

An Invitation to Renew Our Commitment and Mission Together

Our Missional Heritage

As followers of Christ serving God through the General Assembly Council and Middle Governing Bodies of the Presbyterian Church USA, we acknowledge that the Church is God's incarnate instrument, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to reconcile the world to God through Christ. The Church is not merely a place to congregate, nor a provider of religious goods and services. Rather the Church is people in covenant with God sent to carry out God's mission in the world. We acknowledge the essential missional nature of our Church, as declared in our *Book of Order*:

The Church and its mission is given by God's activity in the world as told in the Bible and understood by faith....

The Church of Jesus Christ is the provisional demonstration of what God intends for all of humanity. The Church is called to be a sign in and for the world of the new reality, which God has made available to people in Jesus Christ. The new reality revealed in Jesus Christ is the new humanity, a new creation, a new beginning for human life in the world: Sin is forgiven. Reconciliation is accomplished. The dividing walls of hostility are torn down.

The Church is the body of Christ, both in its corporate life and in the lives of its individual members, and is called to give shape and substance to this truth. The Church is called to tell the good news of salvation by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ as the only Savior and Lord, proclaiming in Word and Sacrament that the new age has dawned. God who creates life, frees those in bondage, forgives sin, reconciles brokenness, makes all things new, is still at work in the world.

The Church is called to present the claims of Jesus Christ, leading persons to repentance, acceptance of him as Savior and Lord, and new life as his disciples.

The Church is called to be Christ's faithful evangelist going into the world, making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all he has commanded; demonstrating by the love of its members for one another and by the quality of its common life the new reality in Christ; sharing in worship, fellowship, and nurture, practicing a deepened life of prayer and service under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; participating in God's activity in the world through its life for others by healing and reconciling and binding up wounds, ministering to the needs of the poor, the sick, the lonely, and the powerless, engaging in the struggle to free people from sin, fear, oppression, hunger, and injustice, giving itself and its substance to the service of those who suffer, sharing with Christ in the establishing of his just, peaceable, and loving rule in the world.

The Church is called to undertake this mission even at the risk of losing its life, trusting in God alone as the author and giver of life, sharing the gospel, and doing those deeds in the world that point beyond themselves to the new reality in Christ.

The Church is called... to a new openness to the possibilities and perils of its institutional forms in order to ensure the faithfulness and usefulness of these forms to God's activity in the world, [and] to a new openness to God's continuing reformation of the Church ecumenical, that it might be a more effective instrument of mission in the world.¹

Confession

¹ *Book of Order*, Chapter III, "The Church and Its Mission," G-3.0100, 3.0200-3.0400, 3.0401c,d.

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48 Despite this Biblical and theological tradition, we confess:
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50 • We have overly depended on our own created organizational structures, rather than
51 God's providence;
52 • We often fail to see the PCUSA essentially and primarily as a partnership with God
53 to carry out God's mission of reconciliation;
54 • We have functioned in silos, rather than living as the family of God;
55 • We have not been willing to take innovative risks for Christ's sake;
56 • We are quick to criticize others or blame the organization rather than engage,
57 collaborate, and resolve our disagreements;
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59 In all these things, Lord, empower us to fulfill Jesus' prayer that we all be one as we strive to
60 lead the Church to reflect Jesus' command to become the salt of the earth and light of the
61 world. In your grace and mercy, hear our prayer.
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63 **Cultural Context**

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65 We recognize our need to adapt to the changing nature of Christian ministry in today's
66 world. These changes result, in part, from the propensity by many:
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- 68 • To mistrust institutions, particularly those characterized as hierarchical, centralized
69 and regulatory;
- 70 • To interact more directly with particular ministries and mission projects, rather than
71 to contribute to distant organizations who do mission by proxy;
- 72 • To fund particular, familiar ministries through designated gifts, rather than funding
73 unfamiliar mission through undesignated gifts.
- 74 • To understand that the church is at the periphery of culture and influence, rather
75 than at the honored center.
- 76 • To operate in an environment which is more congregational and individualistic than
77 connectional and community oriented.
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79 **Themes, Values & Challenges**

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81 I. We recognize together several **themes** as important and central to the content and
82 means by which MGBs and the GAC do our work together. These include:
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- 84 • Spiritual and biblical formation through prayer, study and testimony
- 85 • A desire to acknowledge broken relationships and rebuild trust
- 86 • A desire to build community
- 87 • Desire for itineration of GAC staff (esp. high level) and GAC elected people
- 88 • Limited resources of time, talent and funds
- 89 • Affirmation of PDA, among others, as exemplary ministry
- 90 • Improve interpersonal and online communication
- 91 • Connect the best resources to critical needs, at the right time
- 92 • Develop, identify and place the right leaders for the right tasks
- 93 • Dealing with adaptive change

- 94 • Addressing the General Assembly process (conferring with OGA)
- 95 • Desire for MGB Executives to proactively communicate with GAC and vice versa
- 96 • Sense that GAC is not listening to MGBs and vice versa
- 97 • Courage and innovative risk taking
- 98 • The fear of addressing the issues created by loss of members and reduced
- 99 funding, while determining which ministries and structures we will live into as
- 100 we move forward.
- 101 • Model constructive, honest communications with one another abiding by the
- 102 Biblical instruction to speak the truth in love.
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- 104 II. In a renewed agreement to interact as leaders called by God in the Presbyterian Church
- 105 USA with a clear commitment to helping the whole church – including congregations,
- 106 Middle Governing Bodies and those in the national offices – we express a clear desire to
- 107 live and serve together in God’s mission according to the following **values**:
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- 109 • Practice spiritual disciplines at the heart of our work
- 110 • “Missional” Church²
- 111 • Openness and Transparency
- 112 • Collaboration
- 113 • Excellence
- 114 • Accountability
- 115 • Listening
- 116 • Seek Consensus
- 117 • Healthy, “Missional”² Congregations
- 118 • Healthy, trustworthy relationships
- 119 • Practice ministries that work (e.g., PDA)
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- 121 III. Despite our areas of agreement, we acknowledge remaining **challenges**. Areas of
- 122 disagreement exist between MGB and GAC leaders. While we recognize that “just as
- 123 iron sharpens iron” and some disagreement can be healthy and positive, we are
- 124 compelled to name and acknowledge these areas of disagreement:
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- 126 • Whether desire for GAC staff presence exceeds reasonable abilities of GAC staff.
- 127 • Different understandings of what are appropriate lines of communication and
- 128 contact between GAC and congregations.
- 129 • Need to work in mutual collaboration (OGA, MGB, GAC) at reforming the
- 130 General Assembly meeting process and structure.
- 131 • Who does the GAC serve? The General Assembly? (*cf.*, *Book of Order* G-13.0201)
- 132 MGBs? Congregations? Interest/affinity groups? (Put another way, does GAC
- 133 exist primarily to serve MGBs, as they serve congregations?)
- 134 • Whether GAC goals are congruent with MGB priorities. Whether they should be.
- 135 • Meaning of “Missional” church and whether that should be our focus.

² Use of the term missional is intended as a conceptual term. It is clear that all of us may not have the same definition of this term.

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- Strict protocols for communication and action, versus informal flat organizational structure? Or, should function according to one norm, rather than customize on an MGB by MGB basis?
 - Whether our denomination should/can speak with one voice? Or, might this depend on the issue?
 - How should GAC, presbyteries and synods partner with the OGA in reforming our processes and structural reorganization?

144 IV. In our fervent hope to fulfill God’s call that we live out our values in humility, with
145 integrity and effectiveness, we commit to work promptly in **mutual cooperation** in the
146 following ways:

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- Continue and grow our collaboration in arenas of mission that are fruitful and working well.
 - Address the challenges above by means of the MGB/GAC Advisory Board. **The first meeting was held on November 12, 2008.**
 - Inform and invite participation from MBG leaders and GAC staff/elected officers through regular communication using a variety of electronic and print media that provides updates and opportunities for involvement in addressing the challenges above.
 - Begin broadening the process of mutual cooperation by inviting the OGA, who has the lead role in structural issues (i.e., Book of Order polity), to participate.
 - This is a time specific reflection on our shared hopes and dreams which will be revised each year during the MGB/GAC consultation.

161 V. As we move forward as Partners in God’s mission, *we pray that we will lead lives worthy of*
162 *the calling to which we have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, that we*
163 *bear with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond*
164 *of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as we were called to the one hope of our calling,*
165 *one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and*
166 *in all.* (Ephesians 4:1-6, NRSV)

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