

Cutting through the FOG:  
*Implications for Sessions*

Shenandoah Presbytery BIG Event  
September 10, 2011

# Disclaimer!

- ▶ **Opinions of presenter only**
- ▶ **New FOG belongs to the whole church**
- ▶ **Resources available:**
  - **Presbytery's stated clerk**
  - **The Office of the General Assembly (Department of Constitutional Services)**
  - **<http://oga.pcusa.org/formofgovernment/>**

# Importance: Foundations

- ▶ **God's mission in Jesus Christ, described using four images:**
  - **Biblical – Jesus Christ as Head of the Church (and the Church as his body)**
  - **Ancient Creeds: The Nicene “Marks” – one, holy, catholic, apostolic**
  - **Reformation era: Scot's Confession Notes of the Reformed Church – proclamation of the Word, celebration of the sacraments, ecclesiastical discipline**
  - **Six Great Ends of the Church (UPNA, 1910)**
- ▶ **Importance of latter three images: see G-3.0201, second paragraph**

## G-3.0201, 2<sup>nd</sup> §

The session shall have responsibility for governing the congregation and guiding its witness to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that the congregation is and becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness. As it leads and guides the witness of the congregation, the session shall keep before it the marks of the Church (F-1.0302), the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed congregations have identified themselves throughout history (F-1.0303) and the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304).

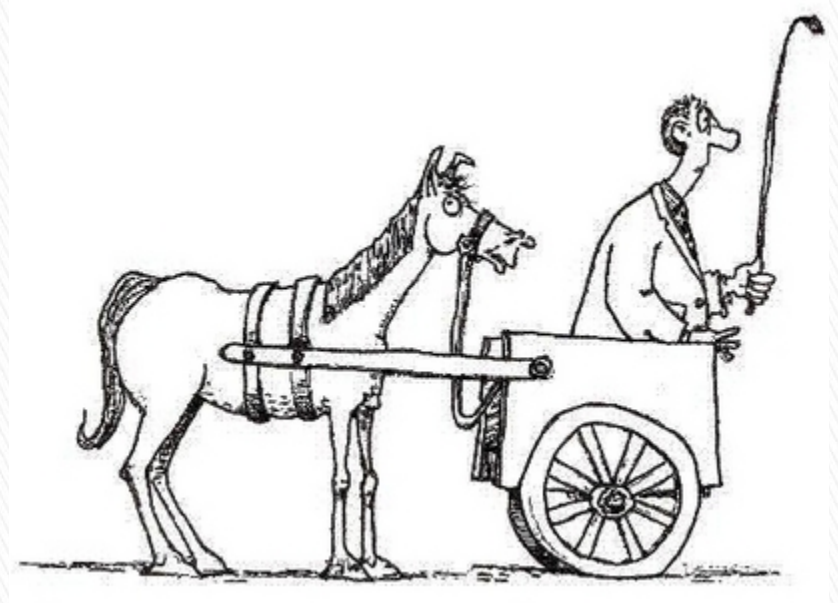
# The First Thing

## ▶ Relax!

- ▶ Rome wasn't built in a day
- ▶ 1983 Reunion didn't happen overnight
- ▶ **We have time to live into the new FOG!**

# The **BIG** Thing


- ▶ Mission determines the forms and structures needed for the church to do its work – G-3.0102
- ▶ Do you have a good sense of what your mission is?
- ▶ **Start that conversation first, before doing any major restructuring!**



# Most Significant Change

- ▶ **Philosophy, not specific section**
- ▶ **Change from “Prescriptive” to “Permissive” polity**
  - **Prescriptive: constitution must specify power (regulatory)**
  - **Permissive: freedom to act within broad principles**
- ▶ **Old FOG: not many required structures for Sessions**
  - **Still, many “hoops” to jump through**
  - **Many of these no longer in Constitution**
  - **Not unimportant, just not constitutional**

# A Change of Mindset


- ▶ Can we learn to approach our polity not as a set of rules but as a description of our common life?
  - ▶ Can we change the pattern of creating a rule to address every uncertainty, and learn to apply the broad principles of our polity with creativity and flexibility?
  - ▶ [Paul Hooker, Task Force member, in “FoG 101”]
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# New FOG

- ▶ Details the “what” – what must be done
- ▶ Does not prescribe the “who” or “how”
- ▶ **How you accomplish your responsibilities is up to you!**

# Congregation Issues

- ▶ Quorum (G-1.0501)
  - ▶ Special Meeting notice (G-1.0502)
  - ▶ Nominations process (G-2.0401)
  - ▶ Parliamentary authority
  - ▶ Bylaws
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# Session: simpler items

- ▶ Quorum (G-3.0203) – no system-wide minimum
  - ▶ Special Meeting notice: “unrepresentative action”  
RONR p. 20f.
  - ▶ Term length – treasurer (G-3.0205) and clerk (G-3.0104)
  - ▶ Inactive members roll: “Other participants” (G-1.0404)
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# Session: more involved items

- ▶ Review mission strategy (G-3.0102) -- Impact on structure, personnel
- ▶ Preparation/examination of those elected to ordered ministries – examinations criteria (G-2.0402; G-2.0403; G-2.0104b)
- ▶ Budget procedures (G-3.0205) –including property and liability insurance (G-3.0112), Full financial review (G-3.0113)
- ▶ Develop or amend manual of operations (G-3.0106)
  - Sexual misconduct policy (G-3.0106)
  - Personnel policies (old FOG)
  - Standing policies: As detailed or brief as meets your needs

# Resources

- ▶ Presbytery web site: [www.shenpres.org](http://www.shenpres.org)
- ▶ GA web site: [www/pcusa.org/formofgovernment](http://www.pcusa.org/formofgovernment)