

August 29, 2011

Fellowship of Presbyterians Debrief

- Gathering of Fellowship of Presbyterians - August 25 - 26, 2011
Minneapolis, MN
- Over 1,900 people from 49 states and 3 countries beyond the U.S.
- Over 830 congregations represented along with Presbytery and denominational leaders
- Worship, Prayer, General Sessions, Table Groups and Breakout Sessions

Definitions:

“The Fellowship” – An association of reformed bodies.

“New Reformed Body” – A proposed entity of reformed congregations.

Why a Fellowship of Presbyterians?

- 10A Amendment - A signal of something larger yet. Something has changed between us and our denomination
- One group calls itself inclusive, while the other group refers to them as unrighteous
- "We are just a movement"
- We no longer expect to renew the PCUSA by outvoting it. This is not the solution.
- The question is...what are the solutions?
- Adaptive changes where there are competing values
- Not a tactical change, such as changing the Book of Order, we need an adaptive change
- Experiencing a generational disconnect
- Looks like denominationalism in the US is unsustainable
- The PCUSA is dying...no net growth in years
- We are "deathly ill" - doesn't mean that we are dying

Statistics:

- 2010 - 89,990 people entering it
- 1960 - 288,000 people entering it in just the northern church
- In 2010 - 151,000 Presbyterians left
- In 2010 - only started 12 New churches
- Solemn Crisis/Pernicious Errors/Deluded Multitudes
- We need Intervention - we need to shepherd something
- Individuals and congregations need a “safe haven.”

We hold to some values

- We are not mad - we should be gracious make good sound decisions and not judgements. Louisville is not the problem - There is a virus within our church
- We are living in humility
- Our highest value is in our congregations - don't want to do anything that causes our congregations to fracture

- Connect to PCUSA where possible and differentiate where necessary
 - “Revival of Reformed Orthodoxy is sorely needed.” (Dr. Richard Mauw, President of Fuller Seminary)
- “The truth of God is not determined by majority vote.” (Dr. Ken Bailey)

Redefine our Theological Clarity

- During the next 3 months we will be putting together a Theological Statement for our Constitution
- We want a Missional Passion
- We want new Communities of Worship
- We believe that Presbyteries should be small
- We should have global connections
- A New Reformed Body will be formed (Where is the Spirit leading us?)

John Stott:

- The essential lostness of humanity
- The uniqueness of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord
- The authority of Scripture
- Need of salvation

Envisioning a New Reformed Body

- People are engaged to the extent that they are able to participate
- Do we need a New Reformed Body?
- It will only add value if we enhance the work of the congregations
- The world doesn't need another denomination - there are already 35,000 denominations worldwide

Why Should You Join?

- Ache for a better future for our children and our grandchildren - the local church is the hope of the world (God's Plan A)
- Rapidly changing world - social media, Facebook, Twitter, etc.
- Different options for different congregations (Not a one size fits all)
- We need differentiation for our congregations from the PCUSA
- The brand (PCUSA) has become toxic

The New Reformed Body

- The new body does exist although it is an empty warehouse at present
- "Nothing changes without the individual, but nothing lasts without the organization"
- The purpose of the "Fellowship of Presbyterians" is to connect like - minded churches for common ministry and mission (Philippians 2:1-2)*
- PCUSA has become a broad tent with no center pole linking us together with a common center
- Not looking to demonize the PCUSA
- The New Reformed Body will function as an association, not a denomination
- Fear and anger are not the trademark of the gospel

- The G.A. is the best that it has ever been in many years
- Currently working on a Statement of Faith/Constitution/Confessions
- Churches can be dismissed to it
- Centered set and not a boundary set
- Authority to ordain
- Local Networks
- Non - geographic connections
- Gatherings to celebrate and equip (not just business)
- Provide desired services to strengthen congregations
- Biblical/Theological Core
- Like-minded but not same-minded
- Complete clarity on moral issues going forward
- Property issues are not on the table

Distinctives:

- Entrepreneurial - we need radical changes
- Evangelism - How are we expanding the kingdom? Evangelize or Fossilize! Preach or Perish

Next Steps:

- Regional Meetings this Fall for Global Fellowship
- Core documents this Fall on www.fellowship.com on website in October
- January 12 - 14, 2012 Gathering in Orlando, FLA

Things to Consider

- Don't have to make a decision right away if the temperature is not high within your congregation
- Sooner or later the congregation must hear what the leadership has to share in terms of what you want to stand for
- We need to model graciousness and create an environment of grace during this time

Comments on PCUSA

- The Fellowship has had enormous cooperation from G.A. headquarters
- They are less enthusiastic about a New Reformed Body
- The PCUSA provides many resources that are very valuable, e.g. Foundation, B.O.P., World – Wide Mission, Presbyterian Global Fellowship, etc.
- B.O.P. has a very solvent retirement fund

Thoughts on The Fellowship

- Connected but differentiated – what does that mean? – local options
- Gracious Dismissal Policies within Presbyteries
- Will be inclusive amongst gender and ethnic lines
- Fellowship will be the overarching umbrella and the New Reformed Body would be the form underneath the umbrella

- Timeline for developing different options – Most options will be more definable by January, 2012, so overtures can be made at the 2012 G.A. meeting
- (Statement of Faith/Constitution/Confessions will be in place)
- It's not just about theological differences, it is also about a different way of doing business
- Now is a time of discernment...to determine...Is God calling us to something new and different?
- Want us to be theologically united while expressing ourselves in our own way

Questions to Ponder

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|------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. Who are we? | Our Identity |
| 2. What are we called to do? | Our Purpose |
| 3. Who are our Neighbors? | Our Context |

- No conversion growth in our churches
- Church growth for the most part is coming from transfers
- Listen to our neighbors
- Lead our people into our neighborhoods
- Learn from each other
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Four Options

Tier 1

Nurturing Mission & Ministry in place

- Some congregations do not have any formal need for differentiation and can therefore stay in their current configuration
- Stay in same relation to your Presbytery as you are now, while relating differently
- Join the Fellowship

Tier 2

Overlay Presbytery Concept

- Same geographical boundaries as old Presbytery
- Make 2 completely different Presbyteries out of current Presbytery
- Create a Presbytery within a Presbytery
- Join together where we can
- Differentiate where we must (Only takes 10 churches to make up a Presbytery)
- We would like a new local option, e.g. don't comply with NFOG
- We want to stay in the denomination, but only in a way that ensures faithfulness and convictions and provides us a relief of conscience
- Join the Fellowship

Tier 3**Intra Presbytery Option**

- Creating 2 different orders within the Presbytery
- 2 COMs/2 CPMs – Those that agree and disagree with Amendment 10A
- Dual Committees within the Presbytery functioning as commissions
- Create affiliate members
- Join the Fellowship

Tier 4**The New Reformed Body**

- Creating a New Reformed Body
- Move out of the PCUSA and into a New Reformed Body
- A choice to stay in as an affiliate member or out of the body as a separate and distinct entity
- Entrepreneurial and missional leadership are traits of the New Reformed Body
- Currently lots of communication between The Fellowship and the G.A. of the PCUSA
- Join The Fellowship

3 options for the New Reformed Body:**Option 1**

- Completely leave and you are dismissed to another body
- Still connected to The Fellowship
- Have to work through the property issues of your Presbytery

Option 2

- Become a “Union Church”
- Join the uniform body without leaving the PCUSA
- Join the Fellowship

Option 3

- Join the uniform body, but remain an affiliate member of the PCUSA (In the body, but not of the body)
- (not yet in for approval)

The New Reformed Body will have a biblical/theological core of like-mindedness rallying around a central core of beliefs, not a boundary set, e.g. Jesus is the only way to salvation and biblical authority

*“Most churches during the past 50 years have become **attractional**, we have to become **missional**. We also think that smaller is better. This New Reformed Body is going to be messy.”*

7 Reasons Why Tier 4

1. Gives us the opportunity to be dismissed to a New Reformed Body while remaining in relationship with the PCUSA through The Fellowship of Presbyterians
2. It provides a realistic approach to a complex situation
3. It provides a strong theological foundation that allows us to name the Essential Tenets of our Faith (“Tolerance promotes peace, not truth.”)
4. Proactive course to proceed with innovative and new ways to discover less bureaucracy
5. Allows for greater unity versus fragmentation
6. Allows for a new way to do mission work
7. Provides a continuum for new possibilities to arise and surface
- 8.

Our Future as Presbyterians

- The Fellowship is aimed at establishing a brand to identify with and anchor us together
- There is hope
- January 12-14, 2012 a gathering in Orlando, FLA – maybe ready to receive churches that wish to join The Fellowship and/or The New Reformed Body or not do anything
- January was chosen so there is enough time to prepare Statement of Faith/Constitution/Confessions for overtures at the upcoming G.A. meeting to recognize the New Reformed Body and be in communion and communication with it
- “We don’t look at the bible through the lens of the culture, we look at the culture through the lens of the bible.”
- Stay connected to what is happening by looking at the website...www.fellowship.com

There is a 5th option, that of joining the EPC – The Fellowship is acknowledging it, but not proposing it.

Notes from the EPC Round Table Discussion

- We are not saying that the New Reformed Body is any better than the EPC, RCA, PCUSA
- The EPC is very open to considering other churches
- Ordination of Women is a concern – Mixed Presbyteries for and against (8 out of 11 Presbyteries for the ordination of women)

A brief History of the EPC:

- Calvinistic and Westminster Confession deep seated roots
- Great love for theology
- Currently around 300 churches – 80 of which came from PCUSA
- Less bureaucratic, and less encumbered by structure
- Emphasis – core orthodoxy
- New Wineskin Churches (110-130) moving into EPC?

- The window has closed for transitional Presbyteries (Non-Geographic Presbyteries)
- Transitional option in localized Presbyteries are still available
- Window may not be open long term
- EPC can accept pastors in distressed church situations within two weeks (contact Jeff Jeremiah, Stated Clerk of EPC)

***Philippians 2: 1-2 NIV**

Imitating Christ's Humility

¹ Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.