

A proposal to the Middle Governing Bodies Commission from the Presbytery of Santa Barbara

April 5, 2011

The Presbytery of Santa Barbara proposes that the current geographic boundaries of the Presbytery of Santa Barbara be broadened so as to overlay or become conjunct with the current boundaries of the presbyteries that make up the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii. The purpose of this proposal is to further the mission of the PCUSA and to move toward “maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” within the PCUSA in accordance with Ephesians 4:3 and W-4.4003g.

Where Does this Fit in the Larger Discussion?

We recognize that there are discussions about creating “porous presbyteries” where churches within a synod could unite with any presbytery within that synod. This could lead to the same end where churches at some geographic distance could unite around shared mission. However the current Book of Order definition of a presbytery or synod is geographical.

This is not an all or nothing proposal. The type of overlay or conjunct presbytery we propose would meet the Book of Order requirements on geography while achieving the same goal. However if “porous presbyteries” later become possible, the Conjunct Presbytery of Santa Barbara could return to its present geographic boundaries and cease to be conjunct.

How Did this Proposal Come About?

The leadership of the Presbytery of Santa Barbara has been approached by several churches in the geographic boundaries of the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii about the possibility of becoming member churches of the Presbytery of Santa Barbara.

These churches that are currently considering withdrawing from the PCUSA may transfer membership from their current Presbytery to the Conjunct Presbytery of Santa Barbara in accordance with G-11.0103h in order to continue their relationship with the PCUSA. These churches see a possibility of uniting with this Presbytery as a step they could take short of withdrawal from the PCUSA.

The Presbytery of Santa Barbara has not initiated these conversations. However, this desire has struck a responsive chord that none should be lost and we remain united and strong as a denomination.

Why the Presbytery of Santa Barbara?

The stated reasons from these churches for desiring to unite with the Presbytery of Santa Barbara include a shared understanding of scripture, mission priorities and the Presbytery’s record in lay leader training, new church development, and innovative mission projects. Additionally, the churches say that they are attracted by the missional, collegial and gracious spirit that they believe characterize this Presbytery.

The Scope of this Document

The intention of this document is to lay out the case for the approval of this proposal for a conjunct presbytery. It will show that the proposal is:

- Needed
- Missional
- In accordance with our history
- In accordance with our polity
- In accordance with the practice of other Reformed bodies.

In addition there are concluding sections on:

- Book of Order* issues
- Possible objections and responses
- Resolutions

The Proposal is Needed

This proposal for a conjunct presbytery is needed to continue and deepen our connectional heritage. We deeply value the unity of the PCUSA. In no sense is this a move toward the creation of yet another Reformed denomination in the USA.

However we recognize that our denomination is struggling in its communal life, theological understanding, and missional and social witness. While there are disagreements over cause, reasons and severity, we are losing members and are increasingly torn by controversy and deep disagreement. Our denominational debates, often bitter and rancorous, have damaged our unity and troubled our peace.

The effect of all this is that the church is moving rapidly from diversity to division. What was a tendency five years ago has become a trend. More churches are withdrawing, some informally, some formally. Increasingly per capita contributions to governing bodies are being withheld or redirected. Mission funds, special offerings, and contributions are being diverted outside the PCUSA at a heightened rate.

Our vision is to create a structure within our polity which will provide a place of convergence and shared ministry in the PCUSA for those within the borders of the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii. We also hope to reclaim some congregations which have previously united with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. Some of these churches are reportedly less than satisfied with that decision because they have a commitment to greater connectionalism and the full inclusion of women.

The Proposal is Missional

It is essential that any presbytery be focused on a positive vision of mission. Therefore the Conjunct Presbytery of Santa Barbara will consist of congregations and leaders who commit to:

Follow Christ in mission, cultivating fellowships that wish to start new churches, innovative ministries and leadership development that will result in healthy and reproducing churches.

Plant churches and fostering new initiatives to reach the un-churched and de-churched populations of our area. This is in conformity with the General Assembly Mission Council's goal of planting one thousand new churches.

Intentionally develop leadership for Hispanic, Asian and other racial-ethnic communities through programs such as the current Lay Leader Training Institute.

Provide support for international movements with a common goal of reaching the lost.

The Proposal is in Accordance with our History

There are at least two historical precedents for allowing one Presbytery to overlay the geographic boundaries of another in what was called a "Conjunct Presbytery." In 1741, the Synod of Philadelphia voted for the "Old Side" views concerning the first Great Awakening. Since the Old Side ministers were in the majority, the New Side ministers withdrew and formed the Conjunct Presbytery. The Old Side ministers continued as the Synod of Philadelphia. The Conjunct Presbytery had the same geographical boundaries as the Synod of Philadelphia. In 1746, the Conjunct Presbytery and the New York Presbytery joined together to form the Synod of New York, having geographical boundaries covering the old Philadelphia synod and the New York Presbytery. The Conjunct Presbytery was dissolved with the formation of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia in 1758.

A second historical precedent took place in the 1830s. The General Assembly of 1834 created the Second Philadelphia Presbytery that had the same geographic boundaries as the original, now First Philadelphia Presbytery. The Second Philadelphia Presbytery continued to function into 1837. At that point, the Presbyterian Church unfortunately split into two denominations, one taking the First and the other taking the Second Philadelphia Presbyteries. The split was not healed until the reunion of the UPCUSA and the PCUS in the 1983.

The Proposal is in Accordance with Our Polity

This proposal is in keeping with the spirit and letter of the polity of the PCUSA. The *Book of Order* describes a Presbytery as "a corporate expression of the church consisting of all churches and ministers of the Word and Sacrament within a **certain district**" (G-11.0101). The term district is not defined here. However, it is not in conflict to define it by theological or missional interest and still retain a type of conjunct "geographical district" (G-11.0103) such as the Presbytery of Santa Barbara proposes which would have membership beyond its current borders as a Conjunct Presbytery.

The *Book of Order* is silent as to Conjunct Presbyteries. The provisions for non-geographic Presbyteries (G-12.0102k) do not apply since the Conjunct Presbytery of Santa Barbara would continue to be geographic though conjunct with the borders of other Presbyteries.

We propose that churches within the borders of the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii be allowed to make a full transfer from their current Presbytery to the Conjunct Presbytery of Santa Barbara upon a majority vote at a regularly called meeting of the Session and of the Congregation. This congregation could then be transferred from their current Presbytery upon majority vote of that Presbytery and upon reception by majority vote by the Conjunct Presbytery of Santa Barbara

in accordance with G-11.103i. Please see the sections on “objections and responses and “*Book of Order* issues” for suggested financial arrangements.

The Proposal is in Accordance with the Practice of Other Reformed Bodies

The Reformed Church of America has established a “Classis” system which is organized on the basis of theology and shared mission. This proposal for the Conjunct Presbytery of Santa Barbara is very similar to the highly effective Classis system of the Reformed Church of America.

One example of a Classis is the City Classis which is made up of ten congregations located in cities such as San Francisco, Denver, Philadelphia, Compton and Chicago. This Classis overlays numerous traditional geographic Classes and is based on a “shared purpose to cultivate and nurture an environment where spiritual renewal, innovative ministry and leadership development results in healthy and reproducing urban churches.”

In the Reformed Church in America a Classis has many of the responsibilities which belong to Presbyteries in our system. For example, the Classis supervises seminary students and candidates in process toward becoming ministers of Word and Sacrament and processes the call of ministers of Word and Sacrament to Classis churches and congregations. The Classis also monitors and assesses the health of Classis churches; develops supports and provides resources for coached networks for pastors; develops supports and provides resources for church leadership development; meets with the leadership of churches and congregations; and facilitates consultation for churches to provide ongoing growth and health of Classis churches and congregations.

Book of Order Issues

1. Per Capita:

- a. Synod: Similar to G-16.0201p, the per capita apportionments for congregation within the Conjunct Santa Barbara Presbytery should be paid to the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii
- b. Presbytery: Under G-9.0404d presbyteries receive funds from individual congregations. Any congregation transferring to the Conjunct Santa Barbara Presbytery should give their per capita funds as follows:
 - i. On January 1 of the year following transfer, the congregation should give 80% of its per capita to its former presbytery and 20% to the Conjunct Santa Barbara Presbytery;
 - ii. On January 1 of the second year following transfer, the congregation should pay 40% of its per capita to its former presbytery and 60% to the Conjunct Santa Barbara Presbytery;
 - iii. On January 1 of the third year following transfer, the congregation should pay 100% of its per capita to the Conjunct Santa Barbara Presbytery.

2. Judicial Matters: (D-3.0101 and D-6.0202)

Presbytery: The PJC of the Conjunct Santa Barbara Presbytery shall have jurisdiction over any judicial matters arising within or between any of its minister members or congregations.

3. Oversight of ministers and congregations:

- a. Presbytery: The Conjunct Santa Barbara Presbytery shall exercise all powers of oversight given in the *Book of Order* over its minister members. This shall include, but is not limited to, all functions of the Committee on Ministry and the Committee on Preparation for Ministry.
- b. Presbytery: The Conjunct Santa Barbara Presbytery shall have oversight and shall encourage all its congregations in accordance with the *Book of Order*.

Objections and Responses

Objection: This action will take churches and mission support from other Presbyteries.

Response: The reality is that some churches are looking to leave in any case and would take their mission support with them. It is better to provide a structure to allow these churches and their mission support to stay within the PCUSA instead of being lost to the PCUSA altogether.

Objection: This will not be enough. There are disaffected churches all across the country.

Response: We see this Conjunct Presbytery of Santa Barbara as providing hope and an effective model. If successful, this model could be adopted by Presbyteries in other regions.

Objection: There are congregations within the current boundaries of the Presbytery of Santa Barbara that would not want to be a part of the Conjunct Presbytery of Santa Barbara because of a different understanding of mission.

Response: If this were adopted we recognize that there are churches within the current geographic boundaries of the Presbytery of Santa Barbara that might prefer to align with another Presbytery. We recognize that it would be appropriate for another Presbytery to overlay our current boundaries by going through the same process with GAMGBC and for those churches to unite with that Presbytery upon a majority vote of their Session and Congregation and reception by that Presbytery. While we do not desire to disassociate with any of the churches in our Presbytery, we recognize that their sense of integrity and mission might lead them to that step. We would continue to honor their ministries in friendship and collegiality.

Objection: Isn't this just laying the groundwork for eventual disunion?

Response: The purpose of this proposal is for us to continue to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, to continue disaffected congregations as member churches of the PCUSA and, if possible, to reclaim some congregations for the PCUSA which have already left. We are committed to this!

Therefore:

be it resolved that the geographic boundaries of the Presbytery of Santa Barbara be broadened so as to become conjunct with the current boundaries of the presbyteries that make up the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii.

be it resolved that the Presbytery of Santa Barbara be renamed the Conjunct Presbytery of Santa Barbara

be it resolved that churches within the borders of the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii be allowed to make a full transfer from their current Presbytery to the Conjunct Presbytery of Santa Barbara upon a majority vote at a regularly called meeting of the Session and of the Congregation, and upon a majority vote of the sending Presbytery and reception by majority vote by the Conjunct Presbytery of Santa Barbara