First Presbyterian Church of Kannapolis
Denomination Task Force
Initial Findings Report
May 8, 2013
Executive Summary

Charge of the Denomination Task Force
At its October 2012 meeting, on recommendation from the Long Range Planning team, the Session of First Presbyterian Church (FPC) Kannapolis appointed a Denomination Task Force to examine the state of the PCUSA, the Presbytery of Charlotte, and other movements taking place among reformed denominations.

The State of Mainline Protestant Denominations in the United States
- Pew Survey released in July 2012, 19% of Americans’ religious affiliation can be classified as "nones," confessing no religion.
- The mainline Protestant churches are typically considered to be the American Baptist Churches in the USA; the Episcopal Church; the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; the Presbyterian Church (USA); the United Church of Christ; and the United Methodist Church.
- Mainline churches accounted for only one-fifth of Protestant congregations in 2009. This marked a decline from approximately 80,000 churches in the 1950s to 72,000 churches in 2009.
- In the past fifty years, mainline church membership dropped by more than 25 percent to approximately 20 million people.

The State of Presbyterian Church (USA)

By the Numbers
- PCUSA membership declined 22.7 percent between 2000 and 2011.
- There were 712 fewer PCUSA congregations in 2011 than in 2000, and the average congregation size decreased by about 1/5.
- The rate at which congregations are being dismissed greatly increased in 2007.

Polity Issues
- Within the PCUSA organization, the Presbyterian Mission Agency has the largest structural framework beneath it.
- There are six separate ministries under the PCUSA Mission Agency, each of which have between six and 18 sub-ministries and/or networks.

Theology Issues
- Lack of essential tenets.
- Failure to follow the Five Solas of reformed faith: By Christ Alone, By Scripture Alone, By Grace Alone, By Faith Alone, Glory to God Alone
- Presbyterian Mission Agency affiliates’ actions regarding abortion.
- Questionable grant funding through the Compassion, Peace, and Justice Ministry under the PCUSA Mission Agency organizes the “Self-development of People” grant program.
- Removal of the “fidelity in marriage and chastity in singleness” clause from the Book of Order at the 219th General Assembly in 2010 under Amendment 10-A. Also as part of this
amendment, the language that stated that “those called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture” was changed to “governing bodies shall be guided by scripture.”

- A narrowly defeated motion at the 220th General Assembly from the Assembly Committee on Civil Union and Marriage Issues to amend the Book of Order to change the definition of marriage from “a man and a woman” to “two people.” Instead the General Assembly voted (489-152) to “move the whole PCUSA into a season of serious study and discernment concerning the meaning of Christian marriage” between the 2012 Assembly and the 2014 Assembly.

**The State of the Presbytery of Charlotte**
- Presbytery of Charlotte has had financial difficulties for the past several years, with incomes continuing to decline. The budget has been cut in half over the past decade.
- In the summer of 2012, the Presbytery of Charlotte staff was cut to three.
- Dismissal of nine churches since May of 2012 is indicative of the direction that things are going for the Presbytery. This amounts to a 7% reduction in one year alone.
- The number of congregations with temporary and interim pastors is high.

**A Summary of Other Presbyterian Denominations**
- Of the Presbyterian denominations that exist today, the Task Force looked at the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, and A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO).
- Upon comparison, there are two denominations that closely align with the mission of First Presbyterian Church of Kannapolis: the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) and A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO).

**Evangelical Presbyterian Church**
- EPC started in 1981.
- EPC determined that on the basic essentials of the Christian faith, they would not disagree, but on anything that was not essential, such as the issue of ordaining women as officers or practicing charismatic gifts, they give individual churches liberty.
- EPC consists of more than 400 churches and 135,000 members.

**ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians**
- ECO formed out of the Fellowship of Presbyterians movement.
- The Fellowship of Presbyterians began in January 2011.
- In August 2011, more than 1900 men and women of diverse ages and ethnicities gathered in Minneapolis to dream and pray together.
- In January 2012, a Covenanting Conference in Orlando launched a new Reformed body, ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians. Between the Minneapolis and Orlando
gatherings, 1,159 unique congregations were represented. Since that time, hundreds of congregations and individuals have joined The Fellowship of Presbyterians and begun the process of affiliation with ECO.

- ECO's name represents a three-fold commitment to make disciples of Jesus Christ (Evangelical), connect leaders through accountable biblical relationships founded in God’s grace (Covenant), and commit to a shared way of life together (Order). The acronym ECO also speaks to our commitment to strengthen the “ecosystems” of local churches, providing the resources needed to grow, thrive, and reproduce. ECO’s name also draws from the Greek term oikos, meaning “household,” used in the Bible to reference the network of relationships that nurture an individual.

**Presbytery of Charlotte Dismissal Process**

- The Presbytery of Charlotte adopted a new dismissal policy with two tracks: one for discernment and one for dismissal.
- The dismissal process is called the “Gracious Separation Process” and is summarized below:
  1. Notification to Presbytery
  2. Dialogue with Presbytery Representatives
  3. Congregational Gathering
  4. Congregational Meeting and Vote
  5. Property Retention or Compensation
  6. Presbytery Vote
  7. Final Details

**A Case Study: Huntersville Presbyterian Church**

- Huntersville Presbyterian Church (HPC) in Huntersville, NC was dismissed to ECO at the February 2013 Presbytery of Charlotte meeting.
- Huntersville Presbyterian Church currently has 387 giving households and 952 active members.
- The properties owned by HPC have a current tax value of approximately $5.5 million according to Mecklenburg County GIS.
- HPC began dismissal under the previously adopted reconciliation process.
- HPC left the PCUSA with a vote of 82 percent. Since the vote was less than 90 percent, HPC settled with the Presbytery of Charlotte to turn over their Doar Trust and supplement the income from the Trust with a payment equal to $21,600 annually for five years. The amount agreed upon was the average giving by HPC to the Presbytery of Charlotte from 2007 to 2011.
Full Report

Charge of the Denomination Task Force
Reformed theology has long recognized the connected nature of the church. As such, at its October 2012 meeting, on recommendation from the Long Range Planning team, the Session of First Presbyterian Church (FPC) Kannapolis appointed a Denomination Task Force to enter into a time of learning and study of the state of the PCUSA, the Presbytery of Charlotte, other movements taking place among reformed denominations, and the trends in American Presbyterianism as a whole. Below are the findings of the Denominational Task Force.

The State of Mainline Protestant Denominations in the United States
According to a Pew Survey released in July 2012, 19 percent of Americans can be classified as "nones," confessing no religion. This does not necessarily mean that these religiously unaffiliated Americans do not believe in God. It does mean that they do not currently ascribe to one religion or denomination. Compared to the 1990s six to seven percent, this rate of unaffiliated Americans is notably higher. The survey also found that the “unaffiliated” group is the the third-largest group worldwide, with 16 percent of the global population. This is approximately equal to population of Catholics worldwide.

According the Barna Group, a research and resource company focused on the intersection of faith and culture, mainline churches accounted for only one-fifth of Protestant congregations in 2009. This marked a decline from approximately 80,000 churches in the 1950s to 72,000 churches in 2009. The mainline Protestant churches are typically considered to be the American Baptist Churches in the USA; the Episcopal Church; the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; the Presbyterian Church (USA); the United Church of Christ; and the United Methodist Church. In the past fifty years, mainline church membership dropped by more than 25 percent to approximately 20 million people. The Barna Group report goes on to say that:

“The numerical decline is also related to the relative difficulty that mainline churches have experienced in attracting young adults. For instance, young adults (25 or younger) are 6 percent of the national population, they are just one-third as many (2%) of all adults attending mainline churches. At the other end of the age continuum, the statistics show that about one-quarter (27%) of American adults are 60 or older, but more than one-third of mainline attenders (35%) are 60-plus.

Another hurdle for the mainline bodies has been attracting minorities. These churches struggle in reaching Hispanics and Asians. While Hispanics make up 16 percent of the US population, they are only 6 percent of the mainline population. Asians represent 4 percent of the American public, but only half that proportion among mainline congregants. The failure to add substantial numbers of Hispanics is especially significant, given both the rapid increase of the Hispanic population as well as the outflow of Hispanics from Catholicism to Protestant churches in the past decade. Most of the Hispanics leaving Catholicism for another faith community are settling into evangelical or Pentecostal Protestant churches.
There is a behavioral reason for the decline of mainline churches, too: just one-third (31%) of mainline adults believe they have a personal responsibility to discuss their faith with people who have different beliefs.”

In other words, mainline churches may suffer from a severe lack of evangelism.

It may also important to note that, over the past decade, each of these denominations has struggled internally with the push for affirmation of same-sex marriage and/or ordination.

Sources:
• http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/18/world/pew-study-finds-one-in-6-follows-no-religion.html?_r=0
• http://archives.religionnews.com/faith/leaders-and-institutions/methodists-drop-votes-on-gay-marriage-clergy
• http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/02/15/report-us-churches-continue_vote_gay_marriage-clergy

The State of Presbyterian Church (USA)

By the Numbers
According to the Comparative Statistics compiled by the PCUSA Research Services, PCUSA membership declined 22.7 percent between 2000 and 2011. There were 712 fewer PCUSA congregations in 2011 than in 2000, and the average congregation size decreased by about 1/5. The rate at which congregations are being dismissed greatly increased in 2007.

Commissioners to the 2012 Assembly requested that the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly study concerns about per capita giving. This was an overture from the Presbytery of Detroit in which they asked that presbyteries not be required to pay per capita payments because of financial hardship or as a protest to General Assembly actions. Apparently many presbyteries, including the Charlotte Presbytery, are experiencing financial hardships. Under current General Assembly policy, presbyteries are required to pay per capita apportionments on every congregation within its presbytery regardless of whether that congregation is sending apportionment to the presbytery. A growing practice nationwide is for congregations to reduce or withhold their payments to presbytery whether it is for financial reasons or protest.

Sources:
**Polity Issues**

Upon its founding, the Presbyterian Church was organized in a Calvinistic bottom-up structure with congregations electing and ordaining elders as members of sessions, sessions composing presbyteries, presbyteries composing synods, and the General Assembly composing the entire denomination. This structure was decidedly different from the top-down structure of the Roman Catholic Church that, in part, helped to inspire the Protestant Reformation. Within the PCUSA organization, the Presbyterian Mission Agency has the largest structural framework beneath it. It is comprised of six separate ministries, each of which have between six and 18 sub-ministries and/or networks.

Sources:
- [http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/about/about-pma/](http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/about/about-pma/)
Theology Issues

1. Essential Tenets
PCUSA has no listing of the “Essential Tenets.” The ordination vow for pastors and officers asks, “Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable exposition of what the Scripture leads us to believe and do?” In the PCUSA, essential tenets are affirmed in principle, but never listed. Different pastors would give you different answers on what the essential tenets of PCUSA are.

Sources:
- http://www.sbpres.org/essentialtenets.doc
- http://www.layman.org/Files/EPCECOPCUSAComparisonchartsmallerversion.pdf

2. The Five Solas
“Sola” is a Latin word that means “alone” or “only.” The Five Solas emerged during the Protestant Reformation as a summary of the Reformers’ fundamental theological beliefs. At one time, PCUSA, as a reformed body followed these five beliefs that found their expression in the Book of Confessions. The Five Solas are:
- Solus Christus-By Christ Alone
- Sola Scriptura-By Scripture Alone
- Sola Gratia-By Grace Alone
- Sola Fide-By Faith Alone
- Soli Deo Gloria-Glory to God Alone

In its table “Five Solas of Reformed Faith versus PCUSA”, the Layman Online demonstrates how the Word of God compares to the beliefs, policies, and practices of PCUSA over the past three decades. The comparison is informative, thorough, and troubling.

As part of Amendment 10-A in 2010, the language in the Book of Order that previously stated that “those called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture” was changed to “governing bodies shall be guided by scripture.” This subtle yet significant change strips Scriptural authority.

In 2001, the General Assembly compromised on the Solus Christus belief to state that “Jesus Christ was unique but not necessarily the only way to salvation.” This is in direct conflict with the words of Jesus:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.”
John 14:6
Sources:
- http://www.layman.org/Files/Church%20x%20Solas.pdf
- http://www.1stpresbyterian.org/Uploaded%20files/Theological%20Issues%20in%20the%20PCUSA.pdf

3. Abortion

Over the years, the official position of Presbyterian Church on abortion has evolved. Beginning in 1970, the General Assembly declared that “the artificial or induced termination of a pregnancy is a matter of careful ethical decision of the patient … and therefore should not be restricted by law …” Clarifications to this position were made in 1992 and 2006, with the focus remaining an issue of personal choice based on one’s own understanding of scripture. Emphasis was also placed on providing counsel to women and families who found themselves at this crossroads. This principle that ‘God alone is Lord of the conscience’ and that our consciences are thus bound to nothing other than Scripture is perfectly in line with the Presbyterian belief in “freedom of conscience.”

The 204th General Assembly (1992) adopted the most comprehensive policy statement on pregnancy and abortion. The “Report of the Special Committee on Problem Pregnancy” addressed a myriad of issues in order to help guide individuals and families who face problem pregnancies and abortion. The following are excerpt from the 1992 policy:

“There is [both] agreement and disagreement on the basic issue of abortion. The committee [on problem pregnancies and abortion] agreed that there are no biblical texts that speak expressly to the topic of abortion, but that taken in their totality the Holy Scriptures are filled with messages that advocate respect for the woman and child before and after birth. Therefore the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) encourages an atmosphere of open debate and mutual respect for a variety of opinions concerning the issues related to problem pregnancies and abortion.”

Referring to the PCUSA Organizational Chart, Presbyterians Affirming Reproductive Options (PARO) is one of the ten networks that make up the Presbyterian Health Education and Welfare Association (PHEWA). PHEWA is a ministry of the Compassion, Peace & Justice Ministry of the Presbyterian Mission Agency in PCUSA. After navigating through the PCUSA website to the PARO page, PARO asserts that the reproductive health of women is under attack and so are the PCUSA reproductive health policies. PARO calls Presbyterians to action to contact their legislators to urge them to fund Planned Parenthood with taxpayer money to ensure unfettered access of all women to reproductive options including abortion.

Furthermore, Dr. Leroy Carhart, member of the board of directors of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice and one of four late-term abortion providers in the United States, spoke at the PARO luncheon at the 219th General Assembly in 2010. He urged political action to remove the continued inclusion of the Hyde Amendment from federal
appropriation funding. The amendment restricts the federal government from funding abortions for individuals on Medicaid.

PARO stated that:

“He spoke while being guarded by two armed security officers — the price of the increasingly violent actions of some of those who call themselves “pro-life.” He spoke of the continuing attempts at the state level to erode and ultimately eliminate women’s reproductive rights. In his view, this is a serious campaign to restore patriarchal control over women. He urged all present to join in resisting these threats to women’s health, lives, and freedoms. Dr. Carhart entitled his address, “Fighting back! Passing pro-woman, pro-choice legislation to reclaim the moral high ground on reproductive rights.”

The question arises that if, “there is [both] agreement and disagreement on the basic issue of abortion...Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) encourages an atmosphere of open debate and mutual respect for a variety of opinions concerning the issues related to problem pregnancies and abortion,” then why is there currently no corresponding network for “Presbyterians Affirming Life” under the PCUSA Mission Agency umbrella? The networks hold great lobbying power on the actions of the General Assembly. Being that PARO is the only network under PHEWA that deals with abortion, there is no balance as professed.

Sources:

4. Questionable Funding
Over the years, PCUSA has done marvelous work in providing food for the hungry, education for the uneducated, and spreading the name and hope of Jesus to the oppressed. Through the “social justice” movement, however, PCUSA money is being spent to lobby for legislative action on a national single-payer healthcare system and fund grants to questionable entities. The Compassion, Peace, and Justice Ministry under the PCUSA Mission Agency organizes the “Self-development of People” grant program. Upon viewing the funds granted to various entities over the years, some have gone on to do great work for God’s glory, while other have suspect motives and associations.

Sources:
- http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/sdop/funded-partnership-grants/
5. **Fidelity, Chastity, and Marriage**

At the 219th in 2010 the General Assembly passed Amendment 10-A, which removed G-6.0106b from the Book of Order. This produced a Book of Order that no longer contains the “fidelity in marriage and chastity in singleness” clause concerning the service of church officers, thereby opening the door to those participating in same-sex relationships. To ratify the passage of Amendment 10-A by the 219th General Assembly the Presbytery of Charlotte voted 162-154 in favor of removing G-6.0106b from the Book of Order, thereby removing the “fidelity and chastity” clause.

At the 220th General Assembly in 2012, an attempt was made to restore G-6.016b to the Book of Order, but the amendment was overwhelmingly defeated by a vote of 437-169. The General Assembly voted (329-279) to propose an amendment to the ordination standard that the manner of life of church officers should “include repentance of sin and diligent use of the means of grace.” This amendment will be sent to the 173 Presbyteries for ratification. The General Assembly also adopted a statement that “acknowledges that faithful Presbyterians earnestly seeking to follow Jesus Christ hold different views about what the Scriptures teach concerning the morality of committed, same-gender relationships” and that “the Presbyterian Church (USA) does not have one interpretation of Scripture on this matter.”

Also at the 220th General Assembly, after several hours of debate, a motion was narrowly defeated (308-338) from the Assembly Committee on Civil Union and Marriage Issues to propose an amendment to the Book of Order that would change the definition of marriage from “a man and a woman” to “two people.” Instead the General Assembly voted (489-152) to “move the whole PCUSA into a season of serious study and discernment concerning the meaning of Christian marriage” between the 2012 Assembly and the 2014 Assembly. Educational materials are being prepared and distributed to all presbyteries and congregations.

**The State of the Presbytery of Charlotte**

The Presbytery of Charlotte is the third largest presbytery in the PCUSA denomination. It serves seven counties: Anson, Cabarrus, Mecklenburg, Montgomery, Richmond, Stanly, and Union, which include 119 Churches (1 in Chesterfield Co., SC); 35,986 members; 289 ministers and 46 educators. The Presbytery of Charlotte has been experiencing financial difficulties for the past several years, with incomes continuing to decline. The budget has been cut in half over the past decade. In the summer of 2012, the Presbytery of Charlotte staff was cut to three. The dismissal of nine churches since May of 2012 is indicative of the direction that things are going for the Presbytery. That is a seven percent reduction in one year alone. Upon viewing the list of the remaining churches, the number of congregations with temporary and interim pastors is alarming. This calls into question the effectiveness of the call process currently employed by the Presbytery.
Below is a list of Presbytery of Charlotte stated meeting highlights for 2012 and 2013 to date:

- **113th Stated Meeting Highlights (2/11/12):**
  - Recognized 250th anniversary of Hopewell Presbyterian.
  - Voted to dissolve relationship between Presbytery of Charlotte and Rev. Sam Roberson (General Presbyter/Stated Clerk) no later than 3/1/12 and that he be given an one-year severance package.
  - Approved Rev. Timm High as acting General Presbyter and Tamara Williams as acting Stated Clerk.
  - 2 persons were enrolled as inquirers in the preparation of ministry process. 2 persons were examined and approved as candidates for ministry and one person was examined and approved for ordination as teaching elder.
  - Endorsed an overture to the General Assembly from Biscoe Presbyterian Church requesting dismissal to Coastal Carolina Presbytery.

- **114th Stated Meeting Highlights (5/15/12):**
  - Presbytery staff cut to 3 positions, due to budget shortfalls.
  - Bethlehem Presbyterian Church dismissed to Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC). They were the first session to request implementation of the gracious dismissal policy.
  - Interim General Presbyter search committee formed.
  - Comment was made that there were trust issues within the Presbytery.
  - Three persons were enrolled as inquirers in preparation for ministry; one person was examined and approved to be enrolled as candidate for ministry; two persons were examined and approved for ordination as teaching elders.

- **115th Stated Meeting Highlights (7/21/12):**
  - Benton Heights PC dismissed to EPC
  - Rourk PC dismissed to EPC
  - McLean PC dismissed to EPC
  - Two persons were enrolled as inquirers; 4 persons were examined and approved to be enrolled as candidates for ministry; one person was examined and approved for ordination as teaching elder.

- **116th Stated Meeting Highlights (10/16/12):**
  - Calvary Church sold property in Davidson and made large contribution to Presbytery.
  - Bethpage-Concord and First United-Concord merger approved; new church name to be Bethpage United Presbyterian Church.
  - 2013 budget approved. 2013 giving projected at $1,125,000 (down 9% from 2012). Majority of expense reductions due to staff cuts.
  - Recognized ECO (Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians) as a Reformed Body to which congregations from Charlotte Presbytery may be dismissed.
  - Bethel PC dismissed to ECO.
  - Siler PC dismissed to EPC.
Policy on dismissal was revised. Main revisions were eliminating or reducing the # of members of discernment team and meetings between session and presbytery – basically simplifying & shortening the process.

One person was approved to be enrolled as inquirer; one was examined and approved to be enrolled as candidate for ministry and one was examined and approved for ordination as teaching elder.

- 117th Stated Meeting Highlights (2/16/13):
  - 2013 minimum terms of call were approved.
  - Troy PC dismissed to EPC
  - Ridgecrest PC dismissed to EPC
  - Huntersville PC dismissed to ECO
  - Interim General Presbyter Search Committee reported they have interviewed several candidates and has been receiving counsel & advice from Synod Executive & working diligently to complete task.
  - The report from Committee on Preparation of Ministry was given in two parts at this meeting. The first part was presentation of two persons who were examined and approved for ordination as teaching elders. Part 2 was given later presenting 2 persons who were enrolled as inquirers and 4 persons who were examined and approved as candidates for ministry. Of these 4 persons it was stated that one was the first openly gay person to be approved as a candidate for ministry in the Presbytery of Charlotte.

- Items recommended by the 220th General Assembly (2012) for individual presbyteries to vote on by June 2013 include:
  - Amending Heidelberg Catechism in the Book of Confessions
  - 18 Amendments on various issues.

Sources:
- [http://www.presbyofcharlotte.org](http://www.presbyofcharlotte.org)
- [http://www.presbyofcharlotte.org/PresbyteryMeetings/tabid/47432/Default.aspx](http://www.presbyofcharlotte.org/PresbyteryMeetings/tabid/47432/Default.aspx)
A Summary of Other Presbyterian Denominations

Over time a great many splits and unions have taken place in the North American Presbyterian Church (see family connections chart below). The splits took place over disagreements regarding polity and/or theology. The unions were the result of resolving disagreements and/or merging for practicality.

Of the Presbyterian denominations that exist today, the Task Force has looked at the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, and A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO). Upon comparison, there are two denominations that closely align with the mission of First Presbyterian Church of Kannapolis: the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) and A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO).

**Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC)**

According to the EPC website:

“Our name describes us well. The EPC is both evangelical and Presbyterian. We are evangelical in our zeal for the Gospel, as well as, evangelism, missions and living obediently as followers of Jesus. At the same time, we are rooted deeply in the Protestant Reformation and especially the theological and pastoral work of John Calvin. We embrace the Westminster Confession of Faith as our doctrinal standard and the rule of spiritually mature elders linked together regionally as the best way to guide local congregations.”
When the EPC started in 1981 we determined that on the basic essentials of the Christian faith, we would not disagree, but on anything that was not essential, such as the issue of ordaining women as officers or practicing charismatic gifts, we would give each other liberty. Above all, we committed ourselves to loving each other and not engaging in quarrels and strife. The result is that when we get together in our regional and national meetings, we spend most of our time in worship and fellowship and almost none in arguing with each other.

The EPC consists of more than 400 churches and 135,000 members. We have a world missions program with a priority on sending missionaries to unreached people groups. We are eager to plant churches across the United States and especially in urban communities and college towns. Our desire is that every one of our congregations will be an outpost of the Kingdom in post-Christian America with every member viewing himself or herself as a missionary on a mission.”

**Fellowship of Presbyterians and ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians**

ECO formed out of the Fellowship of Presbyterians movement. At the time this report is written, there are 40 congregations in the denomination. Two are in North Carolina, having been dismissed from the Charlotte Presbytery: Bethel Presbyterian Church in Cornelius and Huntersville Presbyterian Church. According to the Fellowship of Presbyterians website:

“The Fellowship of Presbyterians began in January 2011 as a conversation between seven PC(USA) pastors who wanted to find new ways to encourage each other in common faith, ministry, and mission. These pastors were concerned about the health of the PC(USA) as a denomination, where membership has dropped steadily over 40 years and ongoing disputes over theology and bureaucracy were creating a culture of contention rather than Kingdom vitality. They dreamed of reclaiming a covenanted biblical community, where unity is derived from a clearly articulated theology and a shared mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ, and where new generations of leaders are nurtured to speak the gospel into a rapidly-changing world.

These seven pastors issued a nationwide call to others of like mind who envisioned a new future for congregations to connect and grow while sharing a Presbyterian, Reformed, Evangelical heritage. In August 2011, more than 1900 men and women of diverse ages and ethnicities answered that call, gathering in Minneapolis to dream and pray together.

In January 2012, a Covenanting Conference in Orlando, solidified the dream of The Fellowship of Presbyterians (and) launched a new Reformed body, ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians. Between the Minneapolis and Orlando gatherings, 1,159 unique congregations were represented. Since that time, hundreds of congregations and individuals have joined The Fellowship of Presbyterians and begun the process of affiliation with ECO.”
According to the ECO page on the Fellowship of Presbyterians website:

“ECO exists to serve congregations and nurture leaders, building flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ.

As an expression of The Fellowship of Presbyterians, ECO seeks to serve the ministry and mission of Christ’s Church. Our name represents a three-fold commitment to make disciples of Jesus Christ (Evangelical), connect leaders through accountable biblical relationships founded in God’s grace (Covenant), and commit to a shared way of life together (Order). The acronym ECO also speaks to our commitment to strengthen the “ecosystems” of local churches, providing the resources needed to grow, thrive, and reproduce.

Just as earthly ecosystems draw richness from the right kind of diversity, ECO is committed to unleashing the ministry gifts of women, men, young leaders, and every ethnicity. ECO’s name also draws from the Greek term oikos, meaning “household,” used in the Bible to reference the network of relationships that nurture an individual.

Included as an appendix is a chart comparing the PCUSA, EPC, and ECO denominations. Several of the links listed under sources also provide several charts comparing these three denominations.

Sources:
- http://www.fellowship-pres.org/about/
- http://www.fellowship-pres.org/eco/
- http://www.epc.org/about-the-epc/
- http://www.layman.org/Files/EPCECOPCUSAcomparisonchartsmallversion.pdf
Presbytery of Charlotte Dismissal Process
The Presbytery of Charlotte adopted a new dismissal policy on October 16, 2012. The new dismissal policy recognizes the futility of forcing congregations that have decided to leave the denomination into a discernment process. Therefore, two tracks were set up: one for discernment and one for dismissal.

The discernment process involves the identification of issues with a joint task force of members from the congregation and members from the presbytery. It also involves a series of congregational meetings to determine the best course of action to resolve the issues.

The dismissal process is called the “Gracious Separation Process”. The steps are summarized as follows:

1. **Notification**: Session notifies the Presbytery in writing of its intent to seek dismissal to another reformed body.
2. **Dialogue**: The General Presbyter appoints at least two representatives of the Presbytery to dialogue with the Session about the reasons for seeking dismissal.
3. **Congregational Gathering**: The Presbytery representatives meet with the congregation to clarify the concerns leading the Session to seek dismissal.
4. **Congregational Meeting and Vote**: The Session calls a congregational meeting. All active members are notified in writing of the meeting at least 30 days in advance and verbally at all congregational gatherings within the 30 days. The meeting is moderated by a member of the Presbytery (other than the church’s pastor). The Presbyter representatives are also invited to the meeting.
   a. **Quorum and Membership Certification**: One half of the congregations active membership must be present at the Congregational Meeting (Step 4). Provisional ballots may be cast by anyone claiming active membership but is not on the roll and may be verified later by the General Presbyter.
   b. The Session provides written proposals to the congregation recommending dismissal to another Reformed body.
   c. All members present have the right to speak.
   d. Vote shall be taken by written ballot of active members present (2/3 required to pass)
5. **Property Retention or Compensation**
   a. A 90% or greater vote in favor of dismissal allows the congregation to keep all of its property without compensation to the Presbytery. Voluntary contribution is encouraged.
   b. A 66%-90% vote in favor of dismissal will result in settlement negotiation resulting in payment of percentage of property value equal to the percentage vote that did not vote for dismissal or a five-year per capita payment to the Presbytery.
6. **Presbytery Vote**: The Presbytery of Charlotte will vote to approve the dismissal and terms at its next quarterly meeting.
7. **Final Details**: The church may retain its name with the proper denomination title. Other considerations include status of the minister, status of insurance policies, re-establishment of 501c(3) tax exempt status, and the corporate status of the congregation.
**A Case Study: Huntersville Presbyterian Church**

Huntersville Presbyterian Church (HPC) in Huntersville, NC was dismissed to ECO at the February 2013 Presbytery of Charlotte meeting. HPC currently has 387 giving households and 952 active members. The properties owned by HPC have a current tax value of approximately $5.5 million according to Mecklenburg County GIS.

HPC began dismissal under the previously adopted reconciliation process. HPC diligently put all materials and correspondence regarding the process on its website. Through a communication committee, the HPC Session provided a list of concerns with PCUSA, a description of the reconciliation process, and a list of questions and answers about the process and its ramifications. They also provided a link to a comparison Five Solas of Reformed Faith and PCUSA’s actions. They hosted a series of small group discussions among congregation members.

After following the previous reconciliation process, HPC left the PCUSA with a vote of 82 percent. Since the vote was less than 90 percent, HPC settled with the Presbytery of Charlotte to turn over their Doar Trust and supplement the income from the Trust with a payment equal to $21,600 annually for five years. The amount agreed upon was the average giving by HPC to the Presbytery of Charlotte from 2007 to 2011.

Source:

- [http://www.presbyofcharlotte.org/PresbyteryMeetings/INFOPAC/tabid/47827/Default.aspx](http://www.presbyofcharlotte.org/PresbyteryMeetings/INFOPAC/tabid/47827/Default.aspx)

**Respectfully Submitted,**

Erin Burris, Frank Gibson, Bill Hammond, and Debbie McDaniel
## APPENDIX

Comparison of basic beliefs and viewpoints of three Presbyterian denominations: Presbyterian Church (USA) (PCUSA), Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians (ECO), and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISSUE</th>
<th>PCUSA</th>
<th>ECO</th>
<th>EPC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When did the denomination come into existence in its current structure / form?</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can the denomination list what it considers to be “Essential Tenets of the Faith”? (Essential tenets are foundational beliefs required to be held by all ordained leaders.)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Sola Scriptura” is the Reformed teaching that the Bible is the only inspired, perfect, sufficient, and authoritative word of God and the only source for Christian doctrine. Is this view upheld?</td>
<td>Yes and No 2 &amp; 3</td>
<td>Yes  This view is upheld by many (most?) but not by all ordained leaders. There is a wide variety of views on scripture and the authority of scripture held by ordained leaders allowed / accepted in the PCUSA.</td>
<td>Yes  This view is held by all ordained leaders as it is in their essential tenets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do significant numbers of elders and pastors question that Jesus Christ is Lord of all and the singular way of salvation?</td>
<td>Yes 4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language for God</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinitarian by its confessions, but allows and/or embraces views that undermine historic Trinitarian faith</td>
<td>Trinitarian by its confessions, but allows and/or embraces views that undermine historic Trinitarian faith</td>
<td>Strongly embraces traditional (Nicene) standards-their essential tenets</td>
<td>Strongly embraces traditional (Nicene) standards-their essential tenets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Yes
2. Yes
3. No
4. No

Encourages new expressions such to describe the Trinity. Discourages "Lord" and "lordship" language as sexist and patriarchal.

Adheres to biblical and traditional vocabulary.

Adheres to biblical and traditional vocabulary.
Is substitutionary atonement by Jesus upheld (“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,” (1 Corinthians 15:3) See also 2 Corinthians 5:21, Romans 4:25, 1 Peter 2:24, Romans 3:25, 1 John 2:2, etc.) While there is more depth to the atonement than the substitutionary view alone, no Biblical / Reformed view excludes what may be rightly called the foundational view of the atonement, commonly known as substitutionary.)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confessions / Creeds</th>
<th>Confessions plus 3 Catechisms</th>
<th>Westminster Confession of Faith</th>
<th>Call for Ethical Purity</th>
<th>Are women ordained into leadership positions?</th>
<th>Confirms the view that marriage is between one man and one woman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes and No(^{2,3}) (While official statements of the PCUSA uphold this view. Without essential beliefs clearly stated and upheld different beliefs are allowed to be held and taught by ordained leaders)</td>
<td>Yes (included in their essentials so no variance of belief allowed in this area for ordained leaders)</td>
<td>Westminster Confession of Faith (For clarity of message, the EPC lifts up only one confession.)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes and No (While a majority of presbyteries and congregations ordain women into leadership positions, it is not seen as an essential belief. Thus, it is not a required belief all must affirm.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Confessions plus 3 Catechisms</td>
<td>8 Confessions plus 3 Catechisms (same as PCUSA)</td>
<td>8 Confessions plus 3 Catechisms (same as PCUSA)</td>
<td>Yes and No (This is the official position of the denomination but from what was stated at the last General Assembly, some pastors are not abiding by it. The traditional definition of marriage has faced serious challenges at the last 2 national assemblies.)</td>
<td>Yes and No (This definition is not being challenged.)</td>
<td>Yes (This definition is not being challenged.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. Peace and unity seen as higher value</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Affirms the view that marriage is between one man and one woman: Yes and No (This is the official position of the denomination but from what was stated at the last General Assembly, some pastors are not abiding by it. The traditional definition of marriage has faced serious challenges at the last 2 national assemblies.)
meetings and is currently being studied for possible change. Currently over 1500 pastors and elders have signed a petition stating they are, or would if asked, perform same gender marriages and there has been no disciplinary action against anyone. Most everyone agrees the definition of marriage will be changed in the PCUSA within the next 5 years.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are ordained leaders expected to live in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness?</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Those in same gender sexual relationships are being ordained and since ordination is done on behalf of the whole denomination, all congregations and pastors are participants in such ordinations.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View on Abortion</th>
<th>Pro-choice&lt;sup&gt;6&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Pro-life</th>
<th>Pro-life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Some would say the PCUSA is radically pro-choice since its insurance program pays for any abortion, including those for gender selection, later term abortions, for unborn children with Downs, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per Capita (request for funds to help pay for administrative costs of denomination)</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(It is currently $40 per member and is not mandatory, though some believe it may become mandatory)</td>
<td>(It is 1% of church budget and is mandatory.)</td>
<td>(It is $17 per member and can not become mandatory, per polity.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accountability structures</td>
<td>No. Church discipline is rarely exercised and never theology</td>
<td>Yes. central to idea of covenant. Communal accountability vital</td>
<td>Yes. Church discipline considered vital. Wisely practiced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical Faith and Values Affirmed</td>
<td>Allowed but church is becoming increasingly hostile to Evangelical perspectives</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelism</td>
<td>Very poor through past decades. Initiative to plant 1001 new churches recently begun</td>
<td>Evangelism and church planting are a central value and emphasis</td>
<td>Yes. Strong emphasis on church planting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missions/Missional</td>
<td>Historically strong but past decades have seen sharp decline in mission work and funding of missionaries</td>
<td>No missionaries at present but founding principles highly missional. Likely to partner with existing programs work</td>
<td>Highly missional with strong, vital, and healthy work being done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missionaries per ten thousand members</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>None yet, but missions is a strong focus</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of churches</td>
<td>10,466 (rapidly shrinking). At current rate PCUSA will cease to exist by 2060</td>
<td>39. ECO predicts the following: Jan 2014-200 Jan 2015-500</td>
<td>400 (doubled in the last five years). Predict to grow to 1000 over several years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members</td>
<td>1,952,287 (losing 2-3%)</td>
<td>16,048</td>
<td>135,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
or 50-60,000+ per year; almost 64,000 in 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Average Giving per member</strong></th>
<th><strong>Unknown</strong></th>
<th><strong>$2,769</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Ownership of congregation’s property**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Denomination claims ownership</strong></th>
<th><strong>Congregation owns property</strong></th>
<th><strong>Congregation owns property and this provision cannot be changed</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Political Office/Lobby

| Yes (Washington DC) | No | No |

1. In the PCUSA there is an ordination vow for pastors and officers which asks, “Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable exposition of what Scripture leads us to believe and do?” But the PCUSA has no listing of the “Essential Tenets”. Rev. Dr. Ben Lacy Rose (former professor at Union Theological Seminary and former moderator of General Assembly) famously wrote, “If you asked 10 (PCUSA) pastors or seminary professors to make a list (of essential tenets) you would have 10 different lists.” (Presbyterian Survey, June 1987). Both the EPC and ECO have defined the essential tenets and all ordained officers are required to uphold those core beliefs.

There is an ancient, wise statement:  
In essentials---unity  
In non-essentials---liberty  
In all things---charity

The refusal of the PCUSA to declare what it considers to be the few, core essentials of the faith which all ordained leaders must uphold has resulted in what could be stated as a different take on that ancient statement:  
In essentials and non-essentials---liberty (a call to accept all views)  
In all things---charity

Both the ECO and EPC Presbyterian denominations clearly identify a handful of foundational / essential and Biblical beliefs all ordained leaders must uphold.

2. When determining what a denomination’s beliefs are, you need to consider more than official statements by the denomination. Dr. Carl Trueman, professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, states “You can tell a church’s real confessional standards, theological and moral, by looking at the minutes of disciplinary proceedings and seeing what the church disciplines people for teaching or doing.” That is, besides official statements approved by a denomination you can tell what a denomination believes by considering what it knowingly allows to be taught without seeking to correct / discipline. If a denomination knows there are those who are openly teaching “x” and does nothing to correct that teaching, then “x” is at the very least an acceptable view in that denomination.

Here is an example of this on a local level and outside the realm of theology. A church has a trailer and the official policy set by Session is only members may borrow it and a member must be the driver of any vehicle using it. Suppose non-members started using the trailer and the Session knew about it but didn’t take any corrective action / discipline. The ‘official policy’ didn’t change but the actual policy has changed.

When PCUSA presbytery or denominational officials know of ordained leaders who are openly teaching that which is contrary to official denominational doctrinal views but they do nothing to correct or discipline those who are teaching those contrary views, then there is an approval of those views, deeming them ‘acceptable’ even though the official statements have not be changed.

For more on Dr. Trueman’s brief presentation on this topic you may do an internet search for “Dr. Carl Trueman, No Country For Old Men” or go to this link http://www.reformation21.org/articles/no-country-for-old-men.php
3. In the PCUSA’s Worship section of the Book of Order there is a strong ordination vow concerning scriptural authority; “Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God’s Word to you?” However, in recent years, a significant number of pastors in the PCUSA have deemphasized, if not de-facto discarded, the historic principle that the Bible is THE authoritative Word of God written. A recent update to the Book of Order (G-2.0104-b) suggests regarding ordination examinations that Scripture be used as guidance, saying nothing about authority.

The booklet “Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture” underscores that there are at least five different perspectives in the PCUSA on the nature of divine inspiration of scripture, ranging from “inerrancy” to “the Bible is merely a record of moral and religious experiences of Hebrews and Christians.” No preference is pressed for any of the five positions and one can find all five positions described in the booklet being held by ordained leaders in the PCUSA.

Since there are no essential tenets declared by the PCUSA and there is no established standard about how one should view scripture, it is impossible to correct / discipline errant teaching. On May 1, 2012, the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission issued a ruling that greatly impacts this area. The GAPJC ruled that “a vast diversity of interpretation of scripture and the confessions regarding human sexuality” exists within the PCUSA and represents “thoughtful disagreement among reasonable and faithful Presbyterians.” The decision regarding doctrinal orthodoxy in any given case can be made only by the ordaining body, and the GAPJC claims it is not in a position to choose one interpretation and impose it upon all ordaining bodies as an essential of Reformed faith and polity. Implications of this decision: If Presbyterians, using questionable methods of interpretation, promote views contrary to historical teachings of the church and go unchallenged by their own presbyteries, they are shielded from wider church discipline. Is it possible, then, that our foundational doctrines (incarnation, atonement, bodily resurrection, Jesus as the sole / unique Savior, etc.) are now optional? In a word, “yes,” as you can find ordained leaders in the PCUSA who deny those very things with impunity. (See John Shuck and others who are part of the liberal progressive Christianity group.)

Reformed tradition declares that scripture is our primary / foundational authority for faith and life. Thus, being able to rightly interpret scripture is essential. A Reformed way to read scripture is: Pray for illumination by the Holy Spirit; read the Biblical text; seek to understand the plain meaning of the text; use “scripture interprets scripture” method where a particular passage of the Bible is to be understood in the light of the whole counsel of Scripture so that unclear passages are understood in light of clearer passages; consider context, history, literary genre; consider the historical teachings of the church (e.g. confessions) for guidance and help.

Throughout the PCUSA there are more and more using different methods to interpret scripture. There are those who prioritize one’s perceptions of faith above the propositional truths of Scripture. Scripture then is only “authoritative” if it melds with the preconceptions one brings to it. One liberal / progress way of reading the Bible is to start with a principle (e.g., “justice” or “equality” or “liberation”), each with its own predetermined definition, and then interpret a passage of Scripture through the lens of that predetermined principle. The result of this method is the words of Scripture are recast into meanings that, at times, defy what Scripture actually says. This is how some can claim to uphold authority of scripture yet come up with understandings completely foreign to what scripture clearly states and contradictory to what the Church universal has held for 2,000 years. This interpretation method leads to disregarding what Scripture says in favor of what a theologian says that Scripture means. One often hears the statement, “We all agree that Scripture is authoritative, but we have different ways of interpreting it.” Yes, there are different ways of interpreting scripture but not all of them are of equal value or lead to right understanding.

In the recent GA Permanent Judicial Commission Parnell case (in the PCUSA this is similar to a ruling by the Supreme Court), those who sought to reference the authority of Scripture to support their view were told that since there are different ways of interpreting the Bible, than scripture cannot be used to prove any one position. One can find differing interpretations of any essential belief of the church because there are some methods of interpretation which allow the reader to shape God’s word instead of God’s word shaping / transforming how we think (see Romans 12:2). A person who views the Bible as a collection of myths or not of Divine inspiration will have very different methods of interpretation yielding different results.

It is no wonder when you consider the above that in 2010 Landon Whitsitt, vice-moderator of the PCUSA, declared, “Sola Scriptura is dead in most places (in the PCUSA) and rapidly dying in others.”
4. The ordination vows for officers in the PCUSA still have a strong statement about this; “Do you trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?” However, among ordained leadership in the PCUSA there is no consensus regarding whether faith in Christ is necessary for salvation, as shown by a survey from the Research Services of the PCUSA (Presbyterian Panel Survey on Religious and Demographic Profile of Presbyterians) which found that only 35% of pastors, 39% of members and 45% of elders believe Jesus is the only way to salvation. At the 2001 GA a resolution was introduced to declare “Jesus is the singular saving Lord”, but the language failed to pass and instead that GA only could affirm “Jesus is unique.” At the 2006 GA, before modifying a proposed resolution to say Jesus was “uniquely Savoir”, a group of commissioners (all ordained leaders in the PCUSA) stated their belief that Christ is only one among many paths to eternal life, a view held by many theological liberal ordained leaders in the PCUSA.


6. While some will say the PC(USA) affirms both sides of the abortion debate, it would be difficult to support that claim. The PC(USA) has two agencies who are members of an abortion rights lobbying group in Washington, DC but does not belong to a lobby group supporting a pro-life viewpoint. The General Assembly voted in 2002 to affirm late-term abortions like partial-birth abortion, something both houses of Congress overwhelming rejected in a bi-partisan fashion. The medical insurance provided through the PC(USA) Board of Pensions pays for any abortion procedure regardless of the reason for the abortion (e.g. Was the abortion done to save the life of a mother? To abort a child with an identified pre-existing condition? For gender selection? For convenience as a form of birth control?) Member of Washington lobby group for abortion rights, see http://www.rcrc.org/about/members.cfm
   Approves abortion of babies who can live outside the womb, see http://www.ppl.org/old/PPLNews_Fall2002_1.html

7. The 2006 GA voted to “receive and commend the report “The Trinity: God’s Love Overflowing” to the church for study. In part it says, “We should not insist on the exclusive use of the traditional Trinitarian names, lest we quench the Spirit and even foster idolotry. Such a view would insufficiently acknowledge the divine mystery, would neglect the freedom of God’s children to glorify God imaginatively with all our hearts and minds, …” Other experimental ways of speaking of God are encouraged: Lover/Beloved/Love, Our Father/Mother God, Mother/Child/Womb, Rock/Redeemer/Friend.
Evangelical Presbyterian Church’s Essentials of Our Faith

All Scripture is self-attesting and being Truth, requires our unreserved submission in all areas of life. The infallible Word of God, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is a complete and unified witness to God’s redemptive acts culminating in the incarnation of the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible, uniquely and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the supreme and final authority on all matters on which it speaks. On this sure foundation we affirm these additional Essentials of our faith:

We believe in one God, the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To Him be all honor, glory and praise forever!

Jesus Christ, the living Word, became flesh through His miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit and His virgin birth. He who is true God became true man united in one Person forever. He died on the cross a sacrifice for our sins according to the Scriptures. On the third day He arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven, where, at the right hand of the Majesty on High, He now is our High Priest and Mediator.

The Holy Spirit has come to glorify Christ and to apply the saving work of Christ to our hearts. He convicts us of sin and draws us to the Savior. Indwelling our hearts, He gives new life to us, empowers and imparts gifts to us for service. He instructs and guides us into all truth, and seals us for the day of redemption.

Being estranged from God and condemned by our sinfulness, our salvation is wholly dependent upon the work of God’s free grace. God credits His righteousness to those who put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation, thereby justifies them in His sight. Only such as are born of the Holy Spirit and receive Jesus Christ become children of God and heirs of eternal life.

The true Church is composed of all persons who through saving faith in Jesus Christ and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit are united together in the body of Christ. The Church finds her visible, yet imperfect, expression in local congregations where the Word of God is preached in its purity and the sacraments are administered in their integrity; where scriptural discipline is practiced, and where loving fellowship is maintained. For her perfecting, she awaits the return of her Lord.

Jesus Christ will come again to the earth-personally, visibly, and bodily-to judge the living and the dead, and to consummate history and the eternal plan of God. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." (Rev. 22:20)

The Lord Jesus Christ commands all believers to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world and to make disciples of all nations. Obedience to the Great Commission requires total commitment to "Him who loved us and gave Himself for us." He calls us to a life of self-denying love and service. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:10)

These Essentials are set forth in greater detail in the Westminster Confession of Faith.
1. The great purpose toward which each human life is drawn is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

2. We glorify God by recognizing and receiving His authoritative self-revelation, both in the infallible Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and also in the incarnation of God the Son.

3. With Christians everywhere, we worship the only true God -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- who is both one essence and three persons.

4. Jesus Christ is both truly God and truly human.

5. The divinity of the Son is in no way impaired, limited, or changed by His gracious act of assuming a human nature, and that His true humanity is in no way undermined by His continued divinity.

6. The risen Jesus, who was sent from the Father, has now ascended to the Father in His resurrected body and remains truly human.

7. The same Jesus Christ who is now ascended and who will one day return visibly in the body to judge the living and the dead.

8. We are able to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and God only through the work of the Holy Spirit.

9. The present disordered state of the world, in which we and all things are subject to misery and to evil, is not God's doing, but is rather a result of humanity's free, sinful rebellion against God's will.

10. No part of human life is untouched by sin. Our desires are no longer trustworthy guides to goodness, and what seems natural to us no longer corresponds to God's design.

11. In union with Christ through the power of the Spirit we are brought into right relation with the Father, who receives us as His adopted children. Jesus Christ is the only Way to this adoption, the sole path by which sinners become children of God.

12. Having lost true freedom of will in the fall, we are incapable of turning toward God of our own volition. God chooses us for Himself in grace before the foundation of the world, not because of any merit on our part, but only because of His love and mercy.

13. Through His regenerating and sanctifying work, the Holy Spirit grants us faith and enables holiness, so that we may be witnesses of God's gracious presence to those who are lost.

14. In Christ, we are adopted into the family of God and find our new identity as brothers and sisters of one another, since we now share one Father.

15. Within the covenant community of the church, God's grace is extended through the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and the faithful practice of mutual discipline.

16. The ministries of the church reflect the three-fold office of Christ as prophet, priest and king - reflected in the church's ordered ministries of teaching elders, deacons, and ruling elders.

17. Jesus teaches us that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. There is no part of human life that is off limits to the sanctifying claims of God.

18. Progress in holiness is an expected response of gratitude to the grace of God, which is initiated, sustained and fulfilled by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

19. As we practice the discipline of regular self-examination and confession, we are especially guided by the Ten Commandments.