

**General Assembly Middle Governing Body Commission
Focus Groups with Various Constituencies
Analysis and Summary**

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Introduction and Research Strategy

The General Assembly Middle Governing Body Commission asked the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Research Services staff to help the commission consult with Presbyterians as it reimagines presbyteries and synods. Research Services staff conducted one-hour telephone focus group discussions with representatives of 11 PC(USA) constituencies. The staff drafted focus group questions (with input from a research subcommittee of the commission), sampled and recruited focus group participants, moderated the discussions, and summarized and analyzed the discussions. Operating mainly in pairs, commission members opened and closed the focus groups and listened to the discussions. The focus groups took place during the second and third weeks of April 2011. Each focus group involved between six and nine participants, in addition to the commission members and researchers, and lasted for one hour.¹

The focus groups gathered people in the following constituencies:

- Executives of large presbyteries²
- Executives of small presbyteries²
- Moderators of large presbyteries²
- Moderators of small presbyteries²
- Stated clerks of presbyteries
- Pastors who are younger than 45 years old
- African American Presbyterian leaders and leaders in African American ministries
- Asian American, non-Korean Presbyterian leaders and leaders in Asian American, non-Korean ministries
- Hispanic/Latino Presbyterian leaders and leaders in Hispanic/Latino ministries
- Middle Eastern American Presbyterian leaders and leaders in Middle Eastern American ministries
- Native American Presbyterian leaders and leaders in Native American ministries

The names of the individuals who participated in the focus groups are included in the summary of each group (see Appendices A-K). The summaries include the questions that were asked, all of which had been shared with participants in advance.

Findings

Introduction

For the most part, the discussions in the focus groups with racial-ethnic leaders and leaders in racial-ethnic ministries were different from discussions in the other focus groups. Most of the participants in the focus groups that were not with racial-ethnic constituencies were presbytery leaders. These participants are very involved in their presbyteries, whereas racial-ethnic constituency leaders tend to be more involved in their congregation or in their PC(USA) racial-ethnic caucus than with their presbytery. Thus, the discussions among these two groups of participants will be analyzed separately.

¹ For more information about telephone focus groups, see: http://www.tc.umn.edu/~rkrueger/focus_tfg.html.

² Criteria for presbytery size were number of congregations and total number of members in those congregations.

Issues for Presbytery Leaders

Small vs. large presbyteries. Leaders of small presbyteries generally like being in small presbyteries, particularly because they appreciate the intimacy, accountability, and relationships that develop. When one participant talked about moving from a larger to a smaller presbytery, s/he expressed surprise that pastors called him/her in advance if they could not make it to a presbytery meeting. S/he said pastors would not have made such calls in the larger presbytery. This participant realized that it was because, in the smaller presbytery, people noticed when others were absent, and they cared.

On the other hand, leaders of small presbyteries conceded that some such presbyteries run low on resources. Some of these presbyteries have reduced staff—sometimes exclusively because of financial woes, sometimes for other reasons also—and may need help sustaining presbytery initiatives and taking care of presbytery business. Some small presbytery leaders decried the large number of committees the *Book of Order* apparently mandates, while others noted that their presbyteries have simply eliminated many committees. Some small presbytery leaders like that their presbyteries have small administrative staffs. In fact, a few said that presbyteries should have no staff.

The comments of leaders of large presbyteries generally were similar to those of their small-presbytery counterparts, only in reverse. Large-presbytery leaders like having adequate resources and large numbers of people available to serve on committees. They are troubled by the loss of intimacy and relationship-building that being in a large presbytery may bring.

Multiple criteria for size. When recruiting focus group participants, Research Services defined presbytery size by the number of congregations and the number of church members. Leaders of presbyteries identified a third dimension of size: physical size. Presbyteries that have large geographic areas within their boundaries (whether they are small or large in church membership or number of congregations) struggle with specific challenges, including the need for many of those participating in presbytery activities to take significant amounts of time to participate due to travel time. However they are drawn, presbytery lines are also somewhat arbitrary, and Presbyterians who live and work on the far end of one presbytery might be able to forge closer ties with Presbyterians in an adjoining presbytery.

Synods: for or against? Presbytery leaders expressed mixed feelings about presbyteries working together on their own initiative (without their synods) or working through or with their synods. Some presbyteries have recently withdrawn from cross-presbytery partnerships, while others are starting limited new ones, sharing financial management, camps, or even executives.³ In some cases, synods have been providing cross-presbytery services—for example, financial management—while in other cases synods facilitate cross-presbytery networking. In the focus groups presbytery leaders engaged in a lively debate about the future of synods. Some presbytery leaders identified themselves as long-time proponents of eliminating synods. Others said synods used to do important work, but now are weak and do little. Others said the connectional functions that synods serve would be better accomplished if presbyteries created associations on their own. A few also said having a three-layered denominational judiciary is too much, and some suggested eliminating one of the layers. However, others were skeptical that getting people from across presbyteries together would actually take place in the absence of synods. The most vocal proponents of synods were those in three synods that have least one specialized ministry: Living Waters (Living Waters for the World water purification mission project), Pacific (loan fund), and Sun (Solar Under the Sun solar power mission project).

³ The *Book of Order* appears to prohibit some cross-presbytery partnerships.

General Assembly and GA agencies. Like they did about synods, presbytery leaders conveyed diverse views about the General Assembly and working with General Assembly agencies. On the one hand, some focus group participants said that some church members become upset when General Assembly and GA agency leaders wade into areas that the church members would just as soon not have to hear about, or have to explain to their neighbors, year after year. On the other hand, many Presbyterians know hardly anything about General Assembly and the GA national agencies, and this can provide a different challenge for leaders trying to interpret GA mission. Finally, presbytery leaders lauded some national agency staff and ministries as particularly helpful. These included Laurie Griffith, Doska Ross (who recently left her position), and Mark Tammen (who will leave his position in May) in the Office of the General Assembly's Constitutional Services office (particularly with judicial process issues); Julia Thorne in the Office of the General Assembly's Immigration office (particularly with immigration status issues); and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (for disaster relief and recovery assistance in individual presbyteries).

Issues for Racial-Ethnic Constituents

Ignorance and resistance? Participants in the racial-ethnic constituency focus groups, like their counterparts in the other focus groups, expressed mixed feelings about the denomination and its governing body structure. On the one hand, except for some African American Presbyterian leaders and leaders in African American ministries, most participants in these groups believe that the rest of the denomination marginalizes, ignores, and in some cases discriminates against them and against ministries among their racial-ethnic constituents. A participant recalled that other Presbyterians often ask him/her where s/he is from, incorrectly assuming that s/he is a recent immigrant. Some racial-ethnic Presbyterian leaders said they are asked to serve on too many committees, while others said they are never asked to serve on committees, even when they try to volunteer. Asian American and Hispanic leaders said that others in the denomination generally do not appreciate the diversity within their racial-ethnic communities. These communities include not only first-generation immigrants, some of whom do not speak English, but also second-, third-, fourth-, and fifth-generation immigrants, many of whom speak English only. The families of a portion of these latter individuals have been in the United States for many generations. Some Presbyterians from racial-ethnic communities worship in Anglo majority congregations. Several racial-ethnic constituents said that there is no clear, coherent strategy for Presbyterian involvement in mission and ministry with racial-ethnic groups and that efforts to develop such strategies have sometimes failed to involve these constituencies in their development. The absence of such a strategy with the fast-growing Hispanic and Asian American populations is particularly glaring, participants said.⁴

Support from the governing body structure. Participants in focus groups with leaders in racial-ethnic ministries expressed satisfaction with the support they have received from some parts of the governing body structure. Several Middle Eastern American constituents, whose fellowships or congregations are often linked with or embedded in non-Middle Eastern PC(USA) congregations, were pleased with the support many of them receive from these partner congregations. Several Asian American constituents praised the support they receive from their presbyteries. Many racial-ethnic constituents who find very few people of their own race-

⁴ Racial-ethnic constituents also pointed to PC(USA)-related seminaries as a place where some leadership training of both ministers of the Word and Sacrament and other congregational leaders should take place, but at times has not taken place. Often, neither seminaries nor presbyteries are able to help train non-English speakers, and seminaries don't always do a good job of preparing students for the real world of pastoral ministry, which can include part-time pastoral positions and challenging urban or rural environments.

ethnicity within their presbytery find a much larger number of such individuals in their synod. Many synods have at one time financed networking and ministries with different racial-ethnic constituencies within the synod (although this financial support is apparently waning). African American constituents, who were the most consistently positive among racial-ethnic constituents about the support their ministries have received from the PC(USA) governing body structure, conceded that some of that support has likely derived from long-term personal relationships with presbytery leaders. Focus group participants from several racial-ethnic constituencies expressed gratitude for the support they have received from the staff of the Racial Ethnic/Women's Ministries' congregational support program.

Financial support also raised complex issues for the racial-ethnic focus group participants. On the one hand, racial-ethnic constituents appreciate receiving financial support from presbyteries, synods, and General Assembly agencies, although some complained that they have not received any or not enough. On the other hand, some constituents said that Anglo Presbyterians who offer money can be condescending in return, and that racial-ethnic Presbyterians have not always learned how to be more self-reliant and to resource their ministries from within their own communities.

Communication breakdown. Finally, racial-ethnic constituents conceded that racial-ethnic Presbyterians have not always been very interested in what goes on in the rest of the church. For immigrant Presbyterians, language can be a barrier, in that many events and resources are English-only.⁵ Many racial-ethnic Presbyterians also have day jobs with inflexible schedules (witness, for example, the inability of the moderator of the National Asian Presbyterian Caucus to participate in the focus group). Typical Anglo Presbyterian decision-making processes can seem alien to some racial-ethnic Presbyterians, and the kinds of issues discussed at PC(USA) events can seem irrelevant or inappropriate to racial-ethnic Presbyterians (as they do to some other Presbyterians, presbytery leaders said).

Shared Issues

Developing leaders and congregations. Issues on which both presbytery leaders and racial-ethnic constituents focused were: leadership development and congregational development. The denomination's ministerial ordination and pastoral search processes (which some participants described as rigid) ensure that many Anglo majority congregations and racial-ethnic congregations and fellowships go without installed pastors.⁶

Changing responsibilities. Participants from all groups (including the younger pastors) painted a picture of a changing denomination and a changing world. Many Americans are abandoning church; congregations are shrinking; and congregations, presbyteries, synods, and General Assembly agencies are all facing financial challenges. Loyalty to organizations, including denominations, has subsided, and impatience with bureaucratic regulation is at an all-time high, participants suggested. Interest in spiritual development has eclipsed interest in policy-making and administration. The number-one responsibility of presbyteries, synods, the General Assembly, and GA agencies, many participants said, should be supporting and resourcing congregations and pastors. Challenging congregations and holding pastors accountable (perhaps a different kind of support) are also important. It is crucial to give people from

⁵ Asian American constituents praised the denomination for translating the *Book of Order* into Mandarin.

⁶ PC(USA) policies also separate chartered congregations from fellowships, and many local racial-ethnic Presbyterian communities are fellowships rather than congregations. With few installed pastors and few chartered congregations, many racial-ethnic Presbyterian groups (except for African Americans) have little voice in the denomination, a number of racial-ethnic constituents said.

different congregations and presbyteries, from different parts of the country, and from different ethnicities, cultures, and theological orientations a chance to interact, something that presbyteries, synods, and GA can help bring about. Among the presbytery responsibilities that some focus group participants identified as least important were mounting presbytery-wide mission projects, sustaining committees, and holding meetings.

Alternative communities. Many affinity groups of pastors and congregations—across both presbytery and denominational lines—have already developed, based on theological orientation and racial-ethnic constituency, among others. A few younger pastors wondered about going the next step and developing non-geographic presbyteries along some of these lines. Younger pastors, however, laughed at the idea that the success of their careers as PC(USA) pastors and ministry leaders would depend on the way PC(USA) middle governing bodies are structured.

Some participants anticipated a possible change in the denomination's ordination standards (based on presbytery voting), making it easier for congregations and presbyteries to ordain non-celibate homosexual Presbyterians as deacons, elders, and ministers. Others anticipated possible changes to the governing body structure that the Form of Government proposal, if it passes, would effect.

Conclusions

Many focus group participants suggested that PC(USA) governing bodies should support congregations and pastors, stress intimacy and accountability among congregations and pastors, and cooperate across congregations and presbyteries when that makes sense. Participants also suggested improved communication across different parts of the denomination. Racial-ethnic group participants encouraged the denomination as a whole to emphasize racial-ethnic ministries and respect racial-ethnic constituencies.

Focus group participants did not agree on whether or not synods should be eliminated or on what role, if any, synods should play in cross-presbytery cooperation. Participants from most racial-ethnic communities were critical of parts of the PC(USA) governing body structure for their lack of support for racial-ethnic and immigrant ministries.

Appendix A: Focus Group Summary Middle Governing Body Commission

Executives of Large Presbyteries

Participants: Rev. Dr. Nancy Dawson, general presbyter, Presbytery of the Peaks; Rev. Wilson Gunn, general presbyter, National Capital Presbytery; Jeannie Harsh, acting executive presbyter, Presbytery of Scioto Valley; Rev. Jeff Hutcheson, transitional executive presbyter, Presbytery of Southeastern Illinois; Rev. Chaz Ruark, executive presbyter, Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area; Rev. Dr. David Walker, general presbyter and stated clerk, Presbytery of Coastal Carolina

From the Commission: Roger Lee, elder, Woodland Park Presbyterian Church in Seattle, WA, and immediate past moderator of the Synod of Alaska-Northwest; William (Bill) Stafford, elder, Immanuel Presbyterian Church in Milwaukee, WI

Q1. Let's begin by discussing what presbyteries do. In your opinion, of the various functions that presbyteries are responsible for: Which ones are the most important? And which ones are the least important?

Participants agreed that presbyteries should work to support congregations. For one participant, this meant resourcing and supporting congregations connectionally (facilitating connections among congregations, as well as between congregations and the larger church). Another participant listed a three-pronged approach presbyteries can use to support congregations: acknowledge, respect, and take seriously the work of each congregation; practically and effectively help congregations with problems; and ensure that congregations have a vision for their futures. Still another participant noted that it's important to support congregations during transitions in pastoral leadership, which can often be disorienting and traumatizing. One participant also noted that presbyteries should challenge congregations to update their ministry strategies for the 21st century.

One participant said that it is important for the presbytery to create a safe, kind, and collegial atmosphere among its minister members, considering this fellowship with one another to be the minister members' church and the body of Christ. This participant noted that the atmosphere can be less than collegial when disagreements exist.

Participants noted that the least important functions of presbyteries include property management and keeping up-to-date on CPM forms for ministry candidates (which, one participant noted, requires significant time and seems like a largely ineffective process).

Q2. Of the various functions that presbyteries are expected to carry out, which ones, if any: Could be effectively carried out in a shared way by two or three presbyteries working together? Could only be carried out effectively by each presbytery working on its own?

Participants thought that a few presbyteries could share one Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM). This would be especially beneficial if a presbytery with an exceedingly large number of candidates could share their CPM work with presbyteries with fewer candidates.

Participants also thought that presbyteries could share in leadership development (for example, training and best practices). One participant thought it would be important to share this leadership development across presbyteries because some leaders are at the far ends of their presbytery, closer in distance to people from other presbyteries. Enabling these leaders to meet with leaders in nearby presbyteries could foster deep,

enriching, and supportive relationships that these leaders wouldn't be able to experience in their own presbyteries. One participant mentioned the possibility of sharing regional leadership development opportunities with other denominations as well (for example, Lutherans and Episcopalians).

A participant noted the importance of sharing immigrant ministries across presbyteries. In the participant's personal experience, immigrants living near presbytery borders do not care about presbytery boundaries and may choose to be involved in more than one presbytery.

One participant noted that presbyteries could share resource centers (especially instead of trying to recreate ones that had become outdated). There is the ability to share resources with other denominations as well. Also, presbyteries could share conference centers, specialized staff (for example, treasurer or stated clerk), educator resources, or a congregational consultant for strategic planning.

Participants said that presbyteries could not share Committees on Ministry, disciplinary activities, or issues pertaining to the *Book of Order*, Chapter VIII (likely referring to the Form of Government chapter on "The Church and Its Property"). There was a disagreement over whether Company of Pastors fellowship should be shared across presbyteries. One participant said it would be important to share this fellowship across presbyteries because some pastors would have to travel less to meet with pastors in another presbytery than they would to meet with pastors in their own presbytery, and being closer in distance could facilitate better connections. Another participant said that this fellowship should be kept within presbytery boundaries. A third participant said that the decision about whether or not to share Company of Pastors fellowships across presbytery boundaries could be made on a case-by-case basis, depending on the population density of the presbyteries in question.

One participant noted that, as presbyteries are each restructuring/reimagining themselves, there are fewer similarities between presbyteries. This would seem to make it more difficult for presbyteries to share functions.

Q3. How do you think the size of your presbytery affects its ability to do mission? What are some advantages of being a large presbytery when it comes to doing mission? What are some disadvantages of being a large presbytery when it comes to doing mission?

Q4. What other advantages or disadvantages are there to being a large presbytery? Is there anything else you'd like the MGB Commission to know about what it's like to be a large presbytery? [Questions 3 and 4 both answered below]

Participants indicated that advantages to being a large presbytery include having excellent committees (for example, CPM and COM), especially because there is such a large group of people in these presbyteries—and thus a larger group of qualified and talented people—to choose from and work with. Also, in this same way larger presbyteries can have excellent staff resources as well. The ability to guarantee loans to congregations is another benefit to being a large presbytery.

One disadvantage to being a large presbytery is that the presbytery can be very spread out and/or have a large number of congregations, making it difficult for presbytery leaders to take an active and personal role in each congregation. One participant reports that his/her presbytery is working on creating smaller groupings of congregations within the presbytery to help combat this difficulty. Also, there can be a lot of cultural and theological diversity within large presbyteries, which can make it hard to unify people around a common sense of mission. Yet there is also a vibrancy and strength in this diversity.

A couple of participants commented on the way that Presbyterians can currently associate with other believers along non-geographic lines. For example, people can be closer to the Presbyterians for Renewal group than to their own presbyteries. Presbyterian evangelicals, Presbyterian progressives, African American Presbyterians, and Hispanic Presbyterians can connect with similar believers across presbytery and denominational boundaries.

Q5. In what ways does your synod assist your presbytery with its ministries? How has that changed in the past five years? Is there anything your synod could do to help your presbytery that it is not currently doing?

Participants report that synods assist presbyteries practically by providing low-cost bookkeepers for presbyteries to use, organizing synod collegiums (where presbytery executives meet, network, and obtain resources), providing leadership development (for example, interim ministry training and CLP training), and promoting personal development among the leaders within their care.

Many participants seemed to desire synods that are formed/informed by presbytery collaboration. One participant felt that her/his synod was unnecessary, while another spoke of how synods become inflexible structures. Both preferred a more natural formation of synod-like structures through genuine relationships among presbyteries. Another participant said that his/her synod has been shaped by presbytery-level connections (instead of by top-down decisions). One participant noted that the synod staff determine whether the synod operates through presbytery-level initiatives (when staff come from the presbyteries) or through the synod itself (when staff come from synod leadership).

One participant thought that the presbyteries within her/his synod would not work together as effectively without the synod, and said that a synod executive can coordinate executive presbyter forums better than an executive presbyter can. Another participant noted that in his/her synod, the executive presbyters themselves coordinate their forums, and said s/he likes the flexibility involved in this presbytery-centered approach.

Q6. In what ways have General Assembly agencies been assisting your presbytery with its ministries? How has that changed in the past five years? Is there anything the General Assembly could do to help your presbytery that it is not currently doing?

Participants noted that GA staff have been great to work with (specifically Julia Thorne, manager of immigration issues; Mark Tammen, Laurie Griffith, and Doska Ross, Department of Constitutional Services; other staff). One participant said that GA also does a great job with disaster response.

One participant said s/he really liked the per capita brochure that GA just produced and distributed to the churches, and would like to see the GAMC produce a resource like that to inform others about the great work that the church is doing.

A couple of participants noted that the Big Tent event is a great benefit, as it shares speakers and resources in ways that may only be possible on a national scale. One of these participants also voiced disappointment that the upcoming Big Tent, scheduled for summer 2011, has faced some problems and confusion. S/he noted that some of the groups that were going to participate in Big Tent are now planning conferences independent of Big Tent.

Miscellaneous Comments

One participant voiced unhappiness over the current three-tiered judicial system within the PC(USA). This participant talked of wanting to simplify the judicial process by taking out the synod-level tier.

Appendix B: Focus Group Summary Middle Governing Body Commission

Executives of Small Presbyteries

Participants: Rev. Ed Albright, consulting general presbyter of Glacier Presbytery; Rev. Edward Dunn, presbytery executive of the Presbytery of Boise; Fred Feth, stated clerk of the Presbytery of Wyoming; James Kennedy, Sr., stated clerk and presbytery administrator of Kendall Presbytery; Rev. Wayne Parrish, general presbyter of Boston Presbytery; Rev. Marianne Rhebergen, transitional presbyter of Cayuga-Syracuse Presbytery

From the Commission: Rev. Lemuel Garcia-Arroyo, associate presbyter of Salem Presbytery; Jane Smith, elder, First Presbyterian Church in San Bernardino, CA, and moderator of the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii

Introductory question: Could you tell us a sentence or two about a conversation you recently had with someone in your presbytery who doesn't work on the presbytery staff?

In these conversations, participants and others in their presbyteries discussed merging presbyteries, dividing presbyteries, and the desire to move a presbytery in a new direction in the midst of obstacles. Two participants said that their conversations centered on what the passage/expected passage of the Form of Government proposal and/or Amendment 10A (which would change PC(USA) ordination standards) might do to ministers, elders, and/or church ministry. One participant had a conversation with an elder who would like to see his church close.

Q1. Let's begin by discussing what presbyteries do. In your opinion, of the various functions that presbyteries are responsible for: Which ones are the most important? And which ones are the least important?

Presbyteries' most important functions, according to respondents, are to support congregations (including ones that are struggling), support pastors (including with pastoral care), keep clergy accountable (in terms of professional behavior and productivity), foster relationships, and deal with problems. The presbyteries' least important functions include developing stand-alone mission programs, facilitating new church development, holding meetings, and sustaining committees. Also, someone noted that presbyteries could be assisted with the judicial process, which can be costly, especially to smaller presbyteries, and can cause divisions within the presbytery.

Q2. Of the various functions that presbyteries are expected to carry out, which ones, if any: Could be effectively carried out in a shared way by two or three presbyteries working together? Could only be carried out effectively by each presbytery working on its own?

Participants thought that presbyteries could share camps, resource centers, judicial commissions, Committees on Representation, sexual misconduct response teams, training, fellowship, relationship building, and a part-time paid Committee on Ministry support person. One participant thought that presbyteries would be able to share staff, but not functions; "a presbytery that shares its functions with others is less than fully a presbytery." Important issues participants said must be considered are what constitutes a presbytery and how things can be shared between presbyteries without forcing a presbytery to lose its identity as such.

The moderator asked if it seems better to collaborate with other presbyteries on specific functions, rather than to be yoked with one or two other presbyteries. Some agreed with this idea, and one noted the importance of distinguishing between sharing programs with other presbyteries and sharing functions (which s/he believed

essentially can't be shared between presbyteries). Another didn't see an important distinction between sharing staff and sharing functions between presbyteries. Instead, this participant advocated for determining what presbyteries share on a case-by-case basis.

A question was asked of participants: Could the synod take some of the responsibilities where you're imagining presbyteries might cooperate? One participant thought that presbytery-to-presbytery cooperation was more appropriate, instead of having to rely on the synod to schedule meetings and give approval, which would take more time. Others argued for presbytery cooperation, as opposed to synod responsibility, if the synod geography/location doesn't easily support synod responsibility in this way.

Q3. How do you think the size of your presbytery affects its ability to do mission? What are some advantages of being a small presbytery when it comes to doing mission? What are some disadvantages of being a small presbytery when it comes to doing mission?

Most participants were quick to share the merits of small presbyteries. They found these presbyteries to be familial and collegial, and felt that they promoted accountability among those involved in presbytery business.

Drawbacks to small presbyteries include relational dysfunction (similar to a family's dysfunction) and fewer resources, in terms of both money and people (for example, fewer people available to serve on committees). Also, some smaller presbyteries are spread out across large geographical areas, which can make travel around the presbytery difficult and expensive.

Q4. What other advantages or disadvantages are there to being a small presbytery? Is there anything else you'd like the MGB Commission to know about what it's like to be a small presbytery?

A couple of respondents discussed how smaller presbyteries shouldn't need to have much executive staff, if any. The idea of executive staff is a product of corporate culture, not of the Bible or theology, and has been a recent development in the PC(USA).

Also, one participant called others to remember that the original intent of presbyteries was to foster relationships among small clusters of congregations. If, in creating smaller presbyteries, there are fewer resources to devote to presbytery programs and committees, so be it.

Q5. In what ways does your synod assist your presbytery with its ministries? How has that changed in the past five years? Is there anything your synod could do to help your presbytery that it is not currently doing?

Some felt that their synods were very helpful. In particular, the Synod of the Pacific provides a personnel service, custodial fund, and loan fund (essentially a bank). Also, this synod serves as a conduit, providing GA mission funds to presbyteries.

Other participants did not see the support of their synods to be as far-reaching or essential. One participant noted that his/her synod didn't do much except provide funds. Another said that the synod facilitates executive collegiums and stated clerk meetings, which are things the presbyteries could plan on their own. The synod has a program to support new ministers, but this support could be found through other organizations (for example, the Alban Institute). One synod is decreasing its scope, no longer providing the same levels of support, assistance, or guidance. While it once served as a clearinghouse for different funds, this role is being transferred to presbyteries. One participant thought that the PC(USA) needs to get rid of synods and assumed that a specific GA agency, or some other agency, could handle the Synod of the Pacific's loan program. However,

another participant responded by saying that synods can generate more resources than they use, serving a beneficial purpose, and argued that neither the GA nor another agency could handle the Synod of the Pacific's loan program.

Q6. In what ways have General Assembly agencies been assisting your presbytery with its ministries? How has that changed in the past five years? Is there anything the General Assembly could do to help your presbytery that it is not currently doing?

Participants noted that the GA agencies are very responsive and provide information and resources to the presbyteries. One participant said that it would not occur to half of the congregations in the presbytery to ask a GA office for resources—instead, they may seek resources from other presbyteries or other congregations within the presbytery. However, the participant said that some congregations in the presbytery are federated and united ecumenical congregations.

Participants voiced interest in GA support for older pastors (around ages 50 to 55) who are preparing to transition out of ministry. This support could be offered by the Board of Pensions and could take the form of outplacement services and opportunities to get counseling. Also, one participant suggested that the Board of Pension's CREDO conference, which encourages pastors to "embrace wellness and to prayerfully discern the direction of their personal and professional lives," could invite participation from pastors who are transitioning out of ministry. The CREDO program could support these pastors in their transition out of ministry and encourage them to identify their skill sets (or ones that they could develop) to use in this transition.

Appendix C: Focus Group Summary Middle Governing Body Commission

Moderators of Large Presbyteries

Participants: Rev. Jerry Cannon, moderator of the Presbytery of Charlotte and pastor of C.N. Jenkins Memorial Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, NC; Kris Girling, elder and moderator of Donegal Presbytery; Rev. Chris Keating, moderator of the Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy and pastor of Woodlawn Chapel Presbyterian Church in Baldwin, MO; Rev. Jermaine McKinley, moderator of the Presbytery of Pittsburgh; Rev. Robert Millspaugh, moderator of Muskingum Valley Presbytery; Rev. Rick Neese, moderator of Presbytery of the Cascades and pastor of Chapel by the Sea Presbyterian Church in Lincoln City, OR; Rev. J. Perry Wootten, moderator of the Presbytery of New York City and pastor of Eastchester Presbyterian Church in Bronx, NY

From the Commission: Barbara Ranta, elder, First Presbyterian Church in Seattle, WA, and associated stated clerk of Seattle Presbytery; William (Bill) L. Stafford, elder, Immanuel Presbyterian Church in Milwaukee, WI

Q1. Let's begin by discussing what presbyteries do. In your opinion, of the various functions that presbyteries are responsible for: Which ones are the most important? And which ones are the least important?

Participants said that presbyteries are most helpful when they provide congregational and leadership support (including the Committee on Ministry (COM) and the Committee on the Preparation for Ministry (CPM)), assist with the fulfillment of the *Book of Order* requirements, connect congregations with one another (promoting fellowship, sharing, and ministry collaboration through presbytery meetings/gatherings), and provide resources. One participant's presbytery is very involved in college ministry.

Participants were least concerned with presbytery functions that do not support congregational ministry. One participant agrees that congregational support is most important, but in reality the presbytery is most focused on maintaining peace and order in the midst of judicial cases and congregations wanting to be dismissed from the denomination. This participant would rather have the presbytery focus on mission and training, instead of conflict. Another participant said that presbyteries may soon shift from an emphasis on programming to a focus on coordinating missions among congregations. One participant said that s/he does not feel particularly confident in how the presbytery as a whole functions as an organization.

Q2. Of the various functions that presbyteries are expected to carry out, which ones, if any: Could be effectively carried out in a shared way by two or three presbyteries working together? Could only be carried out effectively by each presbytery working on its own?

Participants thought that presbyteries could share commissioned lay pastor (CLP) training; administrative duties; and training in coaching, stewardship, and education.

Participants did not think that presbyteries could share functions that require contact with congregations, like the COM or CPM. One participant noted that it would be especially difficult to share these committees if the new Form of Government proposal passes. It would enable each presbytery to set its own standards and guidelines for these committees (although presbyteries could potentially agree on synod-wide standards). This participant noted that, in general, it is hard to talk about which functions presbyteries can share, since the denomination is currently voting on the new Form of Government proposal. Another participant noted that the congregations will exhibit less trust in governing bodies with larger spheres of influence. Participants said that some neighboring presbyteries are geographically so spread out already that sharing functions would be

difficult. Another participant said that it would be important to see whether presbyteries have a similar focus (business-oriented or more spiritually-focused) before trying to share functions. Slightly in contrast, a participant thought that a benefit to connecting a few presbyteries would be the presence of theological diversity in the midst of corporate worship and spiritual formation.

A couple of participants stressed that differences between presbyteries (size, location) make a one-size-fits-all approach to presbytery ministry unreasonable.

Q3. How do you think the size of your presbytery affects its ability to do mission? What are some advantages of being a large presbytery when it comes to doing mission? What are some disadvantages of being a large presbytery when it comes to doing mission?

Q4. What other advantages or disadvantages are there to being a large presbytery? Is there anything else you'd like the MGB Commission to know about what it's like to be a large presbytery? [Questions 3 and 4 both answered below]

Participants said that large presbyteries are able to provide more resources (funds and people) to use in supporting congregations. However, it was noted that, when presbyteries have been used to having sufficient funds, they may have a more difficult time than other presbyteries when financial hardships come and their funds are depleted. Also, according to participants, large presbyteries can offer more programs, more diversity (urban/suburban/rural settings, race, theology, gender), and more opportunities for connections and networking.

However, participants said that large presbyteries have less ability to engage in presbytery-wide fellowship or spiritual development, offer less intimate relationships, and allow for proportionally fewer leadership roles. One participant's presbytery is actually made up of a few presbyteries that merged into one presbytery. The sense of community that had developed in each of the former presbyteries has led to cliquishness within these groupings even after the merge into one presbytery. Another participant said that if membership decreases in the presbytery but staffing levels stay the same, large presbyteries can end up spending too much money on staffing. Also, one participant from a large presbytery in a small geographic location has noticed that people do not stay for entire presbytery meetings, since their homes are not far away.

Q5. In what ways does your synod assist your presbytery with its ministries? How has that changed in the past five years? Is there anything your synod could do to help your presbytery that it is not currently doing?

Q6. In what ways have General Assembly (GA) agencies been assisting your presbytery with its ministries? How has that changed in the past five years? Is there anything the General Assembly could do to help your presbytery that it is not currently doing? [Questions 5 and 6 both answered below]

Participants said that synods provide banking services; work with presbyteries to provide educational resources for training (including Board of Pensions); offer training, coaching, and/or support (for new ministers and conflict mediators, for example); and act as a higher authority to assist people who are discontented with the way a presbytery may be functioning.

Participants noted that GA staff/leaders have visited presbyteries (for example, for COM retreats) and that the GA assists presbyteries with new church developments. One participant said that, with the lower availability of GA resources in the past few years, the GA may not be as good a source of resources in the future.

Participants reported that both synods and the GA host conferences to help Presbyterians network, connect, and share ideas with one another, and that both also provide assistance with strategic planning and visioning. One participant noted that both are also able to speak about congregational ministry with more weight than a pastor or elder might be able to; another participant said that the synod and the GA are a source of wisdom.

One participant said that his/her synod is in a process of re-evaluating its role.

Appendix D: Focus Group Summary Middle Governing Body Commission

Moderators of Small Presbyteries

Participants: Rev. Paul Fandl, moderator of Stockton Presbytery and pastor of Community Presbyterian Church in Delhi, CA; Rev. Deborah Hollifield, moderator of Cimarron Presbytery and pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Guymon, OK; Rev. Douglas Horne, moderator of the Presbytery of Susquehanna Valley and pastor of Otego Presbyterian Church in Bainbridge, NY; Rev. Jean Hurst, moderator of the Presbytery of Eastern Oregon and pastor of Pioneer Presbyterian Church in Burns, OR; Editha McKay, elder, moderator of Yellowstone Presbytery and commissioned lay pastor for two congregations; Tom Taylor, elder, moderator of the Presbytery of Southern New England

From the Commission: Viola Hickson-Lee, elder, commissioned lay pastor at Faith/Fe Presbyterian Church in Lockhart, TX, and former moderator of New Hope Presbytery; Rev. John Vest, associate pastor for youth ministry at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago, IL

Q1. Let's begin by discussing what presbyteries do. In your opinion, of the various functions that presbyteries are responsible for: Which ones are the most important? And which ones are the least important?

Most participants said that the most important functions of the presbytery are the Committee on Ministry (COM) and the financial administration of the presbytery. One participant said that, with ordained ministers, commissioned lay pastors (CLPs), and lay leaders serving in her/his presbytery's small- to medium-sized congregations, in some way the entire presbytery (including the general presbyter) participates in the work of the COM. Another participant said that the presbytery's Committee on Vocations has taken an active role in training elders to be CLPs. One participant noted that, although the COM plays an important part in his/her presbytery, at times the COM has been too heavy-handed.

Other important presbytery functions that were mentioned were: nurturing pastors within the presbytery, especially since in small presbyteries pastors take on a lot of responsibilities within the presbytery; the Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM); general presbyters having a personal connection to each congregation in the presbytery; and supporting congregations.

One participant talked about a former mission support staff position for a now-defunct three-presbytery partnership. The person in this staff position was paid \$80,000 per year to do a job that the participant thought the chair of a presbytery committee (perhaps the mission committee) could have done; this position was considered unnecessary and frivolous. One participant said that his/her presbytery is in such bad financial shape, the management of presbytery finances is least important; similarly, this presbytery doesn't receive a lot of mission funding from congregations, so the mission work is seen as less important (because the presbytery doesn't have many resources to pursue mission).

A participant said that the *Book of Order* lists some committee requirements (for example, a certain number of people on committees) that are unreasonable for small presbyteries, and that meeting these requirements can waste presbytery resources. For example, small presbyteries may not need as many members on committees as the *Book of Order* specifies. Another participant's presbytery has just moved from forming committees to forming task forces, which are given a lot more independence and less oversight than committees. This has solved the problem of needing a specific number of people on each committee, but it has caused more work for the pastors who serve as "go-to people."

Q2. Of the various functions that presbyteries are expected to carry out, which ones, if any: Could be effectively carried out in a shared way by two or three presbyteries working together? Could only be carried out effectively by each presbytery working on its own?

Participants said that presbyteries could share administrative functions (for example, bookkeeping, presbyter), programs (CLP training), and events/gatherings such as youth events and pastoral support/continuing education events (since these can require musicians and speakers—resources that are in short supply). One participant said that the three presbyteries in her/his area are far enough away to make it difficult to collaborate, although the presbyteries still try to cooperate—especially in sharing resources.

One participant said that people are afraid of merging presbyteries because the resulting larger geographical areas would make it more difficult to foster congregational connections. Also, presbytery duties requiring personal connection (for example, COM, nurturing small congregations, assisting pastors in transition) would be difficult to share among presbyteries.

Q3. How do you think the size of your presbytery affects its ability to do mission? What are some advantages of being a small presbytery when it comes to doing mission? What are some disadvantages of being a small presbytery when it comes to doing mission?

Q4. What other advantages or disadvantages are there to being a small presbytery? Is there anything else you'd like the MGB Commission to know about what it's like to be a small presbytery? [Questions 3 and 4 both answered below]

Advantages to small presbyteries mentioned by participants include their “focus on small local missions,” the intimate care they give to each presbytery’s pastors and congregations, and the close relationships within the presbytery.

One disadvantage to being a small presbytery that was mentioned is that the presbytery has fewer funds for mission. Larger churches within the presbytery, with more funds to give to presbytery mission, will use most of these funds for their own mission interests instead. Also, there are fewer people to assist with presbytery mission or serve on committees—and the small group of people who do help with these things take on too many responsibilities, become overwhelmed, and may stop helping as a result.

Q5. In what ways does your synod assist your presbytery with its ministries? How has that changed in the past five years? Is there anything your synod could do to help your presbytery that it is not currently doing?

Synods provide helpful resources (first-call pastor support retreats, officer training, youth workshops, continuing education) and financial support (including banking services and loans).

However, participants accused synods of failing to keep them informed. For one participant, this is a new development, due to budget cuts and subsequent staff cuts in the synod; another attributed it to the large number of presbyteries in his/her synod. One participant was also somewhat disappointed in her/his synod’s loans.

Participants believe the future of synods is unsure. One participant recently attended a synod meeting where the synod was seeking to define its importance in years to come, and the synod decided it would basically be a clearinghouse and resource for mission. Another participant serving on his/her synod’s Permanent Judicial Commission (PJC) described the synod as a clearinghouse in its relationship with presbyteries and the General

Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission. One participant's synod has broken into clusters of presbyteries that foster connections between presbyteries better than an entire synod can.

Q6. In what ways have General Assembly agencies been assisting your presbytery with its ministries? How has that changed in the past five years? Is there anything the General Assembly (GA) could do to help your presbytery that it is not currently doing?

Participants spoke highly of the Board of Pensions (educational conferences, annual presentations at presbytery meetings, good contact/outreach, strong mission, skilled implementation, supportive, helpful). Also, one participant has been pleased to have GA staff like Hector Rodriguez (associate for Hispanic congregational enhancement) and Philip Lotspeich (coordinator for Church Growth and Transformation) speak at his/her presbytery. Another participant has seen speakers from the GA share information with committees on various topics.

Participants would like to see the GA offer reasonably-priced or free online Christian education materials for congregations (one participant said that other denominations offer these types of materials), create high-quality national commercials/ad campaigns to promote the PC(USA), and provide more communication about GA news (but not too much information—summaries with links to further information would be ideal). One participant did not feel that her/his presbytery was connected to the GA in any significant way, and also noted a feeling of distrust within the presbytery toward the GA.

Miscellaneous Comments

A participant talked about how CPIP (Covenant Presbyterian Insurance Company) disbanded last year, leaving the presbyteries to find a new way to insure their churches. The participant initially thought the synod was to blame for this, but later wondered if the problem was beyond the synod level.

Appendix E: Focus Group Summary Middle Governing Body Commission

Presbytery Stated Clerks

Participants: Rev. Philip Barrett, stated clerk of the Presbytery of Des Moines; Anne Bond, elder and stated clerk of the Presbytery of Denver; Rev. Susan Krummel, stated clerk of the Presbytery of Great Rivers; Rev. George Pasley, stated clerk of the Presbytery of Alaska and pastor of Ketchikan Presbyterian Church in Ketchikan, AK; H. Daniel Rogers, elder and stated clerk of the Presbytery of Albany; Rev. Melana Scruggs, stated clerk of the Presbytery of John Calvin and pastor of Crane Presbyterian Church in Crane, MO; Rev. Cathy Ulrich, stated clerk of the Presbytery of Arkansas and pastor of Central Presbyterian Church in Fort Smith, AR

From the Commission: Barbara Ranta, elder at First Presbyterian Church in Seattle, WA, and associated stated clerk of Seattle Presbytery; Warren B. Cooper, elder, Philadelphia Presbytery

Q1. Let's begin by discussing what presbyteries do. In your opinion, of the various functions that presbyteries are responsible for: Which ones are the most important? And which ones are the least important?

Participants said that it is important for presbyteries to oversee and support churches (through the work of the Committee on Ministry, for example), provide pastoral care (including creating a community of pastors that feels like a supportive church for these pastors), keep records, settle differences, train elders to lead congregations in the absence of pastors, and engage in and support mission.

One participant said that it was not too important for presbyteries to elect examination readers from among its ministers and elders (G11.0103m). Another participant noted that his/her presbytery cut its programmatic activities (especially those that were also carried out by session committees). One participant said that, in the midst of a presbytery restructuring, the presbytery's resource center was cut, and the presbytery is less likely to maintain programming staff.

Q2. Of the various functions that presbyteries are expected to carry out, which ones, if any: Could be effectively carried out in a shared way by two or three presbyteries working together? Could only be carried out effectively by each presbytery working on its own?

Participants said that presbyteries could share programs (camps, Hispanic ministry), the Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM), leadership/staff positions (for example, stated clerk, Committee on Ministry staff), training/educational events and programs, and the judicial process. Due to the large geographic area covered in one participant's presbytery, s/he said that it can be easier to foster community between people of two different presbyteries who are closer in distance to one another than they are to their respective other presbytery members.

A couple of participants talked about sharing resource centers (among presbyteries or ecumenically). Another participant said that his/her presbytery's resource center was so underutilized that it was cut. This participant also stated that, with the advent of technology, resource centers are no longer necessary.

Q3. What challenges does your presbytery face? Do any of these challenges threaten the presbytery's ability to carry out key functions? How has the presbytery tried to confront or manage challenges?

Many participants spoke of a lack of finances within their presbytery. One participant said that her/his presbytery is facing declining finances and membership and, as a way to mediate the effects of these negative changes, the presbytery has put its camp up for sale. Two participants talked about their presbyteries cutting lots of staff positions, with one of the presbyteries planning to put more of the workload on committees, and another already doing so. This latter presbytery has also cut unnecessary committees. In the midst of funding cuts within the presbytery over the next few years, one participant's presbytery is seeking to figure out how to continue promoting ministry (particularly urban and immigrant ministries). One participant linked the lack of finances in the presbytery to people's unwillingness to give financially to the presbytery and, more broadly, to their lack of faith in God's future for the church and God's ability to provide for the church as it carries out God's ministry.

One participant spoke about the absence of ministers of the Word and Sacrament at half of the presbytery's churches. The people who lead these congregations are not always active in the presbytery, which hinders the presbytery-congregation connection in a way that should be remedied. Half of the congregations at another participant's presbytery do not have pastors. This presbytery has congregations that are quite distant from one another, and the presbytery has created groupings of congregations that support and resource one another, a system that has worked fairly well overall.

Q4. The General Assembly (GA) and most presbyteries and synods support their church government functions by assessing congregations and presbyteries a charge based on their number of members, an amount usually referred to as "per capita apportionment." What is your opinion about the per capita funding system? Are there alternative ways of supporting the carrying out of these functions?

One participant asked if the others would mind sharing their presbytery's per capita figures (both the total per capita amount and the per capita amount for presbyteries). Most participants reported these figures, which ranged from \$21 to \$50 for total per capita, and from \$12 to \$40-something for presbytery per capita.

One participant described the per capita system as "theologically and philosophically a marvelous idea . . . inclusive and fair . . ." This participant said that the per capita system allows for equal participation in the life of the denomination by those interested. Other participants agreed that the per capita system is fair and also said it is relatively inexpensive.

One participant noted that it can be difficult for presbyteries to collect the per capita apportionment from their congregations. A few participants talked about how congregations can have a difficult time giving money over to the General Assembly. One of these participants talked about a specific congregation within her/his presbytery that has recently been withholding its total per capita as a way to state its disagreement with the denomination. The presbytery has been paying this church's total per capita to the denomination out of other funds within the presbytery, but the church is sending the council an overture to ask that the presbytery refrain from paying its per capita. Another participant found that some people have a hard time giving control over their money to groups outside of their families or the session. One participant said that it could help Presbyterians if the per capita system was more skillfully interpreted—couching it in the larger story of the PC(USA)'s form of government, mission, and connectional system.

Q5. In what ways does your synod assist your presbytery with its ministries? How has that changed in the past five years? Is there anything your synod could do to help your presbytery that it is not currently doing?

Q6. In what ways have General Assembly agencies been assisting your presbytery with its ministries? How has that changed in the past five years? Is there anything the General Assembly could do to help your presbytery that it is not currently doing? [Questions 5 and 6 both answered below]

One participant spoke highly of her/his presbytery's interim synod executive, who has made the synod much more hands-on; the synod has also facilitated the coaching/training of pastors in ways that have increased collaboration among presbyteries within the synod. One participant's synod hosts an annual Committee on Ministry/Committee on Preparation for Ministry training event, which provides networking opportunities and resources; assists with personnel staffing issues; and provides bookkeeping services for the presbyteries. Another participant's synod has clustered smaller groups of presbyteries together to work on ministry. One participant's synod has taken steps to give itself less power, and will perhaps transition to a virtual office and stop its annual leadership development program due to lack of staff and support. This synod has found itself being simply an intermediary in the transfer of funds among other governing bodies (presbytery, GA).

Participants noted that the GA provides stated clerk training, constitutional advice (although one participant sounded concerned about the merits of the staff transition—presumably with Doska Ross leaving), excellent staff (Julia Thorne, manager of immigration issues; Marcia Myers, director of the Office of Vocation; other Office of Vocation staff, as well as this office's Church Leadership Connection program), emergency support from the Board of Pensions, and help from Presbyterian Disaster Assistance after a church fire. One participant talked about very strong connections between his/her presbytery and General Assembly entities (Presbyterian Investment & Loan Program, the Board of Pensions, and the Presbyterian Foundation), and a potential future connection with the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. This participant thought that this presbytery's stronger connection with GA than with the synod could be due to the fact that a recent GA took place in the region. One participant reported that the Immigrant Group Ministries office has supported the presbytery's Sudanese ministry both with personal and monetary assistance.

One participant reported that the GA doesn't have much of a presence within the presbytery, unless it is to complicate things for pastors (investment policies; ordination standards). Another participant opined that pastors could transfer to the United Church of Christ—with a more congregational governance structure—if they don't like the Presbyterian system of government.

Appendix F: Focus Group Summary Middle Governing Body Commission

Pastors Younger Than 45 Years of Age

Participants: Rev. Robert Bohnsack, pastor, First Presbyterian Church in Fort Walton Beach, FL; Rev. Eric Owens Ledermann, associate pastor, First Presbyterian Church in San Bernardino, CA; Rev. James Hickson Lee, pastor, New Covenant Fellowship of Austin in Austin, TX; Rev. Hanna Peterson, pastor, First Presbyterian Church in Kelso, WA; Rev. Matthew Schramm, pastor, Westminster Presbyterian Church in Bay City, MI; Rev. Pete Ullmann, pastor, Calhoun First Presbyterian Church in Calhoun, GA; Rev. Shannon McBride Weisenfels, pastor of Christian nurture and family ministry, First Presbyterian Church in Midland, TX

From the Commission: Miriam Dolin, elder, Mission Bay Community Church in San Francisco, CA; Rev. John Vest, associate pastor for youth ministry, Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago, IL

Q1. Let's talk about the effect that being part of the governing body structure of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has on the ministry you do in and through your congregation, beginning with presbyteries: In your experience, how has being part of a presbytery *helped* your ministry? And how has being part of a presbytery *hindered* your ministry?

Participants have found that presbyteries can foster connectionalism and collegiality with other ministers and elders, bring chances to partner with other churches in ministry, offer training events that benefit personal ministry, and provide opportunities to serve on committees that serve good purposes and can enrich the committee members' lives.

Presbyteries have also frustrated participants. Comparing the presbytery to a family, one participant noted that not everyone associated with the presbytery is nice, and it can be challenging to work with some of these people. By participating in presbytery meetings, pastors spend less time fulfilling their pastoral duties. When presbyteries cover a large geographical area, it can take a long time to travel to presbytery meetings. Also, presbyteries can demand a lot of time from these young pastors, who have other demands on their time (for example, job and family). One participant found the presbytery to be distant unless a problem arises, in which case it comes in with a prescriptive solution. This participant wished that the presbytery would be more loving and caring at all times. However, another participant thought the presbytery staff served as a great listening ear and source of counsel. Although presbyteries are expected to support churches, one participant thought that presbyteries actually ask the churches to support the presbyteries' goals and objectives. Another participant commented that presbyteries don't show their value through their actions, but instead talk about how valuable they are. One pastor found it hard to gather elders to participate in the presbytery, since lots of the issues that the denomination is arguing over are unimportant to them.

Q2. Next, let's talk about synods: In your experience, how has being part of a synod *helped* your ministry? And how has being part of a synod *hindered* your ministry?

Participants' opinions of synods varied. Some were neutral toward synods. Others had good experiences with synods. In particular, they noted the Living Waters for the World and Solar Under the Sun mission projects that have unified presbyteries in the Synod of Living Waters and the Synod of the Sun, respectively, in common mission. Also, the Synod of the Sun has developed a dynamic relationship with the Synod of Puerto Rico. Synods have been a champion for racial-ethnic congregations. One participant wanted to make sure that minority or immigrant congregations would continue to receive the oversight that synods currently provide

them, since at this point presbyteries aren't offering support and it could be difficult for GA to provide this support.

Some participants questioned whether synods currently play an important role in the PC(USA). As commissioner to the synod, one participant thought that his/her presence at the first synod meeting accomplished little or nothing. Another said that her/his synod was very active a few years ago, but shrank the scope of its functions and now simply disperses money. The synod may be currently having an identity crisis, searching for its function within the PC(USA), the participant suggested. This doesn't mean that synods need to disappear, but it does indicate that they if they continue to survive they should find a significant role within the denomination. One participant argued that synods were created for a time when travel was difficult and a lack of technology impeded quick communication across the country. According to this participant, synods are no longer necessary. They disperse money, but the GA could do this, and eliminating synods would free up money for presbyteries to use.

Q3. Next, let's talk about the General Assembly: In your experience, how has being part of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) helped your ministry? And how has being part of the General Assembly hindered your ministry?

When people discussed the General Assembly, they talked about both the GA meetings every two years and the GA agencies. Participants found that GA facilitates connectionalism and cooperation in mission, and provides oversight. Also, people mentioned that GA agencies are helpful and offer resources (with specific praise for Presbyterian Publishing Corporation publications and Board of Pension resources). Participants wanted to make sure that these resources were—and would continue to be—available to all who wanted to use them. One participant thought that people often didn't realize all the resources that GA agencies offer and thought this could be attributed to the many intermediaries currently delivering these resources from GA to congregations (for example, presbyteries).

Participants also noted that GA discusses issues, like sexuality, which often capture media attention and define the PC(USA) to those outside the denomination. They find that members do not want their friends and neighbors defining their faith in terms of these issues, or members do not want to keep talking about these issues within their own congregations, and would like the GA to stop focusing on them. One participant suggested creating a non-geographic presbytery for More Light congregations, which could then develop their own ordination standards, so that these debates in the denomination could come to an end.

Q4. What sort of ministries do you see emerging now and in the next few years? What kind of presbytery is needed to support these ministries? What kind of synod is needed to support these ministries? What kind of General Assembly is needed to support these ministries?

Participants encouraged creativity in ministry (including taking risks in ministry) and contextual ministry. One participant suggested that the development of smaller presbyteries, in terms of both staff and geographic size, would curtail bureaucracy and allow people to develop relationships and share resources. Another thought that presbyteries or synods could hire an IT consultant to help small congregations create an internet presence.

Participants advocated for a less institutional focus within the PC(USA) and would like to see presbyteries, synods, and GA support the ministry of local congregations. Participants also advocated for less conflict over the *Book of Order*. Another participant thought that people should see the *Book of Order* as a book that gives permission to do great ministry, instead of a book that limits ministry. To unite Presbyterians, one participant encouraged the denomination to keep holding events that bring members together (GA meetings, Youth

Triennium, Big Tent) and to talk less about issues that will never reach a consensus among a diverse body of believers like Presbyterians.

Q5. Beyond what you've already said, what needs to change in the governing body structure, if anything, for you to have a long and fulfilling career as a pastor and leader in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)?

One participant felt positively about GA, but wasn't sure that synods need to exist. This participant said that presbyteries are important to hang on to, less because of their meetings and more because people cooperate and discern together—something that sets Presbyterians apart from many other religious traditions. Another participant found this question to be misguided, because the fulfillment of this pastor's personal ministry will not hinge on the structure of the PC(USA). Lastly, a participant requested the development of a church leadership dating connection.

Appendix G: Focus Group Summary Middle Governing Body Commission

African American Leaders

Participants: Rev. Gregory Bentley, president of the National Black Presbyterian Caucus and pastor of Brown Memorial Presbyterian Church in Tuscaloosa, AL; Rev. Alvin Bridges, pastor of Cornerstone Presbyterian Church in Chicago, IL; Rev. Dr. Karen Brown, vice president of the National Black Presbyterian Caucus; Rev. Arthur Canada, Sr., treasurer of the National Black Presbyterian Caucus and pastor of McClintock Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, NC; Rev. Patrick Daymond, pastor of Sixth-Grace Presbyterian Church in Chicago, IL; Rev. Leon Fanniel, director of chapter and region development of the National Black Presbyterian Caucus; Rev. Betty Griffith, pastor of Immanuel Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis, IN; Mark Jones, Sr., West representative of the National Black Presbyterian Caucus; Rev. Michael Wilson, Northeast representative of the National Black Presbyterian Caucus and pastor of Capital Presbyterian Church in Harrisburg, PA

From the Commission: Viola Hickson-Lee, elder, commissioned lay pastor at Faith/Fe Presbyterian Church in Lockhart, TX, and former moderator of New Hope Presbytery; Rev. Sam Roberson, general presbyter and stated clerk, Presbytery of Charlotte

Q1. Let's talk about the effect that being part of the governing body structure of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has on the ministry you do among African Americans beginning with presbyteries: In your experience, how has being part of a presbytery *helped* ministry among African Americans? And how has being part of a presbytery *hindered* ministry among African Americans?

Overall, most participants had a generally positive view of presbyteries' effects on African American ministry. Participants reported that presbyteries have helped ministry among African Americans by providing presbytery staff support to a congregation dealing with an outside conflict; offering financial resources that enabled African American congregations to meet for fellowship and worship; providing human resources (e.g., workshop facilitators); and showing respect, acceptance, and tangible support for African American congregations (their needs/concerns/ministry style) and local chapters of the National Black Presbyterian Caucus. One participant noted that when funding for some congregations was cut, lots of the African American churches became self-supporting, with half-time pastors. This was a positive change, as these congregations felt more independent and yet still connected to the presbytery.

Some participants thought that, to an extent, garnering presbytery support for African American congregations depended on knowing how to reach presbytery leaders, being represented within the presbytery administration, and/or having an executive leader who is a racial-ethnic or African American ministry advocate. One participant found it important to promote a broader sense of concern in presbyteries for African American church vitality (e.g., new church developments and redevelopments).

One participant reported that presbyteries hinder African American ministry when they act condescendingly toward African American congregations because they are financially supporting these congregations. Also, when the presbytery does not address these congregations' concerns because they say the congregations are not active in the presbytery, this frustrates these congregations' efforts and squelches their interest in participating in the life of the presbytery. Another participant noted that some presbyteries do not promote African American ministry. With one presbytery significantly cutting back its expenditures, its African American congregations with old buildings are not given adequate resources.

Q2. What kind of presbytery would you need in order to grow the Presbyterian witness among African Americans in your area? What would you change? What would you keep the same? [Not asked during the focus group]

Q3. Next, let's talk about synods: In your experience, how has being part of a synod *helped* ministry among African Americans? And how has being part of a synod *hindered* ministry among African Americans?

Participants noted that synods have a positive effect upon African American ministry. One participant thought that synods are better advocates for African American ministry than presbyteries are, since they are more knowledgeable about the needs of African American congregations and more helpful in meeting these needs. Also, synods bring many Presbyterians together, and within this setting Presbyterians who are passionate about African American ministry can alert presbyteries with growing African American populations about opportunities for evangelism with this group. One participant mentioned that her/his synod provides funds for the National Black Presbyterian Caucus (NBPC).

One participant said that with the reorganization of synods two years ago (and the subsequent shift in the relationship between synods and caucuses), her/his synod no longer serves as the main supporter of racial-ethnic ministries. This has hindered racial-ethnic ministry in the synod, especially among presbyteries that are uncommitted or apathetic toward African American ministry. In this synod and its related presbyteries, the NBPC is now the primary means of engaging support for African American congregations, but this support is weaker than when the synod was the main champion for African American ministry.

One participant thought that the support African American ministry receives from the synod can depend on how well one knows how to get needs met within the system, as well as the level of support offered by synod leadership.

Q4. Next, let's talk about the General Assembly: In your experience, how has being part of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) *helped* ministry among African Americans? And how has being part of the General Assembly *hindered* ministry among African Americans?

One participant was a minister-commissioner to last year's General Assembly meeting, and thought that this position fostered a sense of connection with his/her congregation and the GA. Another participant thought that the offices of the GA are willing to address issues and concerns among African Americans within the church, but warns that this can take a while, requires one to speak to the right leaders within the GA, and might not produce an encouraging response. However, this participant had hope that GA's willingness to support African American ministry would grow stronger, as was indicated by the decision to hold this focus group. One participant noted that the GAMC supported his/her synod's request for funding for a new church development and for African American clergy leadership development. This participant noted that success with the GA depends on knowing the right process to use and the right people to speak with to get your needs met.

A couple of participants discussed the PC(USA)'s hierarchical governing structure. One participant thought that the denomination needs to begin considering the congregation as the primary means of engaging in mission. The governing structure doesn't need to be overhauled, but the focus across all levels of PC(USA) governance needs to shift toward supporting and resourcing congregations. Another participant thought that this shift toward a congregational focus has already begun, but that its operationalization hasn't been successful yet. Instead of resources moving from GA to middle governing bodies to congregations, resources aren't moving from any one governing body to another—and this has caused trouble for congregations that need resources but don't know how to get them.

Q5. Where in the governing body structure would you say you receive *the most support* for your ministry among African Americans? [Not asked during the focus group]

Q6. What opportunities are we missing among African Americans that governing bodies might help you address?

A few participants mentioned issues regarding seminary training. One participant wanted to know what the denomination is doing to encourage African American people (and people of other racial-ethnic minorities) to attend seminary and become PC(USA) leaders. Another participant wanted to see a reimagining of theological education within PC(USA) seminaries, which would train people more fully for urban ministry (for example, community organizing training) and church planting. This participant believes that seminaries give incoming students a sense that they will have no problem getting a position as a full-time pastor after seminary, while in reality that is probably not going to happen. If students are trained to create jobs for themselves after seminary (by planting churches and creating ministries), the PC(USA) would lose fewer potential leaders after seminary due to a lack of pastoral positions. Another participant added that seminaries should also promote and prepare students for a bivocational lifestyle, as the ministry situation today could require pastors to live bivocationally.

Other participants mentioned leadership issues within African American ministry. One participant suggested that the presbytery could help develop alternative means of pastoral support other than full-time pastors (for example, sharing pastoral leadership among congregations). Two other participants wanted to see African American leadership development (in general, and particularly for urban congregations that will fail without effective leadership). This general African American leadership development could also address bivocationalism.

One participant noted that, according to the 2010 census, over half of African Americans live in the South, and this percentage is expected to increase in the next years. This means that the South holds great promise for mission and evangelism—something that the PC(USA) should engage in.

Additional Comments

One participant talked about how essential it is for the Office of African American Congregational Support to be able to meet the needs of African American ministry in the PC(USA). S/he said that this office (along with the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns) is the essential link between African American ministry and the General Assembly Mission Council (GAMC) and advocates for African American ministry. If this office lost some of its power and resources, support for African American ministry would be jeopardized.

A participant in an urban presbytery discussed how changes in housing stock, etc., were opening up opportunities for multi-racial congregations. This participant noted that presbytery, synod, and GA support and resources are needed to provide leadership for multi-racial congregations, which s/he believes would grow the church.

Appendix H: Focus Group Summary Middle Governing Body Commission

Asian American, Non-Korean Leaders

Participants: Koonkeo Chanthorn, lay pastor of Lao Presbyterian Fellowship in Fort Smith, AR; Pastor Philip E. Chiang, Grace Taiwan Presbyterian Church in Houston, TX; Rev. Sam Fabila, pastor of Biyaya Community Church [Filipino] in Missouri City, TX; Rev. Kerry Kaino, pastor of Japanese Presbyterian Church in Seattle, WA; Patricia Hew Lee, elder and former moderator of the National Asian Presbyterian Council and the National Chinese Presbyterian Council; Alice Okazaki, member of the National Asian Presbyterian Council; Samson Tso, elder and vice moderator of the National Asian Presbyterian Council

From the Commission: Rev. Terry Newland, synod executive of the Synod of Living Waters

Q1. Let's talk about the effect that being part of the governing body structure of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has on the ministry you do among Asian Americans, beginning with presbyteries: In your experience, how has being part of a presbytery *helped* ministry among Asian Americans? And how has being part of a presbytery *hindered* ministry among Asian Americans?

Overall, participants said that their presbytery is very supportive of Asian ministry, especially when presbyteries have Asian American staff. One participant said that the presbytery communicates excellent Presbyterian theology in a way that her/his Asian American congregation can understand. Another participant said that the presbytery taught the congregation about Presbyterian polity and the congregation's place in the denomination. This presbytery is helping the congregation start a new ministry (which includes a building project). One participant's presbytery has awarded ministry and leadership development grants to Asian American ministry.

Participants would also like to see Asian Americans become more involved in the life of the presbytery (and the synod and the denomination), and the presbytery to be more involved in Asian American ministry (as well as the ministries of other ethnic groups) as a way to better understand the problems these ministries are facing and to support these ministries (including financially). Yet they said that there is a definite language barrier hindering ministry cooperation between Asian Americans and presbyteries, and it can be hard to find an answer to this problem (translation during meetings may not work well in large meetings). One participant noted that Asian American immigrant ministry can take up time that leaders could otherwise devote to PC(USA) committee involvement, while another said s/he wants to see demographic representation on presbytery committees. One participant reported that Asian American ministry has a decidedly different focus and vision; participants talked about how Asian Americans feel that the issues the larger church deals with are not particularly relevant to them, and as a result they may not choose to engage with the larger church or may simply feel less connected to others within the presbytery. One participant expressed frustration that Anglos within the denomination can tend to focus on international issues, instead of caring about the issues facing Asians within the United States. One participant said that the presbytery can place "too many rules, regulations, and structures" on ministry.

Q2. What kind of presbytery would you need in order to grow the Presbyterian witness in your area among Asian Americans? What would you change? What would you keep the same?

One participant said that there are a few things s/he would change to make presbyteries more effective in ministry to Asian Americans: focus on supporting ministry and community, instead of power and politics; take the needs and opinions of Asian American ministry leaders seriously (instead of considering them "token" participants); increase ministry among Asian Americans, since the Asian American population will continue to

grow; create an Asian American ministry council for support and visioning for Asian American ministry; and increase the number of Asian American leaders (create different ordination standards for first generation Asian Americans, and encourage later-generation, younger Asian Americans to pursue ministry careers).

This participant said that s/he would like to see presbyteries continue to draw people together as the larger church (through committees and councils, for example) and support ministry through the Committee on Ministry (COM) and the Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM).

Q3. Next, let's talk about synods: In your experience, how has being part of a synod *helped* ministry among Asian Americans? And how has being part of a synod *hindered* ministry among Asian Americans?

Participants said that synods give loans and grants that support Asian American ministry and also that they help develop Asian American immigrant ministries. Other participants said that they are not too involved with the synod or don't see the synod providing much support to Asian American ministry.

Some participants said that they find the structure of the synod to be more conducive to racial-ethnic ministry support (including Asian American ministry) than the presbytery, since it has a larger influence. However, with presbyteries seeking more control, and the synods receiving less funding, participants said that synods are less able to provide support. Participants also noted that strong support for Asian American ministry within one governing body can also strengthen support in other governing bodies (strong presbytery support can facilitate better relationships between Asian American ministries and synods; synod support can open doors for national ministry support). One participant said s/he would like to see more Asian Americans serving in synod leadership positions, as well as in other leadership positions within the various governing bodies.

Q4. Next, let's talk about the General Assembly (GA): In your experience, how has being part of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) *helped* ministry among Asian Americans? And how has being part of the General Assembly *hindered* ministry among Asian Americans?

One participant mentioned receiving assistance from the office of immigration services (staffed by Julia Thorne). Another participant noted that the GA helps link Asian American ministries to the larger church; provides Asian American networking opportunities through the National Asian Presbyterian Council (NAPC); provides new church development grants for Asian American ministries; and supports efforts to recruit Asian American seminary students and ministry leaders. One of the participants recently served as a GA commissioner and was happy with the experience; however, this participant expressed regret that s/he hadn't been more familiar with the presbytery goings-on at the time, as this hindered his/her participation on the commission. This participant also called for a deeper connection between Asian churches and other Presbyterian churches.

Some participants said they feel that the GA doesn't show true concern for Asian American ministry—treating Asian Americans as a “token” presence in the GA, laying off many Asian American staff during the GA downsizing, providing insufficient funding for Asian American ministry, and assuming that all Asian Americans are immigrants (while some Asian American families have been in the United States for generations). Participants noted that the Asian presence in the PC(USA) is thriving in spite of overall declines in the PC(USA), and wondered why the church doesn't invest more resources in these successful ministries. Also, one participant said that Asian American churches are forced to deal with some GA issues that are of no real concern to them and that the official PC(USA) positions on some issues have caused Asian American worshipers to leave the PC(USA) for non-denominational congregations. One participant had not communicated with the GA.

Q5. Where in the governing body structure would you say you receive *the most support* for your ministry among Asian Americans?

Participants often found the presbytery (including the staff, COM, and CPM) and/or the GA (including the Asian Congregational Support program and Angel Suarez-Valera, associate for Immigrant Group Ministries) to be the most supportive of Asian American ministry. One participant said that the local church is the most supportive, with little/no support received from the presbytery or synod. Also, this participant said that the NAPC does not receive adequate support from the denomination, even as Asian American ministry is more successful than other ministries within the PC(USA).

Q6. What opportunities are we missing among Asian Americans that governing bodies might help you address?

One participant said that the major powers within the denomination need to make sure that minority groups' views are heard and respected within the denomination (including Asian Americans' views), especially in light of current debates over a new Form of Government. Also, due to the ever-growing Asian immigrant population in the United States (including many non-Christian Asians), this participant argued that it's key for the PC(USA) to reach out to Asian Americans at all levels (local congregations, presbytery, synod, and GA).

Additional Comments

Some participants talked about how helpful and important it was for the GA to fund the NAPC's translation of the *Book of Order* into Mandarin. One participant also thought it would be helpful to provide mentors for new immigrant churches, as these churches learn how to be Presbyterian congregations.

Appendix I: Focus Group Summary Middle Governing Body Commission

Hispanic Leaders

Participants: Rev. César Carhuachin, the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic representative of the National Hispanic/Latino Presbyterian Caucus and a Presbytery of Charlotte staff person; Rev. Mauricio Chacon, moderator of the National Hispanic/Latino Presbyterian Caucus; Rev. Daniel Damiani, the Synod of the Northeast representative of the National Hispanic/Latino Presbyterian Caucus; Rev. José G. Gonzalez-Colon, pastor of First Spanish Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn, NY; Rev. Amy Mendez, the Synod of the Rocky Mountains representative of the National Hispanic/Latino Presbyterian Caucus; Rev. Jonier Orozco, vice moderator of the National Hispanic/Latino Presbyterian Caucus and pastor of College Park Presbyterian Church in College Park, GA; Rev. José Luis Torres-Milan, pastor of Tercera Iglesia Presbiteriana in Aguadilla, PR

From the Commission: Rev. José Olagues, associate executive for congregational resourcing for Grand Canyon Presbytery

Q1. Let's talk about the effect that being part of the governing body structure of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has on the ministry you do among Hispanics beginning with presbyteries: In your experience, how has being part of a presbytery *helped* ministry among Hispanics? And how has being part of a presbytery *hindered* ministry among Hispanics?

One participant said that presbyteries can assist with Hispanic ministry by fostering connectionalism among congregations, promoting the sharing of resources and ideas for ministry, providing opportunities to connect with other religious leaders and agencies beyond the presbytery, and offering benefits of association with the presbytery (for example, renting space, obtaining liability insurance). Also, one participant noted that being a Hispanic person in a presbytery leadership position gives voice to Hispanic interests, which in turn can create change.

However, participants said that Hispanics are under-represented in presbytery leadership positions and other leadership positions within the PC(USA). Related to this, participants also said that presbyteries do not minister to Hispanics nearly enough. For instance, there are 15 Hispanic PC(USA) congregations and 2.5 million Hispanic people in New York City.

Participants also expressed concern that the approach to Hispanic ministry should be multi-dimensional but that this hasn't always been the reality. Participants noted that first- and second-generation Hispanic worshipers will respond best to ministries of presence; younger, English-dominant Latinos will respond better to a different form of ministry; and the interests of Hispanic worshipers who do not identify themselves as Hispanic, and instead worship at Anglo churches, need to be considered as well.

Participants talked about how they do not appreciate the condescension in PC(USA) ministry toward the Hispanic population. One participant noted that PC(USA) leaders have been known to direct Hispanic ministries without consulting the Hispanic worshipers themselves; instead of working *with* Hispanic communities, these leaders are working *for* Hispanic communities. Also, Hispanic worshipers aren't consulted when Hispanic ministry leaders are being chosen. One participant reported that PC(USA) white and African American congregations are called "churches," but PC(USA) Hispanic congregations are called "missions." Hispanic ministry is not highly valued within presbyteries or the PC(USA), participants believed. One participant noted that some people within her/his presbytery are not particularly supportive of Latino ministry, which has limited

this ministry (especially in terms of its budget). Another concern is that, when Hispanic ministry is funded entirely by a presbytery, the presbytery's poor financial situation will negatively affect the Hispanic ministry. One participant would like to see a Latino hired by his/her presbytery, but notes that the presbytery's financial situation makes it unable to do so.

Also, one participant noted that presbytery standards about hiring ordained ministers (for example, pastor salary minimums) can make it difficult for Hispanic ministries in their hiring procedures.

Q2. What kind of presbytery would you need in order to grow the Presbyterian witness among Hispanics in your area? What would you change? What would you keep the same?

One participant said that s/he would like to see presbyteries budget for a Latino ministries coordinator, Latino ministry programs, and pastors for new ministries, as well as amass more clergy and laity who advocate for Latino ministries.

Q3. Next, let's talk about synods: In your experience, how has being part of a synod *helped* ministry among Hispanics? And how has being part of a synod *hindered* ministry among Hispanics?

Participants report that synods are not supportive of Hispanic ministry, or not functional at all (including in terms of Hispanic ministry), or that they used to be supportive of Hispanic ministry, but that downsizing and staffing changes have significantly decreased support for this ministry. One participant noted that the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii used to be very supportive of Hispanic ministry, but in that environment the Hispanic ministry didn't learn how to drum up support for itself. A participant noted that the synod has the potential to be very supportive of Hispanic ministry (in terms of funding, events, the National Hispanic/Latino Presbyterian Caucus), while another said her/his synod already is supportive in these ways. One participant mentioned the way his/her synod facilitated the development of the National Hispanic/Latino Presbyterian Caucus, and developed and supports the Eastern Tri-Synod Latino Leadership Initiative.

One participant said that in Puerto Rico the transition from having only one presbytery to having three presbyteries within one synod has hindered the connection among the congregations there. This participant also stressed the importance of gathering together with other pastors/members of the Presbyterian Hispanic community within the presbytery or synod.

A couple of participants engaged in a conversation about the value of the support offered by synods. One synod provides money, but no hands-on support, to Hispanic ministry; yet the Hispanic ministry starts programs and trains leaders with these funds, as a way to multiply the funds' effects. The participant from this synod expressed her/his gratefulness for the support the Hispanic ministry receives. However, another participant argued that the ministry receives a very small amount of money, much less than the level of actual support that the synod could be giving (in terms of both monetary and hands-on support).

Q4. Next, let's talk about the General Assembly (GA): In your experience, how has being part of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) *helped* ministry among Hispanics? And how has being part of the General Assembly *hindered* ministry among Hispanics?

Participants said that GA has assisted Hispanic ministries by providing funding for new church developments; offering funding, resources, and/or support through Hector Rodriguez's office (Hispanic Congregational Enhancement), Marissa Galvan's office (Theology Worship and Education), and the work of Julia Thorne in the immigration office; respectfully interacting with Hispanics who are in contact with the GA; providing

opportunities to network with other Hispanic pastors at an annual event; offering the chance to connect with various offices (like the Ecumenical, Immigrant, and Multicultural offices) to get ideas for Hispanic ministries; and providing information about the Board of Pensions in Spanish. One participant mentioned that his/her connection with the GA Committee on Representation has helped connect her/him to other levels of the PC(USA), and another mentioned involvement with consultation committees.

Participants talked a great deal about the need for GA to intentionally pursue ministry with the growing Hispanic population in the United States, as the Catholic Church is doing—especially as PC(USA) membership is declining. The denomination needs to train Hispanics as pastors and as seminary professors, keep Hispanics on GA staff instead of laying them off during staff cuts, and involve more Hispanics on committees. One participant also called GA to take a more public stand in its support of immigrants, instead of conducting a largely unpublicized effort to support immigrants. Another participant noted that some differences in theological beliefs between Hispanic and non-Hispanic members of the PC(USA) can hinder open dialogue between the groups.

Q5. Where in the governing body structure would you say you receive *the most support* for your ministry among Hispanics?

One participant noted that s/he gets support from all three levels of the governing body structure, with the highest level of support coming from the presbytery (since it is a daily form of support).

Q6. What opportunities are we missing among Hispanics that governing bodies might help you address?

One participant would like to see the governing bodies provide training to regional Hispanic leaders; offer regional models for successful Latino ministries; employ Hispanic lay pastors and clergy in presbyteries and local congregations; and promote fellowship, networking, and partnership among presbyteries' Hispanic ministries coordinators and/or associates.

Miscellaneous Comments

One participant noted that Hispanic pastors are invited to serve on many committees, but when these pastors can't attend committee meetings because of other responsibilities (like their local ministries) others assume that the Hispanic pastors don't want to be involved.

Appendix J: Focus Group Summary Middle Governing Body Commission

Middle Eastern American Leaders

Participants: Rev. Fahed Abu-Akel, moderator of the National Middle Eastern Presbyterian Caucus; Wesley Lasu, lay leader of the Sudanese fellowship at Beechmont Presbyterian Church in Louisville, KY; Rev. Hisham Kamel, pastor of Arabic Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Arcadia, CA; Rev. Moufid Khoury, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Allentown, PA; Rev. Mouris Yousef, pastor of Arabic Christian Fellowship of Moorestown, hosted by First Presbyterian Church in Moorestown, NJ; Rev. Raafat Zaki, secretary of the National Middle Eastern Presbyterian Caucus

From the Commission: Roger Lee, elder of Woodland Park Presbyterian Church in Seattle, WA, and immediate past moderator of the Synod of Alaska-Northwest; Jane Smith, elder of First Presbyterian Church in San Bernardino, CA, and moderator of the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii

Q1. Let's talk about the effect that being part of the governing body structure of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has on the ministry you do among Middle Eastern Americans, beginning with presbyteries: In your experience, how has being part of a presbytery *helped* ministry among Middle Eastern Americans? And how has being part of a presbytery *hindered* ministry among Middle Eastern Americans?

Participants indicated that their involvement with presbyteries often seemed to hinder their ministries, rather than helping them. One participant said that a small number of presbyteries have been supportive in establishing fellowships/congregations for Middle Eastern worshipers, but that most have not been supportive of this goal. Another explained that the presbytery was initially very supportive of the congregation's ministry, but is less so now. This participant attributed the lower level of support to the fact that he himself has gotten busier and has devoted less time to the PC(USA); yet years ago the PC(USA) hadn't reached out to involve him either (even though he had expressed interest in serving on presbytery committees). Another participant initially had trouble with a presbyter who was unsupportive of Middle Eastern ministry. Although the current presbyter isn't antagonistic toward such ministry, the presbytery's lack of funds hinders its support of Middle Eastern ministry.

Participants noted difficulties in partnering with presbyteries to create immigrant fellowships or new congregations. One participant reported that the *Book of Order* gives vague instructions about how to create PC(USA) immigrant fellowships. When a group of immigrant worshipers seeks to become an immigrant fellowship, the stated clerks are able to interpret the *Book of Order* in ways that hinder the formation of these immigrant fellowships. This participant called for the development of a clear policy to encourage the formation of Middle Eastern fellowships in the PC(USA). Also, participants noted that GA's new church development rules do not transfer well to Middle Eastern culture. For instance, the denomination suggests that new church developments conduct a demographic analysis of the area. Participants thought this wasn't an effective or natural way to start a Middle Eastern congregation and reported that these rules kept viable Middle Eastern ministries from developing.

A couple of the participants are involved in Middle Eastern ministries that have relatively weak connections with their presbyteries. For example, one participant is a member of a presbytery, but the fellowship he leads is linked with an already-existing Presbyterian congregation, instead of being a stand-alone Presbyterian fellowship. This participant found it difficult to become an official member of the presbytery himself, and sensed that it would be hard for the fellowship to become a chartered PC(USA) congregation, too. Another

participant's fellowship is only connected to the Presbyterian Church through the pastor at the PC(USA) congregation hosting this fellowship. When this fellowship has requested help from the presbytery (by way of the pastor), the presbytery has at times responded that, since the church is not part of the PC(USA), it can't receive much assistance from the presbytery.

One participant reported that local congregations are the best champions of Middle Eastern ministry. There has to be a staff person in a presbytery who advocates for Middle Eastern ministry in order for the presbytery to engage in this ministry. Local congregations that are passionate about Middle Eastern people have stepped up to engage in and support Middle Eastern ministry, instead of presbyteries and synods.

Q2. What kind of presbytery would you need in order to grow the Presbyterian witness in your area among Middle Eastern Americans? What would you change? What would you keep the same? [Not asked during the focus group]

Q3. Next, let's talk about synods: In your experience, how has being part of a synod *helped* ministry among Middle Eastern Americans? And how has being part of a synod *hindered* ministry among Middle Eastern Americans?

Overall, participants indicated that synods aren't very helpful to Middle Eastern ministry. One participant found some synods to be supportive and others to be unsupportive of racial-ethnic and Middle Eastern ministry. Another participant said that one synod is swimming in money, but doesn't know what to use it for. This synod is constantly changing its direction, management, etc., and is considered ineffective by churches and racial-ethnic ministries under its care. One participant felt that synods are more removed from Middle Eastern ministry than presbyteries are.

Q4. Next, let's talk about the General Assembly: In your experience, how has being part of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) *helped* ministry among Middle Eastern Americans? And how has being part of the General Assembly *hindered* ministry among Middle Eastern Americans?

One participant mentioned how supportive Amgad Beblawi (formerly of the Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries Middle Eastern office, now with World Mission) had been toward Middle Eastern fellowships. Another participant reported that the GA is more supportive of Middle Eastern ministry than presbyteries and synods. He traced this support back to the work of Victor Makari and missionaries in the Middle East who helped draw attention to populations of Middle Easterners in the United States. This support has culminated in the National Middle Eastern Presbyterian Caucus (NMEPC). However, this participant also noted that—no matter how supportive the GA has been—local congregational support has enabled his Middle Eastern ministry to survive. Another participant also mentioned that GA's creation of NMEPC and the Office of Middle Eastern Congregational Support has been very important for Middle Eastern ministry. This participant noted that these two entities have been forces in new church development and the mobilization of Middle Eastern Presbyterians. Although the PC(USA) organizes itself from the bottom-up (churches form, are chartered by presbyteries, and become associated with the PC(USA)), this participant said that there aren't enough worshipers in most Middle Eastern congregations to begin this process of joining the denomination—which is why GA support and resources are essential for successful Middle Eastern ministries.

Participants said that, thanks to the 2010 GA in Minneapolis, Middle Eastern Presbyterians are gaining a larger voice within the denomination. One participant noted that, before this GA meeting, the PC(USA) defined Middle Eastern people as White (consistent with the U.S. Census). Thanks to the efforts of the NMEPC and the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC), and through the decision of the last GA, this

participant reported that the PC(USA) is seeking to consciously incorporate Middle Eastern Presbyterians on committees, staff, etc.

[Added during focus group] What are ways in which working with an individual local congregation has *helped* or *hindered* you in your ministries?

Participants noted that they currently share positive and supportive relationships with their host Presbyterian churches. There are different levels of integration between the host church and the Middle Eastern ministry: sometimes the ministry acts quite independently of the host church, but is still supported and accepted by the host church; at other times, the host church and Middle Eastern ministry are more unified. For example, one participant is very integrated into the life of his Presbyterian church. He is a pastor at this church, with all the same benefits as the other pastors (secretary, office, etc.). He mainly focuses on Arab ministry, but also serves the larger church by preaching at English-speaking services, conducting hospital visits, etc. Participants noted that their relationships with their host churches have facilitated their ministries' growth.

Although relationships with host churches can be beneficial, they can also bring problems or conflict. One Middle Eastern congregation has had to move locations several times (for instance, when a new pastor has been called by the hosting church); this Middle Eastern congregation has now bought land to build its own church. In another Middle Eastern fellowship, the hosting church wanted the fellowship to hold its services solely at the church—but the fellowship didn't feel like this would be most conducive to its worshipers, who came from many different areas. This conflict was resolved, and the hosting church now gives the fellowship much more freedom.

Q5. Where in the governing body structure would you say you receive *the most support* for your ministry among Middle Eastern Americans?

Although this question was not formally asked during the focus group, participants' responses indicate that they find local congregations and the GA to be most supportive of Middle Eastern ministry.

Q6. What opportunities are we missing among Middle Eastern Americans that governing bodies might help you address?

A couple of participants talked about ways that local congregations can support racial-ethnic ministry. Local congregations, presbyteries, and synods can choose to generously support racial-ethnic ministry through the creative use of their resources (even if they have few resources), and to resource and encourage racial-ethnic ministries to engage in evangelism and outreach. One participant considered it important for local congregations to have a mission focus, telling of times when local congregations (with synod and presbytery support) hosted a racial-ethnic ministry which then turned into a new church development. Another participant felt that presbyteries can be so focused on administration that they miss the opportunity to think missionally.

Closing comments

It was noted that PC(USA) governing bodies are resourced and capable enough to reach out and support racial-ethnic ministry (including Middle Eastern ministry), but that many presbyteries and synods do not take this initiative.

Appendix K: Focus Group Summary Middle Governing Body Commission

Native American Leaders and Leaders in Native American Ministries

Participants: Rev. Phil Campbell, pastor of Northern Light United Church in Juneau, AK; Rev. John Chambers, supply pastor of Utkeagvik Presbyterian Church in Barrow, AK; Rev. Irvin Porter, moderator of the Native American Consulting Committee and pastor of Church of the Indian Fellowship in Puyallup, WA; Janis Quinn, elder and vice moderator of the Native American Consulting Committee; Myra Schouten, intern at Papago United Presbyterian Church in Sells, AZ; Corbett Wheeler, elder and member of the Native American Consulting Committee

From the Commission: Roger Lee, elder of Woodland Park Presbyterian Church in Seattle, WA, and immediate past moderator of the Synod of Alaska-Northwest; Rev. José Olagues, associate executive for congregational resourcing for Grand Canyon Presbytery

Q1. Let's talk about the effect that being part of the governing body structure of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has on the ministry you do among Native Americans beginning with presbyteries: In your experience, how has being part of a presbytery *helped* ministry among Native Americans? And how has being part of a presbytery *hindered* ministry among Native Americans?

Participants said that presbyteries provide payroll assistance to congregations without staff, financially support Native American ministries (including through mission grants and endorsements), offer supplies and lay ministry training through the presbytery resource center, provide opportunities for Native Americans to become involved with the presbytery (through presbytery meetings, etc.), and provide continuing education and leadership development opportunities (sometimes with a Native American ministry component to this training).

A couple of participants noted that the PC(USA) pastoral search process does not fit well with Native American culture, especially the mission study component that can take years to complete.

Another participant noted Native Americans' dual image of the presbytery in her/his area of the country, where the presbytery is well-regarded because of its history of ministry to Native Americans, yet also remembered for its disregard of native culture. This participant reported that it is a struggle to figure out how to mend the rocky parts of the relationship between the native culture and the presbytery.

A couple of participants noted the differences in leadership styles between white culture and native culture. In their experience, Native Americans do not want others to take control for them, but that no one within native culture is quick to take the leadership role either. Another participant noted that every native culture is different—one has to enter their culture and work with their ways of making decisions. This participant said that people may treat Native Americans paternalistically, but Native Americans are capable of doing things on their own.

Q2. What kind of presbytery would you need in order to grow the Presbyterian witness among Native Americans in your area? What would you change? What would you keep the same?

One participant said s/he wants to see the presbytery budget money specifically for Native American ministry and make sure Native American ministry has a place in a restructured presbytery system.

Q3. Next, let's talk about synods: In your experience, how has being part of a synod *helped* ministry among Native Americans? And how has being part of a synod *hindered* ministry among Native Americans?

Participants said that synods provide funding for Native American ministries, but some participants don't receive synod funding for their ministries or have contact with the synod. Another participant mentioned having a synod executive who is an advocate for Native American ministries. One participant noted that historically the synod used to provide more support for Native American ministry than the presbytery. A few participants mentioned that geographical separation from the synod office and/or meetings and transitions in synod staff are hindrances. Participants report that in various areas of the country people are wondering if (or thinking that) the synod will cease to exist.

One participant spoke positively of her/his work with the Native American Consulting Committee, a group that helps support Native American congregations. Another participant expressed the opinion that the synod and national structures guiding the Native American Consulting Committee are outdated, that some people on the committee are getting too old to participate, and that there are a few people involved in the committee who end up doing a lot of work. One participant said that it's important to look at the past and present before plotting a future course for the Native American Consulting Committee's national structure.

Q4. Next, let's talk about the General Assembly (GA): In your experience, how has being part of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) *helped* ministry among Native Americans? And how has being part of the General Assembly *hindered* ministry among Native Americans?

Participants said that the GA provides pension funds, manages the mission funds (for example, One Great Hour of Sharing funds), and helps facilitate meetings among Presbyterians involved in Native American ministry by holding national gatherings (GA, Big Tent) where they can come together without added expenses.

One participant said that, overall, GA isn't very connected to Native American ministry. This participant wanted to see the GA make the process of calling a new minister more flexible for ethnicities/cultures in which the current process doesn't work well. This participant also wanted to see the GA work to recruit pastors through seminaries for remote congregations and ministries, and mentioned the possibility of having one person travel across the nation recruiting for Native American congregations.

Another participant mentioned the Comprehensive Strategy for Ministries with Native Americans, which was passed by GA in 2000. This participant wondered if this strategy is periodically reviewed by the church, since s/he thought it is important to allow policies like this to be shaped and adjusted throughout the years.

Participants mentioned what they see as a weakened relationship between GA and Native American ministry. The GA, they said, now considers Native American ministry to be a racial-ethnic caucus, instead of the consulting committee it once was. Participants noted that this shift in GA perception makes Native American ministry feel downgraded in importance, power, and influence within the GA. One participant wanted to see GA consult the Native American Consulting Committee when hiring GA staff who will work with Native American ministry (which didn't happen when Sallie Cuaresma, former associate for Native American congregational support, retired and was recently replaced by Martha Sadongei, church specialist for Native American congregational support, the participant said). This participant also wanted to get more passionate people on the Native American Consulting Committee and have the GA realize that Native American ministry is different from other racial ethnic ministries.

Q5. Where in the governing body structure would you say you receive *the most support* for your ministry among Native Americans? [This question was not asked.]

Q6. What opportunities are we missing among Native Americans that governing bodies might help you address? [This question was not asked.]

Miscellaneous Comments

One participant said that people are dropping out of Native American congregations because they find these congregations to be outdated.