

“The Challenge of Our Time”
Presbytery of San Joaquin
Adopted June 29, 2006

The Presbytery of San Joaquin is a mission agency, comprised of a network of about forty churches and ministries in California’s central valley. We believe we are called to follow the Lordship of Jesus Christ in obedience to His Word, discovering what Christ is already doing in our world and participating in it. As elders, deacons and ministers of the Word and Sacrament, we hold this calling in high regard.

One of the standards of ordained leadership in our denomination is the “*requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness.*” (Book of Order G-6.0106b) We believe this standard is consistent with God’s Word, our Reformed traditions, our confessional heritage, and the historic consensus of the worldwide Body of Christ.

We are thankful that the 2006 General Assembly again affirmed this ordination standard. And, as a Presbytery, we will continue to resist attempts to either remove this standard from our Book of Order or to render its clear intent meaningless. We believe that the removal of G-6.0106b from our constitution, and/or the removal of this requirement’s Authoritative Interpretation by the General Assembly, will signal a repudiation of our Church’s standards and cause denominational fragmentation to accelerate.

We also believe that the recent adoption of Recommendation No. 5 of the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity at the 2006 General Assembly threatens to severely damage the fragile unity of our denomination. We believe this decision may indicate a seismic shift in the Church’s historic position, altering thousands of years of a global, biblical, confessional witness. The Presbytery of San Joaquin cannot affirm this action, and that gives us grave concerns about the future.

Scripture and church history convince us that any division in the Body of Christ is a most serious matter that none of us approaches lightly. We understand that the spirit in which we respond to this potential crisis will sow seeds for our future life together in ways we cannot now comprehend. Our deepest hope is for the restoration and renewal of the PC(USA). Any decision to withdraw from, or seriously alter our relationship with, the PC(USA) would grieve us all.

However, we also understand that should our denomination not repent of or retract any flawed decisions that serve to radically alter its ordination standards, numerous evangelical congregations will enter into a period of trial separation that may well lead to a permanent split from the PC(USA). Thus, our time is limited to discern a corporate solution for the Presbytery of San Joaquin.

Therefore, we hereby commit ourselves to immediately begin the following short and long term responses:

- 1) *Short-term:* The moderator will organize a task group to begin meeting during the summer to address such questions as the following:
 - What are the implications/consequences of the recent adoption of Recommendation No. 5 of the PUP Report for our presbytery?
 - Will we recognize ordinations (minister, elder, deacon) from other presbyteries?
 - How will this impact our individual congregations?
 - How will this impact our relationships with other presbyteries? With our Synod? With our General Assembly (GA)? With the global church?
 - Is it time to begin building new connectional relationships?

2) *Long-term:* We will enter into a two-year discernment process, to determine our presbytery's response to the recent GA actions. During this time, we will:

- Network with other presbyteries, congregations, pastors, leaders, and renewal groups of similar conviction across the country, forming new coalitions, and discerning God's leading together;
- Continue to focus on our own missional transformation, as well as stimulating others who wish to join us on our journey;
- Be watchful regarding our Permanent Judicial Commission's (PJC's) ability to correct biblical and confessional defections from our historic positions;
- Focus on a season of prayer, and not run ahead of the Holy Spirit;
- Make sure we do not abandon our congregations who don't have leadership prepared to deal with the situation; and
- Investigate issues such as pastors' health insurance, pensions, church property, and foundation assets, to ensure good stewardship of the resources God has entrusted to us.

During this two-year period, we call each of our congregations to:

- Resist the temptation to disengage and flee the PCUSA prematurely, but rather work toward a new future with us in our historic connectional system;
- Engage with the presbytery more deeply than ever before, and develop closer relationships with other people/churches in the presbytery; and
- Deepen our sense of community with one another to help us discern the mind of Christ together.

As we move through this period of discernment, we jointly affirm the following values:

- Peace, but not peace at any price;
- Unity, but not a false unity;
- Living within the ongoing tension of combining grace and truth – in our own lives, our churches, our Presbytery, and our denomination;
- A humility that looks for seeds of truth in positions different than our own;
- Holding on to strong convictions without rancor; and
- Not allowing our fears, anger, and frustration to dictate our future.

This is the challenge of our time. In the midst of our present discomfort, we believe God is giving us a great opportunity to participate in the missional transformation of the Church. We hope and pray that our PJC's, our denominational leadership, and our General Assembly will make decisions that are consistent with our biblical, reformed, and confessional heritage.