

A Plan for Moving Ahead

I: What Needs to be Discussed?

A. Issues in the Task Force Mandate

1. What basic principles of reformed faith and identity and Presbyterian Church order should be lifted up and affirmed in our day?
2. What patterns of life (spirit, ethos, practices of faith, disciplines) empower the Presbyterian Church for mission in the present day?
3. How shall theological disputes, such as the ones over atonement and Christology, be addressed in ways that further the peace, unity and purity of the church?
4. How shall the dispute over the ordination of practicing homosexuals be addressed in ways that further the peace, unity and purity of the church?

B. Basic Theological Topics

1. The person of Jesus Christ and the identity of his followers
(how the church speaks about Jesus in a Trinitarian framework, in Christian and reformed tradition, and in the church catholic; what it means to be his witnesses and disciples in a pluralistic age)
2. The Bible, creeds and confessions in Christian faith and life
(knowing God: how God's revelation in scripture authorizes and shapes Christian teaching; how scripture is interpreted in Christian reflection; how scripture animates Christian life; the role of creeds, confessions and other statements of faith in reformed tradition)
3. The nature and purpose of the church in reformed tradition: the community of faith
(how Christian believers in community form a common mind in Christ, honor individual conscience and diversity, teach and nurture each other, exercise discipline, and order their life, leadership and ministry)
4. The nature and purpose of the church in reformed tradition: worship and mission
(how Christians in reformed tradition give glory to God, proclaim the word outside the church, and radiate the life of faith in service to a suffering world)

C. Basic Themes of Presbyterian Polity, Governance and History

1. The current social and religious context of Presbyterian life and mission
(the "decline" of mainline Protestantism and the reality of religious pluralism; various perspectives on current cultural and religious scene and such issues as racial/ethnic diversity, generational differences, changing family structures, etc.; the present period as a missional challenge)
2. How the Presbyterian Church understands and proclaims its faith
(the historic roles of creeds and confessional statements of various kinds; norms in reformed tradition for theological study, Biblical authority, interpretation, and teaching; the nature of authority in matters of faith; how theological disputes have been and may be addressed, from the Adopting Act to the present day)

3. How the Presbyterian Church orders its common life: decision-making
(principles of Presbyterian government; the role of the Constitution; obligations and rights of individual members and affiliated congregations; duties and powers of different governing bodies; formal and informal uses of power; various modes of decision-making; how organizational disputes have been and may be settled [history of voluntary separation, schism, excision, compromise, reunion])
4. How the Presbyterian Church orders its common life: leadership
(reformed understanding of ordination; how disputes over ordination standards and their application may be addressed)

II. How Shall We Approach These Questions?

A. What is the best order for dealing with the questions identified in I above?

In order to deal with the complex features of the issues in our mandate (I. A. above), we propose that the Task Force deal first with the basic theological and governance issues that underlie them (I. B. and I. C. above). If we adopt this strategy, the agenda of the next four meetings might look like this:

Meeting Date	Theological Topic	Polity/Governance/History Topic
October 2002	B. 1 Jesus Christ	C. 1 Social and religious context
February 2003	B. 2 Bible, creeds and confessions in faith and life	C. 2 How reformed Christians proclaim the faith
August 2003	B. 3 Church: the community of faith	C. 3 How Presbyterians make decisions
October 2003	B. 4 Church: worship and mission	C. 4 How Presbyterians order their leadership

Then, the following two meetings might deal more directly with the mandate questions (I. C. above), which will already have been raised in the discussions of basic issues.

Meeting Date	Topics
February 2004	A. 1&2 Basic principles of reformed faith and basic principles and patterns of Presbyterian life together to be lifted up and affirmed for our day <i>Interim report to the General Assembly</i>
August 2004 (extended meeting?)	A. 3 How to address theological controversies A. 4 How to address the ordination dispute

B. What is the best way for the Task Force to approach each question?

We suggest different approaches for the basic and mandate questions.

Basic topics: there should be study sessions on these topics.

- The aim of each session should be to inform the Task Force and engage it in reflection about the range of Christian and reformed/Presbyterian teaching or policy and about contemporary views and disputes. Each session should address these questions:
 - What has been the thinking of the church on this topic?
 - What is the current range of thought on the topic?
 - What are key unsettled questions and paths for future reflection?
 - What is the relevance of what we've learned, to our mandate about this topic?
- A variety of pedagogical strategies should be used in these sessions.
- For each session, a Task Force member who has expertise on the topic should organize the session, using other Task Force members. The organizers should have the option to invite outside resource persons to participate, after consultation with the Task Force. Outside consultants should be used when resources are needed that Task Force members cannot supply. They should be clearly informed that the goal of the sessions is to inform, not to take positions.
- A third person should be appointed to work with both session chairs on coordination, teaching methods, and the integration of various styles of reflection and modes of discernment into the sessions.
- The Task Force member who organized the session and two others should be responsible for producing a careful, systematic summary that will be useful if the session becomes part of the "curriculum" the Task Force develops.

On the mandate questions before the Task Force (February and August 2004 meetings): each meeting should be carefully planned, with both process and substantive goals in view.

These options for procedure should be considered:

- Start at a point of agreement and move to areas of contention.
- Start at the points of contention.
- Start by articulating the grounds of agreement, perhaps using short papers or presentations to set agreement prior to starting to define the points of difference.
- Other approaches (consensus and discernment models that the sub-committee might propose)

These techniques for beginning these major discussions should be considered:

- position papers prepared by two people who have met face-to-face between meetings
- position papers prepared by groups that meet face-to-face between meetings
- assign individuals to summarize views of outsider consultants on the key issues
- other approaches?

C. Learning from Those Outside the Task Force

The church at large:

1. **News Releases:** Continue to issue news releases immediately following Task Force meetings, in print and on the web. Release news regularly between meetings and publicize the topics of the next meeting.
2. **Hand Outs:** A current information sheet available on the web or printed for distribution at meetings.
3. **Web Site:** Try to establish an easily accessible site; include news, bios, pictures, list of resources.
4. **Visits by Task Force Members:** Visitations to official PCUSA meetings (e.g. stated clerks, regional consultations, racial-ethnic gatherings), to affinity groups (e.g. Presbyterians for Renewal, Covenant Network), to seminaries and other groups to which we may be invited to give reports on the work of the Task Force.

Consultants might be called upon in several ways:

- As noted above, Task Force members responsible for organizing particular study sessions may, after consulting the Task Force, invite consultants to make presentations as part of the session if no Task Force members or written texts are available to present important material.
- Others uses of outside consultants would be outside the plenary sessions of Task Force meetings:
 - Task Force members could consult with wise, informed persons about their hopes and ideas for the Task Force's work.
 - The Task Force or its working groups might invite written communications on particular topics.
 - As the Task Force develops perspectives that might become part of its report, members might test these perspectives and ideas with wise and informed persons.
 - If the Task Force develops a "curriculum," experts in educational program design will be needed to put the materials in good form (including interactive and multimedia formats); those with other kinds of expertise (theological studies; church history and church law; congregational life, etc.) might be asked to provide informal review and comment on the substance of materials before they become final.

III. What Should the Task Force Produce?

A. On-Going Communications

- The Task Force should issue press releases describing its work at and between meetings.
- One or two Task Force members should volunteer/be appointed to work with the co-moderators in drafting these releases.

- All Task Force members should have the opportunity to comment (quickly) on e-mailed drafts before anything is released.
- All releases, plus bios of each members, etc. will be posted on a Task Force website.

B. Interim Reports

- There will be an interim report on the Task Force's process to the 215th GA (2003).
- There will be a substantive report on the Task Force's study of basic theological and polity/historical topics to the 216th GA (2004).
- The Task Force will continue to receive directives from General Assemblies and will respond to any directives received.

C. "A Process and an Instrument"

The Task Force is currently exploring various possibilities for developing a process and an instrument as directed in its mandate. The goals adopted for the product are:

1. to reintroduce our church to important parts of our heritage
2. to reintroduce our church to a range of compelling views that all fall under a reformed banner
3. to make these resources accessible and engaging so that people can use these and can become a part of the conversation
4. to bring people closer to each other across the lines that currently divide us

Following these guidelines a work group will meet, engage a professional consultant to help, and develop a proposal for a future meeting, no later than February 2003.

D. A Written Report

In addition to the curriculum, the Task Force will produce a written report to the 217th GA (2006) that includes:

- a narrative of its process
- a pastoral letter to the church summarizing the Task Forces report to these questions:
 - A. 1. *What basic principles of reformed faith and Presbyterian Church order should be lifted up and affirmed in our day?*
 - A. 2. *What patterns of life (spirit, ethos, practices of faith, disciplines) will empower the Presbyterian Church for mission in the present day?*
- recommendations about how to resolve or make progress toward the resolution of these questions:
 - A. 3 *How shall theological disputes, such as recent ones over atonement and Christology, be addressed and resolved?*
 - A. 4 *How shall the dispute over the ordination of practicing homosexuals be addressed and resolved?*