

The Ecumenical Stance of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)



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Introduction

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its antecedent churches have been at the forefront of local, regional, national, and global ecumenism for more than a century. Presbyterians have been ready to reflect on, pray for, and organize ecumenical initiatives in the life of the worldwide body of Christ and respond to the initiatives of others. From discussions of organic union to the formation of councils of churches, from common efforts in evangelism and mission to upholding concerns for justice and social service, Presbyterians have been deeply involved in the ecumenical work and witness of the church. The Presbyterian church has put considerable material, spiritual, and personnel resources into the ecumenical movement, working to “listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches” and respond in creative ways to our ecumenical calling.

In 1975 and 1981, the Presbyterian Church in the United States and the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America held ecumenical consultations that were important milestones on this ecumenical journey. No such consultation had ever been held in the PC(USA). In 2006, the General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations (GACER) decided it was time to call for a new churchwide consultation on the ecumenical stance of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Giving thoughtful and prayerful attention to new directions in ecumenism, as well as to the historic Presbyterian commitment to conciliar ecumenical organizations, the GACER believed the PC(USA) should go beyond the ecumenical vision statement approved by the 212th General Assembly (2000).

The mandate of the consultation was “to review our ecumenical vision and construct an ecumenical stance and policy to guide the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) staff and elected bodies for the next ten years.” To this end, the consultation of September 27–29, 2007, reviewed the biblical and confessional basis of Presbyterian ecumenical commitment, provided a historical overview of the ecumenical journey, surveyed the changing ecumenical landscape, assessed the PC(USA)’s ecumenical experience in the past decade, and explored the new challenges the church faces in this area. On the basis of the findings of the September 2007 consultation, recommendations were made to the GACER. (The list of participants may be found in Appendix A.) In this way, the consultation sought to renew our church’s commitment to ecumenical engagement in the 21st century and set a framework for its ecumenical endeavors, taking account of the new contextual challenges and opportunities present.

Because the purpose of the consultation was to create policy for the ecumenical stance of the PC(USA)—the relationship of the PC(USA) to other Christian churches—participants did not systematically address interfaith relations or the connection between ecumenical involvement and Christian mission. Yet, these two concerns pressed in upon the conversation repeatedly, since they are significant concerns closely related to ecumenism. There was particular energy in the conversation relating to interfaith relations and a strong sense that this topic will need to be addressed more fully in another forum.

Biblical and Confessional Basis of Our Ecumenical Stance

Many texts in Scripture guide and give shape to the ecumenical stance of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). One key text is John 17, where Jesus prays for the disciples, “that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (v. 21). Thus, unity is understood as Christ’s intention for the church, essential to its nature and witness. Another text that has been decisive for the PC(USA)’s self-understanding is 2 Corinthians 5. It declares “... in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself ... and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us” (v.19). The divine purpose of reconciliation is illumined here, and the church must consider how our ministry of reconciliation is compromised if we are not reconciled among ourselves. In Ephesians 4:3–4, we are enjoined to make “... every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all ...” Paul’s image of the church as the body of Christ well conveys the nature of our unity: Though there are many members, diversities of gifts, and differences of ministry, there is one body. We belong to one another and are members of one another (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12).

The Book of Confessions undergirds the ecumenical work of the PC(USA) in its recurring references to the unity and catholicity of the church. It is a fundamental conviction that, in Jesus Christ, the church is already one. This forms the basis for ecumenical endeavors: to seek to make visible this Christ-given unity.

The confessions, in their reaffirmation of and dependence upon the liturgical traditions and ecumenical councils of the early church, implicitly and explicitly express the unity and catholicity of the church. *The Book of Confessions* begins with two ancient creeds, the Nicene Creed (1.1–3) and the Apostle’s Creed (2.1–3), which implicitly demonstrates this sensibility. Explicitly, too, these historic creeds name unity and catholicity as marks of Christ’s church. We thus understand ourselves to be in continuity with the ancient consensus of these broadly shared confessions, including the underlying Trinitarian theology and Christology that these early confessions proclaimed.

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The unity and continuity is not only with apostolic witness in creedal statements, but also with apostolic mission. As the Confession of 1967 affirms,

... This community, the church universal, is entrusted with God's message of reconciliation and shares God's labor of healing the enmities which separate [human beings] from God and from each other. Christ has called the church to this mission and given it the gift of the Holy Spirit. The church maintains continuity with the apostles and with Israel by faithful obedience to his call." (*The Book of Confessions*, 9.31)

Other confessions make explicit reference to Presbyterian convictions about the unity and catholicity of the church. The Second Helvetic Confession, for example, argues that there is "only one church for all times." Since there is only one God, one Messiah, one Spirit, one salvation, one faith, one covenant, "it necessarily follows that there is only one Church, the Catholic Church. ... We, therefore, call this Church catholic because it is universal, scattered through all parts of the world, and extended unto all times, and is not limited to any times or places. ..." (*The Book of Confessions*, 5.126). This affirmation is accompanied by an explicit rejection of claims that would confine the church to any one group of believers.

A similar pattern can be seen in the Confession of 1967, which claims, "The unity of the church is compatible with a wide variety of forms, but it is hidden and distorted when variant forms are allowed to harden into sectarian divisions, exclusive denominations, and rival factions" (*The Book of Confessions*, 9.34). In this pattern, we see an embrace of difference alongside a rejection of division. For Christians of our tradition, a true church is established wherever the word is rightly preached and heard and the Sacraments rightly administered (*The Book of Confessions*: Second Helvetic Confession, 5.134–.137; Scots Confession, 3.18; Westminster Confession of Faith, 6.143).

Further basis for the PC(USA) ecumenical stance can be found in the confessions where the "communion of saints" is described. A Brief Statement of Faith says, "The Spirit ... binds us together with all believers in the one body of Christ, the Church" (*The Book of Confessions*, 10.4, Lines 54–57). So, Christians around the world and down the years all belong to one another, for this communion is to be extended "unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus" (*The Book of Confessions*, Westminster Confession of Faith, 6.147). These references deepen and extend the pattern of difference without division and also serve to give a clearer shape to the nature of our unity, reflecting not a static uniformity, but a dynamic communion.

It is clear from these and other references in the confessions that the unity of the church is God's doing, a gift of God in Jesus Christ. It can neither be created nor destroyed by our efforts. The Heidelberg Catechism asks the question, "What do you believe concerning 'the Holy Catholic Church'?" The answer: "... that, from the beginning to the end of the world, and from among the whole human race, the Son of God, by his Spirit and his Word, gathers, protects, and preserves for himself, in the unity of the true faith, a congregation chosen for eternal life" (*The Book of Confessions*, 4.054). Our divisions, though they may obscure our unity, cannot destroy it. When we come together at ecumenical tables, we are seeking to make visible what, by the grace of God, is already the case. We are one in Christ.

Historical Overview of Presbyterian Ecumenical Involvement

From the earliest days of European settlement in North America, there has been a dynamic tension between the distinctively Reformed identity claimed by Presbyterians and our confession of "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church" that embraces the larger community of believers and churches. This has played out over the years in varying degrees of emphasis on a Presbyterian "brand" in doctrine and polity, and a simultaneous commitment to unity in Christian ministry and mission.

The first presbyteries and synods were made up of disparate congregations, and subsequent, ecumenical challenges have often arisen within the Presbyterian communion itself. The New Side separated from the Old Side in the 1700s, only to be reunited later in that century. In the 1800s, Old School and New School parted ways, as did the churches of North and South. Some groups developed new ecclesiastical expressions, including the Cumberland Presbyterians and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). At the same time, many Presbyterians struggled against these divisions. American Presbyterians sought reunion among their own denominations, as well as closer relations—from local communities to mission fields—with Congregationalists, Associate and Reformed churches, Calvinistic Methodists, Episcopalians, the Reformed Church, and others. The Presbyterian Reunion of 1983 is the latest in a long line of historical efforts to bring visible unity among Presbyterians through institutional merger.

Presbyterians were enthusiastic supporters both of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (an interdenominational body) and a succession of Presbyterian church agencies for global ministries. Combinations of ecumenical alliances in mission, along with Reformed confessionalism, are also to be found in the cases of the Sunday school movement, home missions, relief agencies, and public advocacy.

From the nineteenth century to today, American Presbyterians have been among the founders, leaders, and principal supporters of global and national ecumenical bodies, including the National Council of Churches of Christ (NCCC), the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), and the World Council of Churches (WCC). In partnership with these groups and others, American Presbyterians have played a central role in world mission and evangelism, in pursuit of international peace and justice, in bilateral dialogues with Christian world communions, and other alliances of churches. Partnership with ecumenical bodies also provides churches of various traditions a means toward dialogue from a common Christian perspective with representatives of other religions of the world.

Representation of Presbyterian churches in international, inter-confessional dialogue is organized by the theology department of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. In the last fifteen years, dialogues have included: Adventist–Reformed; African Independent Churches–Reformed; Anglican–Reformed; Catholic–Reformed, with a PC(USA) member; Disciples–Reformed; Lutheran–Reformed, currently co-chaired by a PC(USA) member; Oriental Orthodox–Reformed, with a PC(USA) member; Orthodox–Reformed, with a PC(USA) member; and Pentecostal–Reformed, currently co-chaired by a PC(USA) member. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches is also concerned with fostering unity among members of the Reformed family. As the result of work by WARC and the Reformed Ecumenical Council, a plan has been made to unite the two bodies into the World Communion of Reformed Churches in 2010.

Working with churches of many cultures and nations has sensitized ecumenical bodies to issues of justice and contributed toward their adoption of strong positions on public policy, especially with relation to justice. This was demonstrated in the United States civil rights movement, the call for negotiation and understanding between East and West during the Cold War, the campaign for human rights and liberation in Latin America, the anti-apartheid struggle in southern Africa, and strategies for reconciliation in the Middle East. In 2004, the member churches of WARC at the General Council in Accra covenanted to work together for justice in the economy and creation, and the WCC and the Lutheran World Federation have taken up this challenge. Supporters of such actions believe that through the struggle together to find a path of faithful action in the face of injustice, Christians come to deeper understanding of the gospel and find the courage to witness to their faith. They believe that God requires work toward justice for all the human family and for creation.

Critics have often found this ecumenical approach to be too “political,” a distraction from the church’s work, and have opposed continuing participation in the National and World Councils of Churches. In the 1980s and 1990s, these councils came under intense criticism, leading to lively debate about Presbyterian participation in them. The General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations undertook careful, extensive reviews of the WCC (2003), the NCCC (2004), and WARC (2005), examining their work, their financing, and Presbyterian leadership in them. (Reports of the three reviews can be found in the *Minutes* of the General Assembly for those years.) The outcome of all three reviews was a strong expression of support for the PC(USA)’s participation in the ecumenical movement at the national and international levels. The September 2007 consultation strongly affirmed these commitments as a part of the ecumenical stance of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for the future.

Today, Presbyterians continue to work cooperatively with other churches in the councils of the ecumenical movement by means of presbytery and synod partnerships, in local projects involving multiple congregations and agencies, through evangelical associations such as World Vision International and the Lausanne movement, as well as in emerging fellowships such as Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A. and exploratory meetings toward a broadly based Global Christian Forum. These last two fellowships represent a fresh attempt to find a way to gather both those who have traditionally participated in the ecumenical movement and those who have distanced themselves from it.

Central to this discussion is the Lund principle¹ that churches should do together all that is possible in good conscience, affirming the importance of this principle as part of the framework for ecumenical policy in the coming years.

Review of the Ecumenical Work of the General Assembly Over the Last Decade

The past ten years (1997–2007) of ecumenical work under the auspices of the General Assembly have been marked by new opportunities and continuing challenges. These have been a consequence both of changes in the ecumenical landscape and of changes within the PC(USA) and are reflected in our conciliar relationships, our bilateral and multilateral ecclesial relationships, and our partnerships and organizational structures to implement the ecumenical agenda of the PC(USA).

The 209th General Assembly (1997) approved A Formula of Agreement between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ. This was a historic agreement of Full Communion, the result of thirty-five years of dialogue among these churches. The Lutheran-Reformed Coordinating Committee has overseen the implementation of this agreement, and closer collaboration and cooperation have emerged in shared ministries between congregations.

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Subsequently, the 211th General Assembly (1999), upon recommendation of the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly and the General Assembly Council, created the General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations (GACER). This new committee replaced the Advisory Committee on Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations and “Special Committees of the General Assembly” with ecumenical mandates.

At the conciliar level, the General Assembly holds membership as an ecclesial body in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Caribbean and North American Area Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the World Council of Churches, and the National Council of Churches of Christ, all of which have faced organizational and fiscal challenges. Elected representatives from the PC(USA) on these councils and staff members working with them have contributed to a sense of renewal in their mission and financial stability.

In January 2002, the Consultation on Church Union culminated its decades of work by being transformed into Churches Uniting in Christ (CUiC), with the goals of expressing unity in Christ and combating racism together. Through the coordinating council of CUiC and its task forces on ministry, racial justice, and local/regional work, the PC(USA) has been an active and energetic participant in CUiC.

In the area of bilateral ecclesial relationships, the sixth round of Reformed-Catholic dialogue (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops) concluded in 2001, with a focus on pastoral issues in marriages between members of the Roman Catholic Church and Reformed churches. In response to the papal encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint*, a delegation from the PC(USA) entered into conversation with the Vatican in December 2000 and March 2001. The response of the PC(USA) was presented in the paper, “The Successor to Peter.” Several recommendations from this conversation were implemented through the 213th General Assembly (2001).

The seventh round of Reformed-Catholic (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops) dialogue, mandated by the 215th General Assembly (2003), began meeting that same year. This dialogue also includes the Christian Reformed Church in North America, the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ. The dialogue was charged to work on developing a means for the mutual recognition of baptism and to explore issues related to the Eucharist. Pending recommendations by the GACER, the proposal for mutual recognition of baptism will come to the 218th General Assembly (2008). The bilateral dialogue will then begin to explore issues related to the Eucharist.

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The Moravian-Reformed dialogue was mandated by the 212th General Assembly (2000). The dialogue began in April 2002 with the following goals: (1) to reach an understanding of each tradition’s ministry of oversight; (2) to explore areas of cooperative work in global, national, and local settings so that our congregations may have greater knowledge of each other and our cooperative work; and (3) to seek common agreements that could lead to establishing Full Communion between the Moravian Church and one or all of the Reformed churches. Pending approval by the GACER, a recommendation that the PC(USA) enter a Covenant Relationship will go to the 218th General Assembly (2008) for action.

The Episcopal-Presbyterian bilateral dialogue was mandated by the 212th General Assembly (2000). The focus of the dialogue is the reconciliation of ministries between the two churches. This bilateral dialogue has worked closely with the Ministry Task Force of Churches Uniting in Christ. While unable to achieve full reconciliation of ministries, it is anticipated that we will be able to enter into a mutual recognition of our ministries within the next two years.

The Joint Committee on Presbyterian Cooperation Between the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Korean Presbyterian Church in America was mandated by the 204th General Assembly (1992). It was charged to foster greater unity of witness between our two churches and to explore the possibility of eventual union between the two denominations. Pending recommendations by the GACER, a proposal to enter Covenant Relationship will come to the 218th General Assembly (2008).

The Joint Cooperative Committee with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church was mandated by the 212th General Assembly (2000) and was charged to enter church-to-church conversations searching for means to strengthen their mutual relationships. The work of this cooperative committee culminated in holding concurrent General Assemblies to commemorate the 300th anniversary of Presbyterian witness in the United States in 2006.

Throughout all its work, the General Assembly staff seeks to work ecumenically with counterparts in other denominations, ecumenical councils, and project-specific task groups that involve ecumenical partners. Significant areas of ecumenical cooperation are seen in the areas of disaster relief and development, national and international public witness and advocacy, national and international hunger concerns, theological engagement, youth and young-adult ministries, communications, and international mission partnerships. These partnerships are not only significant for shaping the mission of the PC(USA), but also for bringing PC(USA) resources and insight to the work of our ecumenical partners. A key component has been the understanding that we “do mission in partnership.”

The Changing Ecumenical Landscape

To commit to an ecumenical vision in this time and place involves a study of the changing ecumenical landscape. It is well known that a demographic shift in the global church from the north to the south has reshaped the dynamics of the ecumenical movement in a number of ways. Most importantly, the flow of influence is no longer from north to south or even west to east, but from every part of the world to every other part of the world. This has meant that ecumenical conversation partners are shaped geographically as well as denominationally.

In this regard, contextualized realities have become as important as confessional considerations; thus, the PC(USA) needs to include new and different partners to address the needs of today. One such group is that of churches made up of new immigrants bringing their languages and traditions from home, churches that are now a part of the PC(USA) context. New immigrants bring different understandings of the church and the world, shaped by the cultures of the places they have left. Their visions and understandings can infuse and enrich our own and help the PC(USA) to see the world in ways not seen previously. A second group of partners is that of service and justice coalitions that are not denominationally circumscribed. Groups such as Habitat for Humanity, Bread for the World, and the Heifer Project respond to human suffering through emergency relief and development programs to help heal a divided world. Many Presbyterian congregations support these organizations. A third group of communities responding to a wounded world is that of people of other faiths and religious traditions. In a world where fear of the ‘other’ exacerbates violence and suffering, working in partnership with those whom we often call “other” is of central importance. We are called to join with all those willing to work for the healing of the whole earth and the whole human family.

The purpose of the ecumenical movement is to help make manifest God’s intention for the household of God. In the past, churches have often limited that vision to a unified Church that would help bring about a unified world or even unify the world within it. The ecumenical vision that is part of God’s vision is actually much larger. John 10:10b describes the vision as God’s desire that the inhabitants of the household of God “may have life, and have it abundantly.” This is a vision of justice and peace that allows space for all of God’s creation to live life in its fullness. God is continually active in bringing loving wholeness to creation, where all can live in peace. God is especially attentive to those who have been excluded from abundant life and calls the church to cooperate in this process.

The Holy Spirit, the Advocate whom Jesus promised, invites us to this kind of work. Dialogue with churches of the Pentecostal movement is essential here, as well as attending to the often-surprising movements of the Spirit in our churches and ecumenical bodies. The discernment of God’s vision for the household of God is a gift of the Spirit, since we understand the household of God to cut across all human lines. Biblically speaking, Pentecost was a unique moment when the Holy Spirit acted in an amazing way, enabling the church to communicate across differences. At Pentecost, seekers from every nation were present, communicating with each other through the Spirit in their own languages. Living with this gift of the Spirit in our present moment in history encourages us to hear the voices of people long silenced. Enabled to read the signs of the time, the church becomes empowered by the Spirit to champion a theology of life by amplifying voices that contend with life-denying forces. In this way, the church may become a “blessing to the nations” and offer hope for healing, reconciliation, and justice in the earth and the economy.

Contours of a New Ecumenical Reality

Ecumenism in the 21st century holds varied and diverse nuances for Presbyterians:

- reconciliation in Jesus Christ;
- a spirit of generosity toward others;
- unity and diversity in the Holy Spirit;

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- justice in the economy, and for the earth;
- the call of God to mission and evangelism;
- solidarity with the marginalized;
- common memory of a people on a journey;
- hope for the future of the world;
- a gift of God and a task for all human beings.

At the same time, many Presbyterians are confused about the meaning of ecumenism and question how it relates to their own lived realities in congregations and whether it has relevance to a post-modern church and world. There has been an erosion of understanding of some traditional ecumenical activities and loyalty to them. Nonetheless, lively ecumenical activity is taking place in many forms throughout the denomination at the national, regional, and local levels.

Opportunities and challenges clearly present themselves in the landscape of this new ecumenical reality. Membership loss, institutional downsizing, and financial decline in mainline churches have resulted in an atmosphere of crisis in ecumenical structures and their member-denominations. Flourishing post-denominational mega-churches, theological affinity groups, and para-church organizations pose both opportunities and challenges to our traditional ways of being and acting and to our ecumenical vision. Some churches that have previously hesitated to enter into ecumenical conversation are now finding their way to a newly shaped table.

Our faith in the grace of Jesus Christ is with us, “so we do not lose heart” (2 Cor. 4:16). In the face of these challenges and opportunities, God is calling us, in this moment, to reaffirm our commitment to the unity of the Church—of all Christian people—which is God’s gift in Christ. Essential to that calling is an attitude of humility and openness in all of our ecumenical relationships.

While we affirm our commitment to the unity of the Christian church, the ecumenical challenge for today moves beyond that initial vision to the healing and wholeness of the world. This broader goal of Christian ecumenism requires us to ask how we can be partners with others in building the human community that God intended from the very beginning. Where is there convergence between the Christian household and the larger household of God?

In exploring the contours of this new ecumenical reality, there are ten priorities that such a commitment presents:

1. *Growing the Ecumenical Vision*

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) must renew its foundational ecumenical identity through recommitment to the search for the visible unity of Christ’s church in its many forms. Presbyterian identity is diminished when the church turns inward, away from an embrace of the whole church and the whole inhabited earth. Recovery of the church’s ecumenical vision must begin with confession and repentance—of our internal divisions, our expectation of a privileged position in ecumenical affairs, our imagined self-sufficiency, our presumption of cultural hegemony, and our neglect of ecumenical relationships.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is called to listen anew to what the Spirit is saying to all the churches, and to listen to what Christians from other churches are saying to us. The church’s sustained quest for concord in essential things—faith, sacraments, mission, and ministry—will lead it to new and renewed relationships within the one holy catholic and apostolic church.

2. *Facing Obstacles to Christian Unity*

Distinct traditions, communions, and denominations live in various degrees of estrangement from one another. In addition to the significant historical, theological, and ecclesiastical barriers that continue to separate churches from one another, there is an awareness of the ways in which race, gender, class, culture, wealth, and power reinforce divisions in the church and the human community. All of these divisions do not eradicate the church’s unity, but they obscure it, impairing witness to the gospel and weakening common mission.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is called to recognize the full range of obstacles to Christian unity, and to commit itself to breaking down all dividing walls in both church and world.

3. *Bridging the Gaps Between the Local and the Global, Individual Congregations and the Denomination*

The terms “ecumenical” and “ecumenism” are not restricted to councils of churches or to national and international relationships among denominations. Many congregations are engaged ecumenically in common worship, study, and dialogue, and in partnerships for witness, service, and mission. Theological and structural links between local and broader ecumenism are often weak, however. Contacts among local, regional, and global relationships are often neglected.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is called to new ecumenical awareness that deepens relationships among congregational, denominational, and conciliar ecumenism. Each must be enriched by the others, leading the whole church to deeper communion in Christ.

4. *Enlarging the Table of Ecumenical Relationships*

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) cannot be ecumenical by itself. We are linked to many others as we work for the unity of the body of Christ. The church is called to maintain valued relationships with long-standing partners in ecumenical councils, full communion accords, and other ecclesial agreements. At the same time, we are called to move beyond the limitations of the past to find our place at the ecumenical table. The table belongs to God, and must not be restricted by imagined privileges. All are invited guests of our one Lord, the Lord provides the space for all who are willing to come, and the Lord continues to invite all who are not yet willing.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is called to discover deeper forms of ecumenical commitment to the integrity of the gospel, embracing new partners whose different theologies, traditions, and structures can enrich our theology, traditions, and structures. All of our ecumenical relationships are for healing divisions and seeking reconciliation in the church and the world.

5. *Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth*

The unity of the church is not an end in itself, but an element in the reconciliation of the whole created order. The pursuit of God’s justice is a response to the gospel that embraces the whole world, and that seeks God’s abundant life for all people. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is committed to working with other churches, listening to the voices of brothers and sisters who call for human freedom, social justice, and the healing of the planet entrusted to human care. As Presbyterians hear and engage in the work of freedom and justice, we are transformed.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is called to sustained study and serious engagement with the Accra Confession of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, “Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth” as approved by the 217th General Assembly (2006) (*Minutes*, 2006, Part I, p. 575).

6. *Covenanting for Peacemaking in a War-Torn World*

God’s intention for the world is shalom—peace and justice for all creation—yet the world is wounded by violence and broken by war. Forces of brutality and aggression are at work in all aspects of human life, even within the church. Christ came to break down dividing walls of hostility and establish God’s new way of reconciliation in the world. All who follow Christ are called to live as peacemakers in a world that lacks the deep reality of God’s concord and unity.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is called to renew its commitment to peacemaking within families and communities, in the church, and among societies and nations. As we live in unity with brothers and sisters around the world, working ecumenically to overcome violence, we both embody and proclaim fullness of the Lord’s peace.

7. *Nurturing Interreligious Engagements*

Commitment to peacemaking and to justice in the economy, for the earth and in the social order, is more than a Christian concern. God is at work in the whole world, within and beyond the bounds of the church. God’s household is larger than the church, and all God’s people are integral to each other’s wholeness and the healing of the world.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is called to forge interreligious relationships with all who yearn and work for the healing of our wounded world, grounding interreligious engagements in our ecumenical commitments and practices.

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8. *Renewing a Commitment to Disciplines of Christian Spirituality*

Jesus prayed that all may be one, so that the world may believe that the Lord was sent by the God who loves the world (cf. John 17:1–26). The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is called to pray with Jesus, deepening our relationship to the One who gathers us. Through the ecumenical movement, American Presbyterians have been enriched by the worship practices of other Reformed Christians and other Christian traditions, capturing our imaginations and giving voice to our yearnings.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is called to renew its commitment to disciplines of Christian spiritual formation, especially worship, regular reading of Scripture, prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. As we join with other Christians in praying with Jesus, we can better discern God’s will, join God’s mission, and nurture our life together.

9. *Celebrating Gifts We Receive and Share*

The church’s engagements in ecumenical councils, its bilateral dialogues with other churches, its developing relationships with nontraditional partners, and its encounters with churches in the global community have brought gifts that enrich our understanding of Christian faith and life. We have also offered Reformed gifts such as commitment to scriptural authority and confessional integrity; the bond of grace and gratitude; the shared ministry of deacons, elders, and ministers; confessional declaration of the inclusion of women and men in all ministries of the church; and the indissoluble bond between faith and life, theology and ethics.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is called to receive gratefully the gifts God gives through others, and to share generously with others the gifts God has entrusted to us.

10. *Revitalizing Practices of Ecumenical Formation*

Ecumenical commitment and engagement was once central to Presbyterian identity. In the present time, when many Christians move easily from one denomination to another, confessional identity is ambiguous and the need for ecumenical dialogue is dimly recognized. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) must revitalize practices of ecumenical formation so that a new generation, with all its diversity, can embrace a vision of Christian unity.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is called to encourage commitment to the unity of Christ’s church through a range of educational, experiential, and missional opportunities. Study materials for children, youth, and adults; seminary engagement with ecumenical documents; national and international ecumenical encounters; and regular worship with congregations of ecumenical partners are some of the ecumenical formation possibilities that must become regular features of Presbyterian life.

An Affirmation of Our Ecumenical Commitment

*We affirm the goal of unity that Jesus described in his high priestly prayer:
We seek to become fully one in Christ, so that the world may believe.*

*We believe in one God, known to us in three persons,
eternally united in the bond of love.
In love we proclaim our faith in the Triune God
and acknowledge one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.*

*We are called to unity, but not uniformity, as people of God
who, though many, are members one of another
and who, together, constitute the body of Christ on earth.*

*We come as disciples bearing marks of diverse cultures and traditions,
bringing unique insights, experiences, strengths, and vulnerabilities.
We are eager to learn from one another, to seek formation and transformation,
knowing that each of us stands in need of correction and mutual upbuilding.*

*We confess that too often we have undertaken alone
projects and ministries that could have been enriched by broader participation,
and we recommit ourselves to the historic Lund principle
that Christians should take united action whenever they find this possible.*

*Our vision of unity in Christ is universal,
concerned for the whole of creation, as well as the rights and needs of humanity.
We are called to join with others in bold, prophetic witness when confronting the abuse of power and threats to the planet,
and in covenants for justice in the economy and the earth.*

As Christians, we remain open to the working of God's Spirit among people of other faiths, both in their individual and in their corporate religious lives and are prepared, as we are called by Jesus Christ, to dialogue and cooperate everywhere with people of good will on behalf of justice, peace, and the common good. We pursue the journey of faith with Christ wherever we find ourselves, in whatever company, all in each place.

The tasks of Christian witness, service, justice, and peacemaking are addressed by councils, alliances, and national churches, but also in local encounters, congregational interaction, and common prayer across traditional religious boundaries.

*Guided on our way by the Holy Spirit,
we rejoice in the hope of perfect unity in Christ, a unity not of our making,
but a gift designed and revealed by the Maker of us all.*

Appendix A

Participants in the Consultation on the Ecumenical Stance of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

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Mary Gene Boteler	Eileen Lindner	Rebecca Tollefson
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Jose Luis Casal	Jerrold Lowry	Cathy Ulrich
Ed Chan	Sarah McCaslin	Philip Wickeri
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Edward Davis	Rose Niles McCrary	Jon Chapman
Jane Dempsey Douglass	Don Mason	Hunter Farrell
James Foucher, <i>United Church of Christ</i>	Aimee Moiso	Ann Ferguson
Jonas Georges	Blair Monie	Eric Hoey
Theodore Gill Jr.	Damayanthi Niles	Christian Iosso
Arlene Gordon	James Noel	Clifton Kirkpatrick
Steve Grace	Mercy Amba Oduyoye, <i>Methodist Church of Ghana</i>	Sara Lisherness
Krystin Granberg	Kathleen Owens	Carlos Malave
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Catreli Hunter	Rebecca Todd Peters	Joe Small
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	Allison Seed	Robina Winbush

Endnote

1. The third world conference on Faith and Order in Lund, Sweden (1952) issued this challenge, "should not our churches ask themselves whether they are showing sufficient eagerness to enter into conversation with other churches, and whether they should not act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately?" This principle has been adapted in many forms as the Lund Principle and often is formulated as "we should do together all things except those in which deep differences of conscience demand that we do separately."