

BOP amends Medical Plan, raises dues

By **Carmen Fowler LaBerge**

The Layman

PHILADELPHIA, Pa. – The Board of Directors of the Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (USA) approved significant changes to the medical plan at its meeting held June 29 in Philadelphia. The vote was in response to multiple stressors including financial projections that the self-insured church plan faces an inflection point in 2014 putting its sustainability at risk due to rising healthcare costs, declining enrollment, an aging demographic and potential impacts of federal healthcare reform.

To comply with the requirements of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act the board approved five amendments to the medical plan which will become effective on Jan. 1, 2014:

- “eliminate the preexisting condition limitation for medical plan enrollment for adults age 19 and older,”
- “eliminate the annual and lifetime treatment reimbursement limitations for essential benefits,”
- “modify the in-network maximum copayment amounts,”
- “eliminate waiting periods,” and
- “recognize state and federal government-based medical coverage as acceptable forms of medical coverage for members who have terminated or retired from eligible service prior to eligibility for Medicare coverage.”

Additionally, the board approved several measures related to the dues structure of the medical plan:

1. Increase the minimum dues basis to \$42,000 effective Jan. 1, 2014, and to \$44,000 effective Jan. 1, 2015.
2. Increase the Generic Drug copayment from \$8 to \$10 (retail) and \$20 to \$25 for 90-day mail order prescriptions effective Jan. 1, 2014.
3. Increase dues from 21 percent to 23 percent of effective salary effective Jan. 1, 2014, and an additional 1.5 percent (to 24.5

Read more articles on the June BOP board meeting at www.layman.org

- Investing in uncertain times
- Unemployment and underemployment for seminary-educated Presbyterians

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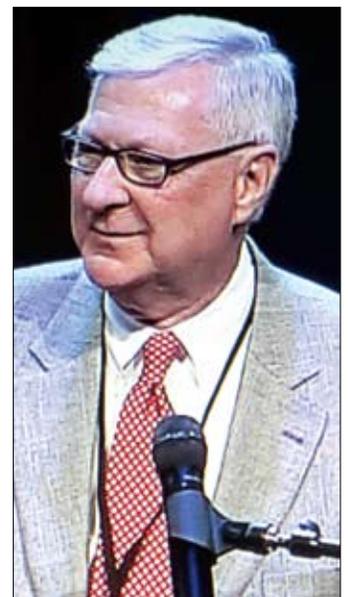
Bill Dudley elected moderator of the EPC

The Layman

The Rev. Dr. William E. (Bill) Dudley was elected as the moderator of the 33rd General Assembly of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) during the denomination’s recent assembly held June 18-22, 2013, in Colorado.

Following his election, Dudley said, “I have been speechless about what I might say to you at the assembly. There is only one great honor for me, and that is the honor that our Sovereign Lord gave His only Son for my life. To serve Him these last 44 years has been a privilege.”

“I have no doubt he will lead us with confidence and excellence,” the Rev. David Swanson, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Orlando, Fla., said in his nomination speech for Dudley. “It is not easy leading in God’s church today, and I am excited that Bill will be moving about our denomination offering comfort and caring to us all ... Bill is a master at crisis man-



William E. (Bill) Dudley

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Presbyteries approve of everything except ‘repentance of sin’

By Carmen Fowler LaBerge
The Layman

The 220th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) met in 2012 and forwarded to its 173 presbyteries for their affirmative or negative vote 11 proposed amendments to the denomination’s constitutional documents. A majority of presbyteries accepted the proposal to replace the Heidelberg Catechism with a new translation. A majority also accepted the requirement that any presbytery sending an overture to the 221st GA must secure a second presbytery’s concurrence.

What we choose to change and what we choose not to change says much about our mutual beliefs and expectations.

Everything passed, except the amendment that would require those being ordained to repent of sin and make diligent use of the means of grace.

Only Amendment 12-B, which sought to clarify the ordination standards of the denomination, was voted down by a majority of presbyteries in the PCUSA. The current language of the *Book of Order* says that the life of the ordained “should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world.” The amendment would have added a new sentence: “This includes repentance of sin and diligent use of the means of grace.”

What we choose to change and what we choose not to change says much about our mutual beliefs and expectations. What does it say about the PCUSA that a majority of presbyteries are willing to limit the minority voice of one presbytery by requiring concurrences for every overture but place no limits on the business that might be generated by denominational agencies, entities and advocacy committees? What does it say about the PCUSA that a majority of presbyters voting in a majority of presbyteries do not believe that those being ordained should live lives marked by “repentance of sin and diligent use of the means of grace?”

As we turn our collective attention to the 2014 GA meeting to be held in Detroit, Mich., June 14-21, what the PCUSA professes to believe and what she practices in the living out of her common life are important questions to ask.

Marriage

The 2012 GA also adopted a statement that “acknowledges that faithful Presbyterians earnestly seeking to follow Jesus Christ hold different views about what the Scriptures teach concerning the morality of committed, same-gender

relationships” and that “the Presbyterian Church (USA) does not have one interpretation of Scripture in this matter.” However, the constitution of the PCUSA in both parts, *The Book of Confessions* and *The Book of Order*, affirms that marriage is ordered by God in creation, affirmed by

Jesus Christ and sustained by the Holy Spirit. As ordered by the GA, the Office of Theology and Worship prepared a study of marriage affirming those foundational truths. Those standards will most certainly be challenged at the 2014 assembly where commissioners will be asked to

redefine marriage accommodating the evermore confused sexual culture in which we live.

Moderator

There is one candidate already in the running for the office of moderator, Heath Rada of Western North Carolina.

2014 overtures and other business

Eight overtures have been received by the Office of the General Assembly for consideration by the 2014 GA. (Posted at www.pc-biz.org)

- An overture to amend G-2.0104b, by replacing “guided by” with “obedient to” in reference to Scripture and the confessions.
- An overture to amend G-2.0504b to require participation in the benefits plan of the PCUSA.
- An overture to issue a request to teaching elders to participate in the administrative costs of the church by paying per capita.
- An overture to direct the Board of Pensions in the distribution of pension benefits of leaders of churches leaving the PCUSA.
- An overture to amend G-3.0106 to allow presbyteries to limit payments of per capita.
- An overture to amend G-4.0206a regarding the sale or encumbrance of property given to a local congregation as a gift.
- An overture to take meaningful action to reduce gun violence.
- An overture to publish the current list of churches certified as relief of conscience churches.

“A *Book of Order* amendment that went into effect on July 7, 2013, states that overtures from presbyteries will require a concurrence from at

least one other presbytery (see G-3.0302d) before being referred to the assembly,” stated the OGA. “The overtures [above], received before July 7, do not require a concurrence.”

It continued that “All future overtures from presbyteries will require a concurrence. The overture title will initially start with ‘NC’ to indicate that the overture needs a concurrence. Once a concurrence is received the ‘NC’ will be deleted and the concurring presbytery information will be added.”

Calendaring toward Detroit

Working “back” from the start date of the 2014 PCUSA General Assembly of June 14, 2014:

120 days is Feb. 14: This is the deadline for “reports” and also the deadline for overtures that seek to change the constitution. This year, those overtures must be submitted by two presbyteries which makes the timeline earlier for the originating presbytery since it will need another presbytery’s support prior to the 120-day deadline.

60 days prior is April 15: The deadline for overtures with financial implications. The timeline is earlier for the originating presbytery since it will need another presbytery’s support prior to the 60-day deadline.

45 days prior is April 30: The deadline for “communications” (which may be directed to the GA from several sources, must be postmarked to the stated clerk by the 45-day deadline but this form of business may not be known to commissioners prior to the assembly).

Now is the time to:

- Familiarize yourself with resources from the Office of the General Assembly (<http://oga.pcusa.org/section/ga/ga220/business>) and PC-Biz (www.pc-biz.org).
- Familiarize yourself with and participate in your presbytery’s process for electing commissioners.
- Download and familiarize yourself with the Standing Rules, Guidelines and Policies, and Organization for Mission for the 2014 GA (www.pcusa.org/resource/manual-general-assembly-ga221).
- Consider overture(s) that your session might forward to your presbytery. Also, consider concurring with overture(s) from other presbyteries as all overtures now require the support of two presbyteries to be heard by GA.
- Become equipped to participate by utilizing sites like www.gahelp.net.
- Pray ardently, regularly and specifically for the 221st meeting of the General Assembly.

2012 statistics show dramatic decrease in PCUSA membership

By Paula R. Kincaid
The Layman

Membership in the Presbyterian Church (USA) declined by more than 100,000 last year, according to the 2012 statistics released recently by the denomination's Office of the General Assembly. It is the single largest annual membership decline since the PCUSA was formed in 1983.

By the end of 2012, total membership in the PCUSA was 1,849,496, down 102,791 from the 2011 figure of 1,952,287.

Only in 1972 and 1973 were the combined membership loss totals of the PCUSA's two predecessor denominations – the United Presbyterian Church in the United States, (UPCUSA) and the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) – greater. In 1972 the losses of the two denominations totaled 103,150, and in 1973 the decline was 139,882. The UPCUSA, or the “northern” church, and the PCUS, or “southern” church reunited in 1983 to form the PCUSA. The membership total of the newly formed PCUSA in 1983 was 3,131,228.

Presbyterian Lay Committee President Carmen Fowler LaBerge commented, “The last time Presbyterians saw this kind of realignment in membership followed the formation of the Presbyterian Church in America in the early '70s. The migration of churches to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians is not noted in the stated clerk's comments but can hardly be ignored.

The EPC has taken in more than 250 churches in the past five years. ECO has 60 with another 140 en route. Those are all losses to the PCUSA, and they're not over yet.”

The number of PCUSA congregations also declined in 2012 by 204. Of those, 86 were dissolved and 110 were dismissed to other denominations. The figure of 110 churches being dismissed to other denominations is less than half the statistic being given by the PCUSA leadership, including its moderator, Neal Presa. In a May 2 presbytery meeting, Presa acknowledged that five churches per week are leaving the PCUSA for other denominations which would

add up to a total of 260 churches departing.

The PCUSA also ended the year with 215 fewer ministers. There were 20,849 PCUSA ministers at the end of 2012, a decline from the 2011 figure of 21,064. While there were 35 ministers accepted into the PCUSA from other denominations – seven more than in 2011, 126 ministers were dismissed to other denominations.

Decreases were shown in the amount of contributions made to the PCUSA. In 2012, total congregational contributions were \$1,910,795,635, a decrease of \$92,769,555 from the 2011 amount of \$2,003,565,190.

In the official press release announcing the results of the 2012 statistics, PCUSA Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons referenced an Oct. 9, 2012, study by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. He said that not only is there an overall decline in membership in all Protestant denominations, there is also huge growth in the United States of the religiously unaffiliated.

“The fact that fewer Americans say they have a religious identity does not necessarily mean there has been an overall decrease in spirituality in America,” Parsons said. “The 2012 statistics challenge us as Presbyterians to connect with the ever-growing number of those with no religious affiliation.”

Blogger Mateen Ellass, a pastor who along with his congregation left the PCUSA in January of 2013 to join ECO, recently commented on the PCUSA's 2012 statistics.

Elass said that the explanation from Parsons “boils down to two things: 1) All the mainline churches are in decline; the PCUSA is a mainline church; therefore it is in decline; 2) Our culture is increasingly resistant to affiliating with reli-

YEAR	PCUSA TOTAL	CHANGE	PCT CHANGE
2006	2,267,118	-46,544	-2.05%
2007	2,209,546	-57,572	-2.61%
2008	2,140,165	-69,381	-3.24%
2009	2,077,138	-63,027	-3.03%
2010	2,016,091	-61,047	-3.03%
2011	1,952,287	-63,804	-3.29%
2012	1,849,496	-102,791	-5.26%

A chart showing PCUSA membership and losses from 1960-2012 can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/oeaeq6z>.

gious institutions – how can we help it if people today don't want to sign on the dotted line ...? Both these reasons, whether true or not, show a desire to excuse the leadership from responsibility rather than a passion to turn things around. There are certain churches that are growing in this environment. Why not study them and invest the denomination's significant resources in retooling itself to become a more effective proponent of the Gospel? Why not return with passion to the heart of the Biblical Gospel rather than giving itself over to causes that are ancillary to the church's true mission?”

He continued, “On the other hand, the denomination is leaking like a sieve when it comes to membership retention. The number who transferred out to other denominations by certificate was up 126 percent from 2011 (52,064 compared to 23,082). The number lost through ‘other’ means (cleaning the rolls, usually) was up about 4 percent (from 95,613 to 99,067). The only category showing a slight decrease in losses from that of 2011 was in number of deaths. This is small consolation.”

Also released with the 2012 statistics was “Miscellaneous Information,” that included the racial composition of PCUSA congregations. In 2012, 91 percent of the congregations were made up of white members; 2.85 percent were Asian; 2.24 percent were African America; 1.42 percent, Hispanic; and 1.03 percent, black. All other categories were less than 1 percent.

LaBerge said that “no consideration of the failure of the PCUSA to keep pace with the changing racial demographics was addressed in the stated clerk's rationale. The failure of Presbyterians to transmit the Gospel effectively to the next generation, evangelize their neighbors and receive Christians immigrating from other parts of the Kingdom is worth noting.”

“The migration of churches [to the EPC and ECO] is not noted in the stated clerk's comments but can hardly be ignored. The EPC has taken in more than 250 churches in the past five years. ECO has 50 with another 150 en route. Those are all losses to the PCUSA, and they're not over yet.”

Carmen Fowler LaBerge

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ECO received into WCRC

The Layman

ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians has been received into the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

The newest Presbyterian denomination, formed in January 2012, will be officially welcomed into WCRC within the next few months but already has been reviewed and received provisionally.

The Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi, general secretary of the WCRC, said, "We welcome the member congregations of ECO as being part of the Reformed family of churches and, consistent with the constitutional basis of WCRC, we desire their active participation with us as together we serve the cause of Christ in the world. In that spirit, and with heartfelt desire, we look forward to welcoming you into WCRC. We seek with you 'The Fellowship of the Spirit in the bonds of peace.'" (Ephesians 4:3)

In an ECO press release, the Rev. Dr. Dana Allin, ECO synod executive, said, "We are thrilled to receive this word and are eager to explore with others in the WCRC how we can deepen our relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ as together we serve in His name."

More than 60 congregations (totaling more than 20,000 members) have joined ECO since its formation. The denomination has two presbyteries in the United States – the East and the West – that make up the synod and includes clergy and congregations in 23 states.

Approximately 40 other congregations have applied for membership in ECO. They are either awaiting acceptance or working toward dismissal from the Presbyterian Church (USA). Another 100 congregations have requested applications.

Many presbyteries in the PCUSA have taken action to recognize ECO as a Reformed denomination to which they will dismiss churches. Membership in WCRC establishes that standard for presbyteries



who were waiting for formal recognition of the new denomination by a third party.

In an earlier interview with *The Layman*, Allin said he was not shocked by the growth of ECO and interest in the new denomination during the past 24 months.

He said, "With the first event in

Minneapolis (August 2011) we saw 800 congregations present ... so to see many congregations considering affiliation with us is not surprising. At the same time, it certainly takes a lot of effort and energy to go through the process to be dismissed to ECO, so I am somewhat surprised at how many congregations are willing to go through that difficult process in order to be with us."

Allin said church renewal, leadership development and church planting are goals ECO wants to accomplish as part of the vision to "baptize more than we bury by 2018."

ECO's mission is to "build flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ." For more information on ECO, visit the web site at <http://eco-pres.org/> or visit The Layman Online's archive of articles, commentary and analysis on the new denomination.

The WCRC, formed in June 2010 through the merger of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC), seeks to unite Christians for common witness and service to the world. Most member churches are in the Global South, and many are called to witness as religious minorities in their countries.

Other U.S. denominations in WCRC include: Christian Reformed Church in North America, Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Hungarian Reformed Church in America, Korean Presbyterian Church Abroad, Lithuanian Evangelical Reformed Church, Reformed Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA) and the United Church of Christ.

Statistics on ECO:*
A Covenant Order of
Evangelical Presbyterians
founded in Jan. 2012:

61 churches

106 clergy

23 states

2 presbyteries

1 synod

www.eco-pres.org

***As of 7/23/13**

The splitting branch of Presbyterian vine produces some sour grapes

The angst is palpable in the June 27 letter from Grady Parsons, stated clerk of the Presbyterian Church (USA), to Jeffrey Jeremiah, stated clerk of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. At issue is the EPC's reception of congregations that have disaffiliated from the PCUSA. Parsons asserts that the EPC can only receive a congregation that has been formally dismissed by its PCUSA presbytery of membership.

Any other exit route is barred, Parsons says. "A Presbyterian congregation, as I am sure you are aware, cannot dismiss, dissolve, disaffiliate or transfer itself by its own action. Any vote taken by a PCUSA congregation or session in no way removes the congregation from the jurisdiction of the PCUSA. Neither the congregation nor the session has the authority to make the congregation 'independent' as the congregation or the EPC may suggest. We do not recognize the action of the congregation and/or the EPC as releasing a PCUSA congregation from the requirements and obligations of our *Book of Order*. If the EPC takes action to receive a non-dismissed PCUSA congregation, such action is not recognized by us as a dismissal and the presbytery of membership will continue to fulfill its responsibility through its related processes, ecclesial and/or secular, through to completion."

Parsons' final sentence in the paragraph is an open threat of ecclesiastical and civil lawsuits.

Parsons acknowledges that presbyteries have the constitutional mandate to have policies in place to effect gracious dismissals of PCUSA congregations to other Reformed bodies. However, the majority of PCUSA presbyteries do not have such a policy. Others have such unwieldy policies as to make dismissal virtually impossible.

He says, "The congregation's presbytery of membership has the responsibility to coordinate, guide, encourage, support and resource the work of its congregations for the most effective witness to the broader community. If a session or congregation expresses a desire to be dismissed from the PCUSA, the presbytery, in light of its mission, has the responsibility to counsel and consult with the session and congregation, and to ultimately determine whether a congregation should be dismissed to another denomination."

That statement begs the question: What legitimate mission does the presbytery have beyond its congregations? Does not the presbytery exist to support the witness of Christ through its constituent congregations? Or, in fact, do the congregations exist to sup-

port the higher governing bodies of the denominational structure, including the presbytery? Has the traditional inverted triangular Presbyterian icon of representative governance been officially reversed?

There is a related issue that is not addressed in the letter:

The regular transfer of clergy from one denomination to another. A pastor is called to serve a local congregation, but he or she is a member of the presbytery. In the case where the congregation wants to leave the PCUSA, the pastor is understandably caught between competing loyalties. In most cases where the congregation votes to disaffiliate the pastor must renounce the jurisdiction of the PCUSA or face ecclesiastical charges for having allowed such schism to foment under his/her watch. Remember Heidi Johnson?

Some pragmatists out there are going to ask, "How many churches are we really talking about? How many churches have taken the disaffiliation route to the EPC?" The answer from recent history is 25 but the forward looking question is: As presbyteries close the dismissal door is the disaffiliation option preserved?

The effect of Parsons' letter may be much broader than churches actively seeking to depart the PCUSA for the EPC. The letter is not only copied to all the executive presbyters and presbytery stated clerks in the PCUSA, it is

also copied to the two highest ranking officials in the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The WCRC is the only international ecumenical body whose membership includes both the affected denominations: PCUSA and EPC. If Parsons can raise concerns about the EPC with the WCRC that may also affect the current provisional membership of the ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians. Why? Because the EPC is one of the two WCRC "sponsors" of the ECO for membership.

Maybe it's all just sour grapes, but I fear it portends negatively of things to come.



Commentary
by Carmen
Fowler LaBerge



Presbyterian Lay Committee

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Presbyterian Lay Committee

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Mission Statement

The mission of the Presbyterian Lay Committee is to inform and equip Christians to share the Biblical faith by proclaiming Jesus Christ alone as:

- The Way of salvation.
- The Truth of God's Word.
- The Life of discipleship.

Objectives

1. To provide reliable information and resources concerning significant issues confronting Presbyterians and the Church Universal, thereby equipping and empowering faithful congregations and leaders to fulfill the Great Commission in the 21st century.

2. To inform and equip Presbyterian congregations and leaders concerning the urgency for greater emphasis on the teaching of the Bible as the authoritative Word of God and regular Bible study and prayer.

3. To inform and equip Presbyterian congregations and leaders concerning the urgency of presenting Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior through preaching, teaching and witnessing, with evangelical zeal, as the primary mission of the Church.

4. To inform and equip individual Christians in Presbyterian denominations to engage the ethical and moral issues in cultural, economic and political affairs as Christ's active disciples.

The PLC is a member – and affirms the respective statements on mission, ethics and accountability – of the Evangelical Council on Financial Accountability and the Evangelical Press Association. It also is a member of the Presbyterian Renewal Network and the Association for Church Renewal.

Craiglow looks to become a teacher of teachers

By Nathan Key
The Layman

Jodi Craiglow has been a teacher, but she has a desire now to be a teacher of teachers. And she is sure that is the direction the Lord is leading.

Craiglow, who was elected as the newest member of the Presbyterian Lay Committee's Board of Directors in the fall of 2012, has earned multiple degrees already and is close to earning more. When she does, she will become that teacher of teachers.

What she means by that is educating teaching elders in the proper ways to share God's Word with their congregations.

"What I feel called to do is teach at the collegiate or seminary level, working with pastors and other leaders teaching them how to teach," said Craiglow, 34. "You can have ministry leaders who know the Word and know theology but can't translate that to people in the pews. I want to help them learn how to communicate and increase their effectiveness in their respective calls."

It's teaching the teachers.

"Pastors are called teaching elders, and teaching is a very important part of what they do," Craiglow said. "I want to make sure they do it right."

Craiglow is doing that by better preparing herself. She taught high school English in her native Ohio for a couple of years after graduating in 2002 from Grove City College in Pennsylvania with degrees in English, communications and secondary education. It was during her freshman year that she decided to attend seminary, so she also studied religion.

Craiglow enrolled at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte, N.C., where she earned a master's of divinity in 2010.

But Craiglow did not feel called into ordained pastoral ministry. Instead, God called her to follow a different path, one to teach and educate those entering the pastorate.

The last few years, she worked toward her master's degrees in Comparative Religion and Educational Psychology at Miami University in Ohio in preparation to begin her doctoral work at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Ill., as she continues to pursue her call.

Having the opportunity to join the PLC Board of Directors is another tool in Craiglow's educational arsenal and a way for her to continue



Jodi Craiglow

learning and teaching.

"What really excites me is the PLC's goal to equip members of the church to carry out the mission of the Gospel. I really take that seriously," she said. "(Lay) people need to be equipped, and it's just as important for them as the people who wear the robes and stoles.

"The educational opportunity really excites me. I'm dedicated to the educational ministries of the church, and I hope to blend the talents God has given me to that end."

Craiglow said serving the PLC also creates

opportunities to network and connect with others and share the message of Christ across the nation, something she holds dear.

"I think it's really important that every part of the church understands what it means to follow Christ, what God has done, and what He continues to do," she said. "At all times we need to be prepared to give a testimony of why we believe what we believe. Being able to use the PLC's nationwide connections allows us to do that and is really a great opportunity. (The PLC) provides resources for people to gain a deeper love of the Lord, and that really excites me because of the lives I've seen changed in that way."

In a similar vein, Craiglow wants to draw off the experiences of seasoned board members who have served the PLC and share her own with them as they work toward that common goal of informing and equipping Christians to share the Biblical faith by proclaiming Jesus Christ alone as the Way of salvation, the Truth of God's Word and the Life of discipleship.

"The healthiest relationships are those that are symbiotic," she said. "Each side has something to give and gain. I'll be learning from people who have lived the faith and be able to share mine."

Craiglow has not always been a Presbyterian. Her father was part of the United Church of Christ (UCC); her mother was Southern Baptist. While pregnant, Craiglow's mother told her father the choice of faiths did not matter but they would be taking their daughter to church.

Staying in the UCC as she grew up, Craiglow determined she was not getting the theological depth she needed and began attending an Evan-

Board profile

gelical Friends Church. She encountered Presbyterianism while in college at Grove City. A good friend of hers was the pastor of a Presbyterian Church (USA) congregation, and Craiglow started attending. Eventually she joined and within five months filled the final year of a session term when an elder passed away. A year later, she filled another final year of a term for the same reason and knew she was where God intended her to be with her faith.

"I really felt this was where God was calling me to be, and I started getting more and more involved at the presbytery and denominational levels," Craiglow said.

She has served as an elder, Sunday school teacher and presbytery representative at Westwood Presbyterian Church, in Hamilton, Ohio, where she is a member. Additionally, she has served on the Miami Valley Presbytery's Committee on Preparation for Ministry and the Evangelism Network as well as a General Assembly Ruling Elder Commissioner in 2012.

Craiglow fully recognizes many of the issues facing the PCUSA these days, and she has dedicated herself toward working to restore the denomination.

"We've got our issues, but I'm committed to working for the health of the PCUSA, to help people come together and work for a common goal," Craiglow said. "We as a group – progressives and conservatives – need to develop a way to somehow work through these issues and not self-destruct. I have to believe that there's some way we can work through this. We are at the point of coming apart at the seams, but I believe that God can and will renew our denomination. I can't and won't believe God has turned His back on this denomination."

As Craiglow sees things, God's presence and intervention is what will be needed if the PCUSA is going to overcome the issues it has been plagued by through the years.

"I'm going to hold that God will stir a change of heart in every member of the denomination," she said. "We are all sinners and fall short of the glory of God. It will take God working within every member of the denomination for that to happen, me included."

"But I'm an optimist. The God we serve is powerful enough to do that, and when it does happen it will be obvious it is Him and not us. God can make the dry bones live."

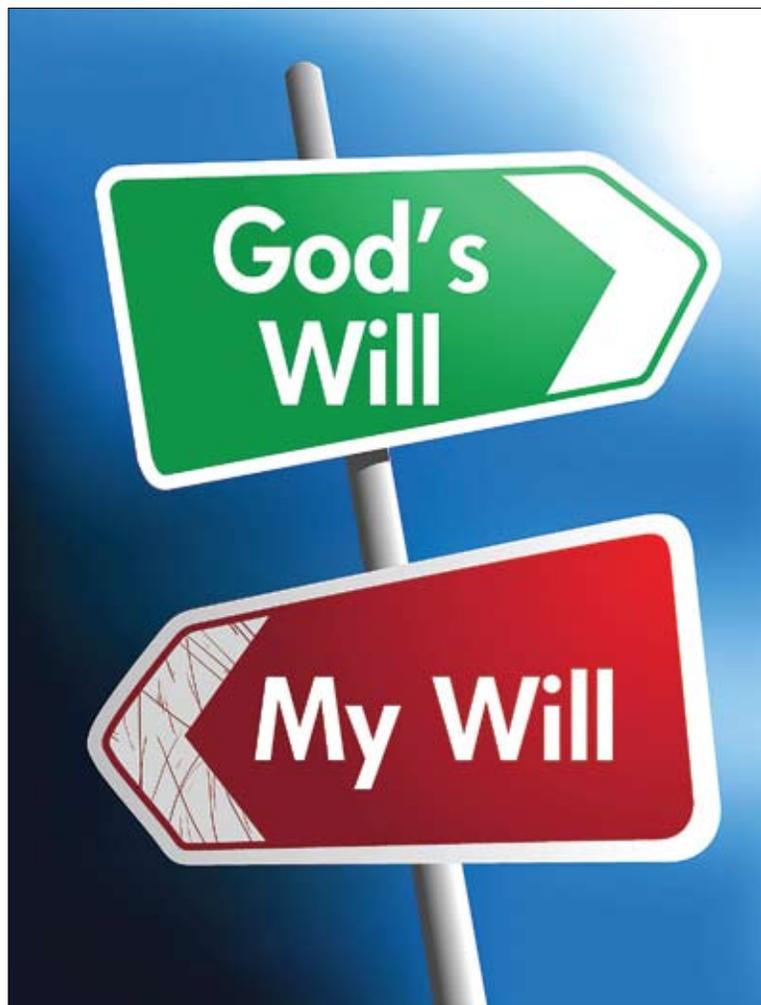
EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Discerning God's pleasing and perfect will

Jeremiah 29:11 declares a particular and personal promise of God to the prophet and, by extension, a hope for each of us. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." But how can we know God's will? Romans 12:2 offers the answer: Those who offer themselves as living sacrifices, those who are genuinely transformed by the renewing of their minds by the Word of God, "will be able to test and approve what God's will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will."

Discerning God's plans and living faithfully into the future God has planned is a personal process for each and every disciple. There are some overarching principles about the will of God and then there are the unique callings to which we have been called. This equipping study is designed to help you embrace the reality of God's will and submit yourself joyfully to the plans He has for you.

Knowing God's will is one thing, doing it is quite another. Abraham knew it was God's will that he offer Isaac in sacrifice. Packing and making that trip, binding Isaac and raising the knife were quite another act of faith altogether. As we enter this "study" it should be acknowledged that



the end goal is complete surrender to the will of God in every moment and every area of life. It is also worth noting that no exploration of God's will is exhaustive and no knowledge of God's will is sufficient.

God has an overarching will for redemptive history and God has a particular will for each of us as we live as His children in the world. We are called to be living demonstrations of grace and

truth – temples of the Holy Spirit in which God would be pleased to dwell. So, does God care whether or not we eat that high-carb, high-fat, high-sugar snack? Does God have a particular will for me in that moment? Yes. Will I submit to His will? Maybe yes, maybe no. Therein lies the struggle. The right hand may not see what the left hand is putting in the offering plate, but God does. The choices we make to submit to God's knowable and known will in the small matters are the real indicators of where our treasure and our heart ultimately reside.

The entire discussion of discerning and doing God's will is had within the context of submission, sacrifice and the spirit of Jesus who prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Not My will but Thine be done." Recognizing at the outset that we have a will (and can be strong willed) is important for the journey ahead. Continually throughout this process we will need to consciously and prayerfully submit our will to the will of the Father. As Romans 12:1-2 says, only after the sacrifice of ourselves and the subordination of our thoughts and ways to His ways will we "be able to test and approve what God's will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will."

One additional consideration before we embark: If you have no intention of doing God's will, why seek to discover it? The great adventure is that we do not know in advance where He might lead!

This is an area of discipleship where the Church sings her theology of surrender in many hymns. It would be helpful to meditate and sing hymns of surrender throughout this equipping study.

- "Jesus calls us" – Cecil Alexander, 1852
- "Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to Thee" – Francis Havergal, 1874
- "I surrender all" – Judson VanDeVenter, 1896
- "Have Thine own way, Lord" – Adelaide Pollard, 1907
- "I have decided to follow Jesus" – unknown
- "Wherever He leads, I'll go" – B.B. McKinney, 1937
- "O Jesus I have promised" – John Bode, 1866
- "I'll go where you want me to go" – Mary Brown, 1892

Carmen Fowler LaBerge is the author of the equipping study that appears in each issue of The Layman.

Your feedback is greatly appreciated as future equipping studies are planned. Share your comments with Carmen via e-mail at cfowler@layman.org.

EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Week I: God's will is knowable, and He has graciously revealed His will in His Word.

God is not hiding, we are. The game of hide n' seek we're playing with God started in the Garden of Eden and it persists for many even today. Jesus came to seek and save the lost, but many run away from His grace and refuse to be found.

Tragically, even among those who are redeemed, many still seek to reserve or hide parts of their lives from the Lordship of Christ.

Again, when they seek to know God's perfect will they are stymied, not by God's evasiveness but by their own. If you want to know the will of God, seek it.

Jesus promises that those who seek will find and to those who knock, the door will be opened. So, if you're not finding, if God's will continually seems opaque and vague, consider that the problem is with you, not Him.

Jesus assured blessings to those who "seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness." That's not a proclamation of the prosperity gospel that promises perpetual health and wealth in this life. Those who have read God's Word and take God at His Word know better.

It is ours to learn the secret of being content in all circumstances, like Paul. It is ours to revel in living as demonstrations of grace and truth, bearing faithful witness to Jesus Christ in and out of season.

If you are doing God's will in the world that He so loves but a world that loves Him not, there will be times when you are at enmity with everyone. To do God's will when no one in our family understands and no one in our culture agrees, we must have the assurance that comes by faith.

Questions for reflection:

1. Do you really want to know the will of God and are you

willing to do it no matter what?

2. What is the most radical thing that you know God asked or instructed someone to do in the entire Bible?
3. Read Hebrews 11. The faithful are those who do the will of the Father. What legacy of faith will be written of us?
4. Sing and consider deeply the 1905 hymn by Elisha Hoffman, "Is your all on the altar?"

Have you longed for sweet peace and for faith to increase, and have earnestly, fervently prayed; But you cannot have rest or be perfectly blest until all on the altar is laid.

Refrain: Is your all on the altar of sacrifice laid? Your heart does the Spirit control? You can only be blest, and have peace and sweet rest, as you yield Him your body and soul.

Would you walk with the Lord in the light of His Word and have peace and contentment always?

You must do His sweet will to be free from all ill, on the altar your all you must lay.

O we never can know what the Lord will bestow of the blessings for which we have prayed, Till our body and soul He doth fully control and our all on the altar is laid.

Who can tell all the love He will send from above and how happy our hearts will be made, Of the fellowship sweet we shall share at His feet when our all on the altar is laid.

Week II: On one level, discerning the will of God is very simple.

God's will is that we should become God's children through salvation in Jesus Christ and that we should be holy, living lives that are acceptable to God, in conformity with Christ.

Romans 10:9 says that if you "confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Period, and yet, not the end but just the beginning of the story! Thus begins the moment-by-moment living of the life of faith. A life marked by continual submission of the human will to the divine, continual transformation from one degree of glory to another, more and more into the likeness of Christ. Simply put: Sanctification.

It is God's will that we should be holy. Why? Because God is holy, and He cannot abide the presence of that which is contrary to His holiness. So, in order to live with God, in order to fellowship with Him, we must be holy as He is holy. Being realists, we recognize in advance that this is impossible – apart from God. But with Christ, all things are possible!

However, herein lies the rub: In order that Christ might live in us, we must die to ourselves. Galatians 2:20 expresses it well: "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Do you understand and embrace the truth that you're already dead? If not, you must come to terms with that reality before you can take one more step forward in the great adventure of the Christian life.

If you think that there are yet things for you to do, things for you to acquire, then you are not ready to do the will of God, for you are still focused on pursuing your kingdom purposes. Only those who have died to self and now live in Christ can be fully animated by His Spirit to advance His Kingdom purposes and fulfill His will.

God's will is that none would be lost and that those who are redeemed would also be sanctified. Where you are on that spectrum is for you to discern and then tend to.

Questions for reflection:

1. As a person who is baptized and professes to be a Christian, do I understand that my salvation from sin and death was not primarily for me but for the glory of God?
2. Do I understand that God saved me on purpose and for a purpose, and am I fully devoted to discovering and doing His will whatever the cost?
3. If I'm already dead (and raised with Christ as His ambassador, a conduit of His grace) what have I to fear?

Week III: God's will is that we should give thanks in all circumstances, trusting Him.

"God is great and God is good, let us thank Him for our food. By His hands we all are fed, give us Lord, this day, our daily bread." God is great and God is good. He is perfectly sovereign. His grace is all sufficient. His love is steadfast and His mercies are new every morning. Why then do we doubt?

Why did Eve believe the lie that God had lied?

Why did Peter avert his attention from Christ to the all-consuming waves beneath his feet?

Why did Thomas doubt that God had done what Jesus promised He would do?

Why did Ananias and Sapphira doubt God's omniscience and omnipotence?

Why do we go to church but then live our lives and make decisions as if God is not present, real and willing to guide us into the paths of righteousness for His name's sake?

Jesus once said that we do not have because we do not ask, but why don't we ask? Why don't we ask God to do whatever He wills with all that we are and all that we have in every moment of every day? The sobering truth is that we trust *ourselves* more than we trust God. We trust *our* ability to reason and assess facts, negotiate, mediate, politic, advocate, manipulate, persuade and control. The Psalmist has one word for us: Fools.

Habakkuk is a minor prophet who lived at the same time as Jeremiah. His conversations with God are tucked in between those of Nahum and Zephaniah. My guess is that most of us have spent little time with Habakkuk. Suffice it to say that Habakkuk lived during a very dry season of history in terms of physical evidence of God's presence and providence. In fact, Habakkuk affirms that Judah is living in the midst of God's righteous wrath exe-

cuted by the Chaldeans. When Habakkuk looked around he saw desolation, depression, destruction, wickedness prospering and goodness maligned. Sound familiar?

Habakkuk took his honest questions to God and trusted Him to answer and to act; Not according to Habakkuk's design but in full submission to God's desire and timing. Read Habakkuk 3:17-19. That is a prayer of faith! That is the prayer of a person whose life is fully submitted to the sovereignty and providence of God.

Habakkuk does what Paul, a prisoner in chains from a Roman cell, commends we do in Philippians 4:4-7, "Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: Rejoice!" God is good and God is great! God will supply everything necessary for the faithful living of these days. God's will is that we would walk into fiery furnaces and lions' dens with the kind of faith and trust in Him that Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and Daniel had. Ponder these things in your heart, like Mary, if you must – but then, by faith turn to the Father and give yourself to Him praying, "Let it be with me according to your Word."

There is great joy in living a life utterly abandoned to Christ. Trust and obey, for there's no other way ...

Questions and Reflections:

1. Where in your life (relationships, finances, health, etc.) do you find cause for anxiety, worry or doubt? What do you know about God that answers that anxiety?
2. What do you fear? What do you know about God that alleviates that fear?
3. Pray submissively to the Father, "Let it be with me according to your Word." Cast all your cares upon Him for He is faithful and He loves you.

Week IV: God calls everyone but not in the same way nor to the same ministry.

God usually leads you according to your gifts and personality. Study Ephesians 4:11-6:1, I Corinthians 12:4-31 and Romans 12:3-8. Utilize a spiritual gifts inventory or meet with your pastor to talk about your spiritual giftedness and the possibilities for ministry in your community and around the world.

All of life is preparation for God's unfolding will. Your family, upbringing, schooling, heartbreaks, triumphs, disappointments, successes, failures, friendships – whether physical, financial, emotional – the path you have walked to this point has been a preparation for the path which now lies ahead. Wherever you have been, whatever you have seen, whatever you have done, God can use it for His glory. Indeed, all that is past is prelude, "that you might comfort others with the comfort with which you have been comforted" (II Corinthians 1:4).

Don't believe me? Consider this: In order to solve a future problem that only God could see (the famine in Israel), God allowed Joseph's brothers to sell him into slavery and convince their father he'd been killed. All so that Joseph could rise to the necessary position of influence in the government of Egypt's Pharaoh. Need more evidence? Read Romans 8:28 and I Corinthians 1:18-31.

God does not call or lead everyone in the same way nor may He ever call or lead someone else in that same way again. Note the unique call and path of:

- Moses: From a reed basket in the rushes to a burning bush to a parted sea to the edge of the Promised Land.
- Zechariah and Elizabeth: From a life devoid of progeny to the parents of the one whom Jesus would call greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.
- Paul: From Pharisee to persecutor of the Church to a life-transforming encounter

with the living Christ to the greatest missionary the world has ever known.

- Philip: Whom God equipped to run with horses in order that an Ethiopian eunuch could come to know Christ and the power of His resurrection.

To what has God called you? Think you're too old? Consider Abraham and Sarah, Zechariah and Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna. Think you're too young? Consider Samuel, David, Mary and John Mark. Think you're too poor or too ignorant or too slow or too ... think again. God calls everyone to full-time ministry as agents of His grace and ambassadors of His Son sent to advance His Kingdom purposes in the world He so loves, but God does not call everyone to ministry as a full-time vocation.

Martin Luther called it the priesthood of all believers. You and I are called and chosen, and by God's grace, we are to be fully equipped for every good work God has prepared in advance for us to do. No more excuses. All the spiritual resources have been poured out and God has made known His will. So we know, so let us now do.

Questions for reflection:

1. What are my spiritual gifts? (If you don't know now is the time for discovery!)
2. What are my passions or heart leanings in terms of ministry? (What breaks the heart of God and breaks my heart as well?) Who is doing that and how can I learn more?
3. If you could join in the effort to change one reality in the world before you die, what would it be? Might that be God's will and your calling? Does it align with what you know of God's character and God's will as revealed in the Bible?

Of this we can be certain: God will never lead you contrary to His Word. Self-contradiction is impossible with God. Test the spirits and test your sense of leading against the revealed Word of God. Finally, test your sense of calling with the community of believers, the Church. And then, having discerned His will, go and do.

Undermining the foundation of the Bible

Review by Carmen Fowler LaBerge
The Layman

Have you ever wished that the Bible said something other than what it says? A self-elected group of 19 have done just that. Led by a member of the Jesus Seminar, ordained members of Christian denominations including Episcopal (TEC), Presbyterian (PCUSA), Roman Catholic, United Methodist, United Church of Christ and Lutheran (ELCA), along with two Jewish rabbis and a yogi, have added 10 additional texts to the New Testament canon of the Scriptures.

The primary orchestrator of the project is Hal Taussig, a visiting professor of New Testament at the PCUSA's Union Theological Seminary. He also serves as professor of early Christianity at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and copastor at Chestnut Hill United Church in Philadelphia. He successfully rebutted two charges of heresy in the United Methodist Church for earlier publications.

Having sought to strip Jesus of His divinity through The Jesus Seminar, Taussig's latest project seeks to strip the Bible of its authority. He does this by putting together a so-called council of Biblical scholars and denominational leaders, including the past PCUSA General Assembly Moderator Bruce Reyes-Chow. In a blog post Reyes-Chow said, "Personally, while I understand that there will be continued backlash about this project, it was a privilege to be a part of it. I only hope that even in the midst of the deepest disagreement, we may all see one another as created and complex children of God."

**A New New Testament:
A Bible for the 21st century combining
traditional and newly discovered texts
Published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
2013; 688 pages; \$32.00.**

The other Presbyterian involved was Margaret Aymer, associate professor of New Testament and area chair of Biblical studies at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Ga., who is well known for pursuing her own agenda even at the cost of fundamental fairness.

The 10 texts that were added to the New Testament to comprise a new New Testament are:

- The Prayer of Thanksgiving and the Prayer of the Apostle Paul
- The Gospels of Thomas, Mary and Truth
- The Acts of the Apostles (alternate to Luke's version); and the Acts of Paul and Thecla
- The 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Book of the Odes of Solomon
- The Thunder: Perfect Mind
- The Secret Revelation of John

The publicist for Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Simmi Aujla, says that the "Key ingredients of this overhaul are 10 forgotten, overlooked or lost until now" texts and acknowledges that they were selected with an agenda in mind.

The added texts advance the feminist agenda and female sexuality.

Aujla says that the added texts were also selected for "the importance of the teachings of Christ, rather than His redemptive death, which has alienated Christians who seek to square their faith with reason."

In the Preamble, which begins on page 483, Taussig describes the work as a "reimagined early Christian

collection." Notably, there is no mention of God's inspiration of, or involvement in, the formation of the New Testament nor in the process used by the council that produced this new version.

Taussig does not suggest that

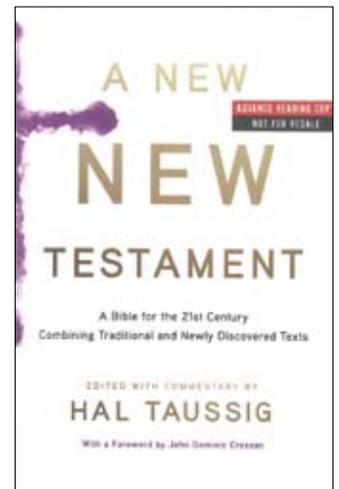
people see this book as authoritative, and yet, it undermines the authority of the New Testament by supplanting the Word of God with other words.

He suggests that the book be read with "a spiritual mood and perspective," taking pains to avoid any reference to the present power of the Holy Spirit to illuminate the study of God's Words by God's people. There is no sense of divine revelation, just the reorganization of historic manuscripts into a canon that suits the appetites of a 21st century social agenda.

In a discussion of what is gained by the addition of the Secret Revelation of John, Taussig says it "strikes a very different tone for God's final victory. Unlike the world in flames found in the traditional Revelation to John's vision of God's final triumph, the Secret Revelation portrays a consummate ending by virtue of Christ's successful teaching about God's compassion and goodness. Instead of the traditional Revelation's final verses cursing anyone who would change any words, the Secret Revelation finished with John proclaiming Christ's vision and teaching."

It is not difficult to see why a group of people with enough hubris to add 10 books to the Bible would prefer a version that did not include a prohibition against the very project they undertook. But of equal significance is to note that instead of supporting a redemptive view of history through God's ultimate intervention, the new New Testament supports a humanistic worldview that says we can all make it progressively better together.

Nowhere is it acknowledged that the Bible is sacred because it is actually the divinely inspired Word of God. So, from the perspective of those who think they are smarter than the Councils that ultimately sealed the New Testament canon, this council regards it all as merely the words of men and women, and therefore open to their personal manipulation.



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Churches that have left the PCUSA recently

To access articles on each of the churches on the list below, visit www.layman.org and type the church's name in the "search box."

For a complete list of churches, visit www.layman.org/discern/faqs-and-urgent-issues

(EPC: Evangelical Presbyterian Church; ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians)

CHURCH NAME	CITY, STATE	MEMBERS	PRESBYTERY	DETAILS	JOINED
Bethany Korean	Carrollton, Texas	344	Grace	On 4/20/13 presbytery dismissed the congregation. Bethany Korean will pay \$270,000 to presbytery for its financial interest in the property. A lump sum payment of \$230,000 was made at the time of dismissal, with a sum of \$10,000 to be paid annually for the next four years.	ECO
First	Aplington, Iowa	253	North Central Iowa	Presbytery voted to dismiss the congregation at its 4/30/13 meeting. Congregation will pay \$93,302 – a figure reached by taking the appraised value of the property into consideration along with two years of per-capita payments.	EPC
First	Punta Gorda, Fla.	104	Peace River	On 2/28/13, congregation and pastor were dismissed. Dismissal terms included the presbytery retaining the real property which would be leased to the congregation for \$1 per year for two years, with the congregation responsible for all maintenance, and a \$25,000 escrow account be established by the congregation for large property maintenance items.	ECO
SPLIT, First (PCUSA) Cornerstone (EPC)	Stapleton, Neb.	56	Central Nebraska	The churches and presbytery reached an agreement where both use the church facility. Fund balances were split in half between both churches. The agreement to share space is for five years and can be renewed annually.	EPC & PCUSA
First Union	Luling, La.	76	South Louisiana	Congregation was dismissed during the 6/4/13 presbytery meeting. Church paid \$10,000. A 17-14 presbytery vote released the congregation. The payment was taken to presbytery on June 11. As of July 23, a certificate of dismissal still had not been issued by the presbytery.	ECO
Kingman	Kingman, Ariz.	91	Grand Canyon	Church was dismissed at the 4/27/13 presbytery meeting. Congregation agreed to a settlement of \$60,000 plus costs of administrative commission.	EPC
Mohawk Valley	Roll, Ariz.	37	Grand Canyon	Congregation was dissolved by the presbytery at its 4/27/13 meeting, allowing it to become a community church. Church paid \$15,300 for property, plus all costs of the process with the administrative commission.	Community church
Moses Lake	Moses Lake, Wash.	613	Central Washington	Congregation was dismissed from presbytery at its 2/23/13 meeting. It was required to pay three years of per capita totaling \$63,000, an amount that already has been provided to the presbytery.	ECO
Muddy Creek	Butler, Pa.	116	Beaver-Butler	Congregation was approved for dismissal in April 2013 for \$13,000 (10% of appraised property).	EPC
New Lebanon	Jasper, Ga.	120	Cherokee	Congregation was dismissed during the 5/28/13 presbytery meeting. It must pay \$50,000 for continued support of presbytery and \$80,000 for land, building and property.	ECO
Riceville	Swannanoa, N.C.	62	Western N.C.	Congregation was dismissed at the 4/30/13 presbytery meeting. The church deeded its manse and the parcel of land where it is located to the presbytery in exchange for its sanctuary being declared free of the trust clause.	EPC
Rockville	Wadmalaw Island, S.C.	125	Charleston Atlantic	Congregation was released during the 5/18/13 presbytery meeting. It must pay the presbytery a \$45,000 settlement in three years in exchange for a quit claim deed to the property as well as an additional \$10,000 to make up the last year of "fair share" contributions to the presbytery.	EPC
St. Giles	Richmond, Va.	375	James	Congregation dismissed at the 6/18/13 presbytery meeting. It must pay \$250,000 to presbytery for property.	ECO
Westminster	Spartanburg, S.C.	675	Foothills	Presbytery dismissed church at its 4/28/13 meeting. Congregation will pay \$350,000 over the next five years as part of settlement.	ECO
Westminster	Burlington, N.C.	85	Salem	Congregation was dismissed during a 5/4/13 presbytery meeting. It made a \$5,000 contribution to the presbytery upon dismissal.	EPC

'Peace Discernment' study points toward pacifism

By Alan F.H. Wisdom
The Layman

A study process underway in the Presbyterian Church (USA) asks church members to “[s]eek clarity as to God’s call to the church to embrace nonviolence as its fundamental response to the challenges of violence, terror and war.” The process, initiated by the 2010 PCUSA General Assembly, is expected to yield policy changes proposed by the 2014 assembly and approved by the 2016 assembly.

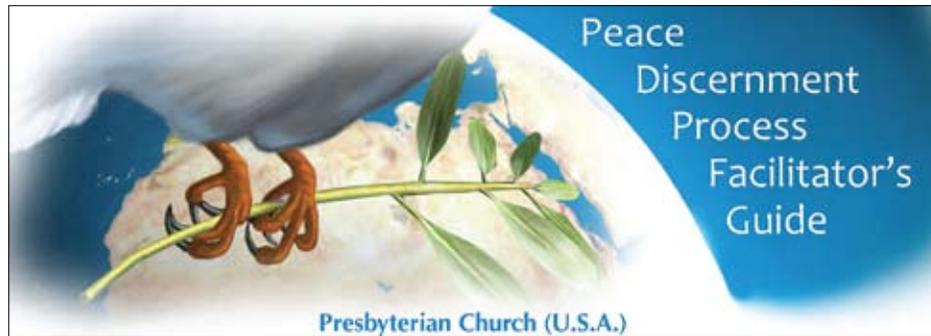
Study materials released so far suggest that the intended result is to move the denomination in the direction of pacifism.

Historically, Presbyterians have not been pacifists. Two of the PCUSA confessions state directly that magistrates may “wage war upon just and necessary occasions” (Westminster, 6.128). They base this teaching on Biblical passages such as the Apostle Paul’s affirmation that “the authority does not bear the sword in vain” because it is “the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer” (Romans 13:4).

Presbyterians were notable for their willingness to fight in the American Revolution and subsequent U.S. wars. A November 2012 survey conducted by the PCUSA Research Office shows 90 percent of today’s Presbyterians believe war is justified “to protect our country after attack by another country.” Large majorities also support taking up arms to “protect one of our allies,” to “live up to treaties we’ve ratified,” or to “punish known backers of terrorism.” Nevertheless, denominational structures are weighing whether to join the Quakers, Mennonites and others who refuse to fight under any circumstances.

The Presbyterian Peacemaking Program has published a “Facilitator’s Guide” for congregations undertaking the new “Peace Discernment Process.” The guide asserts, “[I]f discernment is to be genuine, it cannot have predetermined outcomes; it must be truly open-ended.” Yet that same guide poses leading questions:

- “Should the PCUSA continue to rely on the ‘just war’ tradition as its basis for restraining war, or have the conditions of modern warfare and the politics and economics of war rendered our historic stance obsolete?”
- “In what ways does the church today practice (or fail to practice) Jesus’ message of nonviolence?”
- “Do you, in your own life, see signs of a



The Peace Discernment Process Facilitator’s Guide can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/ovdy65x>

‘military-industrial-congressional’ complex supporting our tendency to use force or threat of force?”

- “Is the PCUSA now being called to become a ‘peace church,’ not simply opposing particular wars but affirming nonviolence as a basic orientation toward conflict in our daily lives, in our communities and in our world?”

The main resource provided to help study participants answer the questions is a “Peace Discernment Interim Report” received by the 2012 General Assembly. “Matters of social and economic justice hold a central place in the Bible,” the report asserts. It portrays the abstract, negative concept of “nonviolence” as “a central theme of Jesus’ public ministry.” The report depicts Christ as an exponent of a “third way strategy that – rather than fight evil or flee it – resists evil through nonviolent means, an approach that outflanks and reverses aggression, sometimes by choosing to suffer.” It downplays the “violent imagery” in Jesus’ parables and other New Testament passages that show God’s anger against sin. The report rejects “the myth of redemptive violence.” It notably refrains from presenting Jesus’ death as an atonement for sin.

“The first Christians lived according to a non-violent code,” the interim report claims. “Indeed, there is no affirmation of killing or war anywhere in the writings of the early church.” In the report’s telling, it was only after the conversion of the Emperor Constantine that “Christians began to take up arms on behalf of the Roman Empire, sometimes with inducements of money, property, and power.” This simplistic account ignores the work of scholars such as Peter Leithart. In his book *Defending Constantine*, Leithart concludes, “The church was never united in an absolute opposition to Christian participation in war.” Long before Constantine, going back to the centurion Cornelius in Acts 10, there were Christians who served in the Roman army

and were accepted in the church.

The report casts doubt upon whether there might be legitimate reasons for war. It refers to “those we call our enemies” – as if the hostility were a figment of our imagination. It puts “war on terror” in quotes, as if to question the threat from terrorist movements. It speaks of “the fear that drives our [U.S.] military policy.”

The interim report portrays U.S. defense efforts as a base conspiracy of the “congressional-military-industrial complex” bent on preserving profits and power. America’s wealth comes out of the barrel of a gun, in this dark vision: “We maintain our privileged economic position in the world through U.S. military might, as well as through military aid and weapons sales to governments around the world.... Militarization makes corporate-led globalization possible.”

The “Peace Discernment” report affirms “an increasing sense of the impotence of military might.” On the other hand, it boasts, “there is growing recognition that nonviolent direct action can be a powerful, alternative means of responding to conflict, as it has proven successful in struggles for justice, human rights, and self-determination around the world – even overthrowing some of the most brutal dictatorships the world has seen” The report pays no attention to counter-examples where nonviolence was not successful against fascist and communist regimes.

The interim report presents the current “peace discernment process” as a follow-up to earlier General Assembly statements on war-peace issues. “Peacemaking: The Believer’s Calling” and other statements from the 1980s were sharply critical of the U.S. stance in the Cold War. Resolutions in the last decade condemned the Iraq War as “unwise, illegal and immoral” and urged withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Summarizing this record of opposition to almost every U.S. military involvement since Vietnam, the report states, “The current position of the Presbyterian Church (USA), then, tilts strongly toward peace.” The new study process appears designed to tilt that position all the way over into pacifism. It remains to be seen whether Presbyterians are willing to take that last step away from the mainstream Christian “just war” tradition that has been their historic heritage.

Steering team believes God is calling PCUSA to re-examine its position on war and peace

As the Moderator of the Peace Discernment Steering Team, I am writing to respond to the critique of the Peace Discernment process by Alan Wisdom (*See article page 12*). First, I would like to thank him for taking the time to read the

Interim Report and the discernment materials and respond in writing. My colleagues and I on the Peace Discernment Steering Team welcome all persons and perspectives, and are listening attentively to all voices participating in peace discernment. From the outset, we have considered it essential that we hear from the full range of viewpoints on these vital issues, and that has absolutely been the case thus far.

Wisdom's critique of the Peace Discernment process is that it is slanted toward pacifism. Further, he implies that it is the Peace Discernment process' agenda to transform the Presbyterian Church from a church that allows justifiable war to one that does not. Let me state unequivocally that there is no such agenda. We have adopted a discernment model for this process precisely to avoid pre-determined outcomes.

We have invited the whole church to participate in peace discernment in order "to seek clarity as to God's call to the church." Genuine discernment is dynamic and open-ended; it leads us away from "what we have always thought" to a radical openness to the leading of God's Spirit in this particular historical situation. Discernment undercuts the usual left/right divide, and challenges all of us to be truly open before God and each other. I would also point out that our mandate from the General Assembly was to engage nonviolence as a serious option; to give it a fair hearing in light of current realities, as the church did in the 1930s.

Thus far, peace discernment is yielding very meaningful experiences for those who have participated across the church. People are telling personal stories from their lives, thinking new thoughts and sharing fresh insights. From what we have heard thus far, we believe God is indeed calling the Presbyterian Church (USA) to re-examine its historic position on war and peace, and re-think its response to rampant violence in society and in the world. Peace discernment is ongoing, so we can't yet say where the Spirit is leading the church. But what the Peace Discernment Steering Team has discerned thus far is that a majority of voices in the Presbyterian Church (USA) are

Letter to the editor

deeply concerned about the horrible consequences of war – the hundreds of thousands who have lost their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan, the millions displaced because of the violence, the thousands of American soldiers who have died or been maimed and the lifelong burdens and costs of their care, the trillions of dollars spent and the damage to our economy.

Similarly, there is a strong majority of Presbyterians deeply worried about the epidemic of violence in our culture – the recurring nightmare of school shootings, casual violence in media, sports and entertainment, and the underlying causes in embedded structural violence against women and minorities and against the Earth itself.

You might think there would be a lot of discussion about the old justifiable violence vs. pacifism debate. Not so much, though most assume that Jesus did not use violence. Instead, what we're hearing in peace discernment is a growing consensus that the church needs to do much more than it's now doing to work for "violence-reduction." Certainly this applies to war, but also to patterns of violence in daily life. There is considerable interest in "just peacemaking," a relatively recent development in Christian ethics that focuses on preventing war and recovering from it. There is new interest in exploring the power of nonviolence as a strategy for social change, an alternative to the myth of redemptive violence, and as a way of life.

What is remarkable about peace discernment thus far is how Presbyterians are wrestling with the violence and war they see as *unjustified and unjustifiable*; what to do about *that*? Turns out the issue is much broader than whether the church will be pacifist or not. It's worth remembering that the just war tradition and the tradition of pacifism share a presumption against the resort to violence. What peace discernment participants seem to be agreeing on is their shared desire to see the Presbyterian Church (USA) live more boldly into its calling to be a faithful and effective peacemaking church. For that calling, there's room at the table for all of us.

REV. J. MARK DAVIDSON

Moderator, Peace Discernment Steering Team
Pastor, Church of Reconciliation
Chapel Hill, N.C.

Survey shows the views of PCUSA

The Layman

The results of the "Religious and Demographic Profile of Presbyterians 2011: Findings from the Initial Survey of the 2012-2014 Presbyterian Panel," conducted by the PCUSA's Research Services, have been published.

The survey was sent to 6,493 Presbyterians in September 2011, and 3,972 were returned – 1,036 from PCUSA members; 1,424 from PCUSA ruling elders and 1,512 from teaching elders (pastors). For the analysis sections of the survey, teaching elders are divided into two separate groups, based on the individual's call: pastors, serving congregations and specialized ministers, serving elsewhere.

The statistics reveal that:

- An equal number of pastors either agree (44 percent) or disagree (44 percent) that the PCUSA should permit ministers to perform same-sex marriages in U.S. states and territories where same-sex marriage is legal.
- 49 percent of members and 50 percent of elders do not think the PCUSA should allow ministers to conduct same-sex marriages. 30 percent of members, and 33 percent of elders think they should be allowed to do so.
- 56 percent of specialized ministers believe that PCUSA pastors should be allowed to perform same-sex marriages.
- 22 percent of members and elders described themselves as "very liberal." 39 percent of members and 38 percent of elders called themselves "moderate;" 39 percent and 40 percent, respectively, used the label "very conservative" or "conservative."
- 33 percent of pastors declared themselves to be "very conservative or conservative;" 33 percent were "moderate." 34 percent of pastors say they are "very liberal or liberal."
- 48 percent of specialized ministers say they are "very liberal or liberal," 32 percent "moderate" and 20 percent "very conservative or conservative."
- 80 percent of pastors pray daily or almost daily, and 50 percent of them read the Bible daily or almost daily.
- 56 percent of members pray daily or almost daily, and 62 percent of ruling elders talk with God on a daily, or almost daily, basis.
- As far as reading the Bible, 50 percent of pastors, 33 percent of specialized ministers, 17 percent of elders and 14 percent of members read the Bible daily or almost daily.

Stated Clerk of the EPC issues a call

‘From transfers to transformation’

By Carmen Fowler LaBerge
The Layman

HIGHLANDS RANCH, Colo. – “The EPC is comprised of 462 churches as of today,” said the Rev. Dr. Jeffrey J. Jeremiah, stated clerk of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, as he addressed its General Assembly on June 21.

“This increase of 280 churches, with 20 exceptions, can be attributed to transfers. While we celebrate and welcome them all, we know that transfer growth is not what we are ultimately about. God has something much, much greater for us and we all know it.”

He challenged those present to consider what similar growth might look like in the context of the local church. “We have grown by a factor of 2.5 in recent years ... think for a moment of the number of members in your church today. In the next three years, what would it be like if that number increased by a factor of 2.5? From 80 members to 200; from 150 to 425; from 1,000 to

2,500. If that was the future, it could not be explained by transfer growth – that could only be explained by transformation.”

Jeremiah asked, “Transformation, isn’t that what we are really about as believers in Jesus Christ?” Continuing, he said, “by the power of the Holy Spirit we have been born again, transformed by death to life and having been transformed we want to see others transformed in the same way.”

He said, “I had a learning experience recently from a Nazarene leader from Mozambique. He shared that churches in his region have grown from 20 to 120 in one year. That was not transfer growth.”

Jeremiah then said that he and other Americans present in the conversation immediately wanted to know “how did you do it?”

The answer offered from our brother was “We stopped relying on ourselves. We stopped relying on others. We started relying on God and we

prayed and God showed up.”

Pleading, Jeremiah asked, “There are certainly notable exceptions, but could it be that one problem the American church faces today is that it’s powerless? Powerless because it relies on itself – its own resources – instead of real power – the power of God?”

He then encouraged his fellow EPC leaders, saying, “I am excited about our future but, if we are going to take full advantage of what the Lord has for us we must move on from transfer to transformation in all of our churches. That will only happen if we rely on Christ and Christ alone to show up with the power for mission that He has for us as He pours out His power on us.”



Jeffrey J. Jeremiah

BOP amends Medical Plan, raises dues

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percent) for those whose coverage includes eligible family members effective Jan. 1, 2015.

4. Increase the deductible for network and non-network medical costs to 1.5 percent of effective salary, effective Jan. 1, 2015.

The last item, increased deductible, can be effected by the plan member through participation in the board’s new “Call to Health” initiative.

Pat Haines said, “In 2014 members will be given opportunity to earn a deductible of 1 percent in 2015 if they comply with certain activities and actions. That’s lower than the deductible they’re paying today.”

She outlined the plan, saying, “They must have a preventative exam and they must engage with an active health nurse if they are called.” They would also have to complete two of a list of five additional options: Complete a health assessment, have lab work and “know your numbers,” have a vision exam, participate in smoking cessation program (if you are a smoker), or if eligible, participate in CREDO program.

The bottom line is that in 2014 dues will rise to 23 percent of effective salary, coverage will include the full family and the church or employing organization will continue to bear the full

responsibility. The minimum effective salary will also rise to \$42,000 as will prescription co-pays.

In 2015 dues will remain at 23 percent for plan members with no covered spouse or dependents. For plan members with dependents (regardless of family make up: partner only, partner + children, or children only) dues will rise to 24.5 percent. The church could decide to pass along up to 1.5 percent of those dues but that will be negotiated between the plan member and the employing organization. The minimum effective salary will also rise to \$44,000.

In 2015 when churches may consider passing along up to 1.5 percent of the cost of coverage to plan members with covered dependents, the potential annual “pass along” cost to plan members is “\$660 at the minimum salary level; \$810 at the median salary and \$1,880 at maximum salary,” Healthcare committee chairman John Hamm said.

In the “dues plus” model that was proposed in 2012 the top value of full family coverage was estimated at \$5,700 annually. The BOP staff and directors have worked to craft a plan that, although not financially painless, is responsive to the concerns raised by presbyteries for “more time” to communicate and prepare churches for the changes.

It was acknowledged that throughout the months and many avenues of feedback the board heard “a lot that older participants should, and

are willing to, support the younger participants. There is a strong sense of community and commitment to the community nature of the plan,” Susan Reimann said.

The BOP heard from all levels but especially from presbytery representatives “give us time. We need time to have discussions. We need time to make decisions. We need time to communicate those decisions to churches. We are going to need time,” Reimann said, repeating what she has heard in feedback since October 2012.

The request for time, preservation of the community nature of the plan and concern for the impact on call neutrality were all considered by the board.

Churches will have until Jan. 1, 2014, to plan for the fiscal impact of the 2 percent increase in dues plus the rise in minimum effective salary. And churches and their plan members will have an additional year to plan for who and how current dependents will be covered. Some may opt for healthcare exchanges under healthcare reform. Some spouses may opt for coverage from their own employer.

Much is uncertain. The question was asked, “What about 2016?” The answer from Hamm was “You’re asking what’s going to happen 36 months from now and we have no idea.”

That is not an indication of lack of attention to the question but a genuinely dynamic national, denominational and financial environment.

EPC GA revises abortion statement

By Marie Bowen
Presbyterians Pro-Life

Revising their abortion statement was on the agenda of The Evangelical Presbyterian Church as representatives from more than 400 churches met at Cherry Hills Community Church in Highlands Ranch, Colo., June 18-22, 2013. Debate was surprisingly vigorous, but centered on *words chosen* to express their pro-life position regarding abortion and not because they have disagreement about their *position* on abortion.

A few years ago, the permanent Theology Committee was asked to write a position statement addressing the bioethical issue of stem cells. Because the topic involved scientific developments that are rapidly changing, they opted instead to send a pastoral letter to EPC congregations. During their process of study they found the original writing of the abortion statement to be in need of updating. Both the pastoral letter and the revised abortion position paper were approved at the 2012 Assembly, but a clerical error left out some of the changed language to the abortion paper. In order to avoid confusion the omitted language was re-submitted to this year's assembly for another vote.

The proposed abortion statement was referred to the General Assembly's Theology Committee. The Rev. Don Elliott, former president of Presbyterians Pro-Life, introduced his concern about the broad and vague language in a parenthetical list of examples appearing in two places. The language – (*life-threatening; physical health; or valid medical reasons*) was deleted in the first instance so that the text of that item read instead:

"A woman facing a problematic pregnancy or an unwanted pregnancy should expect to receive support, love, acceptance and wise counsel from her pastor(s), counselor(s), physician(s) and fellow Christians." Regardless of the woman's decision, the Church should always provide compassionate Biblical and spiritual guidance to that individual."

The Rev. Matthew Everhard, author of *Abortion: The Evangelical Perspective*, stated that he was more concerned by the use of the same language in another place in the document. The Rev. Ken Thomas moved an amendment to strike the wording in the parentheses replacing it with (e.g. "those which endanger the mother's life"), to address the concerns cited by Everhard.

The final language adopted read as follows:

"Christians should individually and corporately oppose abortion (except under the most extreme of circumstances that endanger the life of the mother), and do everything in their power to provide support groups, para-church

ministries and sponsoring agencies which offer viable alternatives to abortion."

Additional changes were made to substitute more pastoral language in other paragraphs expressing support for women choosing life for her child and support and care for those children. The amended language was then considered by the entire assembly on June 21.

Not all commissioners were comfortable with the language of an exception for abortion even for circumstances endangering the life of the mother. Some expressed concern that adding any exception opened the door to abortion. An amendment inserting the word "*physical*" before "life of the mother" was approved and the new language was adopted by voice vote with a few "no" votes scattered across the gathering. From the debate it was easy to surmise that those voting against the language felt there were *no* circumstances that warranted abortion including when the physical life of the mother was endangered.

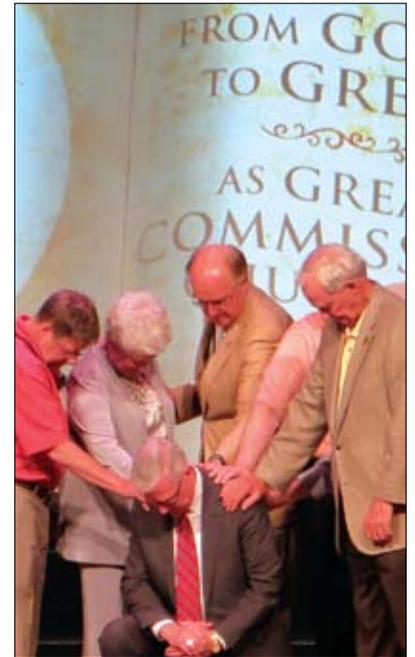
Additional edits to the document changed "*give up a child for adoption*" to "*place a child for adoption*," and wherever the document referred to "*unwanted pregnancy*" the phrase was changed to "*unexpected pregnancy*." As one commissioner explained, "*Every child is wanted by God*." Language was altered in a section about reminding men of their responsibility and obligation to care for their children to make it more pastoral and supportive.

New language was added to the statement calling the church to "actively oppose the killing of human embryos through the extraction of stem cells for medical research or treatment" and to "oppose the practice of producing more embryos by *in vitro* fertilization that would be implanted *in utero*, which would either be destroyed immediately or stored frozen with the strong practical likelihood of later destruction."

For Presbyterians newly transferred from the Presbyterian Church (USA) it was refreshing to participate in substantive debate on the nuances of wording in a gathering where there was clearly essential unity about standing against abortion and acknowledging that every human life is sacred and precious to God.

Commissioners were clearly intent on giving careful attention to the pastoral expression of the pro-life position they hold. Refreshing indeed for this pro-life Presbyterian who remains a member of the PCUSA where abortion is condoned, choice to abort is advocated, and abortions are paid for with member tithes.

Marie Bowen is the executive director of Presbyterians Pro-Life (www.ppl.org).



Dudley kneels as the assembly prays for him.

Dudley elected moderator of EPC

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agement. He has an amazing ability to read a room, discern the needs, and apply caring and healing."

Dudley has been the senior pastor of Signal Mountain Presbyterian Church in Signal Mountain, Tenn., for 24 years. A native of Opelika, Ala., he graduated from Auburn University and received both his Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry degrees from Columbia Theological Seminary.

Dudley has served as associate pastor of Memorial Presbyterian Church in Montgomery, Ala.; pastor of Newnan Presbyterian Church in Newnan, Ga.; and, again at Memorial Church as senior pastor for 14 years before his call to Signal Mountain.

After 38 years of ministry in the Presbyterian Church (USA), in 2007, he transferred his ordination to the EPC. At that same time, Signal Mountain also transferred into the EPC.

His wife is the former Julia Lake Vass, and they have three children.

The Presbyterian Story

Origins & Progress of a Reformed Tradition

By **S. Donald Fortson III**

Professor of Church History, Reformed Theological Seminary

Being Presbyterian involves multiple layers of identity and connection. As Christians, Presbyterians are “catholic,” sharing the common heritage of ancient Christianity with all believers, of all times, in all places.

Presbyterians are Protestant by conviction sharing the rich spiritual heritage of the sixteenth century and the unique contributions of the Reformed Tradition.

Historically, Presbyterians are also part of the evangelical movement, embracing the legacy of the eighteenth-century revivals (awakenings) in America and Britain. Each of these historic layers is equally important to Presbyterian identity and this book will seek to underscore that reality.

In The Presbyterian Story, Don Fortson brings together a multitude of threads of church history, while writing in a style that is easily accessible. My understanding of my own “family history” was expanded, as well as discovering more about some near-relatives with whom I was not well acquainted. For a primer on church history and the varied branches of the Presbyterian family story, I warmly commend Fortson’s book.

Dr. Robert Austell,

Pastor of Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church
Charlotte, NC, PCUSA

Don is a pre-eminent 21st century historian of Presbyterianism in America. A thorough and thoughtful scholar, he presents the history of our branch of the church in a way that meets the high standards of academic scholarship and is understandable and enjoyable for the layperson who wants to learn more about how our past has shaped our church today.

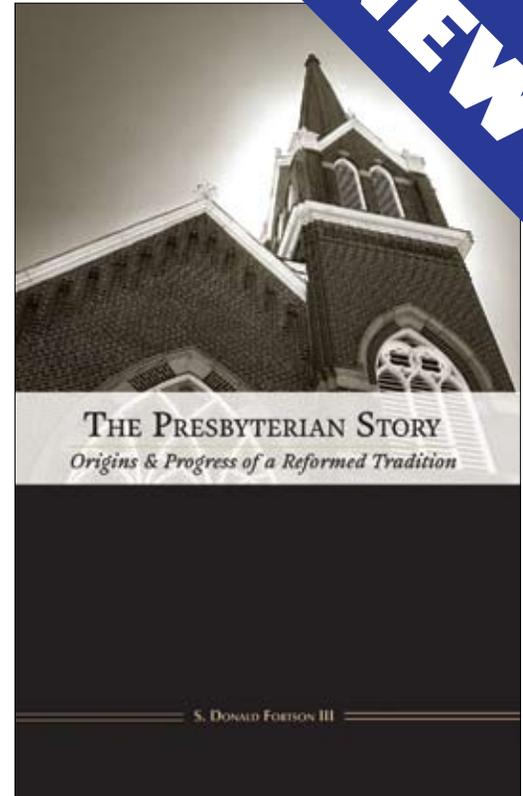
Dr. Jeff Jeremiah,

Stated Clerk of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church

The Presbyterian Story is a great introduction to the Presbyterian tradition, mediated to this country from the British and Continental Reformations. I especially appreciate the way in which Fortson highlights robust orthodoxy and evangelical warmth as natural allies over these past centuries.

Dr. Kenneth J. Stewart,

Professor of Theological Studies, Covenant College
Presbyterian Church in America



From the Preface:

“A unique feature of this book is the Connections section at the end of each chapter. The author realizes that not everyone is hooked on history like he is and thus asking the ‘so what’ question of historical accounts is legitimate. All chapters conclude with suggestions on how particular portions of the story still have relevance to the present and, while these suggestions are not the last word, they should stimulate thinking and application of the historical materials.”

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