

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Where the heck are we going?

What does the horizon look like?



Whether we call it:

- the Great Emergence with Phyllis Tickle
- the age of the spirit with Harvey Cox
- a Christianity worth believing with Doug Pagitt
- the new Christians with Tony Jones
- generative christianity with Diana Butler Bass
- a generous orthodoxy with Hans Freil
- integral mission with René Padilla

whatever we call it, something is trying to be born among those of us who believe and follow Jesus Christ.

Organization/Organism

- There is a dawning realization of the distinction between the *organization that is called the church* and the *living organism that is the church*. An organization that is called the church is a collection of individuals who cooperate within an agreed-upon structure to conduct business that achieves a common goal. The organism that is the church is a living thing with a vision built into it by God that constantly adapts its actions and its organization to bring that vision to life in each new generation.

(Tom Howard, *Paradoxy*)

The congregation: covenant relationship

The polity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) presupposes the fellowship of women, men, and children united in covenant relationship with one another and with God through Jesus Christ. The organization rests on the fellowship and is not designed to work without trust and love.

(G-1.0102)

Faith

Take away certainty as the foundation of Christian community, and we are left with faith: faith in the incarnate person of Jesus Christ.

(Paradoxy)

The Church is to be a community of faith, entrusting itself to God alone, even at the risk of losing its life.

*(Foundations of
Presbyterian Polity,
F-1.0301)*

Hope

Take away the security of organization as the primary preservation principle of Christian community, and we are left with hope: the hope of an organic, spiritual community that is yet to emerge.

(Paradoxy)

The Church is to be a community of hope, rejoicing in the sure and certain knowledge that, in Christ, God is making a new creation. This new creation is a new beginning for human life and for all things. The Church lives in the present on the strength of that promised new creation. *(F-1.0301)*

Love

Take away power and control as the binding force of Christian community, and we are left with love: the love of Christ experienced in common worship and fellowship.

(Paradoxy)

The Church is to be a community of love, where sin is forgiven, reconciliation is accomplished, and the dividing walls of hostility are torn down.

(F-1.0301)

Openness

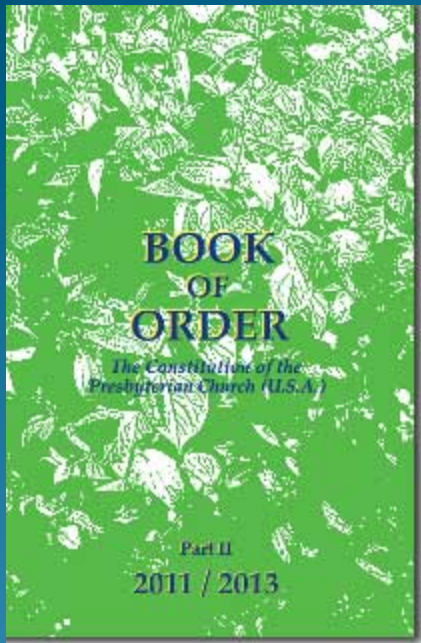
Faith, hope, and love . . . sound familiar? Christians have long seen the wisdom of ordering their individual and interpersonal lives by these three words from the apostle Paul (see 1 Cor. 13:13). The more the church breaks free from the grip of these old ways of viewing the world, the freer the church will be to live into these words in its corporate life.

(Paradoxy)

As it participates in God's mission, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) seeks: a new openness to the sovereign activity of God in the Church and in the world, to a more radical obedience to Christ, and to a more joyous celebration in worship and work; a new openness to see both the possibilities and perils of its institutional forms in order to ensure the faithfulness and usefulness of these forms to God's activity in the world
(F-1.0404)

new FOG was approved:

nFOG



Jesus came back



10-A was approved:

G-6.0106b

Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament.

G-2.0104b

Standards for ordained service reflect the church's desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (F-1.02). The council responsible for ordination and/or installation ...shall examine each candidate's calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of ordered ministry. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate's ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003). Councils shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.

From the vertical to the horizontal



CONGREGATIONS



SYNODS/
PRESBYTERIES



CHURCHWIDE
ORGANIZATION

We have more than four times the number of call seekers as there are calls:

- 2306 professionals (2245 clergy and 61 lay professionals) seeking relocation; 375 of them are seeking their first call.
- 502 positions in the system; 147 of them are available for persons seeking their first call.
- 48 racial ethnic, multi-ethnic churches with active openings in the system.
- 233 racial ethnic clergy and lay professionals in the system.

Some of you are old:

- In most congregations, worshipers between 45 and 64 years of age make up the largest group (39%). But in PC(USA) congregations, people 65 and older comprise the largest age group (43%).
- In PC(USA) congregations, for every worshiper under the age of 25, there are more than six worshipers over the age of 65.
- The average (median) age of worshipers in PC(USA) congregations is 61 – older than the national average for all congregations (54), and older than the national average for the U.S. population (15 years of age and older), which is 44.

What we value in worship

From a list of 14 possibilities, what PC(USA) worshipers most value in their congregation:

- traditional worship
- preaching
- celebrating the Lord's Supper
- wider community care or social justice emphasis
- care for one another
- ministry for children or youth

Ordered differently, these are the same things valued by worshipers in other types of congregations.

We see possibilities:

How open are worshipers in PC(USA) congregations to change and new directions?

- About half of the worshipers in PC(USA) congregations (54%) believe their congregation is always ready to try something new.
- Seven out of ten worshipers (69%) also express a sense of excitement about the congregation's future.

In the national picture of all U.S. congregations, worshipers are more likely to describe their congregation as willing to try new things (62%) and are excited about the future (76%).

We see a future:

Do worshipers in PC(USA) congregations claim a clear vision, goals, or direction for their congregation's ministry and mission?

- Most worshipers in PC(USA) congregations believe there is a clear vision or direction for the future (75% say yes, including 69% who are committed to that vision).
- Others are not sure that the vision is clear or that it exists (25%).

The national average shows most worshipers in U.S. congregations share similar views about their congregation's future (77% believe there is a clear vision, including 66% who are committed to the congregation's vision).

Congregational strengths

Strong congregations:

1. help their worshipers grow spiritually
2. provide meaningful worship
3. are places where worshipers participate in the congregation in many ways
4. give worshipers a sense of belonging
5. care for children and youth
6. focus on the community
7. help worshipers share their faith with others
8. welcome new people
9. rely on empowering congregational leadership
10. have a positive outlook on the future

Fastest-growing congregations

A national study of fast-growing PC(USA) churches reveals they do a good job in several areas:

1. These churches ***focus on the spiritual development of their worshipers***. Many of their worshipers are involved in activities that help them grow in faith and discipleship.
2. Worshipers believe that ***all participants are part of the church's leadership***. *Empowering leaders inspire* others to take action, make certain that everyone's gifts are valued, and employ those gifts in the church's work.
3. Fast-growing congregations ***actively welcome new people to attend and participate in the congregation***. This means that they use multiple efforts to increase the number of visitors and take additional steps to ensure that those visitors are warmly welcomed, continue attending, and become active participants.

So what?

- How can the new flexibility with the FOG help us respond to this evolving church scene?
- How can we help our existing congregations engage their mission and their future?
- How can we minister beyond our middle class niche?
- How can we encourage seminary grads as church planters?
- What kind of council leaders do we need to be?

Can we move toward a horizon
without knowing what is over the edge?

