselves of and
15 learn from those in other fields who are already in the middle of organizational transformation.
16 We believe that this next season of experimentation will serve to develop the transformational
17 leadership gifts of a whole new generation of church leaders. Different contexts challenge us
18 all to learn how to lead differently.

19 **Rebuild Trust**

20 *“Regulation cannot do what the loss of trust has undone.” Cynthia Bolbach,*
21 *Moderator of the 219th General Assembly*

22 Of all the “non-structural issues” that we have identified, perhaps the single greatest gift that
23 this Commission can raise up for the church is to say as loudly and as clearly as we possibly can
24 that there is a crisis of trust in our denomination and that it, more than anything else, is the
25 single greatest threat to the vitality and future existence of the church.

26 Congregational leaders don’t trust presbyteries. Presbyteries don’t trust synods. Synod leaders
27 see themselves as the “breakwater” protecting the church from the General Assembly (which
28 might be the least trusted system of all.) As the report from our Commission’s Racial Ethnic
29 Strategy Task force states, *“Also prominent in the Commission’s polling of the Church were the*
30 *expressions of deep and abiding mistrust – fueled by a general absence of meaningful*
31 *connection to the national, regional and even local judicatories.”*

32 We do not believe that this is due to any individual persons acting in any particularly egregious
33 and untrustworthy ways. Indeed, we believe that the great majority of General Assembly,

1 presbytery, and synod staff members and leaders are trustworthy people. But the system itself
2 fosters mistrust.

3 Generations of attempting to solve problems by constitutional fiat have left us without the
4 ability to build relationships with those who deeply disagree with us. We have trusted that our
5 membership in presbyteries and synods, and our participation in council deliberative processes
6 and committee assignments, would be context enough to build trust. Once again, a reliance on
7 compliance with regulation has not only sapped our creativity, it has made it impossible for us
8 to give ourselves enough “room” to trust each other again. Indeed, at the center of the
9 Commission’s own work of deliberation was a commitment to transparency through our entire
10 process. We have used media, including social media, to engage in a conversation with the
11 entire church. We have traveled many miles, engaged in numerous conversations, and listened
12 deeply to people who disagree with each other (and often ourselves!) about the causes of
13 concern and the potential future of the church. We have engaged people from across various
14 spectrums in a conversation with full disclosure, even taking our most provocative proposals to
15 the church before the final report was finished to allow input. Within the Commission itself, we
16 have come to realize that, for the sake of the mission, nothing can substitute for taking the time
17 to build relationships, work through conflicts, and get beyond the stereotypes that we each
18 bring into any circumstance. Indeed, we needed to learn to trust each other enough to become
19 comfortable with discussing, debating, and finally deciding to bring even these proposals to the
20 church.

21 Perhaps the greatest effect of our proposals is that it will by necessity bring the church closer.
22 Now, for *congregations* to have more flexibility they will necessarily practice discernment
23 within both *presbytery* and *General Assembly* processes. While the flexibility to experiment
24 comes with built-in mechanisms to insure relational and constitutional fidelity, the true test of
25 our trust will come as we allow room for others to create presbyteries that are different than
26 our preferences and maybe even contradictory to our convictions.

27 Barry Ensign-George offers “*theological friendship*”⁸² as a different possibility for nurturing the
28 rebuilding of trust. Theological friendship is based on the conviction that in conversations both
29 *about* and *with* the Triune God, *we are brought closer to each other through transformation*.
30 This is not the result of regulation or polity, but intentional spiritual practice. Trust, like
31 friendship, takes time to cultivate and flourishes in the “space between created differences”.
32 Ensign-George encourages us to hold on to the values, and live in the relational realities of both
33 *diversity and compatibility* as an opportunity for continued transformation as a spiritual
34 practice to which we willingly and, yes, voluntarily enter in. “Communities of theological
35 friendship flourish through *diversity and a wise attention to compatibility*...Communities of
36 theological friendship recognize the need for diversity that genuinely stretches *and* the

1 importance of willingness to join in a shared journey with a particular group of people.”⁸³ As
2 Ensign-George reminds us, this very practice of trust-building through friendship could become
3 an act of witness to a deeply divided world. “Theological friendship, which is to say,
4 incorporation into friendship with Jesus Christ, is what we are empowered to offer to a world
5 rife with disconnection’s long and deadly reach (even in our world that prides itself on being
6 connected!).”

7 The Confession of 1967 has this poignant line: “*The quality of their relation with other persons is*
8 *the measure of the church’s fidelity.*”⁸⁴ Trust is the life blood of a community. Without
9 rebuilding trust we will never have the quality of relationships that we desire. We are under no
10 illusions about the sorry state of trust in our denomination and know that our proposals will not
11 pass through the Assembly without it. We also believe that if we engage in this provisional
12 presbytery experiment, we will need to trust each other more than some of us think possible.
13 We hope that even the conversations about our recommendations will be a spur for rebuilding
14 the trust to truly enable us to be a dynamic missional denomination again.

The Reports

1 Our Process

2 Our Commission convened via Conference Call on October 14, 2010 to inaugurate our oversight
3 of the Special Committee of Administrative Review, Boriquen (SCARB) and to give a brief
4 orientation for the Commissioners. Our first official Commission meeting was on November 4-
5 6, 2010 in Baltimore, Maryland. At that meeting we agreed that our commitment to the church
6 would be:

- 7 • To be a *listening* Commission...
- 8 • To be an *experimenting* Commission...
- 9 • To be a *discerning* Commission...
- 10 • To be a *transparent* Commission

11 Over the next fifteen months we convened meetings in Orlando, Seattle, Indianapolis and
12 Dallas; we learned from church experts on demographics, history, polity, and theology; we
13 invited Executive and General Presbyters from around the country to offer us perspective; and
14 we engaged some of the most creative leaders in the church to share their observations and
15 learning with us.⁸⁵

16 In order to listen to the broader church, we contracted with Presbyterian Research Services to
17 conduct surveys and gather data from a wide swath of the church; we conducted focus groups
18 in every Synod, at every large denominational event, and in consultations with group of
19 Executive Presbyters, Synod Executives, the GAMC, and the OGA Executive Team. In addition,
20 we had smaller group consultations with representatives from the Advisory Council of Racial
21 Ethnic Concerns, the Committee of Representation, and a host of conference calls with specific
22 focus group constituents. (See the next section for more details.)

23 From the very beginning, our Commission endeavored to create a transparent conversation
24 with the entire church. We used social media and blog postings to reflect back to the church
25 our observations, we traveled extensively throughout the country to engage in discussions, and
26 we called upon church leaders, theologians and historians to help us gain perspective. In
27 addition, we looked at models in other denominations, consulting especially with the City
28 Classis of the Reformed Church of America, and invited two mid council leaders who had
29 recently led re-organization teams in their respective mid councils to share their insights.

30 For the better part of a year, we listened. Consultations were held in every synod. A survey
31 was developed and phone consultations with diverse demographic groups were provided by
32 Presbyterian Research Services. Additional consultations, conversations and presentations

1 were conducted by Commission members for Big Tent, NEXT Church Conference, the
2 Committee of the Office of the General Assembly, the Executive Committee of the General
3 Assembly Mission Council, The Association of Executive Presbyters, The Clerks Conference, The
4 Moderators Conference, the Synod Executive Forum (twice) as well as consultations with
5 representatives from Synod of the Pacific, Synod of Southern California and Hawaii, Synod of
6 the Northeast, and a number of individual conversations with presbytery and synod leadership.

7 A summary of the data collected from these listening sessions is provided in next section and
8 the full Data Reports are in Appendix 4. At the same time, we charged a group with doing even
9 more research into the changing context of our world. Both brought substantive reports to our
10 Indianapolis Commission meeting.

11 At our final two commission meetings, in response to these reports, and in the interim
12 between, with considerable discussion, debate and time for discernment between Commission
13 members and with leaders in the larger church, the recommendations that are included here
14 took shape.

15

1 **Looking (and Listening) Deeply: Data and Discussions**

2 The mandate from the 219th General Assembly required the Administrative Commission to:

3 *“...consult with sessions, presbyteries, synods, and the wider church on the mission and function*
4 *of middle governing bodies. Such a process should include:*

5 *a. current diversity in the role and functions of middle governing bodies,*

6 *b. demographics and financial realities that affect the role and function of synods and*
7 *presbyteries.*

8 *c. the role of each governing body in its oversight role – presbyteries of congregations, synods*
9 *of presbyteries, and General Assembly of synods – both historically and in present experience.*

10 *d. relationships with General Assembly agencies in role and function.”*

11
12 In order to fulfill this mandate, the Commission contracted with Presbyterian Research Services
13 (PRS) to conduct surveys of session, presbytery, and synod leaders, and to gather data from
14 focus groups including leaders of large and small presbyteries, young pastors, African-American,
15 Hispanic/Latino, American Indian, Middle Eastern, and Asian-American church leaders. The data
16 design also included an “open invitation” survey for individuals from all over the denomination
17 to provide input for Administrative Commissioners to consider.

18 In addition to these formal research activities, a team of two Commission members met in
19 consultation with each of the sixteen synods, and members of the Commission personally
20 interviewed participants at the following events: The Big Tent, two Board of Pensions regional
21 meetings, the General Assembly Mission Council, the Committee On General Assembly, and the
22 Coordinating Council of Korean American Presbyteries.

23 All of these data were provided to all commission members, and a summary report was
24 presented to the Commission prior to their consideration of proposed models or changes in the
25 constitution. The data collected in this process is voluminous, and summaries of the data are
26 contained in Appendix 4. In response to the mandate from the 219th General Assembly, this
27 report will summarize the data reported in the four mandated categories.

28 **Current Diversity in the Role and Functions of Middle Governing Bodies**

29 The PRS survey assumed that diversity meant demographic diversity, when the intent of the
30 General Assembly was diversity in role and function, not demographics. Nonetheless, the
31 Models subgroup gathered a significant amount of data as to how presbyteries and synods are
32 currently operating in the current context. These data are more helpful to this mandate (please
33 see the following report, *The Colors of Vitality: Trends and Attributes in Transformational*
34 *Presbyteries*). It may be helpful for this report to note that while presbyteries and synods
35 operate in vastly different ways depending on whether they are highly urban, highly rural, small

1 or large, the differences relate primarily to *form, not function*. All presbyteries and synods seem
2 to retain the same functions and roles, in keeping with the Book of Order, but how those
3 functions are carried out varies widely throughout the denomination.

4 **Demographics and Financial Realities that Affect the Role and Function of Synods and** 5 **Presbyteries**

6 When session members were asked to rate their presbytery membership and leadership for
7 how well it represented the racial ethnic, age, economic, rural/urban, size, and theological
8 diversity demographics of their churches, most participants responded that the representation
9 was “effective.” When asked to assess the size of their presbyteries, 58% of respondents
10 reported that their geographic size was “about right” and 64% reported that the number of
11 congregations was “about right.” Size and demographic realities of either presbytery or synod
12 did not seem to be big issues among the participants in the various surveys and focus groups.

13 In contrast, financial realities were a significant issue. Seventy-two percent of presbytery
14 leaders reported that their finances have decreased in the past five years, and more than half
15 of presbyteries predict continued reduction in revenue, programs, membership, and
16 attendance in the next five years. Insufficient funding and lack of support from congregations
17 were listed by presbytery leaders as two major obstacles to accomplishing their mission. Sixty-
18 eight percent reported that worship attendance had decreased in the past five years. Two-
19 thirds of synod leaders believe that presbytery giving to synods will decrease in the next five
20 years, and only one-third of presbytery leaders report that their relationship to the synod was
21 “excellent” or “very good.” About half of synod and presbytery leaders are familiar with their
22 council’s budget, but seventy-seven percent of presbytery AND synod leaders feel that less per
23 capita should go to synods.

24 The PRS survey asked presbytery leaders whether congregation support was an obstacle, but in
25 our consultations we heard very clearly that the question that most needs to be asked is: *How*
26 *does the presbytery support the congregation?*

27 **The Role of Each Governing Body in its Oversight Role – Presbyteries of Congregations,** 28 **Synods of Presbyteries, and General Assembly of Synods – Both Historically and in Present** 29 **Experience**

30 When asked how supportive presbyteries have been to congregations, only 30% of session
31 members responded “very” or “a little supportive,” suggesting that most session members do
32 not see presbytery as highly supportive of their congregation. The highest scores in this arena
33 were for support when congregations are in crisis (40% either “very” or “a little” supportive).
34 This would suggest that when congregations need an outside influence, presbytery is there and

1 is generally supportive. Otherwise, presbytery plays a very minor role in the life of the
2 congregation.

3 When survey participants were asked what roles or functions their presbytery carried out most
4 effectively they (very generally) rated fairly high the ecclesiastical responsibilities such as
5 review of records, ordaining and receiving ministers, electing commissioners, working with
6 candidates, and having a nominating committee (40-45%). They are less positive about
7 presbytery's role in initiating new programs, visiting with sessions, and providing a strong vision
8 for area Presbyterians.

9 Only about one-third of sessions provided an opinion on the question, "which term best
10 summarizes your congregation's relationship with the synod" over the past two years? Indeed,
11 more than half responded "not enough contact on which to base an opinion" (52%; another
12 12% are "not sure"). Of those with an opinion— 36% of the total—only 21% responded either
13 "excellent" or "very good." One of the clear themes of the conversation data (synod
14 consultations and conversations at other "events") was that although connectionalism is highly
15 valued, there is also a sense that the communication between the governing bodies is a major
16 problem. The governance structure is seen as a hindrance, and participants longed for more
17 focus on mission; less on rules. When participants were asked "What is working well in middle
18 governing bodies?", the most common response was "no response". Of those who did respond,
19 there was clear support for racial ethnic ministries and the programs and processes that
20 support pastors, both in the call process and in their ministry. The comment, "We're better at
21 closing churches than at planting them," seemed to sum up the frustration with rule-based
22 processes vs. the messy work of evangelism and relationships. There is frustration with
23 presbyteries that care more about their projects than they do their congregations.

24 No empirical data were collected related to the historical roles of each governing body.
25 Members of the Commission perceived that one of the changing contexts in which the church is
26 living is the notion that congregations should support a large bureaucracy. In today's world,
27 congregations are more inclined to wonder how their per capita dollars support their own
28 ministries, not the larger bureaucracy of which they are a part.

29 **Relationships with General Assembly Agencies in Role and Functions**

30 In multiple conversations with Synod Executives, the lack of trust and consternation with the
31 General Assembly organization and structure was repeatedly articulated. Indeed, some Synod
32 executives believed that one of the primary roles of Synods was to be a "buffer" between
33 presbyteries and a meddlesome and unhelpful General Assembly structure.

34 From the PRS report:

1 Majorities of sessions and leaders report that [they]... had related in some way
2 with three of the six General Assembly agencies in the past two years: the General
3 Assembly Mission Council, the Board of Pensions, and the Presbyterian Publishing
4 Corporation.

5 Almost all leaders (96%) also report relating with the Office of the General
6 Assembly, though only 35% of sessions do so.

7 A majority of sessions report an “excellent” or “very good” relationship with only
8 one agency, the Board of Pensions (60%). The next highest “excellent”/“very
9 good” total is 44%, for the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. At the low end,
10 with 26%, is the Office of the General Assembly. ...

11 Many more presbytery and synod leaders than session members used “excellent”
12 or “very good” to describe the relationship between their entity and each General
13 Assembly agency.

14 The concern about these data is that the questions were answered in ways that *assumed* the
15 role and function and focused on the quantity and quality of the relationship (e.g., “Has your
16 synod/presbytery/ session related to the Board of Pensions in any of the following ways in the
17 last year?” and “Which term best summarizes your relationship with the agency?”). The issue of
18 role and function was not addressed.

19 **Data Informing Commission Decisions**

20 As will become evident, clearly, **the data that most impacted the decisions of the Commission**
21 **were those that relate to the synod as a council. The data from the consultations with the**
22 **synods showed that the number one change desired by respondents was to either re-define**
23 **or eliminate the synod as a “governing body”.** Of sixteen synod reports, nine listed “change or
24 eliminate synod” as a primary theme in the responses of the attendees. This refrain was also
25 heard from the Big Tent event, committee On General Assembly, General Assembly Mission
26 Council, and Board of Pensions meetings. Combined with data from PRS that indicated synods
27 should receive less per capita and that the average session member has had no connection to
28 synod, the Commission felt that there was a clear mandate from the denomination to
29 reconsider the role that synods play.⁸⁶

30 A second area where the data led to Commission action was the role of synods related to racial
31 ethnic ministries. When asked what is working with middle governing bodies, the most
32 common response was either a blank or “nothing.” Nonetheless, of those who responded
33 positively, most reported that the work of racial ethnic ministry was a positive aspect of synods.

1 The Commission recommendation regarding racial ethnic ministry is a direct result of these
2 data.

3 To a lesser but not unsubstantial degree, the recommendations regarding presbyteries were
4 also influenced by the data. The data showed that few session members saw the presbytery as
5 a partner in their ministry. Presbyteries were generally seen as regulatory agencies. Many
6 participants in the consultations made comments about inverting the pyramid and calling for all
7 church councils to focus their energy and resources on the vitality of local congregations. By
8 allowing churches some choice in their connectional relationships, one hopeful outcome is
9 more accountability on the part of presbyteries to the health and satisfaction of their member
10 churches.

11 Finally, the Commission’s recommendation regarding a review of General Assembly agencies
12 came very directly from the data that show a serious disconnect between session members and
13 the GAMC or OGA. It was also heavily influenced by the synod executives’ comments about
14 playing the role of “buffer” between presbyteries and the General Assembly.

15

1 **The Colors of Vitality: Trends and Attributes in Transformational** 2 **Presbyteries**

3 The mid council Commission mandate includes developing “models that reflect the roles of
4 middle governing bodies in our polity and the changing context of our witness.” Initially the
5 Commission endeavored to learn about emerging models in presbyteries and synods with a
6 track record of success that could be recommended to the whole Church. Members researched
7 a variety of councils both within the PC(USA) and a few international bodies. It quickly became
8 apparent that there is considerable experimentation across the Church, however with the pace
9 of change many of these endeavors are so new that they are just coming off the drawing board
10 and others are continuing to adapt. While the Commission had some thought that it would be
11 possible to develop models for different sizes or types of presbyteries or synods, it became
12 clear from conversations with mid council leaders and from data gathered that councils that
13 reflect emerging trends were very conscious of their particular context, culture, function and
14 need for discernment about how God might be at work in their midst.

15 The very concept of “models” is problematic because it suggests that a presbytery or synod
16 could simply copy a standard form and succeed in meeting the needs of a changing society and
17 Church. Steve Yamaguchi, Presbytery Pastor in Los Ranchos Presbytery, spoke to the
18 Commission about the importance of councils “learning to learn” so that they are continually
19 exploring new paths and adapting to a rapidly changing environment. The Commission has
20 concluded that the desire for “models” is an expression of the desire for technical solutions, for
21 generic answers to challenges the church faces, when such solutions do not exist. This is not to
22 say that councils cannot learn from one another’s experience. On the contrary, the
23 Commission wants to lift up emerging trends, celebrate the creativity of many mid councils and
24 offer these many good models as ‘tools’ for other’s creative use, and encourage all councils to
25 reflect on how they can engage in adaptive conversations reflecting on their particular
26 circumstances, calling, challenges and possibilities.

27 Consequently the Commission first calls the Church’s attention to the following trends in
28 healthy presbyteries and synods:

29 ***Emerging Trends***

- 30 • ***The number one shift in presbyteries is to a new focus on support of***
31 ***congregations as the primary agents of mission in the world—that is, instead of***
32 ***seeing themselves as “doing mission” and supporting mission programs, they are***
33 ***putting most of their energies and dollars into supporting congregations as they***
34 ***seek to engage in God’s mission. By the same token, the number one shift in***
35 ***synods is to support presbyteries.***

- 1 • *Presbyteries are intent on **building relationships and developing a sense of***
2 ***community** in the presbytery while a similar trend can be seen in some synods.*
- 3 • *There is a renewed emphasis on **deepening the spiritual life** of presbyteries and*
4 *encouraging spiritual practices in congregations.*
- 5 • *Related to the focus on serving congregations is **a demand for excellence in***
6 ***Ruling and Teaching Elders**—for lifting up the spiritual leadership role of Ruling*
7 *Elders, encouraging pastors to participate in ongoing spiritual formation and*
8 *learning new skills in congregational transformation.*
- 9 • *Presbyteries and synods are **experimenting with structures and patterns of***
10 ***decision-making**—from down-sizing committees and staffing to using*
11 *discernment practices or new technologies to connect people for meetings. Some*
12 *presbyteries took a “sabbatical” for a time from all but Book of Order committee*
13 *functions to see what emerged as important to renew or begin.*
- 14 • ***As giving patterns in our culture have changed mid councils are seeking ways***
15 ***to respond** --with different ways of cultivating generous stewards and/or*
16 *encouraging people to give to their passions. They are attending to their fiduciary*
17 *responsibilities while looking for new funding streams.*
- 18 • ***Cultural shifts and in many cases declining financial support also push mid***
19 ***councils as organizations to let go of some ways of doing things** —no longer*
20 *offering a range of programs or providing staff to do the work of numerous*
21 *committees or funding local social service agencies.*
- 22 • ***Changing demographics are leading some mid councils risk doing ministry in***
23 ***new ways to reach out to new immigrant communities and/or younger***
24 ***generations**—new church developments, fellowships, and emergent worshipping*
25 *communities may take different forms and use bi-vocational pastors, Commissioned*
26 *Ruling Elders, or full-time organizing pastors. Presbyteries and congregations are*
27 *conscious of the nature of their “mission field” and recognize that traditional forms of*
28 *new church development may not be appropriate. The best efforts include developing*
29 *“cultural proficiency” among present members of the Presbytery so that they learn how*
30 *“to interact effectively with people who differ from them.” (“Cultural Proficiency:*
31 *What Is It?” The Cultural Proficiency Group, Beverly Hills, CA, 2003, p.1)*

32 **The Tools for Creating Adaptive Mid Councils**

33 As a Commission, our deep desire is to see the whole church engaged in a wholesale process of
34 reinvigorating congregations through reinventing presbyteries. In many places around the church today

1 this process has already begun. The Commission is convinced that what works in one presbytery
2 (or synod) will not work in all their counterparts. There is no magic bullet, no “one size fits all”
3 model, or even models that work for similar size mid councils. Just as congregations are unique,
4 so are presbyteries and synods. There are a variety of factors that come into play for councils
5 as they clarify their purpose and discover new patterns for engaging in ministry: context, size,
6 culture, resources, leadership, etc. Instead of developing “models” that will not fit all situations
7 or survive the test of changing times, the Commission has identified components of models, an
8 artist’s palette of primary colors that adaptive mid councils seem to take into account in
9 shaping and painting the picture of their life. Each of these components of what might be a
10 “model” is illustrated with a range of examples in the hope that presbyteries might use them as
11 a palette of colors in a collaborative development of their own approach to mid council
12 ministry.

13 *Focus*

14 In the changing context of the church and world each presbytery needs to engage in a process
15 of discernment, seeking clarity about its calling for this particular time. mid councils are at
16 different stages of this process, with some clearly recognizing that the effort to maintain
17 comprehensive programs and mission can no longer be supported by diminishing resources and
18 trends in voluntarism that value short term, hands-on involvement over general giving. The
19 Commission’s research supports the conclusion in the new Constitution, *that in addition to*
20 *governance*, the presbytery’s primary role is “assisting and supporting the witness of
21 congregations” (G-3.0301). The missional character of presbyteries may look different as each
22 one determines what is most important given its context, culture, and size. Presbyteries will
23 each have a unique focus for their life-- such as a guiding Biblical narrative or image, an
24 emphasis on spiritual formation, equipping healthy congregations, prioritizing missional
25 theology, fostering community and accountability, promoting collaboration and partnership,
26 and/ or developing a virtual organization. The Synods that are vital are recognizing new trends
27 in the Church see their role as supporting presbyteries and focus their energies and resources
28 to that end.

29 The Presbytery of Hudson River developed its own discernment process beginning with a
30 leadership retreat in which they learned about how the church and the world were changing.
31 One of the questions they considered in small groups was what metaphors or biblical stories
32 came to mind to explain their situation. The image of “dying and rising to new life” which
33 surfaced that day has given them energy and focus for guiding their future. As a presbytery
34 they now declare that they are “practicing resurrection with passion and partnership, in a
35 changing world.” (In his book *Holy Conversations*, Gil Rendle provides a similar exercise
36 congregations and presbyteries can use).

1 Lehigh Presbytery began work during an interim period clarifying their purpose and core values.
2 Their explicit focus is on nurturing congregations, with the Presbytery gathering as
3 “communities for worship, spiritual renewal and Christian fellowship.” They called a Teaching
4 Presbyter gifted in developing spiritual practices.

5 St. Augustine Presbytery recognized that it had to ask “who are we?” and “what are we to do?”
6 before they could ask “how do we structure ourselves”; it was a shift from asking organizational
7 to theological questions. The result is a commitment to strengthening missional congregations,
8 developing new missional communities, and forming missional leaders, tasks identified by
9 Darrell L. Guder, Henry Winters Luce Professor of Missional and Ecumenical Theology at
10 Princeton Theological Seminary, in his writings about missional ecclesiology. The Presbytery
11 tries to live out three virtues: humility, reconciliation, and trust.

12 San Diego Presbytery has discerned that it has a “missional calling,” rooted in the experience of
13 the early church sending people into the mission field (Acts 13:1-3). The Presbytery went
14 through a three stage process that included working with a missional church consultant, Alan
15 Roxburgh. It sees itself today as a learning community that is shaped by spiritual, missional,
16 and relational factors. It chooses to take a permission-giving stance and cultivates missional
17 imagination, innovation, creativity, and thinking outside the box. Reflection on Jesus’ words in
18 John 20:21: “As the Father has sent Me, so now I send you,” is leading them to explore how to
19 move back into the neighborhood, how to discern what the Spirit is up to, and how to
20 participate in the mission of God today.

21 *Context*

22 The Commission defines context as “who we are in relation to where we are.” mid councils
23 need to ask questions about where God has placed us and recognize the characteristics of our
24 environment and times as relevant factors in shaping a presbytery or synod’s life and calling.
25 What are the characteristics of the geography, how do natural boundaries divide or impact
26 travel and relationships, how dense and diverse is the population, are there a variety of people
27 groups or is it a fairly homogeneous region? How do economic factors shape life, is the
28 economy stable, are there a variety of lifestyles and resources represented? How are societal
29 changes impacting the nature of life in our communities and congregations? How is the
30 presbytery or synod taking these factors into account, not as problems to be solved but as ways
31 to discover the opportunities and possibilities for discerning identity and mission/engaging in
32 God’s mission?

33

34 Palisades Presbytery in northern New Jersey is in the midst of a rapidly changing context, with
35 the growth of Asian and Hispanic/Latino populations in a three county area with 2 million

1 residents in northern New Jersey. The presbytery reflects the multi-ethnic character of the
2 region with 12 racial-ethnic congregations out of 49, plus a Korean new church development,
3 and four immigrant fellowships. For the past few years the presbytery has had a unique
4 staffing pattern with three part-time presbyters; one of the three is a Multicultural Presbyter to
5 resource these congregations and to assist others to transform into multi-cultural places of
6 worship. With increased financial pressures the presbytery is now re-visiting the staffing plan.

7 Glacier Presbytery in Montana, by contrast, has 3,000 members in 19 congregations across a
8 broad geographic region. Members may drive eight to nine hours from its eastern to western
9 borders making connections between congregations and members challenging. The Presbytery
10 has begun rotating committee and presbytery meetings between four clusters and holding
11 meetings by teleconference on alternate months.

12 Baltimore Presbytery with 16,000 members in its large metropolitan context has become
13 conscious of how its congregations have become disconnected from their so one of its new
14 emphases is on reconciling with the community in ways that advance God’s reign.

15 Pacific Presbytery has long been conscious of its multicultural context and the realities of a
16 changing world. It is intentionally seeking to encourage and promote younger leaders. The
17 presbytery is using a two year stimulus grant from its Synod to encourage young
18 congregational leaders with ideas to revitalize their congregations.

19

20 *Size*

21 What is the “right” size for a presbytery or synod? Is it large enough to sustain mission but
22 small enough to foster community and expect accountability? A majority of those surveyed
23 believe their presbytery is the right size, yet the Commission also heard concerns across the
24 country about financial viability on the one hand and the importance of building relationships,
25 on the other. Larger membership presbyteries often have the advantage of greater resources
26 but need to consider how they establish community between congregations, teaching and
27 ruling elders. Small presbyteries may experience community naturally but often struggle with
28 how to support ministry with minimal finances. Size by itself is an insufficient means of
29 evaluating a presbytery’s health or identity but it is a reality that needs to be addressed as
30 presbyteries look to the future and consider emerging trends.

31

32 National Capitol Presbytery with its 108 churches and 32,000 members identifies itself as
33 “Missional, Pastoral and Prophetic.” While it is addressing some financial challenges it
34 continues to have resources for multiple staff and ministries. As part of its concern for pastoral

1 well-being and a concern to build community, the Presbytery requires pastors to be in a
2 support/accountability group and name who “their own pastor” will be. Presbytery meetings
3 are organized to promote conversation “with one another and the Holy One.” The emphasis is
4 relational, focused on “the Lord’s Table not the Clerk’s table.” The Committee on Ministry hosts
5 a dinner two to three times a year with the moderators of Pastor Nominating Committees and
6 new pastors where brief faith journeys are shared.

7 Santa Fe and Sierra Blanca Presbyteries together cover 90% of the state of New Mexico, with
8 approximately 8000 members in 63 congregations and two Hispanic new church developments.
9 For a few years the two presbyteries explored how they might share leadership without
10 merging. Together they called a Regional Presbyter to serve both presbyteries while each
11 continues to have its own Associate Stated Clerk. After experiencing this pattern for more than
12 a year, when they began talking about the future, someone suggested that they create a new
13 presbytery –not as a merger but by exploring what it would look like to start from scratch. A
14 joint presbytery task force was appointed in 2011 with key leaders from each presbytery. A
15 vision and values conversation at a joint presbytery meeting provided an opportunity for
16 feedback and encouragement to continue the conversation, fleshing out more details. The
17 process will continue into the spring of 2012 before the two presbyteries will consider voting on
18 a proposal. While the process was initiated due to financial pressures and grief over losing
19 some congregations, there is new energy and excitement as people sense that God is at work.

20 Cayuga-Syracuse Presbytery in upstate New York, by contrast covers four counties with 5323
21 members in 40 congregations within about 90 minutes of one another. The Presbytery
22 engaged in a three year process to look at the realities and possibilities of their decreasing size,
23 human and financial resources. They decided to hire a Transitional Presbyter who has
24 consulting experience to help the presbytery with the next phase of their vision and planning.
25 The transition process is leading them to identify ways to rebuild community and become less
26 staff dependent. A “Creation Team” appointed by the Presbytery, evaluated policies, standing
27 rules and bylaws in order to develop and propose recommendations for how to carry out
28 presbytery-directives. Over the next year the presbytery will move to a new leadership pattern
29 with fifteen Council members directing the work of presbytery, overseeing fiduciary
30 responsibilities and Book of Order requirements, organized in a variety of ways. By the end of
31 2012 they will have a virtual office and the only staff position will be a combined Stated Clerk
32 and Web Spinner. The Transitional Presbyter will oversee and resource the council as they
33 move into this new way of being and then will step aside.

34

1 **Culture**

2 According to the handbook, *Studying Congregations*, edited by Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson
3 W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney, “Culture is who we are and the world we have
4 created to live in. It is the predictable patterns of who does what and habitual strategies for
5 telling the world about the things held most dear.” Students of culture look for patterns of life
6 that give a community, a congregation, a presbytery, or synod its identity. The handbook
7 further explains that culture is not “who we always will be nor who we ought to be. It is who we
8 are and all the ways in which we reinforce and recreate who we are.” Culture includes style,
9 attitude, emotional climate, the gifts and passions of the people and congregations. The
10 culture of a presbytery or synod should foster trust, build community among congregations, be
11 conscious of and ready to adapt to a changing world and the needs of younger generations and
12 new populations. In his article *The Travail of the Presbytery*, Joseph D. Small, recently retired
13 Director of Theology and Worship for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), argues for the
14 importance of developing presbytery culture which is more relational and able to hold pastors
15 and congregations accountable to one another. Some mid councils are working on developing
16 a “virtual culture” which relies heavily on social networking and *Go To Meeting* types of
17 technology, in order to be good stewards of time and resources, while still attending to
18 relationships. Other councils emphasize a “sending culture”, to nurture, guide and strengthen
19 congregations for witness and service in their particular context, as described by writers such as
20 Princeton University Professor, Darrell L. Guder, and Paul Hooker, Executive Presbyter and
21 Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of St. Augustine.

22 The Presbytery of Los Ranchos in Southern California is moving from a culture of “command
23 and control” to one of “collaborating and connecting,” of recognizing the importance of being a
24 missional learning community which is always “learning to learn”. The Presbytery created an
25 “Odyssey” group to define the purpose and function of the presbytery which resulted in
26 “flipping the Presbytery”, from expecting congregations to support the presbytery to a
27 presbytery serving congregations. The process identified that the most vibrant conversations
28 going on at presbytery meetings were happening in the Narthex, so the Odyssey group asked
29 what would happen if those conversations became *the* meeting. Now “open space” time
30 during “presbytery gatherings” provide opportunity for people in the presbytery to offer a
31 variety of voluntary learning and discussion forums open to all and organized by those who are
32 present.

33 Muskingham Valley Presbytery, in rural Ohio, has made a major shift in its culture through a
34 spiritual “Journey with Jesus” that is transforming its life and that of its congregations. The
35 Presbytery is intentional about identifying the gifts of members, encouraging spiritual
36 disciplines, developing and supporting leaders. Several pastors and leaders have become
37 oblates in various Catholic orders, particularly the Order of St. Benedict. The Presbytery has an

1 action learning team leading the presbytery in discernment about what it would mean to
2 commit to “shared rhythms,” to be shaped by the Word, daily prayer, service to community,
3 fellowship at the table and ordering their lives around the liturgical calendar.

4 The Presbytery of Western North Carolina has a strong commitment to international and local
5 mission through congregational partnerships. The region has a long history of supporting
6 missionaries and is the home of Montreat Conference Center. The Presbytery encourages
7 congregational initiatives, assists with networking, and promotes projects. The presbytery’s
8 stated focus is on congregational transformation, but it sees “strengthening churches to be
9 faithful and vital witnesses to Jesus Christ” growing through mission partnerships and exposure
10 to the lives of others. The Presbytery’s history and culture of mission partnership supports the
11 focus on congregational transformation which in turn generates greater vitality and mission.

12 The Presbytery of the Western Reserve values relationships between congregations and
13 between members. For over a decade an email prayer chain has built community; cluster
14 session visits and congregational partnerships are promoted; and, while imperfectly practiced,
15 an attitude of “walking with” congregations is being encouraged, especially through its
16 Committee on Ministry. As presbytery leaders began looking at how to implement a new focus
17 on equipping congregations, a subtle but significant change came from reflection on Jesus’
18 words to his disciples about taking *what they had* to go into the crowd and feed the people.
19 After years of seeing struggling congregations as “problems to be solved”, the presbytery has
20 embraced as a core assumption, that “God has given each congregation a gift for ministry,”
21 beginning a new approach to supporting vital congregations and being in community.

22 **Function**

23 In the new *Form of Government* presbyteries continue to have a number of important
24 responsibilities. The focus groups conducted by Presbyterian Research Services for the
25 Commission identified support for congregations as the most valued function of presbyteries.
26 Secondly, people cited the importance of pastoral care and accountability for teaching elders.
27 The Synod consultations and focus group respondents value and would not want to lose
28 networking and collaboration. Rule-oriented administrative processes were least valued by
29 respondents from various settings. Sessions gave high ratings for presbytery processes in
30 orienting new pastors, review of records, and pastor accountability, but were less
31 complimentary about missional aspects of their presbyteries. Nonetheless, two-thirds reported
32 the presbytery had been supportive of their congregation in the last two years.

33 While all presbyteries have fiduciary functions, some approach those responsibilities by
34 targeting the support of congregational vitality as their goal. This represents a shift from
35 monitoring the life of congregations through the lens of rules and regulations to one that seeks
36 to build healthy relationships both internally within congregations and between the presbytery

1 and the congregation. As noted above, some presbyteries are making concerted efforts to
2 develop spiritual practices, encourage excellence in ruling and teaching elders, and foster
3 community, particularly among teaching elders. Several presbyteries are experimenting with
4 patterns of decision-making, particularly to re-consider the purpose and format of presbytery
5 meetings, reducing time spent on “business” in favor of worship, spiritual formation,
6 theological reflection or generative conversations. Two synods have moved toward more
7 virtual practices of decision-making while focusing resources on presbytery needs.

8

9 Charlotte Presbytery sees empowering the transformation of congregations as its most
10 important function and has attempted to direct its staffing, structure, and resources to that
11 end. The presbytery is clear that all congregations need to be going through transformation
12 and is intentional about supporting multicultural learning and new church plants, most new
13 immigrants. The third largest presbytery in the P.C. (U.S.A.) with 130 congregations and 39,900
14 members, Charlotte addresses the challenge of developing relationships by organizing five
15 regional Committee on Ministry Cluster Teams to serve all its congregations. Each COM Cluster
16 Team has co-moderators and 7-10 members. Most Committee on Ministry responsibilities
17 reside with the Cluster. The Church Development, Leadership Development, and Mission and
18 Justice Committees actively work through the Cluster Teams to offer support and deliver
19 resources. This system is designed to bring the presbytery to the pastors and congregations as
20 well as encourage regional identity.

21 The Presbytery of Los Ranchos declares that “the presbytery is wherever two or three
22 congregations are gathered to partner in mission”. It encourages the initiative of congregations
23 and people with passion partnering for mission, instead of trying to maintain its own mission
24 and program functions. The new format of presbytery gatherings compresses business to one
25 hour and allows for people with common interests to network during the “open space” time.
26 The Presbytery Council coordinates three teams: Administrative (resources and assets),
27 Strategic (how to do mission), and Generative (which views the presbytery from the balcony
28 raising challenges and opportunities). The Presbytery Pastor moderates the Council which acts
29 as the steward.

30 Lehigh Presbytery, with its 36 worshipping communities, also places emphasis on strengthening
31 and supporting congregations, but as a smaller presbytery it functions very differently with
32 minimal staff leadership and resources. With some assistance from the Synod, it supports a
33 multi-year contract with missional church consultants working with clusters of congregations. .
34 Among the presbytery’s core values are affirming collaboration and partnerships; nurturing
35 mutual trust; pursuing openness to new ideas and risk-taking; challenging individuals to
36 discover their gifts. It models discernment and spiritual development through its gatherings.

1 Each presbytery meeting begins with 20 minutes of Dwelling in the Word, a Bible reflection on
2 the same scripture passage for the whole year, which is also used by committees and
3 congregations. They spend up to an hour in worship, an hour for education and an hour for
4 business. In 2011 the presbytery is engaged in studying Peter Block’s book *Community: The*
5 *Structure of Belonging*. Members of congregations who are not commissioners to presbytery
6 are recruited to serve as “Presence Keepers,” to pray for the community as it meets, pay
7 attention to dynamics and have a gong to call attention to something the body may be missing
8 whether it is less appropriate behavior or pointing out something worthy of praise. They are
9 intentional about hospitality and frame presbytery service in terms of “calling.”

10 The Presbytery of St. Augustine, covering nineteen counties in north Florida, reduced its
11 committee structure by roughly 50% and reconceived the function of committees to exist as
12 *resources* for ministries, not as ends in themselves. The Presbytery Council is empowered to
13 carry out functions once done by separate committees: personnel, bills and overtures, review
14 and evaluation, and worship planning. The presbytery assembly meets three times per year
15 and includes worship with a guest preacher from outside the presbytery and a block of time for
16 theological reflection with the business agenda at the end.

17 The five presbyteries of South Carolina hold one joint meeting each year and their Presbytery
18 executives meet monthly to nurture relationships across presbytery lines but within a
19 geographic area that is less than one-third the size of their Synod.

20

21 *Structure*

22 The new Form of Government recognizes the diverse contexts and needs facing mid councils. It
23 identifies the basic responsibilities of a council yet gives permission for them to adapt their
24 organizational design to fit particular circumstances. Emerging models are already moving
25 toward alternative ways of making decisions and seeking ways to “flatten” or de-centralize the
26 organization. Presbyteries and synods are experimenting with different structures to fit their
27 needs. Given cultural shifts in how people make time commitments today, many have reduced
28 the number and size of committees, with some only having Book of Order mandated
29 committees. Instead some encourage mission initiatives through congregational partnerships,
30 short term ministry teams or networks of people with a common passion, networks and more
31 decision-making delegated to committees, commissions or clusters of congregations.

32

33 Palisades Presbytery has gone through a major re-structuring of committees and staff that
34 “flattens” the organization and allows for broader participation. The Presbytery formerly had
35 divisions to provide programs to congregations and now has three roundtables:

1 *Resources:* assisting congregations with property issues, development and funding.
2 *Evangelism and Community Outreach*
3 *Discipleship:* includes Christian Education, spiritual development, youth ministry, training and
4 development.

5
6 Each roundtable includes three ruling and three teaching elders who are elected, yet all
7 meetings of roundtables are “open” so anyone can attend. Agendas for roundtables are widely
8 publicized. Each roundtable intentionally supports parity with co-moderators, a ruling and a
9 teaching elder. The structure is designed to shift from a few people developing ideas for
10 programs to an open opportunity for developing ways to resource actual needs in
11 congregations.

12 Pueblo Presbytery in Southern Colorado has organized itself into four clusters of congregations
13 across its 35,000 square miles as a way of building on the connectional, relational values they
14 lift up in their mission statement. The clusters enable them to “learn to live together, live to
15 love each other, and love to serve God.” All mission grants are determined by the local church
16 clusters with each cluster sending advocates to the budget meeting. Through the clusters the
17 Presbytery also developed peer learning groups for pastors using recommended books to help
18 them grow as missional leaders. Accountability is taken seriously as the Presbytery learns from
19 the work of Paul Borden, author of *Hitting the Bullseye* and *Direct Hit*. The Presbytery has
20 developed a covenant process for congregations and pastors willing to commit to significant
21 learning time and risk re-orienting change; it has provided weekend consultations, workshops,
22 and coaching.

23 Baltimore Presbytery has taken intentional steps to de-centralize decision-making and
24 encourage community among its 72 congregations and 16,000 members. A recent re-
25 organization provides for three Commissions to make decisions for the Presbytery: Thriving and
26 Reconciling Congregations, Spiritual Leader Development, and Presbytery Administration and
27 Shared Witness. The Presbytery Council’s role is to oversee implementation of Presbytery
28 decisions and hold Commissions and staff accountable. The Commission on Thriving and
29 Reconciling Congregations will work through six ministry groups with twelve congregations
30 each, enabling congregations and leaders to learn from and with one another and have a
31 greater role in decision-making. Each group will be provided with \$25,000 and one day a week
32 of a presbytery staff member’s time. The Committee on Ministry will continue to carry out the
33 examination and reception of incoming ministers on behalf of the presbytery.

34 The Presbytery of Greater Atlanta engaged in a major re-visioning, re-structuring process to
35 address declining vitality and church membership. The process has resulted in an effort to
36 move from an emphasis on gate-keeping and maintenance of a large structure towards a more
37 permission-giving culture, focused on equipping healthy, growing congregations. The decision

1 to shift the primary function and culture was tied to a dramatic re-organization. For years the
2 flow of energy and effort was from congregations toward programs of the presbytery and
3 higher governing bodies. The relatively new plan calls for staff consultants to work directly with
4 congregations, ends the maintenance of myriad committees, eliminates staff support for
5 committees other than Book of Order units. The expectation is that networks of churches and
6 people with passion for particular ministries will continue some work once done by committees
7 and develop new initiatives.

8

9 *Leadership*

10 All presbyteries need effective leadership whether paid or unpaid. Good leadership is
11 inspirational but is expressed in a variety of styles. In an era that calls for adaptive change, it is
12 not resident “experts” who are needed, but leaders who can help the organization continually
13 ask the questions that lead to vision, focus, and hope. We believe that the church will need to
14 rely more heavily than ever on real parity of ruling and teaching elders, not as a matter of
15 technical balance but as spiritual leaders with particular gifts, functions and responsibilities.
16 Efforts to identify, prepare, and support younger, multi-cultural leaders is a sign of a vital
17 presbytery attending to contextual and cultural shifts. Trends in leadership development in
18 emerging models point to the importance of framing service in terms of “calling” and
19 willingness to pursue excellence. Presbyteries promote opportunities for spiritual formation,
20 coaching, intentional exposure to new ideas and best practices, and the creation of learning
21 communities which encourage mutual teaching and learning.

22 New patterns for staffing are evolving with economic pressures and the movement to prioritize
23 support for congregations. Larger membership presbyteries continue to have multiple staff but
24 may deploy them differently while medium and small presbyteries are looking for creative ways
25 to function with fewer or minimal paid staff. Thoughtful councils, experimenting with greater
26 use of part-time or contract staff, are trying to balance reduced personnel costs with concerns
27 about how to reduce staff responsibilities and the ethics of providing adequate benefits and
28 support for staff. Titles and roles of presbytery staff leaders also vary from presbytery to
29 presbytery: Presbytery Pastor, Connectional Presbyter, Transformational Presbyter, Presbytery
30 Leader or, more commonly, General Presbyter or Executive Presbyter. The Presbytery of
31 Southern New England recently changed the position description and title of its full-time
32 Executive Presbyter to Presbyter to the Spiritual Community. The position is described with the
33 images of Sentinel, Midwife, and Tender of the New Vineyards.

34

1 Cimarron Presbytery in Oklahoma has a ruling elder who has served for several years as a
2 “dollar-a-year” Executive Presbyter as well as volunteer Stated Clerk and Treasurer. They have
3 minimal structure with a Council and task forces. Their aim is to be responsive to what comes
4 from the individual congregations. South Dakota Presbytery has a similar pattern with a
5 “retired” ruling elder serving as Presbytery Administrator.

6 The Presbytery of Greater Atlanta, with over 44,000 members in 108 congregations in urban,
7 suburban, and rural counties, has re-directed staff roles, replacing three full-time Associate
8 Executive positions with two full-time and two part-time congregation consultants. In addition,
9 several ruling elders are being trained as additional consultant/mentors. While eliminating
10 some positions the Presbytery added a communications/technology position.

11 Muskingham Valley Presbytery’s transformation includes implementing a nominating process
12 with clear criteria, communication of high expectations, and consideration of spiritual gifts for
13 people serving presbytery committees and ministries. A number of ruling and teaching elders
14 have received training in specific congregational processes so that they can serve as
15 consultants.

16 The Presbytery of Great Rivers in Illinois encourages internal leadership rather than “outside
17 experts”. Great Rivers has a pool of funds to enable ruling and teaching elders to provide
18 particular services to congregations such as ways to “go green” or assist with writing Church
19 Information Forms.

20 Several presbyteries, among them: Giddings-Lovejoy, Genesee Valley, Eastminster, Western
21 Reserve, and Philadelphia have recruited and trained coaches to work with pastors seeking to
22 improve their resilience and creativity for ministry or with congregational groups in the midst of
23 transformation. Detroit Presbytery has trained leaders to serve as “healthy congregations”
24 coaches.

25 Not all models are successful. The Presbytery of Northern New York experimented with dividing
26 the presbytery into three geographic deaneries. The design called for each deanery to elect an
27 Elder or Minister of Word and Sacrament from within the deanery to serve as Dean for a term
28 of three years. The purpose of the Deanery and the mission of the Dean was to help churches
29 thrive by identifying resources to solve problems, celebrating individual congregations’ identity
30 and contribution, and further relationships. The Deans were not to do the work but to help
31 congregations and pastors to do the work to which God called them. The Deans were
32 accountable to a Council of Deans including two members each appointed annually by the
33 Committee on Ministry and Presbytery Council. An annual covenant agreement between the
34 Deans, the Council of Deans, and the Presbytery set the year’s responsibilities and
35 compensation. Although this model has not continued in this particular presbytery, a variation

1 of it might work in another setting and so it's worth applauding and sharing their effort to be
2 creative.

3

4 ***Financial Viability:***

5 How much money is enough? How much do you need "to run" a mid council? In the present
6 economic climate and given declining membership in many congregations, mid councils are
7 looking at what kind of financial assets they have, how to allocate them and expand their
8 revenue streams. Financial challenges are creating a sense of urgency and openness to change,
9 prompting mid councils to seek ways of being more effective with less, building a better
10 stewardship environment and a theology of abundance. Some are discovering that limited
11 resources can foster innovation and drive opportunities for partnering with other presbyteries
12 or organizations. Size, context, functions, leadership needs and realities are part of the process
13 of determining priorities and looking for synchronicity and "the possible". While some
14 presbyteries are reducing paid staff or experimenting with leadership models that address their
15 context, others are deploying staff to work out of coffee shops, copy centers and cars rather
16 than maintaining office space. A number of presbyteries report dealing with significant
17 financial challenges in supporting camp and conference ministry: a few presbyteries partner to
18 support a camp and conference center, others have turned their camps into separate 501c3
19 entities responsible for their own management, and some have sold their camping facilities
20 setting aside funds to use for outdoor ministry. Long-standing programs, camp maintenance
21 and aid to agencies and congregations are being re-considered as presbyteries focus
22 increasingly on equipping missional congregations and congregational mission partnerships.
23 There are a number of experiments underway as mid councils clarify their focus, set priorities,
24 and consider options.

25

26 Mid Kentucky Presbytery has focused on developing new faith communities, immigrant
27 ministries, and deepening the presbytery's prayer life. To address financial realities the
28 presbytery is reducing its office space to enough for one administrative assistant, with the
29 expectation that continuing staff will work from home or coffee shops, to prioritize resources
30 for outreach to new populations.

31 The Monmouth and New Brunswick Presbyteries in New Jersey are beginning a shared
32 leadership model by calling a Regional Presbyter. The new partnership will reduce overhead to
33 enable mission. They continue to be two presbyteries, each retaining its own stated clerk,
34 distinct culture, functions, and structure. In the process of working together on the position

1 description for the shared Regional Presbyter they recognized that they did not want an
2 administrator but someone who could assist them with vision and equipping leaders.

3 Three presbyteries in New York—Utica, Susquehanna, and Cayuga-Syracuse—share
4 bookkeeping and financial services; those three presbyteries and Albany Presbytery share some
5 staff. In northeast Ohio, two Associations of the United Church of Christ share one office for
6 communications, financial and other administrative services while Regional Ministers (similar to
7 Executive and Associate Executive Presbyters) work from home or a small shared satellite
8 office.

9 Charlotte Presbytery seeks to be effective stewards of its resources. Numerous educational
10 efforts have been attempted to raise awareness of the importance of the Presbytery’s mission
11 and ministry. Appreciation of the Presbytery’s work has been regularly documented, yet
12 income from local churches has continued to decline. By policy, revenue from closed churches
13 has become immediately available for church development. This revenue source, carefully
14 utilized and managed, has permitted the Presbytery to avoid untenable financial crisis. At the
15 same time the presbytery continues to make strategic decisions about expenditures and
16 priorities, including plans to move to smaller office space when the current lease expires.

17 Pacific Presbytery has determined to lease property from closed congregations for ten years
18 and then evaluate needs. Some other presbyteries specify that assets from closed
19 congregations be dedicated to supporting urban churches or new church development.

20 National Capital Presbytery encouraged stewardship education in a presbytery meeting using a
21 speed-dating format: people were divided into small groups and attended a dozen
22 presentations of 5 to 10minutes as they rotated around the fellowship hall. Participants were
23 energized by learning from one another, gathering ideas and handouts, and experiencing
24 presbytery as equipping leaders.

25 **Each of these “colors” of healthy, adaptive mid councils which exhibit emerging trends, are**
26 **founded on basic foundational assumptions that**

- 27
- *Presbyteries have important fiduciary, governance responsibilities which need to be carried out well and*
 - *That presbyteries recognize that their role is to “assist and support the witness of congregations” while they*
 - *“Nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ” within their region (G-3.0301, G-3.0301c, G-3.0304, G-3.0304c).*
- 33

34 In these changing times each council will need to continually seek to discern God’s call to them
35 in their context, given their culture, size, gifts and challenges. Each council will need to learn

1 some new behaviors, to engage in being a community that is continually “learning to learn.” As
2 Gil Rendle notes in his book, *Journey in the Wilderness: New Life for Mainline Churches*, the task
3 is to keep asking questions about who we are? What do we need to be doing in the next few
4 years to be more faithful? What are we trying to make different? What difference are we
5 making in the lives of others and the life of the world?

6 One presbytery focused its conversation around these questions, questions that we on the mid
7 council Commission believe need to be at the center of a larger, broader, deeper discussion:

- 8 1. What kind of people do we want to send into the world?
- 9 2. What kinds of congregations send those kinds of people?
- 10 3. What kind of leadership equips that kind of congregation?
- 11 4. What kind of presbytery structure and staff leadership will set free those kinds of
- 12 leaders to equip those kinds of people to be sent into the world?
- 13

1 **The Outlines of Possibilities: Synods as Multi-Presbytery Missional** 2 **Partnerships**

3 The action of the Commission is to eliminate the synod as a council, or ecclesiastical entity. The
4 intent of the Commission is to take a step toward “flattening” the church’s organization for the
5 purpose of reducing redundancy in process and the bureaucratic layers between the local
6 congregation and the national church. **It was not the Commission’s intent to eliminate those**
7 **programs and processes that cross presbytery lines and either provide economies of scale or**
8 **address identified missional goals. *Indeed, we believe that the ingenuity and effort necessary***
9 ***to retain or reinvent these assets is crucial to the ongoing vitality of the church.*** Some
10 examples of highly valued ministries and assets that will need to be reformed and retained in a
11 new ecclesiastical system:

12 The Synod of Living Waters believes its mission is to give presbyteries a chance to thrive.
13 The Synod seeks to create community among presbytery leaders and draws its strategy
14 from those leaders. They are clear that they do not do anything that does not support their
15 presbyteries. The Synod of Living Waters is also the home to a nationally recognized
16 ministry that provides clean water for impoverished areas around the world. This mission
17 already stretches far beyond the geographical bounds of the synod.

18
19 The Synod of the Trinity’s mission statement declares that its role is “to provide support,
20 resources and nurture to its presbyteries.” It provides major grants to presbyteries for
21 consultants to work with clusters of missional congregations.

22
23 The Synod of Rocky Mountains also has funding available to support members within the
24 Synod providing their expertise.

25
26 The Synod of Lincoln Trails is known for its commitment to work in partnership with its
27 presbyteries and congregations to develop and support leaders. It offers training and
28 continuing education for Commissioned Ruling Elders, hosts seminars for new pastors
29 spanning a three year timeframe, provides Interim Pastor and Interim Executive training
30 and has a fund for Ministerial Excellence to assist pastors and congregations with education
31 for dealing with economic challenges.

32
33 The Synod of the Pacific determined years ago to provide financial and administrative
34 services and never became a programmatic body. It developed a unique revenue stream by
35 creating a savings and loan program to benefit congregations, presbyteries, and
36 Presbyterian entities within its bounds. Due to economies of scale, the program is able to
37 generate revenues to cover Synod expenses beyond per capita so that all mission funds
38 from congregations support their presbyteries and General Assembly. The Synod is able to
39 take on several fiduciary functions, including personnel services and some health benefits,

1 on behalf of its presbyteries. The Synod staff places a high value on “customer service,”
2 listening and responding to the presbyteries.

3
4 The Synod of Lakes and Prairies has a nationally respected “Synod School” for training
5 church leaders, educators and officers that draws from a large and diverse population
6 offering churches the very highest caliber of resources.

7
8 The Synod of Mid America virtual model grew out of recognition that the ways people in
9 our culture communicate and relate to one another have changed. With people having
10 limited time for meetings it was unrealistic to expect people to travel across state to make
11 routine administrative decisions. They were also conscious that using newer technologies
12 was better stewardship of financial and environmental resources. They are making
13 decisions using conference calls, web-based platforms like *Skype or Go To Meeting*, and
14 other evolving modes of communication. They will continue to have mission and training
15 opportunities, but believe community will also be created by web-based discussion forums,
16 blogs, and other virtual options.

17
18 The Synod of Alaska-Northwest has started a new way of coming together which they name
19 a “Call to Table.” Two or more presbyteries can call a gathering to look at a common
20 challenge or mission opportunity.

21
22 The Synod of Living Waters values relationships and effectiveness. It gave up a physical
23 office for a virtual one, not for financial reasons, but to allow staff to spend more time
24 meeting with people in presbyteries. All documents are scanned and saved into “the cloud”
25 for easy access. To encourage broader participation, particularly among younger
26 Presbyterians many meetings are held by conference call, *Skype, Go To Meeting*, and other
27 electronic formats. The synod also changed its approach to doing the Living Waters for the
28 World project –after the first few years of asking people for money to do the mission and
29 installing a handful of water systems, they stopped “doing the mission” and switched to
30 training and equipping people, installing hundreds of water systems with teams from inside
31 and outside Synod bounds.

32
33 **Organization:** Presbyteries will be free to continue to collaborate for programs, mission, and all
34 other needs where collaboration produces better outcomes. Under the new structure, it is also
35 possible that any presbytery in the denomination could be part of this collaborative if the Board
36 of Directors or those responsible for project chose to broaden its scope.

37 The difference is that presbyteries would no longer rely on synod as a council of the church to
38 administer such a program; the presbyteries would collaborate on the structure for such a
39 program as an administrative operation. Presbyteries could form a “joint powers authority”
40 (JPA), a foundation, or simply agree to elect members of a committee or board to exercise
41 administrative power over a program. This has the intended consequence of making the
42 program more accountable to the end users.

1 **Programs:** It is the intent of the Commission that ministry programs such as Synod of Lakes and
2 Prairies “Synod School” and the Synod of the Pacific’s Loan Program would *not* be eliminated.
3 While there will certainly be work and cost involved in transitioning these programs, we believe
4 that they are validated by their missional relevance to churches and presbyteries, and not just
5 vested in the synod structure, and therefore could continue to thrive in a new structure with
6 creative leadership.

7 **Advocacy:** Another piece of significant data that was reviewed by the Commission is the
8 concern that racial ethnic ministries seem to work better across presbytery lines where there
9 are more numbers and hence, more energy for their particular ministries. This issue requires
10 serious attention of presbyteries.

11 Many members of the racial ethnic Presbyterian community have contributed greatly to the
12 history and vibrancy of the PC(USA); initiating and modeling leadership, guiding the church to
13 more socially and theologically responsible posture in its witness to the world, creatively
14 enhancing the form and substance of worship, sensitizing and educating the church regarding
15 manners of race and providing a unique Presbyterian witness of the ministry of Jesus Christ.
16 The call for the church to review and reorganize its commitment and approach to Racial Ethnic
17 Ministry is significant both within and beyond the notion of a Presbyterian reality that removes
18 the ecclesiastical functions from Synods. The need to discover a posture from which genuine
19 ministry partnership can thrive is vital to the current health and future relevance of the Church.

20 It is worthy of note that the plight of many established and emerging racial ethnic
21 congregations directly mirrors the plight of small churches in the denomination. Exploring
22 models that support and strengthen racial ethnic ministry has the added benefit of discovering
23 new ways in which the entire church can be strengthened, both structurally and relationally.
24 Beyond the notion of tolerance, God calls us to be imaginative and authentic in our interactions
25 and in our witness. As a Church, the degree to which we extend ourselves to and within racial
26 ethnic communities will be directly reflected in the health and relevance of our brand of
27 witness. A culturally proficient engagement will bear much fruit, not only in matters of church
28 development and growth, but also in matters of spiritual health and wellness.

29 Using the regional administrative commissions authorized under the Commission’s
30 recommendation to give oversight and accountability to the Committee of Representations
31 work, one of the most significant presbytery collaborations should be an active commitment to
32 the particular needs and requirements of racial ethnic ministries. We are hopeful that this
33 would end up being a priority in the creation of multi-presbytery partnerships to support the
34 kinds of ministries that exist in regional areas. Hopefully, a good consequence could be more
35 ownership of racial ethnic programs and ministries by the presbyteries.

1 In their cry to the PC(USA) for resource, relevant inclusion, nurture and support, the racial
2 ethnic Presbyterian community must be met with a posture that authentically values diversity,
3 genuinely respects culture, and fully recognizes that what can be gained from honest
4 engagement is not just the joy of giving, but the blessing of receiving. Within this frame,
5 *partnership* emerges beyond *paternalism* as a fundamental engaging principle for racial ethnic
6 ministry, and the denomination achieves an enhanced eligibility for the richness of blessing that
7 compliance with God's inclusive intention can bring.

8 **Mission Projects:** As described above, the Commission is confident that when mission activities
9 are valued by the presbyteries and churches, they will continue to exist under a new structure
10 that actually gives them more accountability and control. By converting projects to 501 3c
11 organizations, or foundations, or by creating Joint Powers Authorities, collaborative groups of
12 an unlimited number of presbyteries can continue the mission activities that capture the
13 imagination and energy of their members. The solar project in the Synod of the Sun and the
14 Living Waters of the World project of the Synod of Living Waters As the Commission
15 understands, the Living Waters project can “stand alone.” It now functions under of the
16 purview of the synod, but could just as easily be a project on its own. That is an exemplar of
17 what the commission hopes would happen with such mission projects.

18 **Shared Life:** This is where the rubber meets the road. In reviewing the survey data, it was
19 apparent that while we talk the talk about connectionalism, there is a significant lack of walking
20 the walk. Survey respondents listed connectionalism as a very high value, but they also listed
21 lack of communication among middle councils and with congregations as a major problem. The
22 Commission believes that by not *mandating* cross presbytery connections in an ecclesiastical
23 entity, the new structure will actually require presbyteries to define when and how they choose
24 to collaborate with each other in a shared spiritual life, and in making the notion of “one body
25 in Christ” a reality. With the possibility of provisional presbyteries and provisional membership
26 of presbyteries beyond its original geographic bounds, we strongly urge the formation of
27 covenants of agreements between churches and their membership and affiliated
28 congregations.

29 It is the Commission’s hope that in this season of reflective experimentation presbyteries will
30 pay even closer attention to how churches connect to each other across presbytery boundaries,
31 regional boundaries, and indeed throughout the denomination. What does it truly mean to be
32 connectional? If we’re not required to do it, will we actually embrace the notion of “one body”?

33 **Assets:** Although this varies widely from synod to synod, it is true that many existing synods
34 have significant assets in the form of endowments, property, and reserves. The relocation of
35 the management of these assets will be a significant issue if the new structure is approved. It is
36 also true that the state in which these assets reside is a significant variable and would have to

1 be considered on a case by case basis. The Commission recommends that each existing synod
2 establish a committee made up of representatives from each presbytery within the existing
3 structure and that these committees be charge with developing a plan for the management of
4 what is now thought of as synod assets.

5

1 **Report of The General Assembly Mid Council Commission Racial Ethnic**
2 **Strategy Task Force**

3
4 **CHARGE**

5
6 To address the question: *“In the light of what we have heard from the church regarding the*
7 *intrinsic value of racial ethnic Ministry within the PC(USA), how will that priority be preserved*
8 *in the face of transition to a structure that does not include Synods with ecclesiastical status?”*
9
10

11 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

12
13 1) That a **NATIONAL RACIAL ETHNIC MINISTRIES TASK FORCE** comprised of
14 representatives from:

- 15
16 - Racial Ethnic Church Leadership;
17 - Racial Ethnic Caucus Leadership;
18 - The Advisory Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC);
19 - Presbytery Leadership; and
20 - The Committee on Representation
21

22 be established to exclusively review, assess and explore the Call to, Responsibility in and Vision
23 for Racial Ethnic Ministry within the PC(USA), reporting its findings for implementation to the
24 221st General Assembly.
25

26 2) In light of what we have heard in our conversation with the church, identifying a
27 critical condition concerning confidence in the substance and direction of Racial Ethnic Ministry,
28 we would also recommend the following:
29

30 That this **NATIONAL RACIAL ETHNIC TASK FORCE** be:

- 31
32 a) Created separate and apart from the proposed OGA Task Force;
33
34 b) Created whether or not the motion for the repurposing of Synods is
35 approved;
36
37 c) Instructed to specifically address the issue of language access, sensitivity and
38 resource (particularly as relates to the Spanish and Korean languages)
39 within the existing frame of Judicatory operation, as well as within the

1 context of any Regional Administrative Structure that emerges as a result
2 of the approval of the repurposing of Synods;

3
4 d) Instructed to review the models of racial ethnic Ministry that are operating
5 successfully in the denomination with particular focus on, but not limited
6 to, those noted in this Commission’s report.

7
8 e) Instructed to explore the viability of a nationally organized racial ethnic
9 Ministry Advocacy Model on the Local and/or Cluster Congregation level.

10 **PROCESS**

11 Representatives from ACREC, representing the collective community of the racial ethnic
12 Presbyterian Family, presented the Commission with a unified case for considering the historic
13 role of Synods in the vitality of racial ethnic Presbyterian ministry. Subsequently ACREC was
14 invited to partner with this Task Force. Working together we embarked on a process of
15 exploration, assessment and visioning regarding potential options and elements of a strategy
16 for the PC(USA) to sustain the viability of *established* racial ethnic Presbyterian congregations
17 and Communities as well as those that are emerging, and those that have yet to. The focus of
18 this exploration was founded in the overwhelming response in the Commission’s polling of the
19 Church that consistently lifted up racial ethnic Ministry as the number one element that needed
20 to be accounted for in a Post-Synod Presbyterian universe.

21
22
23 **RATIONALE**

24 Even though the work of this Task Force was focused on identifying models for racial ethnic
25 ministry in the face of potential transition to a structure that does not include synods with
26 ecclesiastical power, we heard a wide spread outcry for relief from conditions as they currently
27 exist. Established racial ethnic congregations continue to struggle in their relationships with
28 their Presbyteries, resourcing and nurture are widely unavailable to them, and there is a feeling
29 within this community that they are being abandoned in favor of other priorities within the
30 denomination. The commitment to racial ethnic ministry that the PC(USA) has professed is
31 seen as mere lip service, due to the general absence of evidence of that commitment on the
32 local church level. The notion of life in the absence of Synod ecclesiastical authority is, for
33 many racial ethnic congregations, the ‘last straw’ in what has developed into a perceived
34 tradition of tacit exclusion.

35
36 It is widely acknowledged, and factually irrefutable, that Synods have been the traditional *Safe*
37 *Haven* for matters regarding racial ethnic Ministry. This truth emerges from two (2) primary
38 factors, *Critical Mass* and *Sociological Necessity*. Regarding *Critical Mass*, it is clear that in many
39 areas of the country the numerical count of racial ethnic Presbyterians was insufficient to

1 command the attention, sensitivity and focus of many Presbyteries. Synods provided the place
2 where racial ethnic Presbyterians could gather in numbers that afforded them a voice that was
3 not available on the Presbytery level. Regarding *Sociological Necessity*, one need only refer to
4 the historical truths that required Federal Government intervention in the local implementation
5 of Civil Rights in many parts of the United States. Unfortunately the truths that called for such a
6 solution were also actively impacting the life of the PC(USA), and the ecclesiastical power of
7 Synods served as the lone buffer for many racial ethnic Presbyterians and congregations.

8
9 The place of Synods in this mix was both programmatic and resource oriented. Many Synods
10 had dedicated staff focused on the particular and peculiar place of racial ethnic ministry within
11 the established Presbyterian domain. Local congregations were resourced with people,
12 programs and funding generated from the Synod, which also evolved into a place of shelter and
13 recourse for racial ethnic Presbyterians unable to access justice, recognition and relief within
14 their own Presbyteries. The historic memory of this era looms somewhat larger than more
15 recent renditions of that reality, but the Spirit of the role that Synods have played in the life of
16 racial ethnic Presbyterian Ministry continues to be the measure by which they are valued
17 among the community of racial ethnic Presbyterians.

18
19 An historical fact that bears mention is that “racial ethnic” prior to the 1980’s was primarily a
20 ‘black and white’ issue. That is to say, that the focus of most matters regarding ethnicity and
21 race in America was conjugated in the context of the ‘Negro / Black / African-American’ struggle
22 for Equal Rights. The Presbyterian Church, in the southern and northern versions of itself, was
23 challenged to respond to the social injustices of the time with ground breaking postures and
24 statements that valued the parity, ministry and witness of Black Presbyterians within the life
25 and body of the church. In the northern church this was evidenced by, among other things, the
26 hiring of Black Presbyterians into the established structure. In the southern church the social
27 circumstance manifested the continuation of a structure that included the thriving presence of
28 All Black Presbyteries and Synods.

29
30 The fact that these All Black Judicatories (like the Synods of Atlantic, Blue Ridge, Canadian and
31 Catawba and Presbyteries like Cape Fear, Yadkin, Southern Virginia, Tennessee and others)
32 were “structured” out of existence (along with much of the programming focused on their
33 constituency) in a process advanced by the ‘redistricting’ that followed the 1983 Reunion, is a
34 fact that serves as a point of reference for the current concern that the fruits of the church’s
35 current plan for restructuring will include *sour grapes* for those historically disenfranchised
36 within the mainstream of American Reality. The Native American concern had already been
37 marginalized and because it was less visible in the ‘nightly news’, it less often received the
38 recognition of having provided the original context (at least in principle) for the Civil Rights

1 struggle. There were also Mexican Presbyteries, which were more remote in connection, but
2 no less relevant in the overall historic context of racial ethnic Presbyterian ministry.

3
4 Today when we use the term “racial ethnic” it refers to a multitude of cultures, including
5 immigrants of all ‘non-white’ races and ethnicities. The fact that most of them, like the Negro /
6 Black / African and Native Americans became Presbyterian pursuant to global efforts of Mission
7 (albeit in somewhat of a different *storyline* of historic context), is one that is relevant to the
8 universal nature of Presbyterian Witness. It is this Witness that moves ‘front and center’ in
9 forward looking discussions concerning the future of racial ethnic Presbyterian Ministry,
10 particularly in light of the demographic shifts occurring within the American Mission Field.

11
12 Also prominent in the Commission’s polling of the church, were the expressions of deep and
13 abiding mistrust – fueled by a general absence of meaningful connection to the national,
14 regional and even local judicatories. This is by no means a *racial ethnic phenomenon*, but it has
15 peculiar ramifications within the racial ethnic Presbyterian community. Those feelings of
16 distant disconnect are exacerbated by the day to day experiences of those within the
17 communities of traditionally disenfranchised people; it is in fact a double-disconnect from
18 society as a whole and from the church, so the distance seems greater—and the isolation more
19 severe.

20
21 In a spirit that recognized ‘what Jesus would do’, the PC(USA) in the Book of Order creates a
22 context for its place of responsibility to such communities:

23 24 **F-1.0403 Unity in Diversity**

25
26 *“As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no
27 longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you
28 are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according
29 to the promise” (Gal. 3:27–29).*

30
31 *The unity of believers in Christ is reflected in the rich diversity of the Church’s membership. In
32 Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God unites persons through baptism regardless of race, ethnicity,
33 age, sex, disability, geography, or theological conviction. There is therefore no place in the life of the
34 Church for discrimination against any person. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall guarantee full
35 participation and representation in its worship, governance, and emerging life to all persons or groups
36 within its membership. No member shall be denied participation or representation for any reason
37 other than those stated in this Constitution.*

38 39 40 **G-3.0101 Councils as an Expression of Unity of the Church**

1
2 ***The mutual interconnection of the church through its councils is a sign of the unity of the***
3 ***church. Congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), while possessing all the gifts necessary to***
4 ***be the church, are nonetheless not sufficient in themselves to be the church. Rather, they are called to***
5 ***share with others both within and beyond the congregation the task of bearing witness to the***
6 ***Lordship of Jesus Christ in the world. This call to bear witness is the work of all believers. The particular***
7 ***responsibility of the councils of the church is to nurture, guide, and govern those who witness as part***
8 ***of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), to the end that such witness strengthens the whole church and***
9 ***gives glory to God.***

10
11
12
13 **APPENDIX B - ARTICLE 8. RACIAL ETHNIC REPRESENTATION, PARTICIPATION**
14 **AND ORGANIZATIONS**

15
16 **8.1** ***The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall provide for a Committee on Representation for each***
17 ***governing body above the Session. Its membership shall consist of equal numbers of men and women.***
18 ***A majority of the members shall be selected from the racial ethnic groups within the governing body***
19 ***and the total membership shall include persons from each of the following categories:***

- 20
21 ***a. majority male membership***
22 ***b. majority female membership***
23 ***c. racial ethnic male membership***
24 ***d. racial ethnic female membership***
25 ***e. youth male and female membership***
26

27 ***Its main function shall be to guide the governing bodies with respect to their membership and to that***
28 ***of their committees, boards, agencies and other units, in implementation of the principles of***
29 ***participation and inclusiveness, to ensure effective representation in the decision making of the***
30 ***church.***

31
32 **8.2** ***Governing bodies of the Church shall be responsible for implementing the Church’s***
33 ***commitment to inclusiveness and participation which provides for the full expression of the rich***
34 ***diversity within its membership. All governing bodies shall work to become more open and inclusive***
35 ***and to correct past patterns of discrimination on the basis of racial ethnic background.***
36

37 ***Racial ethnic members in the United States (Presbyterians of African, Hispanic and Asian***
38 ***descent and Native Americans) shall be guaranteed full participation and access to representation in***
39 ***the decision-making of the Church, and shall be able to form caucuses. Participation and***
40 ***representation of racial ethnic membership shall be assured by the Committees on Representation***
41 ***(8.1).***
42

1 The challenges we are currently facing as a Church regarding racial ethnic ministry relate to the
2 concept of fundamental commitment to this ideal. Arguably, the Church's passion has not been
3 invested in racial ethnic ministry, regardless of the number of "success stories" that can be
4 celebrated. Diminishing resources pumped through a structure of systems that are decades old
5 continues to serve fewer and fewer people. Emerging racial ethnic Worshiping Communities
6 are receiving their due priority, but more and more often it is at the expense of Established
7 racial ethnic Congregations, who are struggling (along with the entire denomination) with the
8 realities of decline in vitality and relevance. All of this while voice after voice echoes the
9 sentiment that the PC(USA) continues to speak 'out of both sides of its mouth' – stating the
10 priority nature of racial ethnic ministry while simultaneously withdrawing resources from the
11 places that would enhance and support it.

12 In response to a demographic reality in which the racial ethnic tide continues to swell, the
13 PC(USA) has embraced Multi-Culturalism as "...the answer..." divesting itself further and further
14 from racial ethnic ministry support. Valuing Multicultural Contexts of Worship could never be
15 'wrong', but to choose those contexts as *alternatives* to racial ethnic ministry would be a
16 mistake that many already believe the denomination to be making. The identified trend of
17 immigrant racial ethnic congregations seeking to call pastors from their homeland of origin
18 speaks to the critical nature of a Cultural Context in ministry. This Cultural Context is critical not
19 only to the Taiwanese, Hispanic/Latinos and Nigerians, it is critical for the long established racial
20 ethnic Presbyterian Worshiping Communities as well. A "...both/and..." strategy is called for,
21 and the PC(USA), if it is to be true to its stated priority for racial ethnic ministry (in a way that is
22 consistent with the Book of Order), must passionately invest in both streams of racial ethnic
23 ministry.

24 A structural reality that does not include Synods with ecclesiastical power presents a
25 fundamental threat to racial ethnic ministry, because it removes a recognized place of shelter.
26 As relates to the concepts of 'injury' and 'harm', they are experienced in both *actual* and
27 *perceived* ways by the racial ethnic Presbyterian communities who have traditionally found
28 nurture, protection and care in a place that may no longer exist. In the sequence that calls for
29 the "repurposing" of Synods then, there must be a simultaneous process of identifying new and
30 effective ways to resource, support and enhance racial ethnic Presbyterian ministry; only then
31 can the angst of "*being restructured out of relevance in, and connection to the denomination*"
32 be replaced by a "*purposeful discovery of a place from which to regroup and grow...again.*"

33 A fundamental element in this entire process is Cultural Proficiency, an ideal that is more
34 prominently finding its way into popular focus. Yet in spite of most of us "*beginning to be*
35 *aware that we should be aware*" (in matters of cultural [and other categories of] diversity)
36 there is a lack of organized consensus regarding the measurement of our progress in that

1 direction. As we speak there are, emerging from a varied set of sources within the
2 denomination, numerous calls for us to fundamentally value the fruits of diversity with a
3 reverence and respect that will allow us to truly grow together as a Unified Community in the
4 Body of Christ.

5 The fragrant flowers of this ideal must be cultivated and nurtured however, and we have heard
6 the voices of racial ethnic Presbyterians crying out (as in the wilderness) for an *authentic*
7 *diversity* that has a shelf life beyond the boundaries of a photo opportunity. In the light of all
8 those who are laboring to craft a Church Adaptive Model, and in the face of a circumstance
9 where the fantasy of “*One Lord, One Faith and One Baptism*” is accosted by the reality of
10 “*Divided Mind, Divided Body and Divided Spirit*”, we would represent the awareness of an
11 overwhelming desire for Cultural Proficiency to become one of the ‘Marks of the Presbyterian
12 Church’; setting a visible example for a world that is sorely in need of one.

13 **CONCLUSION**

14
15 In our journey through the evident possibilities for a structure that would take all of these
16 elements into account and provide a framework for the enhancement, nurture and support of
17 racial ethnic ministry in a Post-Synod Presbyterian Context, there were a number of models
18 that emerged. They ranged from the formation of new commissions and the creation of local
19 advocates exclusively assigned to racial ethnic ministry concerns, to the adjustment of existing
20 General Assembly constitutional provisions. At the end of the day the boundaries of our charge
21 as a Commission limited the degree to which we could prescriptively address these matters.
22 Additionally, all of the primary stakeholders were not present at the table of our discussion.

23
24 In our unified effort, the members of ACREC and the members of this Task Force agree that the
25 discussion we have been marinating needs to continue into a level of detail calls for significant,
26 time, prayer and study. Certainly there is much we can learn from those racial ethnic
27 Worshipping Communities who are thriving and growing. Certainly there is wisdom to be
28 gleaned from the Korean Councils currently and the racial ethnic Judicatories that appear in the
29 history of our denomination. Certainly there are many structural options that have the capacity
30 to transform our denominational ethos as relates to racial ethnic ministry. We find this to be a
31 process that calls for all racial ethnic ministry Stakeholders to engage in a constructive dialogue
32 that can serve to heal past harms and forge a bold path forward into a vibrant and relevant
33 vision for the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

34
35 As Jesus ministered to the Samaritan woman at the well, and the “Good” Samaritan man
36 ministered to his Jewish “neighbor”, we are called – in Christ – into one another’s care. As a
37 Church we must not only embrace, but also live into the vision of an ethos that values the

1 content of each character, regardless of the skin it's in. Christ calls us to this as individuals and
2 as a Church for the very same reason – to provide a demonstrative witness to the world of the
3 Kingdom of Heaven. The PC(USA) posture on racial ethnic ministry must be reflective of this
4 context as it moves to address the question of how the disproportionate injury to the
5 established racial ethnic Presbyterian Community (caused by the removal of ecclesiastical
6 status from Synods) will be balanced in any new structure moving forward; but even if the
7 Synod structure is retained there is a cry for the PC(USA) to re-assess, re-conjugate, re-set and
8 re-focus its approach to racial ethnic ministry.

9

10 With this aim in mind, we conclude that it would be most productive for all of the Primary
11 Stakeholders in the PC(USA) frame of racial ethnic ministry to be convened and focused on an
12 agenda of reflection, assessment, and imaginatively bold visioning – for the purpose of forging
13 an effective and historically responsible model for moving forward in the effort to revitalize
14 racial ethnic ministry on the national and congregational level.

15

16

Appendix #1

Our Guiding Principles

- **We live in a post-Christendom context** that calls for continual re-consideration of our mission, our structures and our practices in order to be faithful to Christ and fruitful participants in God’s mission to the world.⁸⁷ This reality is now undeniable. We live in a new day, a new epoch. It is as significant as it was for the Reformed tradition to be transported from Europe to America, and it requires no less a reconsideration and reformulation of our way of being the church. And if we do not do so, the will eventually die.
- The **missional congregation** in a healthy, faithful covenant community is the center of the mission and faithful life of discipleship of Jesus Christ. Congregations *are* the “basic but insufficient” form of God’s mission in the world. (G.10101) The Congregation is the basic form of mission, but for congregations to be faithful to their mission also requires them to be in covenant relationships with other congregations for shared authority, accountability, edification and missional support.
- **Councils exist to serve the mission of the congregations in their local context.** In the words, of Louis Weeks, president emeritus of Union Theological Seminary, “The highest council in the church is really the Session. The rest of the governing bodies serve the Session.” Presbyteries are “**covenant communities of missional congregations**”⁸⁸ and the center of our corporate life, governance and mission together connecting congregations to each other and the larger witness of the Church. It is a “collegial bishop” charged with preparing and ordering the ministry of teaching elders, it is a covenant community of missional congregations, it is the “balcony” that offers a broader perspective to congregational leaders so that they might serve wisely and well in their specific contexts.
- This report and our recommendations are committed to refocusing the mid council structure on one goal: ***servicing fruitful and faithful missional congregations***. To that end, our structures, especially our mid council structures, **must engage and serve the mission of God in the world through missional congregations and partnerships**, not our institutional or denominational concerns.
- **There is no “one size fits all model”**. Ecclesial structure follows missional function and is always marked by a commitment to being covenantal and contextual. The best ecclesiastical structures are discerned by those who live in it together. They will be

1 contained within the frame of our shared constitutional life, but those structural
2 changes should ordinarily come **from the local context**, not the “national office”. The
3 new Form of Government and the passage of Amendment 10A indicate a shift of
4 authority to the local contexts for discerning the shape of a mission and we want to
5 affirm and build upon that shift.

- 6 • Our structures must serve and support healthy, shared, spiritual and **collaborative**
7 **leadership between ruling and teaching elders.**

- 8 • This report continues, builds upon and lives into the decisions made by the church to
9 accept a new Form of Government and place the discernment of fitness for ordination
10 on local churches and presbyteries. ***Our proposal is a next step in a trajectory that we***
11 ***believe will result in further collaborative creativity by the whole church in every***
12 ***context.***

- 13 • We envision a **“big canvas with a clear frame”**. While remaining securely within the
14 “Foundations” of our theological and governance tradition, we call the church to create
15 the conditions to energize collaborative creativity, missional innovation and relational
16 accountability with **permission for many different models of middle councils to emerge**
17 **that will foster the vitality and fruitfulness of missional congregations.**

18

Appendix #2

Glossary of Key Terms

ADAPTIVE CHANGE: in contrast to “technical solutions” that are built on best practices and known insights or techniques, adaptive change demands group learning and institutional transformation to address new realities, circumstances, and challenges. Adaptive challenges require experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments across the organization. Technical problems may involve intentional effort and accountability or better communication. Adaptive challenges require the organization to change values, behaviors, and attitudes. Adaptive challenges require leaders to learn something new in order to address the situation. In the adaptive context, the leader’s role is not to “fix the problem” but to help the system understand the underlying issues and competing values at work in order to lead the system a shift in habits, beliefs, values or behaviors that will open up new possibilities for facing the challenge.

ADJACENT POSSIBLE: drawn from the work of Steven Johnson (*Where Good Ideas Come From*), this concept suggests that innovation comes by small steps through a process of trial and error and the insights of joining previously disparate ideas into a new understanding. Each small step opens up possibilities for new discoveries and innovations.

BALCONY: a concept of adaptive change, the “balcony” is a place for perspective and reflecting, for noticing patterns and seeing possibilities. To “get on the balcony” does not mean to run away from “the fray”, but rather, to pause and detach, in order to develop a broader, longer-range perspective on the issues. “Without the capacity to move back and forth between the field of action and the balcony, to reflect day to day, moment to moment, on the many ways in which an organization’s habits can sabotage adaptive work, a leader easily and unwittingly becomes a prisoner of the system.” Heifetz and Laurie.

BOUNDED SET: an organizational model in which group membership is determined and maintained by establishing and enforcing boundaries. In churches, these boundaries can be doctrinal, practical, or cultural.

CENTERED SET: an organizational model in which group affiliation is more loosely determined and maintained, not by means of boundaries, but by means of shared commitments to a central idea or practice.

CLASSIS: in the Reformed Church in America, classis is the equivalent of our presbytery. In RCA polity, a classis can be a loose collection of churches who share a common mission, not just common geography.

1 CLERICALISM: a tendency to rely on professional clergy for the work of the church, at both
2 congregational and mid council levels. Clericalism results in the loss of parity between ruling
3 and teaching elders. John Calvin developed Presbyterian polity, in part, as a way to avoid
4 clericalism in the church.

5 CONNECTIONALISM: a core principle of Presbyterian theology, ecclesiology, and polity,
6 connectionalism is the insistence that congregations are more effective at mission and ministry
7 when working together in covenantal relationships of support and mutual accountability.

8 COVENANT COMMUNITIES OF MISSIONAL CONGREGATIONS: this concept, drawn from the
9 missional ecclesiology of Darrell Guder, serves as our working definition of what a presbytery
10 should be. This way of thinking about presbyteries de-emphasizes traditional focus on the
11 governing, regulatory, and judicial functions of presbyteries, and instead highlights the
12 relational and missional character of a Council.

13 CROWD SOURCING: a decentralized form of creativity in which an open call is made to
14 collaborate on a shared project.

15 CULTURE: Kikanza Nuri Robbins writes, “Culture is the shared beliefs, customs, values and
16 behaviors that unite a group of people and distinguish them from others. People belong to
17 several cultures that are usually associated with their race or ethnicity, language, occupation or
18 organization.”

19 CULTURAL PROFICIENCY: a process of discernment and problem solving by learning to look at
20 issues from the cultural perspectives of those involved.

21 DISESTABLISHMENT: beginning with the withdrawal of state recognition and/or support from
22 churches in Western societies, disestablishment in the contemporary United States also refers
23 to the post-Christendom reality that church is no longer at the center of culture.

24 ECCLESIAL INSTITUTIONS: church structures responsible for order, discipline, ordination of
25 ministers, continuing education, mutual encouragement, and missionary work.

26 ECCLESIOLOGY: theological reflection on the nature, purpose, and organizational structure of
27 the church.

28 EMERGING CHURCH MOVEMENT: in various manifestations coming from both evangelical and
29 mainline churches, the emerging church movement is an innovative and ever-developing
30 attempt to reconsider Christian traditions in light of the changing contexts of our flat,
31 networked, postmodern, post-Christendom world.

1 EMERGING GENERATIONS: youth and young adults in Generation X (born between the mid-60s
2 and early 80s), Millennials (also known as Generation Y; born between the early 80s and mid-
3 90s), and the subsequent generation.

4 FLAT: popularized in the title of Thomas Friedman’s seminal work on globalization, *The World is*
5 *Flat*, flattening refers to the “shrinking” and connecting of our world through travel and
6 communication technologies, as well as a growing preference for non-hierarchical and non-
7 bureaucratic organizational models.

8 GLOBALIZATION: the pervasive interconnectedness of global economies and culture.

9 THE GREAT EMERGENCE: in her influential book *The Great Emergence*, Phyllis Tickle suggests
10 that every 500 years the church engages in a cultural and ecclesiastical “rummage sale” that
11 sifts through the dead and dying elements of the past en route to a new expression of life and
12 faith. Tickle argues that we are in the midst of one of these periods, which she calls the Great
13 Emergence, occurring about 500 years after the Protestant Reformation.

14 THE INVENTIVE AGE: in a series of recent books, Doug Pagitt labels our contemporary time the
15 Inventive Age. Most pertinent to our discussion is the transition from the recent Information
16 Age (which is more familiar to many us) to the Inventive Age, which Pagitt describes as a shift
17 from being *consumers* of information to *producers and participants* in information and media.
18 The Inventive Age is typified by Web 2.0, wiki culture, and social networking.

19 KAIROTIC TIME: *kairos* is a Greek word used in the New Testament to indicate an appointed
20 time for God’s action. In Christian theology, it has come to mean a crucial juncture, a moment
21 of truth, a turning point in history.

22 LEARNING COMMUNITY: the ability to learn new ways of understanding, responding, and
23 growing is a necessary aspect of adaptive change. Learning communities nurture flexibility and
24 adaptability as key characteristics needed to meet the challenges of rapidly changing
25 environments. In a learning community, adaptive change is an ongoing reality of life.

26 MAINLINE PROTESTANT: this term refers to the streams of Christianity that represented the
27 majority of Americans up through the middle of the 20th century. Mainline denominations
28 include the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church
29 (USA), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the United Church of Christ, the Disciples of
30 Christ, and the Reformed Church in America.

31 MID COUNCILS: in the terminology of our new Form of Government, which went into effect in
32 2011, presbyteries and synods are now known as “mid councils” instead of “middle governing
33 bodies”.

1 MID COUNCIL COMMISSION: in response to the 219th General Assembly (2010), Moderator
2 Cynthia Bolbach and outgoing Moderator Bruce Reyes-Chow created the Middle Governing
3 Bodies Commission. After the 2011 ratification of the new Form of Government, this
4 commission was renamed the Mid Councils Commission to reflect the terminology of the new
5 Form of Government.

6 MISSIONAL: whether describing theology, ecclesiology, mid councils, or congregations,
7 "missional" indicates that the central purpose and organizing principle of a congregation is
8 personal and communal participation in the *Missio Dei*—the mission of God in Jesus Christ to
9 redeem and heal the world. In missional ecclesiology, there is a shift away from thinking of
10 churches *having missions* to a realization that the church *is mission*.

11 MULTI-PRESBYTERY MISSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS: according to our proposals, after the
12 ecclesiastical functions of synods are replaced by Regional Administrative Commissions,
13 presbyteries will focus on the missional partnerships that have always characterized healthy
14 synods. The repurposing of synods as multi-presbytery missional partnerships responds to our
15 changing contexts by flattening denominational hierarchy and bureaucracy.

16 NEIGHBORHOOD PRESBYTERY: a presbytery model defined by shared geography.

17 NETWORK PRESBYTERY: a presbytery model that spans geographical boundaries and is defined
18 more by shared missional purposes or affinity to particular theologies or ideologies. Networks
19 are often built around more fluid structural organization and are more focused on common
20 concerns, objectives, and relationships.

21 NETWORK THEORY: originating in computer science, the study of how networks function and
22 affect systems. Contemporary social networks, facilitated by developing social media, are of
23 particular concern for our reflection on the changing contexts of ministry in the 21st century.

24 PARITY: John Calvin's basic concept of Presbyterian polity creates and sustains a relationship of
25 equal and shared leadership, authority, and accountability between ruling and teaching elders.

26 PARTNERSHIPS: two or more groups, organizations, or parties forging a relationship for mutual
27 benefit and mission. Partnerships might be formal or informal, simple or complex, involve many
28 people or just a few.

29 POLITY: the structural system of governance for a church. The three primary forms of polity are
30 Congregational, Episcopal, and Presbyterian.

31 POST 10-A: a description of life in the PC(USA) after the 2010-11 approval and ratification of
32 Amendment 10-A, which replaced the "fidelity and chastity" clause in the *Book of Order*.

1 POST-CHRISTENDOM: in today’s Western world, Christianity is no longer the definitive center
2 and shaper of culture, as it had been since Constantine made Christianity the official religion of
3 the Roman Empire. “Christendom”—the triumphal reign of Christianity in Western culture—is
4 over. No longer part of the “cultural establishment”, the church must envision new ways of
5 bearing witness to God’s kingdom in a rapidly changing world. (See “disestablishment.”)

6 POST-DENOMINATIONAL: the current reality in which appreciation of distinct denominational
7 identities has become less critical to the average American Protestant. “Brand loyalty” is no
8 longer a compelling factor in the growth or success of a congregation.

9 POSTMODERNISM: philosophical challenges to the multifaceted ways in which Western culture
10 was transformed by the Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment.

11 PROVISIONAL PRESBYTERY: a temporary presbytery which can be created and explored during
12 the season of reflective experimentation recommended in this report.

13 REGULATORY: an understanding of mid councils that prioritizes the sense of appropriate control
14 and accountability exercised by a mid council over its constituent councils and/or individuals.
15 While this term often elicits a negative connotation, it describes the legitimate need for
16 organizations to live and work together in mutual accountability under a set of shared values
17 and commitments.

18 SAFE HOLDING ENVIRONMENT: in the process of adaptive change, a “safe holding
19 environment” is a place or situation in which experimentation and risk taking can take place. In
20 the context of our report and recommendations, we suggest that Regional Administrative
21 Commissions (taking the ecclesiastical place of synods) will function as the safe holding
22 environment for experimentation, risk taking, and innovation at the presbytery level. Likewise,
23 the kinds of presbyteries we envision will function as safe holding environments for
24 experimentation, risk taking, and innovation in local congregations.

25 SEASON OF REFLECTIVE EXPERIMENTATION: a proposed time in which the church will allow
26 experimentation and flexibility in the formation of connectional relationships at the presbytery
27 level. Among the possibilities to be explored during this season of experimentation are the
28 creation of provisional non-geographic presbyteries and provisional presbytery realignments for
29 specific missional purposes. This season of experimentation will be evaluated by subsequent
30 General Assemblies and will expire on December 31, 2021.

31 STRATIGRAPHY: the study of strata or layers, used here not in the geological sense, but to note
32 the changing nature of the church through time.

1 THEOLOGICAL FRIENDSHIP: a concept suggested by Barry Ensign George which suggests that
2 trust is built across ideological lines through the transformative work of shared theological
3 reflection. In communities of theological friendship, diversity and compatibility are held
4 together in creative tension.

5 WEB 2.0: internet applications based on participation and collaboration. Blogging and social
6 media like Facebook and Twitter are prime examples of Web 2.0.

7 WIKI CULTURE: a wiki is a website whose content can be created and modified by users. Wiki
8 culture is the sense of participation, collaboration, and shared ownership that is generated by
9 this technology. Wikipedia is a prime example of wiki culture.

10 WORSHIPPING COMMUNITIES: a distinct community that gathers around the Word and
11 Sacraments, is under the authority of a council, practices patterns of mutual accountability, is
12 engaged in mission, and is self-sustaining or moving toward it.

13

Appendix #3

Cultural Proficiency: What is it?

Cultural proficiency is a way of being that allows individuals and organizations to interact effectively with people who differ from them. It is a developmental approach for addressing the issues that emerge in diverse environments. In 1989, Terry Cross, Executive Director of the National Indian Child Welfare Association, in Portland, Oregon, published a monograph that changed many lives. *Toward A Culturally Competent System Of Care* provides several tools for addressing the responses to diversity that we have encountered in our work. Although Dr. Cross addressed the issues of difference in mental health care, his seminal work has been the basis of a major shift in responding to difference in organizations across the country.

We like this approach for several reasons: it is proactive; it provides tools that can be used in any setting, rather than techniques that are applicable in only one environment; the focus is behavioral not emotional; and it can be applied to both organizational practices and individual behavior. Most diversity programs are used to explain the nature of diversity or the process of learning about or acquiring new cultures. This is an approach for responding to the environment shaped by its diversity. It is not an off-the-shelf program that an organization implements through training. It is not a series of mechanistic steps that everyone must follow. It is a model for shifting the culture of the organization-it is a model for individual transformation and organizational change. There are four tools for developing one's cultural proficiency.

THE CONTINUUM: Language for describing behaviors and situations. Use the Continuum to describe both healthy and non-productive policies, practices and individual behaviors.

THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS: Five behavioral standards. Use the Essential Elements as standards for planning and evaluating growth toward cultural proficiency.

THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES: Underlying values of the approach. Use the Guiding Principles to integrate with the core values of your organization.

THE BARRIERS: Caveats that assist in responding effectively to resistance to change. Use the Barriers to determine appropriate interventions.

The Continuum Explained

There are six points along the cultural proficiency continuum that indicate unique ways of seeing and responding to difference:

Cultural destructiveness: *See the difference, stomp it out.* The elimination of other people's cultures.

Cultural incapacity: *See the difference, make it wrong.* Belief in the superiority of one's culture and behavior that disempowers another's culture.

1 **Cultural blindness:** *See the difference, act like you don't.* Acting as if the cultural differences you see do
2 not matter or not recognizing that there are differences among and between cultures.

3 **Cultural pre-competence:** *See the difference, respond inadequately.* Awareness of the limitations of
4 one's skills or an organization's practices when interacting with other cultural groups.

5 **Cultural competence:** *See the difference, understand the difference that difference makes.* Interacting
6 with other cultural groups using the five essential elements of cultural proficiency as the standard for
7 individual behavior and organizational practices.

8 **Cultural proficiency:** *See the differences and respond effectively in a variety of environments.* Esteeming
9 culture; knowing how to learn about individual and organizational culture; interacting effectively in a
10 variety of cultural environments

11 **The Essential Elements**

12 The essential elements of cultural proficiency provide the standards for individual behavior and
13 organizational practices-

- 14 • Name the differences: Assess Culture
- 15 • Claim the differences: Value Diversity
- 16 • Reframe the differences: Manage the Dynamics of Difference .
- 17 • Train about differences: Adapt to Diversity
- 18 • Change for differences: Institutionalize Cultural Knowledge

19 **The Guiding Principles**

20 These are the core values, the foundation upon which the approach is built. Culture is a predominant
21 force; you cannot NOT be influenced by culture- .People are served in varying degrees by the dominant
22 culture-People have group identities that they want to have acknowledged- .Cultures are not
23 homogeneous; there is diversity within groups. .The unique needs of every culture must be respected.

24 **The Barriers**

25 *The Presumption of Entitlement:* Believing that all of the personal achievements and societal benefits
26 that you have, were accrued solely on your merit and the quality of your character.

27 *Systems of Oppression:* Throughout most organizations are systems of institutionalized racism, sexism,
28 heterosexism, ageism, and ableism. Moreover these systems are often supported and sustained without
29 the permission of and at times without the knowledge of the people whom they benefit. These systems
30 perpetuate domination and victimization of individuals and groups.

31 *Unawareness of the need to adapt:* Not recognizing the need to make personal and organizational
32 changes in response to the diversity of the people with whom you and your organization interact.
33 Believing instead, that only the others need to change and adapt to you. In our experience, the most

1 effective and productive approach to addressing cultural diversity within an organization is cultural
2 proficiency.

3 In an organization it is the *policies-and practices*, in an individual, it is the *values and behaviors* that
4 enable that organization or person to interact effectively in a culturally diverse environment. In a
5 culturally proficient company or organization, the culture promotes inclusiveness and institutionalizes
6 processes for learning about differences and for responding appropriately to differences. Rather than
7 lamenting, "Why can't *they* be like *us*?" managers and staff welcome and create opportunities to better
8 understand who they are as individuals, while learning how to interact positively with people who differ
9 from themselves.

10 Cultural proficiency is an inside-out approach, which focuses first on those who are insiders to the
11 company or organization, encouraging them to reflect on their own individual understandings and
12 values. It thereby relieves those identified as outsiders, the members of the excluded groups, from the
13 responsibility of doing all the adapting. Cultural proficiency as approach to diversity surprises many
14 people, who expect a diversity program to teach them about others. This inside-out approach
15 acknowledges and validates the current values and feelings of people, encouraging change and
16 challenging a sense of entitlement without threatening one's feelings of worth.

17 Cultural proficiency prizes individual culture while focusing on the organization's culture, which has a life
18 force beyond the individuals within the company or organization. This focus removes the needs to place
19 blame and to induce feelings of guilt. The approach involves all members of the community in
20 determining how to align policies, practices, and procedures in order to achieve cultural proficiency.
21 Because all of the stakeholders are deeply involved in the developmental process, there is broader based
22 ownership, making it easier for them to commit to change. This responds to the issues that emerge
23 when there is diversity among managers, staff and clients at a systemic level.

24 Building cultural proficiency requires informed and dedicated staff, committed and involved managers,
25 and time. Employees cannot be sent to training for two days and be expected to return with solutions to
26 all of the diversity issues in their company or organization. This approach does *not* involve the use of
27 simple checklists for identifying culturally significant characteristics of individuals, which may be
28 politically appropriate, but socially meaningless. The transformation to cultural proficiency requires time
29 to think, reflect, decide, and change.

30 The culturally proficient organization closes the door on tokenism and stops the revolving door through
31 which highly competent, motivated people enter briefly and exit quickly because they have not been
32 adequately integrated into the organization's culture. Culturally proficient managers can confidently
33 deliver programs and services, knowing that their staff and clients genuinely want it and can readily
34 receive it without having their cultural connections denied, offended, or threatened. Culturally
35 proficient organizations can also be sure that their community perceives them as a positive, contributing
36 force that substantively enhances the community and the organization's position in it.

37

1 **Definitions**

2 *Read the definitions for these commonly used and misused terms. Reflect on the definition comparing it*
3 *to how you use the term. Note whether the definition affirms, helps to clarify, or challenges your*
4 *thinking.*

5 *Culture.* Everything you believe and everything you do that identifies you as a member of a group and
6 distinguishes you from other groups. You may belong to more than one cultural group. Cultures reflect
7 the belief systems and behaviors that are informed by ethnicity as well as other sociological factors like
8 gender, age, sexual orientation, and physical ability. Both individuals and organizations are defined by
9 their cultures.

10 *Diversity.* A general term for indicating that many people with many differences are present in an
11 organization or group. Diversity refers to ethnicity, language, gender, age, ability and sexual orientation
12 and all other aspects of culture.

13 *Tolerance.* Putting up with differences with which one disagrees. Tolerance is first in a progression of
14 steps that may lead to valuing diversity. Teaching tolerance is a good way to get beyond genocide or
15 cultural destructiveness. It is the beginning of a process that moves toward cultural proficiency.

16 *Multiculturalism.* The preservation of different cultures or cultural identities within a society or nation,
17 holding each as equally valuable to and influential upon the members of society. The educational term,
18 *multicultural* refers to teaching about different cultures. Multiculturalism differs from cultural
19 proficiency, in that it reflects a state of being, whereas cultural proficiency is a process or a way of being.

20 *Cultural Competence.* A term created by Terry Cross which means interacting with one's clients,
21 colleagues and community using the essential elements of cultural competence: assessing culture,
22 valuing diversity, managing the dynamics of difference, adapting to diversity and institutionalizing
23 cultural knowledge.

24 *Cultural Proficiency.* The *policies and practices* of an organization, or the *values and behaviors* of an
25 individual, which enable that organization or person to interact effectively in a culturally diverse
26 environment. Cultural proficiency is a way of being reflected in the way an organization treats its
27 employees, its clients and its community.

28 *Affirmative Action.* A legally mandated approach to increasing the diversity of an organization. Focuses
29 on having a proportional representation of all the people in the community in the organization. The
30 intention is to have qualified people; the implementation often results in a focus on counting numbers
31 rather than assessing qualifications.

32 *Politically Correct.* A term used to describe language that reflects sensitivity to the diversity of a group.
33 People can *act as if* they are culturally proficient by using politically correct language. A culturally
34 proficient person may be perceived as politically correct, but in reality that person is *culturally correct*.

35

1 Read more about the concept and its applications in *Cultural Proficiency* by Randall B. Lindsey, Kikanza
2 Nuri Robins, and Raymond D. Terrell (Corwin Press, 1999, 2003), and *Culturally Proficient Instruction* by
3 Kikanza Nuri Robins, Randall B. Lindsey, Delores B. Lindsey, and Raymond D. Terrell (Corwin Press, 2001)
4 ©2003 THE CULTURAL PROFICIENCY GROUP 8306 Wilshire Blvd. #7019 Beverly Hills CA 90211
5 323.939.1034

6

Appendix #4

(For the Full Data Reports from Presbyterian Research Services, see attachments)

SUMMARY OF THE DATA FOR THE SYNOD CONSULTATIONS

Based on the summaries of the sixteen Synods

Question Number One: What needs to be preserved in our current middle governing body system?

Comment	Number of summaries
Our connectionalism, networking, shared resources and ministries	11
PJC, accountability	8
Leadership development by synods or presbyteries	7
Support for racial ethnic ministries	7
Cross presbytery missions	6
Supporting pastors	3
Accountability	3
“gatekeeper” for the pulpit, COM, CPM	3
Balance between pastors and laity	2
Ecumenism and relationships with other institutions	2
Financial, personnel, administrative functions	2
Geographic presbyteries	2
Scholarships	2
NCD	2

Summary: The shaded areas are the most frequent responses to these questions. There is strong and clear support for maintaining a sense of connectionalism and collaboration among levels of the church. The focus of that collaboration is particularly strong in support of racial ethnic groups, leadership development, and common mission and ministry.

1 **Question Number Two: What needs to be changed in our current middle governing body**
 2 **system?**

Comment	Number of summaries
Better communication and interpretation with congregations	10
Less administrative structure in the Synod	6
Get back to mission and ministry; reduce “governance”	6
Less legalism and more flexibility	5
Either redefine or eliminate synods	5
Need smaller presbyteries	4
Need more racial diversity	4
Need more support from synod; use resources for mission	3
Less bureaucracy in the presbytery	3
The problem is General Assembly and the presbyteries	3
Emphasis needs to be on local congregations, not on MGBs	2
Get rid of things that do not meet today’s needs	2
Synods should be focused on the needs of the presbyteries	2
Use technology to lower costs	2
Need to be bottom up instead of top down	2

3
 4
 5 **Summary:** While connectionalism is highly valued, there is also a sense that the
 6 communication between the governing bodies is a major problem. Clearly, the governance
 7 structure is seen as a hindrance. Respondents want more focus on mission; less on rules.

8

1 **Question Number Three: What is working well in your experience with middle governing**
 2 **bodies?**

Comment	Number of summaries
"Nothing" or blank	5
Racial ethnic ministries	4
Presbyteries that focus on church needs	3
Clergy colleague groups	3
Presbytery Executive Forums	3
COM/CPM	3
PJC	2
Presbytery partners groups (instead of synod)	2
PW	2
Camps/conferences	2
Leadership development	2
Collaboration, not competition	2
Support from synod for presbyteries	2
Communications	2

3
 4 **Summary:** It is significant that respondents struggled for consensus on what is working
 5 well. As with question one, there is support for racial ethnic ministries and
 6 programs/processes that support pastors, both in the call process and in their ministry.
 7

1 **Question Number Four: What is NOT working in your experience with middle governing**
 2 **bodies?**

Comment	Number of summaries
Synod, as currently functioning	9
Communication between and within MGBs	8
The relationship between the synod and presbyteries	6
Too much staff, too much duplication of effort	5
Leadership	4
Too much governance/politics; not enough mission/relationships	4
Connections to congregations	3
Lack of racial ethnic representation	2
We're better at closing churches than planting them	2
Blanks or "nothing"	2
The financial burden of PJC's	2

3
 4 **Summary:** Nine of sixteen synod consultations identified that synods, as currently
 5 functioning, are not working, and it would seem that, as with question two, the big problem
 6 is relationships and communication. The comment, "We're better at closing churches than
 7 at planting them," seemed to sum up the frustration with rule-based processes vs. the
 8 messy work of evangelism and relationships. There is frustration with presbyteries that care
 9 more about their projects than they do their congregations.

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¹ G-1.0101. “The congregation is the church engaged in the mission of God in its particular context. The triune God gives to the congregation all the gifts of the gospel necessary to being the Church. The congregation is the basic form of the church, but it is not of itself a sufficient form of the church. Thus congregations are bound together in communion with one another, united in relationships of accountability and responsibility, contributing their strengths to the benefit of the whole, and are called, collectively, the church.”

² When Presbyterians were surveyed about the things that are valued and should be preserved in our structure, the synod-related responses were about programs and connections, not about ecclesiastical processes. It seemed to the Commission that there was very little support for “oversight” and polity functions at the synod level and stronger support for those synods that collaborated with their presbyteries to find common mission, ministry, and support.

³ See Ronald L. Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); ix, 104ff

⁴ <http://www.cityclassis.org/>

⁵ <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/> “A [fresh expression of church](#) is a new form of church for a fast-changing world that serves those outside the existing church, listens to people and enters their culture, makes discipleship a priority and intentionally forms Christian community.”

⁶ Steven Johnson, *Where Good Ideas Come from: The Natural History of Innovation* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2010), Kindle locator 494-496: “What kind of environment creates good ideas? The simplest way to answer it is this: innovative environments are better at helping their inhabitants explore the adjacent possible, because they expose a wide and diverse sample of spare parts—mechanical or conceptual—and they encourage novel ways of recombining those parts.”

⁷ See Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011) 129-130.

⁸ “Trends continue in church membership growth or decline, reports 2011 Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches,” *National Council of Churches USA*, February 14, 2011, <http://www.nccusa.org/news/110210yearbook2011.html>; David A. Roozen, “A Decade of Change in American Congregations: 2000-2010” (Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2011), <http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/decade-change>.

⁹ Jack Marcum, “Comparative Statistics 2009: Information about the membership, ministers, and finances of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)” (Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Research Services, 2010), 4.

¹⁰ Jack Marcum, “Comparative Statistics 2008: Information about the membership, ministers, and finances of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)” (Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Research Services, 2009); Jack Marcum, “Comparative Statistics 2010: Information about the membership, ministers, and finances of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)” (Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Research Services, 2011).

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- ¹¹ Marcum, "Comparative Statistics 2009," 3.
- ¹² Marcum, "Comparative Statistics 2008," 3.
- ¹³ Ibid., 4.
- ¹⁴ Marcum, "Comparative Statistics 2010," 4.
- ¹⁵ Dean Hoge, Benton Johnson, and Donald A. Luidens, *Vanishing Boundaries: The Religion of Mainline Protestant Baby Boomers* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994).
- ¹⁶ Marcum, "Comparative Statistics 2009," 4.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Marcum, "Comparative Statistics 2010," 3.
- ²⁰ Marcum, "Comparative Statistics 2008," 8.
- ²¹ Joseph D. Small, "The Travail of the Presbytery," 4. This work was given to the Commission in essay form, and references refer to that essay. It is also available in *A Collegial Bishop? Classis and Presbytery at Issue*, ed. Alan J. Janssen and Leon van den Broeke (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2010).
- ²² In addition to Small's essay, see 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: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992) for a discussion of the development of bureaucratic professionalism as a result of institutional isomorphism.
- ²³ Small, "The Travail of the Presbytery," 6–7.
- ²⁴ Daniel Burke, "Mainline moves to trim bureaucracy," *The Christian Century*, December 5, 2011, <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2011-12/mainline-protestants-seek-reforms-stir-anger>.
- ²⁵ Small, "The Travail of the Presbytery," 2–3.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 5–6.
- ²⁷ See Barry Johnson, *Polarity Management: Identifying and Managing Unsolvable Problems* (Amherst: HRD Press, 1992).
- ²⁸ For a recent discussion of this question by a Presbyterian theologian, see John R. Franke, *Manifold Witness: The Plurality of Truth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009).
- ²⁹ Marcum, "Comparative Statistics 2008," 7.
- ³⁰ Roozen, "Decade of Change," 5.
- ³¹ Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
- ³² Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- ³³ Leslie Scanlon, "Mexican Presbyterian Church votes to end 139-year-old relationship with PC(USA)," *The Presbyterian Outlook*, August 19, 2011, [http://www.pres-outlook.com/news-and-analysis/1-news-a-analysis/11753-mexican-presbyterian-church-votes-to-end-139-year-old-relationship-with-PC\(USA\).html](http://www.pres-outlook.com/news-and-analysis/1-news-a-analysis/11753-mexican-presbyterian-church-votes-to-end-139-year-old-relationship-with-PC(USA).html).
- ³⁴ Douglas John Hall, *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 18.
- ³⁵ Marcum, "Comparative Statistics 2010," 2.
- ³⁶ Guder, "A Missiological Context" 7.
- ³⁷ From a forthcoming essay by Barry Ensign George, "Denominations", with thanks from the Commission for the author's generosity in sharing it with us.
- ³⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching Among Exiles* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).
- ³⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 39–57.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 39.
- ⁴¹ Jack Haberer, "Pastors call for denomination to be 'radically transformed'," *The Presbyterian Outlook*, February 2, 2011, <http://www.pres-outlook.com/news-and-analysis/1-news-a-analysis/10946-pastors-call-for-denomination-to-be-radically-transformed.html>.
- ⁴² Marcum, "Comparative Statistics 2009," 4.

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- ⁴³ Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, 3rd ed. (New York: Picador/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).
- ⁴⁴ Joshua Cooper Ramo, *The Age of the Unthinkable: Why the New World Disorder Constantly Surprises Us and What We Can Do About It* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2010).
- ⁴⁵ Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams, *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything* (New York: Portfolio, 2006).
- ⁴⁶ Ori Brafman and Rod A. Beckstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations* (New York: Portfolio, 2007).
- ⁴⁷ See Steven Johnson, *Where Good Ideas Come from*; Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown, *A New Culture of Learning: Cultivating the Imagination for a World of Constant Change* (Lexington: Self Published, 2011).
- ⁴⁸ Doug Pagitt, *Church in the Inventive Age* (Minneapolis: Sparkhouse, 2010).
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 30–31.
- ⁵⁰ Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008). Tickle identifies the “Rummage Sales of History” as: 1st century: Jesus and the Early Church, 6th century: Gregory the Great, 11th century: The Great Schism, 16th century: The Great Reformation, 21st century: The Great Emergence.
- ⁵¹ An analogous development in literary studies called deconstruction suggested that truth is also relative and dependent on the act of interpretation. At the same time, historical critical approaches to the Bible were calling into question what we can and cannot know about the foundational texts of our faith. Philosophically and theologically, this led to a crisis of authority.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 77–117.
- ⁵³ Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 136–39.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 150–53. For an innovative treatment of how network theory, crowd sourcing, and wiki culture might impact the church, see Landon Whitsitt, *Open Source Church: Making Room for the Wisdom of All* (Herndon: Alban Institute, 2011). See Also Tony Jones, *The Church Is Flat: The Relational Ecclesiology of the Emerging Church Movement* (JoPa Productions: 2011)
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 158–59. See also Doug Pagitt, *Community in the Inventive Age* (Minneapolis: Sparkhouse, 2011).
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 159–61.
- ⁵⁷ Tony Jones, *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 8.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 78.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 81.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, 111.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 163.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 180.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 204.
- ⁶⁹ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional Church in Perspective*, 129-130
- ⁷⁰ With thanks to Darrell Guder, for his generous contribution of an unpublished chapter from “The Presbytery as a Missional Context”. This chapter was the result of a funded research project addressing the ways in which the presbytery could serve the missional transformation of congregations. It was carried out in a cluster of presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) from 1998 to 2008. This essay served as the theological orientation for the various findings generated by the project. It was, however, not published and is distributed with the permission of the author.
- ⁷¹ See Darrell Guder, “The Presbytery as a Missional Context” where this quote and these key missional sources are provided: Newbigin’s thought is documented especially in *The Other Side of 1984: Questions for the Churches*, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983; *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986; and *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987. The

Missional Church discussion has been shaped by the publications of the Gospel and Our Culture Network: Darrell Guder, ed., et al., *Missional Church: A Theological Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, Grand Rapids; Wm. B. Eerdmans 1998; Darrell Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000; Lois Barrett, ed., et al., *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002; Craig van Gelder, ed., *Confident Witness – Changing World: Rediscovering the Gospel in North America*, Grand Rapids; Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999; Craig van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2007; George Hunsberger, ed., *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America*, Grand Rapids; Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996; George Hunsberger, *Bearing the Witness of the Spirit: Lesslie Newbigin's Theology of Cultural Plurality* Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998; James Brownson, *Speaking the Truth in Love: New Testament Resources for a Missional Hermeneutic*, Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998; James Brownson, ed., et al., *StormFront: The Good News of God*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003..

⁷² See 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: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992). The Commission also thanks Steven Toshio Yamaguchi for sharing with us an essay, "How Did We Get This Bureaucratic Model? or What Kind of Presbytery Do We Really Want?" <http://www.losranchos.org/wp-content/uploads/Odyssey-WhitePaper-v7.pdf>

⁷³ See Ronald L. Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); Gil Rendle, *Journey in the Wilderness: New Life for Mainline Churches* (Abingdon Press, 2010), Kevin Ford, *Transforming Church* (David C. Cook, 2008) Jim Osterhaus, Joseph Jurkowski and Todd Hahn, *Thriving Through Ministry Conflict* (Zondervan, 2005) Osterhaus, et. al. offers this definition specifically for pastors, "Adaptive leadership for the pastor involves creating an environment in which the congregation can wrestle with the competing values and implications associated with this problem."

⁷⁴ Emil Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953)

⁷⁵ [http://gamc.PC\(USA\).org/ministries/1001/vision/](http://gamc.PC(USA).org/ministries/1001/vision/)

⁷⁶ For one example, see The City Classis of the Reformed Church of America, a non-geographical classis (akin to our presbytery) that is formed of all urban, church-planting churches with a focused mission. <http://www.cityclassis.org/>

⁷⁷ F-1.0404 "As it participates in God's mission, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) seeks:...a new openness in its own membership, becoming in fact as well as in faith a community of women and men of all ages, races, ethnicities, and worldly conditions, made one in Christ by the power of the Spirit, as a visible sign of the new humanity"

⁷⁸ Steven Johnson, *Where Good Ideas Come From: the Natural History of Innovation* (Kindle Edition: Penguin Publishing, 2008) "The history of life and human culture, then, can be told as the story of a gradual but relentless probing of the adjacent possible, each new innovation opening up new paths to explore." Kindle loc. 393-394

⁷⁹ For an insightful look at enormous value of trial-and-error approaches to innovation, see Tim Hartford, *Adapt: Why success always starts with failure* (Kindle Edition: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011)

⁸⁰ *ibid*, Kindle locator 494-496, "What kind of environment creates good ideas? The simplest way to answer it is this: innovative environments are better at helping their inhabitants explore the adjacent possible, because they expose a wide and diverse sample of spare parts—mechanical or conceptual—and they encourage novel ways of recombining those parts."

⁸¹ For more information on Cultural Proficiency see: "Working for Justice," *Horizons*, Jan./Feb. 2004, pp4-7; Lindsey, Randall B., Kikanza Nuri Robins and Raymond D. Terrell. *Cultural Proficiency: A Manual for School Leaders*, 2nd Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc., 2003; Nuri Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey, Terrell. *Culturally Proficient Instruction: A Guide for People Who Teach*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc., 2003; Cultural Proficiency Initiatives have been implemented at GAC and OGA staffs, as well as the other entities comprising PC-USA's General Assembly. (see report from Climate for Change to the 220th General Assembly) Need link See appendix for more resources.

⁸² Barry Ensign George, "Cultivating Communities of Theological Friendship", 12 (author's emphasis). "Theological friendship is friendship in which the triune God is both the object of *and* an expected participant in our conversation and relationship. Theological friendship with one another is a way of naming what we are called to in

Jesus Christ. Theological friendship: ministers and elders and deacons and teachers together engaged in conversation about and with the living God, is one element of the best wisdom and lifeblood of our Reformed, Presbyterian tradition.” Available at [http://www.PC\(USA\).org/resource/theological-friendship-paper/](http://www.PC(USA).org/resource/theological-friendship-paper/)

⁸³ Ensign-George, “Cultivating Communities of Theological Friendship” “Communities of theological friendship flourish through *diversity and a wise attention to compatibility*. Pastoral ministry is carried out in the midst of multiple spectra of diversity. Friendship happens in the space-between created by differences. Communities of theological friendship flourish when there is plenty of space-between...At the same time, a community of theological friendship can only be built among people who are willing to participate in this particular community of theological friendship, with this particular group of people. This is an extension of the practice of friendliness. There are those who, for whatever reasons, are unable or unwilling to befriend or to be befriended. There are pairs of people who, again, for whatever reasons, are unable to serve as friends to one another. Communities of theological friendship will both be open to investigating such situations, asking whether friendship might be built together; and at the same time communities of theological friendship will have a collective wisdom in discerning when the community must move forward with those who are willing to make this journey together. Mention of “compatibility” will be a complete non-starter for some, fearing that it is no less than a covert rejection of diversity. This anxiety can become something a bit odd. After all, the PC(USA) itself is a community that insists on a significant level of compatibility from its pastoral leaders in particular. Those leaders are asked to commit to a particular way of living out the Christian faith (a specific form of the presbyterian way) that separates us from the vast majority of Christians. Those not open to such commitment are welcome to seek pastoral leadership elsewhere. Communities of theological friendship recognize the need for diversity that genuinely stretches *and* the importance of willingness to join in a shared journey with a particular group of people.”

⁸⁴ Book of Confessions, 9.37

⁸⁵ With thanks to Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons, Moderator Cynthia Bolbach, Eileen Lindner, Joe Small, Paige McRight, General Presbyter of Central Florida Presbytery; Dan Saperstein, Executive Presbyter, Presbytery of Peaks and Plains; Paul Hooker, Executive Presbyter, St. Augustine Presbytery; Graham Hart, Executive Presbyter, Peace River Presbytery; Scott Lumsden, Executive Presbyter, Seattle Presbytery; Peter Nord, Executive Presbyter, Baltimore Presbytery; Steve Yamaguchi, Presbytery Pastor, Presbytery of Los Ranchos; Alan Thames, Executive Presbyter, Whitewater Valley Presbytery; Nancy Kahaian, Interim Synod Executive, Synod of Mid America; Rick Melin, Stated Clerk, Synod of Alaska-Northwest.

⁸⁶ Because all these data were collected between March and June of 2011, prior to the passage of 10a and nFOG, the conversations that have ensued since the summer of 2011 are not reflected in our data. It is an interesting example of how quickly our context is changing and how important it is to find structures and a church “culture” that can respond to these changes.

⁸⁷ Guder, “The Presbytery as Missional Context”, p.3 “Perhaps the most pervasive and powerful reduction made in the course of the western church’s gradual establishment, as it became more dominant in its social and political context, and as the assumption took hold that everyone born and reared in this territories was Christian, was the fact that the essential character of mission in the biblical sense gradually faded away. Mission is not needed if everyone is already a Christian!...The contemporary exploration of the church’s essentially missional vocation challenges unquestioned attitudes formed over centuries that the church is to be defined more in terms of its maintenance than its mission. What is meant is, of course, the concern for the maintenance of the church as an institution. That concern turns the church inward, centers its attention upon itself and its members, upon its survival and their religious needs. The institutional inwardness of western church contradicts the clearly missional calling of the church in the New Testament defined by Jesus on the Mount of the Ascension: ‘You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’ (Acts 1:8). Thus, Newbigin’s question can be paraphrased: *How does the church truly regain its understanding of itself as called and sent, remembering that the term mission means, in fact, “sending” (see John 20:21)? How does the church move beyond the idea that Christian identity is basically a geographical or cultural or organizational concept?* (emphasis ours).

⁸⁸ This definition is from Darrell Guder, “The Presbytery as Missional Context”.