

**THE PRESBYTERY OF COASTAL CAROLINA
POLICY FOR CHURCHES SEEKING TO SEPARATE FROM
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA)**

(Approved & adopted at the 6/18/09 Stated Presbytery Meeting)
(Edited 2/17/12 for conformity to Book of Order amendments)

“The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity” in the first part of the Book of Order are sufficient to guide the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina in any crisis if honored by all in the church including its officers and congregations. The Presbyterian Church (USA), The Presbytery of Coastal Carolina, and its particular churches are members of the Body of Christ. Faith-group affiliation does not alter such membership. Should a congregation vote to separate from the Presbyterian Church (USA), The Presbytery of Coastal Carolina under the guidance of the Holy Spirit shall maintain communications and a relationship in service of Our Lord to the extent possible. The Presbytery of Coastal Carolina does not intend to appeal to civil authorities to judge or decide its relationship and responsibilities with its member churches.

“THE FOUNDATIONS OF PRESBYTERIAN POLITY,” PART ONE OF THE BOOK OF ORDER,
IS THE RECOMMENDED FOUNDATION FOR DISCUSSION

Separation from the Presbyterian Church (USA) is a serious issue for the congregation and for The Presbytery of Coastal Carolina. Even if a congregation votes for separation, it is the intent of The Presbytery of Coastal Carolina that the relationship not be permanently broken. In an effort to enable a proper discussion during the process, the following topics in Part One of the Book of Order are recommended for careful consideration.

1. **The Head of the Church.** All power in heaven and earth is given to Jesus Christ who calls the church into being and who gives his church its faith and life, its unity and mission, its officers and ordinances. (See F-1.02)

2. **The Great Ends of the Church.** The areas listed focus on the proper tasks and mission of a Presbyterian Church. These are “the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of mankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservations of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.” (F-1.0304)

3. **The Historic Principles of Church Order.** The following are brief references to the concepts in this section that may be subject matter for any discussion.

(F-3.0101a, b) “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of Men...” “Therefore, we consider the rights of private judgment, in all matters that respect religion, as universal and unalienable: We do not even wish to see any religious constitution aided by civil power...”

(F-3.0104) “That truth is in order to goodness...” and its tendency is to promote holiness. “And that no opinion can either be more pernicious or more absurd than that which brings truth and falsehood upon a level, and represents it as of no consequence what a man’s opinions are....we are persuaded there an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty.’

(F-3.0105) “...we also believe that there are truths and forms with respect to which men of good characters and principles may differ. And in all these we think it the duty of both of private Christians and societies to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other.”

(F-3.0107) “That all Church power, whether exercised by the body in general or in the way of representation by delegated authority, is only ministerial and declaration; that is to say, that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners;... “

(F-3.0108) “Since ecclesiastical discipline just be purely moral or spiritual in its object and not attended with any civil effects, it can derive no force whatever but from its own justice, the approbation of an impartial public, and the countenance and blessing of the great Head of the Church Universal.”

4. **The Principles of Presbyterian Government**

(F-3.02) “That the several different congregations of believers taken collectively constitute one Church of Christ, called emphatically the Church;” All parts of the Church are to be united and the majority shall govern with the minority having right of appeal but ultimately decisions are to be made “...by the collected wisdom and united voice of the whole Church. For these principles and this procedure, the example of the apostles and the practice of the primitive Church are considered authority.”

PROCEDURE

1. Should a congregation desire to explore separation from the Presbyterian Church (USA) to another Reformed denomination, the Committee on Ministry of The Presbytery of Coastal Carolina shall appoint a Pastoral Committee to enter discussion with the congregation and to ensure a fair and valid vote. The Pastoral Committee shall adhere to the procedures as defined in G-3.0303 of the Book of Order. The hearing procedures required by an administrative commission as defined in G-3.0109b of the Book of Order shall apply to the Pastoral Committee.

2. Should a congregation decide to call a Congregational Meeting to vote on separation from the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Pastoral Committee shall assure a fair and valid vote by requesting the Sessions of the Congregation to adhere to the following procedure:

Forty-five days prior to the Congregational Meeting to vote on the issue a list of the active members of the church is to be provided to the Pastoral Committee.

On the Tuesday before the Congregational Meeting a list of any members who have been added to the active membership by joining the church or by transfer from an inactive roll is to be provided to the Pastoral Committee.

Whether or not a member voted to separate from the Presbyterian Church (USA) shall not be recorded but each member voting shall sign a roll provided by the Pastoral Committee for the sole purpose of verifying that only active members of the church voted.

3. Should the active members present and voting approve separation from the Presbyterian Church (USA) by ninety percent or more, The Presbytery of Coastal Carolina ordinarily shall permit the congregation to separate with its property.
4. Should the active members present and voting approve the separation from the Presbyterian Church (USA) by seventy-five percent or fewer, The Presbytery of Coastal Carolina ordinarily shall retain the property and support the continuing life of the church with the members of the congregation remaining.
5. Should the active members present and voting approve the separation from the Presbyterian Church (USA) by fewer than ninety percent but more than seventy-five percent, the Pastoral Committee shall:

Report to The Presbytery of Coastal Carolina that the active members of the congregation who desire to continue as a member church of the Presbyterian Church (USA) shall retain use of the property:

or recommend to The Presbytery of Coastal Carolina for its action that the property be transferred to the congregation voting to separate from the Presbyterian Church (USA).