

## THE CASE FOR GRACIOUS SEPARATION

**Whereas** The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), was formed through reunion in 1983 to uphold and promote the six Great Ends, but it has failed to make measurable progress in serving those ends.

**Whereas** during the past 40 years, the PCUSA and its principal predecessor have experienced continuous dramatic declines in membership and viability of congregations;

**Whereas**, the national structure of the PCUSA has become primarily a political institution devoting much of its time, talent and treasure to secular and unbiblical agendas, with the entrenched bureaucracy providing disproportionate leverage to such agendas;

**Whereas**, we are a denomination in defiance of our own Constitution without a demonstrated will among most Presbyterians to initiate and employ the Rules of Discipline as a means of grace to uphold God's Word, to restore fellowship, and to obtain compliance with our constitution;

**Whereas**, the ineffective response of denominational leadership to open defiance of the Constitution is encouraging continued defiance by those who disagree with the overwhelming majority votes upholding our ordination standards;

**Whereas**, the current Moderator and Stated Clerk of the General Assembly assert that the mind of Christ has not yet been discerned on the Ordination issue and by their actions undermine the will of the overwhelming majority of church members who have repeatedly upheld the historic and biblical Constitutional standards of chastity in singleness and fidelity in marriage between one man and one woman;

**Whereas**, disagreement over sexual practice is only the most visible evidence of a church that is increasingly divided, with oppositional theologies and Christologies, producing very different priorities for the church;

**Whereas**, such division results in continuous political maneuvering and power struggles, which dishonor Christ and distract the whole church from His great commission;

**Whereas**, such divisions and differences are irreconcilable because we no longer share a common understanding of the authority of scripture, the person, work, and lordship of Christ, and the commitment to holy living that discipleship requires;

**NOW THEREFORE**, we call upon the whole church to support Gracious Separation through which the PCUSA will be dissolved and two new denominations formed. One consisting of individuals and congregations committed to the exclusive Lordship of Jesus Christ, the authority of the Scriptures, and the power of the Holy Spirit to actively transform sinners into saints; and the other consisting of individuals and congregations committed to a "progressive theology" that affirms multiple ways to salvation, the shared authority of Scripture and human experience, and the belief that polity can bring unity among sinners and saints who do not share a common understanding of the Gospel.

**GRACIOUS SEPARATION** into two new denominations and dissolution of the PCUSA could be accomplished through a four year process of voluntary and cooperative corporate reorganization involving at least the following steps:

- A. **Shadow denominations** created by the two opposing wings of the denomination commence the process. Each publicly defines the distinctives of its theology, christology, and polity, while working cooperatively to implement complete Gracious Separation.
  
- B. **General Assembly** creates Reorganization Task Force (RTF) and impose moratorium on all constitutional changes during 4 year interim period. GA staff downsizes by attrition.
  - 1. RTF, with balanced/equal representation from shadow denominations, directs all planning groups, teams, and materials required for specific PCUSA assets and entities.
  - 2. RTF develops interim arrangements for PCUSA governance while detailed work completed for reorganization into two new corporate entities.
  - 3. RTF oversees voting required of every Congregation, under strict due process guidelines, to determine affiliation with which new denomination.
  - 4. RTF oversees procedures by which every Minister of Word and Sacrament, including all retired clergy, elect to transfer status to one of two new denominations.
  - 5. RTF oversees procedures by which every Board of Trustees of every college, seminary, and other separate corporate entities, determine affiliation/relationship with which denomination.
  - 6. RTF approves names of two new denominations to avoid too much similarity to old name, which neither can use.
  - 7. At end of 4 year interim reorganization period, GA takes all necessary legal actions to transfer assets to new legal entities created by the shadow denominations and to dissolve the existing PCUSA.
  
- C. **Special procedures for particular assets.**
  - 1. Pension fund — divided into two separate pension funds following 4 year transition period, in proportion to minister elections as to denomination affiliation.

2. Foundation — divided into two separate foundations following 4 year transition period based on review of all foundation gifts for donor intent. If donor intent not discernable, gifts divided in proportion to membership of two new denominations.

D. **Congregational Decisions/Affiliations.**

1. Each Congregational vote would require super majority to determine new affiliation. Process would require fair and balanced presentation of distinctives of each new denomination and strict guidelines for notice and voting.
2. If less than super majority decides in favor of one new denomination, then majority would allocate portion of congregation's assets, corresponding to size of minority, for new church development in other denomination.

E. **Interim Presbyteries** are developed by the shadow denominations. Upon final reorganization, new denominations determine number and size of their Presbyteries based on numbers and location of churches and membership. All existing Synods cease to function. All reorganization decisions are thru GA, Congregations and shadow denominations.

F. **Why the whole church could support Gracious Separation:**

1. Renewalists, conservatives and moderates could support because:
  - a. It will allow them to focus resources of time, talent and treasure on what they perceive to be the core mission of the church: evangelism and discipleship.
  - b. It will allow them to structure a 21<sup>st</sup> century connectional church that is downsized, streamlined, missional, and designed to serve congregations.
  - c. An empowering vision for a different kind of denominational structure will generate new energy for continued reform of PCUSA from within during transition to Gracious Separation.
  - d. Some within the church will continue to press for more inclusive ordination standards and the redefinition of marriage, reorganization provides relief of conscience for those who oppose such change.
  - e. Unchallenged control of a smaller, more effective institutional structure is better than continually challenging those in control of the existing one.

2. Liberals and progressives could support because:
  - a. It will allow them to focus resources of time, talent and treasure on what they perceive to be the core mission of the church: justice and social righteousness.
  - b. Recognizing that they do not have the votes to change ordination standards, reorganization would allow for open standards in a new denomination.
  - c. Some within the church will continue to press for discipline, reorganization provides relief of conscience for those who oppose discipline.
  - d. Unchallenged control of smaller institutional structure with unfettered commitment to broad inclusivity is better than continuing challenges to control of existing one.
  
3. Institutional preservationists and employed staff of existing structures could support because:
  - a. Present positions are threatened by continued unrest and conflict, lack of trust in national leadership, and budgetary constraints, all of which will increase due to irreconcilable theological division.
  - b. Two new denominations will generate sufficient institutional positions for all who are called to such service, allowing them to serve without conflict over their personal convictions.

**THE FOREGOING OVERTURE** in favor of formation of two new denominations and dissolution of the PC(USA) Inc., is adopted this \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 200\_, at \_\_\_\_\_, by \_\_\_\_\_, and forwarded to \_\_\_\_\_ for action.

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Attest

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Signed by