

# ***Building a Community of Faith, Hope, Love and Witness*** **The Missional Church and the New Form of Government** **Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**

With **greater freedom and flexibility**, the new Form of Government encourages congregations and councils to **focus on God’s mission and how they can faithfully participate in this mission**. In offering a structure that is more horizontal than hierarchical, the new Form of Government encourages the church to **be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit** as it seeks to **be Christ’s body** and **live out its calling as a community of faith, hope, love and witness**.

## **THE MISSIONAL CHURCH: PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA)**

God’s Mission is at the heart of the new Form of Government and the mission of God in Christ gives shape and substance to the life and work of the Church.<sup>i</sup> The foundation for all mission is *missio Dei*, God’s own “self sending” in Christ by the Spirit to redeem and transform the world.<sup>ii</sup> Thus, it is not the church who sends, but God who sends the church to be a community of witness sent into the world and called to testify and participate in God’s mission for the transformation of creation and humanity.<sup>iii</sup> The new Form of Government further reminds us that mission goes beyond simply deciding which community service project to do or what congregational outreach priority to set, for mission also get’s at the core of who the Triune God is and who we are as God’s people.

## **GOD’S MISSION (F-1.01)**

The new Form of Government begins by recognizing “the good news of the Gospel is that the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit— creates, redeems, sustains, rules, and transforms all things and all people.”<sup>iv</sup> In a world wrought with bad news, it is important for Presbyterians to recognize that the foundations of our polity and our understanding of church governance begin with “the good news.” Further, F-1.01’s emphasis on the “triune God,” calls us back to the *Book of Confessions*, which also begins with a discussion of the Trinity in the Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds. Further, inline with John Calvin’s theology, God’s engagement with the world is an act of the whole Trinity and we can’t speak of one person of the trinity without speaking of all persons of the trinity.<sup>v</sup> Third, emphasis on the “triune God,” further points to the relational reality of God and how the church is called to reflect this relational reality in its own life as a community.<sup>vi</sup> Along these lines, we are reminded that the trinity reflects an indivisible community bound by love and justice modeling equality, unity and diversity.<sup>vii</sup> As a whole, F-1.01 calls us to join with the triune God and participate in God’s mission of transformation of creation and humanity by proclaiming the good news of God’s love, offering all people the grace of God at font and table and calling all people to discipleship.<sup>viii</sup>

## **A MISSION FOCUSED “FORM OF GOVERNMENT”**

**God’s mission is the central framework and critical to understanding our entire Form of Government. Mission guides our understanding of:**

- ❖ **Congregations**—“the congregation is the church engaged in the mission of God in its particular context.” God’s mission shapes the life and witness of congregations and “through the congregation God’s people carry out ministries of proclamation, sharing the Sacraments, and living in covenant life with God and each other. The congregation reaches out to people, communities, and the world to share the good news of Jesus Christ, to gather for worship, to offer care and nurture to God’s children, to speak for social justice and righteousness, to bear witness to the truth and the reign of God that is coming into the world. (G-1.0101)
- ❖ **Membership**—Membership in the Church of Jesus Christ is not only a joy and a privilege, but “also a commitment to participate in Christ’s mission.” We are reminded that faithful membership requires us to bear witness to God’s love and grace as well as requires responsible involvement in the ministry of Christ’s Church. (G-1.0304)
- ❖ **Councils**—The reason councils (sessions, presbyteries, synods and the General Assembly) “exist is to help congregations and the whole church be more faithful participants in Christ’s mission.” (G-3.0101)
- ❖ **Administration**—“Mission determines the forms and structures needed for the church to do its work.” God’s mission should thus guide the policies and procedures of advisory handbooks, manuals of operations as well as council decisions to delegate powers. The administration of mission demonstrates the unity and interdependence of the church, in that councils share with one another responsibilities, rights, and powers. (G-3.0106)
- ❖ **Mission Funding**—“Funding of mission similarly demonstrates the unity and interdependence of the church. The failure of any part of the church to participate in the stewardship of the mission of the whole church diminishes that unity and interdependence. All mission funding should enable the church to give effective witness in the world to God’s new creation in Jesus Christ, and should strengthen the church’s witness to the mission of God.” (G-3.0106)
- ❖ **Staffing**—“Councils higher than the session may employ staff as is required by the mission of the body.” Additionally, in consultation with the next higher council, councils may share staff as required by mission of the body. (G-3.0110)
- ❖ **Property**—“The property of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), of its councils and entities, and of its congregations, is a tool for the accomplishment of the mission of Jesus Christ in the world.” (G-4.0201)

**Question for Discussion**

1. What does it mean for you and your church community to be faithful participants in God’s Mission?
2. How will you keep perspective and stay focused on God’s Mission in times of church conflict? How will mission guide your decisions during these times?

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<sup>i</sup> F-1.01; *see also* The Confession of 1967, 9:31-9:40

<sup>ii</sup> Paul K. Hooker, *What is Missional Ecclesiology*, August 2009 at: <http://www.pcusa.org/resource/what-missional-ecclesiology/>; Along these lines, mission is not primarily an “activity of the church, but an attribute of God.” *See* David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology in Mission*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 390.

<sup>iii</sup> F-1.01; F-1.03; F-1.0202; *See also* Hooker, *supra* note ii, p. 1,3.

<sup>iv</sup> F-1.01

<sup>v</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeil (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, MCMXL) 1.13.16-20. or p.140-145; *See also* Shirley Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 92.

<sup>vi</sup> *See* Donald McKim, *Introducing the Reformed Faith: Biblical Revelation, Christian Tradition, Contemporary Significance*, (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 32-33.

<sup>vii</sup> *Id.*

<sup>viii</sup> F-1.01