STATEMENT OF PRESBYTERIAN RENEWAL MINISTRIES
ON THE PEACE, UNITY, AND PURITY REPORT
October 1, 2005

The General Assembly Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church has issued a Report to the denomination, requesting that Presbyterians reflect upon its findings in a period of discernment. We, representatives of renewal organizations in the Presbyterian Church (USA), accept the Task Force invitation and have gathered in Chicago for the purpose of studying and responding to the Task Force Report.

Task Force members worked long and hard and are to be thanked for their efforts to create an instrument whose purpose is to help the church discern how to live in peace, unity, and purity. With them, we are grieved by our denomination’s decline and disunity. We had hoped and prayed that from the Task Force Report we would hear a witness to the Word of the Lord that would speak to the needs of our church.

In parts of this Report, we do hear a witness to the Word of God. Certain statements affirm God’s eternal triune identity, the singular saving lordship of Jesus Christ, the authority of Holy Scripture, and the necessity of living a disciplined and holy life.

In spite of these valuable affirmations, we conclude with regret that the Report has not given the church a consistently clear witness to the word of God. Taken as a whole, it constitutes a blend of truth and error that, if adopted, will undermine the church’s purity and exacerbate the denomination’s disunity. Indeed, it will promote schism by permitting the disregard of clear standards of Scripture and the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

This Report will not promote the peace and unity of the church. The Report promotes radical change while claiming to make no change. Recommendation 5 will bring about denominational fragmentation through de facto local option. Ordaining bodies would be authorized to disregard explicit constitutional standards, including but not limited to the fidelity/chastity requirement in G-6.0106b.

The proposed authoritative interpretation would reverse the will of the church without consulting the church through constitutional amendment. Thus, it does not respect the Presbyterian way of delineating and maintaining boundaries for our community. Although higher governing bodies would be permitted to review the work of ordaining bodies, they would not be under any obligation to ensure compliance with confessional standards specifically singled out by amendment and constitutionally required of all governing bodies. Indeed, they would be encouraged to “honor” that work with a “presumption of wisdom.” The proposed authoritative interpretation, which was intended to advance church unity, will further divide the church by inviting all ordaining bodies to do “what is right in their own eyes” (Judges 21:25). They will have the right to convert a mandated "shall" in The Book of Order to a merely permissible "may" or "might," even though The Book of Order carefully distinguishes between these ways of speaking.

In addition, the Task Force Report will not promote unity in the worldwide church. Our brothers and sisters in the non-Western church – the majority church – find our moral confusion troubling. Our relationship with them has been harmed and would be further harmed by the adoption of this Report.
The Report will not promote the purity of the church
For the past quarter century, the Presbyterian Church (USA) has repeatedly expressed its conviction regarding God’s will in matters of sexual morality. The Report subverts these core sexual standards of behavior that are grounded in Scripture by substituting sincerely expressed personal opinions for rigorous biblical exegesis that has been confirmed by centuries of church tradition.

The Report accepts conflicting interpretations of Scripture without doing the hard work of helping the church to assess the respective merits of these interpretations. The Report proposes compromising the one Word of God with “words,” by replacing the witness of Scripture with the product of dialogue. By replacing the authority of Scripture with a consensus-building process, the Report separates the church from its only real source of purity, Jesus Christ. The Lord of the church prays for our purity, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17).

These observations lead us to conclude that the Task Force Report does not provide what the church needs at this critical juncture in our life together. The Report will not promote the peace, unity, and purity for which the Savior prays, for which we hope, and to which we are committed.

Because we cannot commend the whole Report to the church, our renewal organizations will offer resources to assist the church in discerning a better way to seek its peace, unity, and purity.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

Signed by
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