Minutes of the
Special Session

of the
PRESBYTERY OF SHENANDOAH

December 17, 2013

Massanutten Presbyterian Church
Penn Laird, Virginia

NEXT STATED SESSIONS

Saturday, February 8, 2014
First Presbyterian Church
Harrisonburg, Virginia

Tuesday, May 13, 2014
Moorefield Presbyterian Church
Moorefield, West Virginia

Saturday, August 23, 2014
Camp Paddy Run
Star Tannery, Virginia

SHENANDOAH PRESBYTERY IS A COVENANT BODY WHERE:

» congregations are empowered to be centers for mission,

» lay persons are equipped to be Disciples of Christ in a challenging world,

» church leaders and members are nurtured and strengthened for service,

» open communication and information are used constructively and creatively to keep us connected.
SHENANDOAH PRESBYTERY
DIRECTORY

Teaching Elder Olivia Haney ........................................................................................................... Moderator 2013
  johnolivia@mgwnet.com
Teaching Elder Betty Dax ....................................................................................................... Vice-Moderator 2013
daviddax@comcast.net
Teaching Elder Roy Martin ..................................................................................................... Transitional Presbyter
  presbyter@shenpres.org  Ext 108
Teaching Elder David Witt .................................................................................................................... Stated Clerk
  statedclerk@shenpres.org  Ext 110
Larry Holsinger ......................................................................................................... Treasurer
treasurer@shenpres.org  Ext 111
Ruling Elder Doug Sensabaugh ......................................................................... Communications Coordinator/HAE
doug@shenpres.org  Ext 106
Heather Carter .......................................................................................................... Office Coordinator/Bookkeeper
  bookkeeper@shenpres.org  Ext 100
Kimberly T. Stroupe .......................................................................................................... Assistant for Constitution
  kims@shenpres.org  Ext 107

490 Burning Tree Road, Pinehurst, NC  28374

SHENANDOAH PRESBYTERY OFFICE
1111 North Main Street, Harrisonburg, VA  22802
Telephone:  540-433-2556   Fax:  540-433-6830   shenpres@shenpres.org

SHENANDOAH PRESBYTERY CORPORATION
1111 North Main Street, Harrisonburg, VA  22802

Current Officers
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Philip H. Miller, Secretary
B. Randolph Roller, Treasurer

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Brown, Edwards & Company, LLP

CAMP PADDY RUN
Address:  221 Camp Lane, Star Tannery, VA  22654; Telephone: 540-436-3665
CANDIDATES FOR MINISTRY OF THE WORD AND SACRAMENT

Marie Mainard O’Connell  
Home Church – Covenant  
638 W. Frederick St., Apt 2  
Staunton, VA 24401

Helen “Punker” Robertson  
Home Church – Goshen  
471 Sunnybrook Rd.  
Fairfield, VA 24435

Rebecca Siddle  
Home Church – Waynesboro First  
649 Chestnut Ave.  
Waynesboro, VA 22980

INQUIRERS FOR MINISTRY OF THE WORD AND SACRAMENT

John Craft  
Home Church – Tinkling Spring

Emily Peterson  
Home Church - Covenant

Gwen Carr  
Home Church – Tinkling Spring

Eric Gleason  
Home Church - Warrenton

Kristy Ray  
Home Church – Tinkling Spring

Jacob Kave  
Home Church – New Monmouth

Tom Forbes  
Home Church – Bunker Hill

Seth Lovell  
Home Church – Tinkling Spring
GOVERNING BODIES

Synod of the Mid-Atlantic
3218 Chamberlayne Ave.
Richmond, VA 23227
804-342-0016
800-743-7670
www.synatltantic.org

Office of the General Assembly
100 Witherspoon St.
Louisville, KY 40202-1396
502-569-5000
888-728-7228
www.pcusa.org
PRESBYTERY OF SHENANDOAH
MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING

A Special Meeting of the Presbytery of Shenandoah was held at Massanutten Presbyterian Church, in Penn Laird, Virginia, at 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, December 17, 2013. The Special Meeting was called for the purpose of hearing and acting upon a report from the Study Task Force appointed at the November 12, 2013, stated meeting of presbytery. The Study Task Force was appointed to study the theology and polity of ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians and approve the denomination as a receiving body that meets the standards of the PCUSA in order that congregations may be dismissed to said body. Assuming the report is approved, the Body will then act upon a report of the Administrative Commission to the Spring Hill Church. The Moderator, Teaching Elder Olivia Haney, called the meeting to order with prayer.

WORSHIP

The Presbytery was led in opening Advent centered worship by the Worship Committee of the Presbytery, chaired by Teaching Elder Amy Fetterman, and ruling elders and teaching elders from the Presbytery. The scripture readings from Ephesians 4:1-6 and Luke 2:1-7 inspired us to focus on the coming of Christ and the hope and unity we share because of this great Gift. Amy Fetterman shared a Meditation on the Word.

QUORUM AND ENROLLMENT

The Stated Clerk reported that a quorum was present. The final enrollment was as follows:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
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<tr>
<td>Adm</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>DYP Director, Youth Program</td>
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<td>Asst</td>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td>ED Educator</td>
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<td>Assoc</td>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>HR Honorably Retired</td>
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<td>Chap</td>
<td>Chaplain</td>
<td>IA Interim Associate</td>
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<tr>
<td>CM</td>
<td>Campus Minister</td>
<td>IN Inactive</td>
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<tr>
<td>COP</td>
<td>Co-Pastors</td>
<td>IP Interim Pastor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coun</td>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>ML Minister-at-Large</td>
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<tr>
<td>DP</td>
<td>Designated Pastor</td>
<td>OM Overseas Missionary</td>
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<td>WC Without Charge</td>
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(Description code for attendance:  P = present   E = excused   A = absent)

A Allen, Donald R., Jr. HR
A Arnold, Timothy P Sherando Absent
A Barner, Ann Elizabeth HR
A Barner, Fred Thomas HR
E Baxter, John A. HR
P Bethard, John T. P Charles Town Absent
P Biggs, Thomas T. HR
E Boyer, Grace Jones HR
A Brandon, Joseph C. HR
E Bridgman, Larry Ann C. HR
E Bridgman, Stewart G. HR
A Bromhead, Jonathan ML
E Brownlee, J. Malcolm HR
A Bucy, Ralph D. HR
P Bunker, Jonathan W. P Berryville Absent
P Burton, Rufus T., III P Martinsburg First James Sadler
A Cardot, Guy Richard P Petersburg Absent
E Carlsson, Charles M., Jr. HR
A Carr, Phillips L. HR
P Chapman, George W. P Buena Vista Absent
E Coffman, Donna B. HR
E Cole, William A., Jr. HR
P Coleman, Glenn M. ML
P Conrad, Scott A. ML
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tr>
<td>Corder, William “Lee”</td>
<td>ML</td>
<td>New Providence</td>
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<td>Cornfield, Keith A.</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Tinkling Spring</td>
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<td>Cornish, Homer T.</td>
<td>HR</td>
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<td>Cox, C. William</td>
<td>HR</td>
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<td>Cranford, April H.</td>
<td>Assoc</td>
<td>Tuscorsora</td>
<td>Karen Thatcher</td>
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<td>Crumley, Rachel</td>
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<td>Cushman, James E.</td>
<td>HR</td>
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<td>Cushwa, John W.</td>
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<td>Dax, Betty G.</td>
<td>IP</td>
<td>Waynesboro First</td>
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<td>Dent, William H., Jr.</td>
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<td>Dietrich, Richard S.</td>
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<td>Dobyns, Sharyl A.</td>
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<td>Donohoe, Patricia A.</td>
<td>HR</td>
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<td>Dorn, Constance A.</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Broadway</td>
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<td>Douty, Horace D.</td>
<td>HR/IP</td>
<td>Oxford</td>
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<td>Earl, John B., Sr.</td>
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<td>Evans, Caroline B.</td>
<td>Assoc</td>
<td>Warrenton</td>
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<td>Everhart, William G.</td>
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<td>Farthing, Stanley H.</td>
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<td>Zetta</td>
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<td>Fetterman, Amy</td>
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<td>Covenant</td>
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<td>Field, Robert F.</td>
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<td>Fisher, Merle L., Jr.</td>
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<td>Fisher, Otis L.</td>
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<td>Foster, M. Kerry</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Bridgewater</td>
<td>Merrill Simon, III</td>
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<td>Franklin, John S.</td>
<td>HR</td>
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<td>Garrison, John D.</td>
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<td>Garriss, K. Braxton</td>
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<td>Goodman, William R., Jr.</td>
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<td>Goshorn, Robert D.</td>
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<td>Habbersett, Bonnie D.</td>
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<td>Hahn-Campanella Kitty</td>
<td>Supply</td>
<td>Franklin-Memorial</td>
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<td>Hand, Kevin L.</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Ruddles</td>
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<td>Haney, John H.</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Millboro</td>
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<td>Haney, M. Olivia Kincaid</td>
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<td>Beulah</td>
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<td>Harmon, Melissa L.</td>
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<td>Monterey</td>
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<td>Harrison, L. Randolph</td>
<td>HR</td>
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<td>Hastings, John R. “Skip”</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Collierstown</td>
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<td>Hay, Thomas D.</td>
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<td>Hayter, J. T., Jr.</td>
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<td>Heeringa, Jon E.</td>
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<td>Richard Johnson</td>
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<td>Held, Ann Reed</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Trinity</td>
<td>Carolyn Arbuckle</td>
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<td>Hendy, Susanna</td>
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<td>Hill, Robert S., Jr.</td>
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<td>Hill, Sarah L.</td>
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<td>Holden, Thomas J., III</td>
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<td>Hopkins, E. Reed</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Loch Willow</td>
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<td>Howard, Carl D.</td>
<td>SS</td>
<td>Hedgesville &amp; Little Falls</td>
<td>Absent</td>
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<td>Howard, David D.</td>
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<td>Strasburg</td>
<td>Absent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hunt, Patricia</td>
<td>HR</td>
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P Hunter, Tully J.  
E Inglis, J. Leslie HR
E Jackson, James R. HR
A Jackson, Katherine C. P Moorefield Absent
E Jaureguizar, Marcia W. HR
P Johns, Harry E. IP Staunton Second
E Johnson, Barbara R. P Romney Excused
E Jones, Donald D. M. HR
E Kennedy, J. Whitner HR
P Key, Kyle W. Assoc Harrisonburg First
A Klein, Deborah H. ML
P Klein, William M. P Lexington David Dax
E Johnson, Barbara R. P Romney Excused
P Johns, Harry E. IP Staunton Second
E Johnson, Barbara R. P Romney Excused
P Reller, Charles K. HR
A Rhyne, C. Thomas P Front Royal Absent
A Robinson, John A., Jr. Adm
P Robinson, Sally O. IP Mt. Horeb
P Ross, Anne M. P Elkton Ray Burkart
A Schmahl, Carl HR
E Sefcik, Joseph T. HR
P Sherman, H. Wray P Hermitage Joyce H.
P Sherrard, Robert L. P Windy Cove Sharon Sherrard
P Sieck, Philip L. HR
E Slider, C. Richard II HR
A Sloop, John F. HR
A Smith, Nancy A. ML
E Snelson, Andrew L. HR
A Sommer, Philip W. HR/IP Bethel
A Sonstegard-Spray, Maren Assoc Winchester First
E Stanley, Arthur L. HR
E Stephens, Millard M. HR
P Stokes, Martin L. P New Monmouth Henry Schreiber
E Swezey, Charles M. HR
A Symons, Charles D., Jr. HR
A Thomas, Aaron Lee P Absent
P Thornton, Joel P.
P Cedar Creek Absent
Clear Brook Absent
Ivanhoe Absent
Middletown Absent
Mt. Hope Absent
Second Opequon Absent
Wardensville Absent
E Tremba, Randall W. P Shepherdstown Excused
P Tutterow, Christina B. P Bethesda Absent
A Unger, Philip E. ML
E Vernon, Joseph H. J. HR
A von Oeyen, Jr., Robert HR
E Watkins, John M. HR
P Webb, Lisa M. P Woodstock Absent
P Webb, Randall E. Supply Nineveh
A Whiteley, Nancy S. HR
P Wilkers, Jack B. P Staunton Third Absent
E Wilkinson, Donald S. HR
P Wilson, Joan M. Supply Mt. Storm
A Wilson, Stanton R. HR
P Witt, David R. P Opequon William Heavner Stated Clerk Absent
E Woodworth, Robert B. HR
P Wyche, Frank P Hebron Hannah Bush
E Young, Betty Jean HR
A Young, James R. M. DP Westminster Absent
E Young, Philip H. HR
A Young, Richard O., Sr. HR

CHURCHES WITHOUT INSTALLED PASTORS
Ben Salem Absent
Bethany Absent
Bethel Absent
Bloomery Absent
Buckton Absent
Buffalo Gap Dan Stogdale
Bunker Hill Absent
Burlington Excused
Circleville  Absent
Craigsville  Absent
Elk Branch Absent
Falling Waters Absent
Gerrardstown Absent
Glen Kirk Absent
Halltown Absent
Hedgesville Absent
Highland Memorial Absent
Hot Springs Absent
Immanuel Absent
Kearneysville Absent
Keyser Excused
Little Falls Absent
McCutch en Absent
Mossy Creek Charles Blair
Mount Carmel James Ramsey
Mount Horeb John Bosserman
Mount Joy Absent
Mount Olive Absent
Mount Storm Tony Wilson
Nineveh Sandi Ey
Oxford Absent
Piedmont Absent
Pines Chapel Tommy Roadcap
Seneca Rocks Absent
Slanesville Absent
Smyrna Richard Ryder
Springfield Excused
Staunton First Louisa Dixon
Staunton Second Andy Easley
Sunnyside Absent
Tabler Edward McLaughlin
Tomahawk Absent
Union Absent
Warrenton Joan Bundy
Absent
Waynesboro First Joyce Tipton
Waynesboro Second Absent
Williamsville Absent
Zetta Larry Lawhorn

VOTING RULING ELDERS:

Commissioned Ruling Elders

P William Barnett A James Boyette A Michele Elliott
P Tom Forbes P Judy Hensley P Carol Miller
P Isca Mitchell A William Moore P Alan Morrison
E Linda Reece P Dwight Rinard A Alvin Russell
A Bobby Spurgeon P Ron Wilkes

Voting Ruling Elders of Presbytery Staff or Presbytery Leadership Team (PLT):

A Sue Hotinger, PLT E Doug Sensabaugh, Staff Ruling Elder
P Sandi Ey, PLT (also Nineveh commissioner) A Greg Trobaugh, PLT
P Mike Robison, PLT E Jim Johnston, PLT

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NON-VOTING VISITORS:

Candidates
Punker Robertson

Inquirers
Gwen Carr

Visiting Ministers
Mary Johns

Presbytery Staff
Larry Holsinger
Kim Stroupe

Visitors
Patricia Armstrong  Jane Baylor  Ellen Blose
Paula Griffin  Judy Harman  Ron Huntley
Sam Lantz  Virginia Painter  Peggy Roberson
Charles Robertson  Don Roll  Gail Smith
Bill Vance  James Wenger  Anna Lee Wilkes
Cheryl Zeiner

Teaching Elders = 54    Voting Ruling Elders = 47    Additional Guests = 21    TOTAL = 122

WELCOME

The Moderator welcomed all visitors and ruling elder commissioners were recognized for this being their first Presbytery meeting. The Rev. Mary Johns of the Presbytery of the James, was recognized and given privilege of the floor. Rev. Johns is serving as interim pastor of the Staunton First Church. Teaching elder John Leggett welcomed everyone to Massanutten Church.

APPOINTMENTS

The Moderator appointed the following: Assistant Clerks – Teaching Elder John McDonald, Member at-large; and Teaching Elder Jim Young, designated pastor at Westminster Church. Teaching Elder Fred Holbrook served as the parliamentarian.

NEW BUSINESS

Presbytery excused from attendance of all or part of this special meeting those ministers who submitted such a request.

DOCKET

The docket was approved as distributed. (see page 175).

REPORT OF THE STUDY TASK FORCE

The Rev. Fred Holbrook gave the report of the study task force. After much discussion, the document Policy of Shenandoah Presbytery Regarding ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians was approved 50 to 39: See pages 176-193 for policy and supporting documents.

The Stated Clerk received the following written protest:

I, Rufus Burton, member of the Presbytery of Shenandoah, protest the decision of the Presbytery to approve ECO as a Reformed Denomination. The action violates the clear teaching of the Book of Acts, violates the clear teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith, and fails to live into the high priestly prayer of Jesus Christ.

Rufus T. Burton
Pastor, First Church Martinsburg
The Rev. Rob Sherrard gave the report of the Administrative Commission. (See pages 194-201 for full report and supporting documents) It was noted that all members of the Commission were present at today’s meeting. Time was given for questions and answers.

After much discussion, the following was placed on the floor as a recommendation::

A. That Spring Hill Presbyterian Church be dismissed from Shenandoah Presbytery on December 31, 2013 to unite with the Presbytery of the East of ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians contingent upon payment of $40,000 to Union Presbyterian Church for the restoration of their building. \[Note: Union Church is the closest church in Shenandoah Presbytery to the Spring Hill community, and Union Church has a definite need to repair their floor in order to preserve their ministry in the general area.\];

B. That Spring Hill Church transfer all original Session minutes and other official records related to the church’s life in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to Shenandoah Presbytery;

C. That Shenandoah Presbytery on behalf of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) relinquish any further claim upon property currently held or administered by Spring Hill Presbyterian Church;

D. That Pastor Charles McFarlin be dismissed from Shenandoah Presbytery on December 31, 2013 to continue his ministry within the Presbytery of the East of ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians;

E. That a pastoral letter be sent from Shenandoah Presbytery by the Stated Clerk informing all members of Spring Hill Church of actions a, b, c and d above and offering assistance to any members who might wish to relocate to another church affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.);

F. That, at a date convenient for those involved, a Worship Service of Endings and Beginnings be held at Spring Hill Church including representatives from Shenandoah Presbytery, the Presbytery of the East of ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, and Spring Hill Church.

The following motion was made, seconded and defeated 55 to 38:

Move to suspend the rules and to consider the recommendations of the Administrative Commission without the possibility of amendment.

The following amendment to the recommendation was made and seconded:

Wording to be added appears in bold italics. Wording to be deleted is [bracketed].

1. Amend Recommendation A to read as follows: “That Spring Hill Presbyterian Church be dismissed from Shenandoah Presbytery on December 31, 2013 to unite with the Presbytery of the East of ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians contingent upon payment of $701,000.00 to Shenandoah Presbytery. [$40,000 to Union Presbyterian Church for the restoration of their building.]  [The Note referencing Union Presbyterian Church would also be deleted.]

2. Add a new recommendation B which would read: Payment received by Shenandoah Presbytery from Spring Hill Presbyterian Church will be used to establish the “Spring Hill Fund” to recognize and continue the legacy of ministry of Spring Hill Church within Shenandoah Presbytery and its predecessor bodies. A plan for making these funds available to congregations within the former Lexington Presbytery shall be developed by the Committee on Church Development and approved by the presbytery.

3. Re-letter the remaining recommendations accordingly.

4. Amend Recommendation C. (D in the new re-lettering) to read as follows: “That Shenandoah Presbytery on behalf of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) relinquish any further claim upon property currently held or administered by Spring Hill Presbyterian Church except that within a ten
year period of dismissal should the Spring Hill congregation dissolve or otherwise cease to exist, fail to
remain within the Reformed body to which it was dismissed, or become independent, then all real
property of the Spring Hill congregation shall revert to the Presbytery of Shenandoah. (See page 6 of the
Report of the Study Task Force, paragraphs 5 and 6)

The following amendment to the amendment was made, seconded and approved:

Amend Recommendation A to read as follows: “That Spring Hill Presbyterian Church be dismissed from
Shenandoah Presbytery on December 31, 2013 to unite with the Presbytery of the East of ECO: A
Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians contingent upon payment of $701,000.00 to Shenandoah
Presbytery, OR AN ARRANGEMENT FOR PAYMENT TO BE AGREED UPON BY THE SESSION
OF SPRING HILL CHURCH AND THE PRESBYTERY LEADERSHIP TEAM.

The following amendment to the amendment was made, seconded and approved:

Amend Recommendation A to read as follows: “That Spring Hill Presbyterian Church be dismissed from
Shenandoah Presbytery on December 31, 2013 to unite with the Presbytery of the East of ECO: A
Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians contingent upon payment of $701,000.00 $235,000 to
Shenandoah Presbytery, OR AN ARRANGEMENT FOR PAYMENT TO BE AGREED UPON BY THE
SESSION OF SPRING HILL CHURCH AND THE PRESBYTERY LEADERSHIP TEAM.

A call for the question was entertained and the Body voted by standing on the amendment to the recommendation,
item 1. It was defeated 63 to 28, which voided items 2 and 3.

The Body voted by standing on the amendment to the recommendation item 4. It was defeated 77 to 13. The Rev.
George Evans and the Rev. Jan Owen publicly announced their abstention votes.

The main recommendation, items A-F was then voted on by written ballot and approved 79 to 19 with one
abstention.

The Rev. Rob Sherrard made the following recommendation, which was approved:

That, having completed its work, the Spring Hill Administrative Commission be dismissed.

The Stated Clerk received the following written protest:

I, Rufus T. Burton, a member of Shenandoah Presbytery, protest the action of Shenandoah
Presbytery to dismiss the Spring Hill Church to ECO. The action violates any coherent
understanding of Reformed ecclesiology and violates the Second, Fifth, Eight, Ninth and Tenth
Commandments.

Rufus T. Burton
Pastor, First Church Martinsburg

ADJOURNMENT

The presbytery adjourned at 12:25 p.m. in a circle around the sanctuary, with prayer by the Rev. Roy Martin and the
singing of the first verse of Blst Be the Tie That Binds. Presbytery will meet in stated session on Saturday,
February 8, 2014, at First Church in Harrisonburg, Virginia, beginning at 9:00 a.m.

M. Olivia Haney, Moderator
DOCKET
(Members of Presbytery are urged to be registered and seated by 9:30 a.m. If not yet registered, please do so right after worship)

8:15 a.m.  REGISTRATION BEGINS
9:00 a.m.  Opening Prayer and Call to Order
           Worship
9:30 a.m.  Determining a Quorum
           Welcoming and Introduction of Guests
           Seating correspondent members
           Appointment by the Moderator
           Adoption of the Docket
           Representative of host church
9:45 a.m.  Report of the Study Task Force
10:30 a.m. Report of the Spring Hill Administrative Commission
12:00 p.m. Anticipated Adjournment
Policy of Shenandoah Presbytery Regarding
ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians
Approved: December 17, 2013

Background

“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may be one. As you, Father are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe you have sent me” (Jesus, in prayer with and for his disciples in John 17:20-21).

Because in Christ the Church is one, it strives to be one. To be one with Christ is to be joined with all those whom Christ calls into relationship with Him. To be joined with one another is to become priests for one another, praying for the world and for one another, and sharing the various gifts God has given to each Christian for the benefit of the whole community. Division into different denominations obscures but does not destroy our unity in Christ.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) [P.C.(U.S.A.)], affirming its historical continuity with the whole Church of Jesus Christ, is committed to the reduction of that obscurity, and is willing to seek and to deepen communion with all other churches within the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church (Book of Order F-1.0302a).

The P.C.(U.S.A.) at all levels “seeks to manifest more visibly the unity of the body of Christ and will be open to opportunities for conversation, cooperation, and action with other ecclesiastical groups. It will seek to initiate, maintain, and strengthen relations with other Reformed and Christian entities” (Book of Order G-5.0101).

Shenandoah Presbytery, “a community of Christ for worship, nurture, and mission,” is a council within the P.C.(U.S.A.). Together with our sisters and brothers throughout this denomination, we stand in full accord with our Lord Jesus Christ whose prayer was that we all be one.

Context

Shenandoah Presbytery recognizes its calling in Christ to the unity of the Church, the body of Christ. At the same time, it acknowledges, in the existence of various denominations, the continued obscurity of the unity of that body. It is committed, as the Book of Order maintains, “to the reduction of that obscurity, and is willing to seek and deepen communion with all other churches in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church” (Book of Order F-1.0302a).

Recent developments within the P.C.(U.S.A.) have led to the formation of ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians [ECO]. Formed in January 2012, ECO (not an acronym but an effort “to strengthen the ecosystems of local churches”) describes itself as “a Presbyterian denomination that exists to serve the local church” (www.eco-pres.org).

Whereas many of the presbyteries in the P.C.(U.S.A.) are developing policies in regards to how member congregations might relate to affinity groups like the Fellowship of Presbyterians, this policy is specific to ECO. It is intended to aid Shenandoah Presbytery as it determines if ECO is a Reformed body to whom our presbytery might dismiss congregations.
The 218th General Assembly (2008) of the P.C.(U.S.A.) advised presbyteries to “satisfy themselves concerning the conformity with this denomination” of entities like ECO (See Appendix A). Though this authoritative interpretation was in answer to questions regarding transitional presbyteries with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the guidance is helpful in providing structure for the response regarding ECO. In exploring other denominations or entities self-identifying as Reformed bodies, the General Assembly of the P.C.(U.S.A.) advises presbyteries to consider whether the receiving presbytery is:

- doctrinally consistent with the essentials of Reformed theology as understood by the presbytery;
- governed by a polity that is consistent in form and structure with that of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); and,
- of sufficient permanence to offer reasonable assurance that the congregation is not being dismissed to de facto independence.

Keeping these three considerations in mind, the Task Force appointed by Shenandoah Presbytery carefully and prayerfully reviewed ECO’s resources including the “Essential Tenets & Confessional Standards,” the “ECO Polity and Discipline,” the “ECO Ordination Manual,” the “Covenant for Congregations,” and the “ECO Mission Affinity Groups.” All of these documents are found at the ECO website (www.eco-pres.org) and clearly identify the guiding principles of ECO.

Note is taken that some within the P.C.(U.S.A.), including the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii, have termed ECO a “special interest group” and not a Reformed body. In considering a case involving a potential joint P.C.(U.S.A.) and ECO presbytery, that synod’s Permanent Judicial Commission (PLC) recalled the principle that “God alone is Lord of the conscience” (Book of Order F-3.0101) and stated that becoming a “covenant partner” (member) in an ECO congregation has requirements that are opposed to the polity of the P.C.(U.S.A.). In particular, it observed, membership in the P.C.(U.S.A.), as is true in all Reformed bodies, “has as its only membership requirement one’s personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord” (Case Number 2012-3, Synod of Southern California and Hawaii PJC).

The Synod’s PJC indicated an understanding that ECO’s requirement for church membership includes “a signed agreement of like belief” in addition to one’s personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. This presumed ECO practice, the Synod declared, is “beyond the boundaries of what it is understood to be Reformed.” ECO, however, in its Polity and Discipline statement specifies only that “those who wish to embrace the congregation’s covenantal expectations may become covenant partners (members) by action of the session after hearing testimony of their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior” (Polity and Discipline 1.0303). Therefore, ECO’s polity statement on membership lacks the requirement for “a signed agreement of like belief” that was central to the PJC’s ruling.

Further, a remedial case between the Synod and San Gabriel Presbytery was dismissed allowing two congregations in that presbytery to be dismissed to ECO. Of the eight presbyteries in the Synod, Los Ranchos, Santa Barbara, and the Presbytery of Pasadena have joined San Gabriel in affirming that ECO is a Reformed denomination to which they may dismiss a congregation.
Whereas many presbyteries expect the General Assembly to provide guidance and decisions on matters of theology and polity, it is clear that the matter pertaining to satisfaction concerning the theology, polity, and permanence of ECO rests, not with the synods or with the General Assembly, but with each particular presbytery.

Policy

Therefore, responding to the three considerations regarding theology, polity, and permanence, Shenandoah Presbytery affirms:

A) ECO is doctrinally consistent with the essentials of Reformed theology as understood by Shenandoah Presbytery.

The Finley Memorial Presbyterian Church, Stuarts Draft, VA, includes on its website a page entitled “Essential Beliefs of the Reformed Faith.” Various lists of “essentials” can be found throughout the history of the Reformed tradition. These ten from Finley’s site capture the essence:

1. Trinity—God the Father, who is over us; God the Son, who is with us and for us; and God the Holy Spirit, who is in us and among us.
2. Incarnation—In Jesus Christ, the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. In Jesus Christ, the Triune God is revealed.
3. Salvation by grace through faith.
4. Scripture is the Word of God and our only rule of faith and obedience.
5. Sovereignty and Providence of God.
6. The election of the people of God for service as well as for salvation.
7. God’s involvement in the covenant community of God’s people.
8. A faithful stewardship of ourselves, our gifts, our resources, and the earth.
10. The commitment of believers to justice, liberation, and obedience.

ECO is confessional when it states that “the appropriate confessional standards for ECO are the creeds, confessions, and catechisms in the Book of Confessions” (ECO Confessional Standards). Though some raise a question regarding “conscience,” ECO states, “We confess that God alone is Lord of the conscience, but this freedom is for the purpose of allowing us to be subject always and primarily to God’s Word…. We are happy to confess ourselves captive to the Word of God, not just individually, but also as members of a community of faith, extending through time and around the globe. In particular, we join with other members of the Presbyterian and Reformed community to affirm the secondary authority of the Book of Confessions as a faithful exposition of the Word of God.” We find them, in this context, to be “doctrinally consistent with the essentials of Reformed theology” (ECO Essential Tenets).

The “Essential Tenets of ECO,” to which covenant partners must agree if they are “to take significant leadership roles in the congregation,” are in the most part consistent with the essential beliefs of the reformed faith as stated by our Finley Memorial congregation (See Appendix B). Where ECO departs from the understandings embraced by the P.C.(U.S.A.), the differences are not significant enough to declare them to be “doctrinally inconsistent.”

Therefore, Shenandoah Presbytery affirms that ECO is doctrinally consistent with the “essentials of Reformed theology.”
B) ECO is governed by a polity that is consistent in form and structure with that of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

There are many important consistencies between the P.C.(U.S.A.) Book of Order and ECO’s Polity and Discipline (i.e. ordination of women, dedication to ecumenicity), though there are some inconsistencies. While the polity within ECO significantly calls for congregations, presbyteries, and the Synod (its “widest council”), it has more of a “congregational” emphasis when compared to the “connectional” nature of the P.C.(U.S.A.). For example, minutes of a session are reviewed by themselves and not by the presbytery. In like manner, presbytery reviews its own minutes and does not submit them to the Synod.

As regards ordination vows, the third question for the P.C.(U.S.A.) asks: “Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?” (Book of Order W-4.4003c). The third ordination question for ECO asks: “Will you receive, adopt, and be bound by the Essential Tenets of ECO as a reliable exposition of what Scripture teaches us to do and to believe, and will you be guided by them in your life and ministry?” (Polity and Discipline 2.0103c). Though the Essential Tenets are extensive and central to ECO belief and practices, ECO also embraces the P.C.(U.S.A.) Book of Confessions as “the confessional standard” and as “an appropriate expression of the Reformed commitment to honor our fathers and mothers in the Faith.”

As regards property, the P.C.(U.S.A.) Book of Order states that “all property held by or for a congregation…is held in trust nevertheless for the use and benefit of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)” (G-4.0203). ECO’s Polity and Discipline includes no “trust clause” and makes it clear that all property is owned by the congregation and that it is free to buy, mortgage, transfer, or sell property following permission granted “at a duly constituted meeting” of the congregation (1.0503 and 4.0101a.).

As regards ECO’s “pastoral covenant groups” in which each pastor is required to participate, they may appear to be similar to our “mission communities” (Polity and Discipline, 2.0402). The major difference is that ruling elders are not included in the pastoral covenant groups and the richness of wisdom provided by the laypersons is lacking.

While, like other Reformed bodies, ECO differs from the P.C.(U.S.A.) in some elements of polity, the similarities are more significant. Therefore, Shenandoah Presbytery affirms that ECO is governed by a polity that is consistent in form and structure with that of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

C) ECO is of sufficient permanence to offer reasonable assurance that the congregation is not being dismissed to de facto independence.

Only God knows the future. Though Christ’s prayer was that we all be one, denominations exist as families within the body of Christ and will be in existence, most likely, until Christ returns. Our prayer is that the Holy Spirit will open our eyes and hearts to see the good in
each denominational family as we remain members of Christ’s body with Him as the Head of the Church (Book of Order F-1.0201). It is Christ who calls and equips the Church (F-1.0202), gives the Church its life (F-1.0203), is the Church’s hope (F-1.0204), and is the foundation of the Church (F-1.0205).

Founded in January 2012, ECO already has ninety-seven congregations and 159 pastors who have joined. It is growing and it has a structure in place to assure Reformed governance. At present, it has only two presbyteries: the Presbytery of the East (East of the Mississippi) and the Presbytery of the West. As ECO expands, its plans are to form other presbyteries. In the meantime, its requirement for “pastoral covenant groups” affords helpful connectionalism on a geographic basis.

ECO is seeking membership in the World Communion of Reformed Churches whose General Secretary, the Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi, responded to an inquiry from Shenandoah Presbytery (See Appendix C). At present there are ten North American member churches, including the P.C.(U.S.A.), in the WCRC and ECO is expected to become a member church in February 2014. This indicates that ECO has taken appropriate steps to assure ongoing presence as a Reformed denomination.

Shenandoah Presbytery must determine as well if there is “sufficient permanence to offer reasonable assurance” that congregations we dismiss to ECO are not just “one step away” from independence. The operative words are “sufficient” and “reasonable.” An ECO congregation may request “that presbytery dismiss the congregation to another presbytery of ECO” or request “that the presbytery dismiss the congregation to another Reformed body” (Polity and Discipline 1.0503d). The inclusion of this assurance within the polity of ECO calls for trust on the part of respective presbyteries within the P.C.(U.S.A.) that the spirit of the dismissal is being honored. Congregations are being welcomed into ECO with the prayerful hope that they will remain in ECO. Again, there is no guarantee of the future, both in polity and in practice, but trust must be present in any decision related to dismissal.

Some have suggested that a “reversion clause” be included in dismissal processes. The Presbytery of Tropical Florida adopted a reversion clause that states, in essence, that, within a five-year period of dismissal, if a dismissed congregation intentionally dissolves, fails to remain in the Reformed body to which it was dismissed, or becomes independent, then all real property of the dismissed congregation shall revert to the Presbytery of Tropical Florida.

Though such a policy is understandable, Shenandoah Presbytery desires to trust that dismissing congregations will be received and cared for lovingly by the receiving Reformed body. Our prayer is for the process of dismissal, as painful as it may be, to be filled with a spirit of hope, help, and wholeness. As stated in our Dismissal Guidelines, we remain open to churches who might desire to return to the P.C.(U.S.A.). Our actions now can have a positive impact on relationships in the future.

We trust God—the one who lovingly holds the future—to guide the body of Christ as it seeks to bear witness to God’s grace and love in a broken and fearful world.

Therefore, Shenandoah Presbytery affirms that ECO is of sufficient permanence to offer reasonable assurance that the congregation is not being dismissed to de facto independence.
Conclusion

The evidence is sufficient for Shenandoah Presbytery to conclude that ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians conforms to the doctrines and order of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and, therefore, is recognized as a Reformed denomination. Having made this determination, the presbytery may dismiss congregations to ECO believing that they meet all standards of doctrine and order required of the presbytery and that such a dismissal is not in violation of “the spirit of the polity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).”

ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians
Study Task Force

Teaching Elder Fred Holbrook
Teaching Elder Carl Howard
Ruling Elder Stephany Morgan (Staunton First Church)
Ruling Elder Beth Smith (Massanutten Church)
Teaching Elder David Witt (Stated Clerk) Ex-officio
Item 07-13. Transfer of Ministers and Congregations to Transitional Presbyteries-From the General Presbyter/Stated Clerk, Presbytery of Charlotte.

[The assembly approved Item 07-13, Recommendation 1. See pp. 14, 15.]

1. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution recommends that the 218th General Assembly (2008) answer Item 07-13 with the following recommendation:

   With respect to the first question presented, the Advisory Committee on the Constitution finds that the question presents a matter in which interpretation of G-11.0103i and G-15.0203a and b is advisable. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution recommends that the 218th General Assembly (2008) respond to the question with the following interpretation:

   “Presbyteries may dismiss congregations to other ecclesiastical bodies of this denomination, and to denominations whose organization is conformed to the doctrines and order of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). No congregation may be dismissed to independent status, or to the status of a nondenominational congregation. It is the responsibility of the dismissing presbytery to determine whether the receiving body meets these standards, and this responsibility cannot be delegated to any other entity within the presbytery (such as an administrative commission). Thus the General Assembly may not determine in advance whether a particular denomination or its constituent bodies qualify under these standards.

   “The provisions of G-15.0203 a and b do, however, require that the General Assembly, as the highest governing body of this denomination, advise its presbyteries in this matter. The 218th General Assembly (2008) therefore advises the presbyteries that they must satisfy themselves concerning the conformity with this denomination of a transitional presbytery of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) in matters of doctrines and order. Presbyteries may facilitate the exploration of conformity by means of an administrative commission, although such commissions may not be empowered to approve the dismissal of the congregation. In exploring this matter, presbyteries should consider such questions as whether the receiving EPC presbytery is

   - doctrinally consistent with the essentials of Reformed theology as understood by the presbytery;
   - governed by a polity that is consistent in form and structure with that of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.);
   - of sufficient permanence to offer reasonable assurance that the congregation is not being dismissed to de facto independence.

   “Failure on the part of the presbytery thoroughly to explore and adequately to document its satisfaction in these matters may thus violate, however unintentionally, the spirit of the polity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).”
Dear Rev. Holbrook,

Thanks for your letter of Thursday, November 21, 2013 on the status of ECO and the WCRC.

The executive committee of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) considered their application for membership in WCRC at its meeting in May 2013. The consideration of any application for membership includes a rigorous examination of the documents provided to ascertain if the church is a bona fide Reformed Church.

The decision of the executive committee on the basis of the examination was two-fold:

1. The Executive Committee expressed its welcome to ECO as being part of the Reformed family of churches and, consistent with the constitutional basis of WCRC.

2. The executive committee expressed its awareness that the coming into being of ECO represents fragmentation within the body of Christ and the painful realities that come with such developments. In consistency with the WCRC’s commitment to the biblical principles of unity in the body to the greatest extent possible, it decided to first facilitate a conversation with the leadership of ECO before completing the process of admission.

A two person delegation from the WCRC Executive visited and had conversations with leaders of ECO in August 2013. The delegation also spoke with the Stated Clerk of the PCUSA. On the basis of their report to the WCRC officers, a decision was made to further have another conversation with the leaders of PCUSA, ECO, and the EP Church before completing the process. This is to ensure that the WCRC fulfil its calling of fostering unity within the Reformed family.

This process is expected to be completed in February 2014 with ECO becoming a member of the WCRC at that time.

I hope this responds adequately to the questions you raised on your letter.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]

Setri Nyomi (Rev. Dr.)
General Secretary
Essential Tenets & Confessional Standards
Presbyterians have been of two minds about essential tenets. We recognize that just as there are some central and foundational truths of the gospel affirmed by Christians everywhere, so too there are particular understandings of the gospel that define the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition. All Christians must affirm the central mysteries of the faith, and all those who are called to ordered ministries in a Presbyterian church must also affirm the essential tenets of the Reformed tradition. Recognizing the danger in reducing the truth of the gospel to propositions that demand assent, we also recognize that when the essentials become a matter primarily of individual discernment and local affirmation, they lose all power to unite us in common mission and ministry.

Essential tenets are tied to the teaching of the confessions as reliable expositions of Scripture. The essential tenets call out for explication, not as another confession, but as indispensable indicators of confessional convictions about what Scripture leads us to believe and do. Essential tenets do not replace the confessions, but rather witness to the confessions' common core. This document is thus intended not as a new confession but as a guide to the corporate exploration of and commitment to the great themes of Scripture and to the historic Reformed confessions that set forth those themes.

The great purpose toward which each human life is drawn is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Each member of the church glorifies God by recognizing and naming His glory, which is the manifestation and revelation of His own nature. Each member of the church enjoys God by being so united with Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit as to become a participant in that divine nature, transformed from one degree of glory to another and escortcd by Christ into the loving communion of the Trinity. So we confess our faith not as a matter of dispassionate intellectual assent, but rather as an act by which we give God glory and announce our membership in the body of Christ. We trust that when God’s glory is so lifted up and when His nature is thus made manifest in the life of the body, the church will be a light that draws people from every tribe and tongue and nation to be reconciled to God.

I. God’s Word: The Authority for Our Confession

The clearest declaration of God’s glory is found in His Word, both incarnate and written. The Son eternally proceeds from the Father as His Word, the full expression of the Father’s nature, and since in the incarnation the Word became flesh all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are offered to His disciples. The written Word grants us those treasures, proclaims the saving gospel of Jesus Christ, and graciously teaches all that is necessary for faith and life. **We glorify God by recognizing and receiving His authoritative self-revelation, both in the infallible Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and also in the incarnation of God the Son.** We affirm that the same Holy Spirit who overshadowed the virgin Mary also inspired the writing and preservation of the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit testifies to the authority of God’s Word and illumines our hearts and minds so that we might receive both the Scriptures and Christ Himself aright.

We confess that God alone is Lord of the conscience, but this freedom is for the purpose of allowing us to be subject always and primarily to God’s Word. The Spirit will never prompt our conscience to conclusions that are at odds with the Scriptures that He has inspired. The revelation of the incarnate Word does not minimize, qualify, or set aside the authority of the written Word. We are happy to confess ourselves captive to the Word of God, not just individually, but also as members of a community of faith, extending through time and around the globe. In particular, we join with other members of the Presbyterian and Reformed community to affirm the secondary authority of the *Book of Confessions* as a faithful exposition of the Word of God.

II. Trinity and Incarnation: The Two Central Christian Mysteries

A. Trinity

The triune nature of God is the first great mystery of the Christian faith. **With Christians everywhere, we worship the only true God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – who is both one essence and three persons.** God is infinite, eternal, immutable, impassible, and ineffable. He cannot be divided against Himself, nor is He becoming more than He has been, since there is no potential or becoming in Him. He is the source of all goodness, all truth and all beauty, of all love and all life, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. The three persons are consubstantial with one another, being both coeternal, and coequal, such that there are not three gods, nor are there three parts of God, but rather three persons within the one Godhead. The Son is eternally begotten from the Father, and the Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son. All three persons are worthy of worship and praise.

God has no need of anyone or anything beyond Himself. Yet in grace this Triune God is the one Creator of all things. The ongoing act of creation is further manifested in God’s gracious sovereignty and providence, maintaining the existence of the world and all living creatures for the sake of His own glory. He is the Holy One, the ground of all being, whose glory is so great that for us to see Him is to die. Yet He has made the creation to reflect His glory, and He has made human beings in His own image, with a unique desire to know Him and a
A. God’s grace in Christ

God declared that the world He created was good and that human beings, made in His own image, were very good. The present disordered state of the world, in which we and all things are subject to misery and to evil, is not God’s doing, but is rather a result of humanity’s free, sinful rebellion against God’s will. God created human beings from the dust of the earth and His own breath, to be His images and representatives, conduits of God’s grace to the creation. Since the fall our natural tendency is to abuse and exploit the creation, preferring evil to goodness. God also created human beings to speak His grace and truth to one another, to be helpers who are fit for one another, so that our social relationships would strengthen our ability to serve and obey Him. Since the fall, our natural tendency is to engage in relationships of tyranny and injustice with one another, in which power is used not to protect and serve but to demean. God further created human beings with the capacity for relationship with Him, with His law written on our hearts so that we had the ability to worship Him in love and obey Him by living holy lives. Since the fall, our natural tendency is to hate God and our neighbor, to worship idols of our own devising rather than the one true God.

As a result of sin, human life is poisoned by everlasting death. No part of human life is untouched by sin. Our desires are no longer trustworthy guides to goodness, and what seems natural to us no longer corresponds to God’s design. We are not merely wounded in our sin; we are dead, unable to save ourselves. Apart from God’s initiative, salvation is not possible for us. Our only hope is God’s grace. We discover in Scripture that this is a great hope, for our God is the One whose mercy is from everlasting to everlasting.

This grace does not end when we turn to sin. Although we are each deserving of God’s eternal condemnation, the eternal Son assumed our human nature, joining us in our misery and offering Himself on the cross in order to free us from slavery to death and sin. Jesus takes our place both in bearing the weight of condemnation against our sin on the cross and in offering to God the perfect obedience that humanity owes to Him but is no longer able to give. All humanity participates in the fall into sin. Those who are united through faith with Jesus Christ are fully forgiven from all our sin, so that there is indeed a new creation. We are declared justified, not because of any good that we have done, but only because of God’s grace extended to us in Jesus Christ. In union with Christ through the power of the Spirit we are brought into right relation with the Father, who receives us as His adopted children.

Jesus Christ is the only Way to this adoption, the sole path by which sinners become children of God, for He is the only-begotten Son, and it is only in union with Him that a believer is able to know God as Father. Only in Jesus Christ is the truth about the Triune God, fully and perfectly revealed, for only He is the Truth, only He has seen the Father, and only He can make the Father known. Only Jesus Christ is the new Life...
that is offered, for He is the bread from heaven and the fountain of living water, the one by whom all things were made, in whom all things hold together. The exclusivity of these claims establishes that God’s love is not impersonal, but a particular and intimate love in which each individual child of God is called by name and known as precious; that God’s love is not only acceptance, but a transforming and effective love in which His image within us is restored so that we are capable of holy living.

B. Election for salvation and service
The call of God to the individual Christian is not merely an invitation that each person may accept or reject by his or her own free will. Having lost true freedom of will in the fall, we are incapable of turning toward God of our own volition. God chooses us for Himself in grace before the foundation of the world, not because of any merit on our part, but only because of His love and mercy. Each of us is chosen in Christ, who is eternally appointed to be head of the body of the elect, our brother and our high priest. He is the one who is bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, our divine Helper who is also our Bridegroom, sharing our human nature so that we may see His glory. We who receive Him and believe in His name do so not by our own will or wisdom, but because His glory compels us irresistibly to turn toward Him. By His enticing call on our lives, Jesus enlightens our minds, softens our hearts, and renews our wills, restoring the freedom that we lost in the fall.

We are all sinners who fall short of God’s glory, and we all deserve God’s eternal judgment. Apart from the saving work of Jesus Christ, we are incapable of being in God’s presence, incapable of bearing the weight of His glory. We rejoice that Jesus Christ offers us safe conduct into the heart of God’s consuming and purifying fire, shielding us with His perfect humanity and transforming us by His divine power. Having received such grace, we extend grace to others.

We are not elect for our own benefit alone. God gathers His covenant community to be an instrument of His saving purpose. Through His regenerating and sanctifying work, the Holy Spirit grants us faith and enables holiness, so that we may be witnesses of God’s gracious presence to those who are lost. The Spirit gathers us in a community that is built up and equipped to be light, salt, and yeast in the world. Christ sends us into the world to make disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that Christ has commanded us. We are now in service to God’s plan for the fullness of time: uniting all things in heaven and earth to Himself. To this end, we preach Christ, calling all persons to repent and believe the gospel. We also care for the natural world, claim all areas of culture in the name of Jesus, serve the poor, feed the hungry, visit the prisoner, and defend the helpless. We do this work not with any thought that we are able to bring in the kingdom, but in the confident hope that God’s kingdom is surely coming, a day when suffering and death will pass away and when God will live among His people.

C. Covenant life in the church
We are elect in Christ to become members of the community of the new covenant. This covenant, which God Himself guarantees, unites us to God and to one another. Already in the creation, we discover that we are made to live in relationships to others, male and female, created together in God’s image. In Christ, we are adopted into the family of God and find our new identity as brothers and sisters of one another, since we now share one Father. Our faith requires our active participation in that covenant community.

Jesus prays that His followers will all be one, and so we both pray and work for the union of the church throughout the world. Even where institutional unity does not seem possible, we are bound to other Christians as our brothers and sisters. In Christ the dividing wall of hostility created by nationality, ethnicity, gender, race, and language differences is brought down. God created people so that the rich variety of His wisdom might be reflected in the rich variety of human beings, and the church must already now begin to reflect the eschatological reality of people from every tribe, and tongue, and nation bringing the treasures of their kingdoms into the new city of God.

Within the covenant community of the church, God’s grace is extended through the preaching of the Word, the administration of the Sacraments, and the faithful practice of mutual discipline. First, through the work of the Holy Spirit, the word proclaimed may indeed become God’s address to us. The Spirit’s illuminating work is necessary both for the one who preaches and for those who listen. Second, the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are signs that are linked to the things signified, sealing to us the promises of Jesus. In the Baptism of infants, we confess our confidence in God’s gracious initiative, that a baby who cannot turn to God is nonetheless claimed as a member of the covenant community, a child of God, cleansed by grace and sealed by the Spirit; in the Baptism of adults, we confess our confidence that God’s grace can make us new creations at any stage of our lives. In the Lord’s Supper, we confess that as we eat the bread and share one cup the Spirit unites us to the ascended Christ, so that His resurrection life may nourish, strengthen, and transform us. Third, the community of the Church practices discipline in order to help one another along the path to new life, speaking the truth in love to one another, bearing one another’s burdens, and offering to one another the grace of Christ.

D. Faithful stewardship of all life
The ministries of the church reflect the three-fold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king – reflected in the church’s ordered ministries of teaching elders, deacons, and ruling elders. We affirm that men and women alike are called to all the ministries of the Church, and that every member is called to share in all of Christ’s offices within the world beyond the church. Every Christian is called to a prophetic life, proclaiming the good news to the world and enacting that good news. Every Christian is called to extend the lordship of Christ to every corner of the world. And every Christian is called to participate in Christ’s priestly, mediatorial
work, sharing in the suffering of the world in ways that extend God’s blessing and offering intercession to God on behalf of the world. We are equipped to share in these offices by the Holy Spirit, who conforms us to the pattern of Christ’s life.

Jesus teaches us that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. There is no part of human life that is off limits to the sanctifying claims of God. We reject the claim that love of any sort is self-justifying; we affirm that all our affections and desires must be brought under God’s authority. We reject the claim that human souls are unaffected by the fall and remain naturally inclined to God; we affirm that soul and body alike must be cleansed and purified in order to love God properly. We reject the claim that the life of the mind is independent from faith; we affirm that unless we believe we cannot properly understand either God or the world around us. Historically, the Presbyterian tradition has been especially called to explore what it is to love God with all our minds, being committed to the ongoing project of Christian education and study at all levels of Christian life.

E. Living in obedience to the Word of God

Progress in holiness is an expected response of gratitude to the grace of God, which is initiated, sustained, and fulfilled by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. The first response of gratitude is prayer, and the daily discipline of prayer – both individually and together – should mark the Christian life. The life of prayer includes praise to God for His nature and works, sincere confession of our sin, and intercession for the needs of those we know and for the needs of the world. As we practice the discipline of regular self-examination and confession, we are especially guided by the Ten Commandments. We therefore hold one another accountable to:

1. worship God alone, living all of life to His glory, renouncing all idolatry and all inordinate loves that might lead us to trust in any other help;

2. worship God in humility, being reticent in either describing or picturing God, recognizing that right worship is best supported not by our own innovative practices but through the living preaching of the Word and the faithful administration of the Sacraments;

3. eliminate from both speech and thought any blasphemy, irreverence, or impurity;

4. observe the Sabbath as a day of worship and rest, being faithful in gathering with the people of God;

5. give honor toward those set in authority over us and practice mutual submission within the community of the church;

6. eradicate a spirit of anger, resentment, callousness, violence, or bitterness, and instead cultivate a spirit of gentleness, kindness, peace, and love; recognize and honor the image of God in every human being from conception to natural death.

7. maintain chastity in thought and deed, being faithful within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman as established by God at the creation or embracing a celibate life as established by Jesus in the new covenant;

8. practice right stewardship of the goods we have been given, showing charity to those in need and offering generous support of the Church and its ministries;

9. pursue truth, even when such pursuit is costly, and defend truth when it is challenged, recognizing that truth is in order to goodness and that its preservation matters;

10. resist the pull of envy, greed, and acquisition, and instead cultivate a spirit of contentment with the gifts God has given us.

In Jesus Christ we see the perfect expression of God’s holy will for human beings offered to God in our place. His holy life must now become our holy life. In Christ, God’s will is now written on our hearts, and we look forward to the day when we will be so confirmed in holiness that we will no longer be able to sin. As the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, Jesus leads us along the path of life toward that goal, bringing us into ever deeper intimacy with the Triune God, in whose presence is fullness of joy.
Confessional Standards

The appropriate confessional standards for ECO are the creeds, confessions, and catechisms in the **Book of Confessions** – The Nicene Creed, the Apostles’ Creed, the Scots Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Second Helvetic Confession, the Westminster Confession, the Westminster Shorter Catechism and the Westminster Larger Catechism, the Theological Declaration of Barmen, the Confession of 1967, and A Brief Statement of Faith. This collection is theologically faithful, ecclesiastically appropriate, and organizationally suitable. The **Book of Confessions** contains the confessions that we have taken vows to receive. It also embodies the Reformed understanding of the way confessions function in the life of the church, an understanding that differs from two common approaches:

**Doctrinal Progressives** understand the church’s confessional and theological tradition as an evolutionary development of doctrine in which the church’s expression of the gospel becomes richer in each succeeding age. In this view, contemporary theology and new confessions of faith are more developed, better expressed, fuller apprehensions of truth than the faith of previous centuries. *Our way is the way.*

**Doctrinal Restorationists** understand the church’s theological and confessional tradition as a series of missteps leading to imperfect understanding and inadequate articulation of the gospel. In this view, a particular moment in the church’s confessional and theological tradition, such as the sixteenth century Augsburg Confession or the seventeenth century Westminster standards, is the pure faith of a theological golden age. *Their way is the way.*

The **Reformed understanding** of the church’s confessional and theological tradition sees contemporary Christians as participants in an enduring theological and doctrinal conversation that shapes the patterns of the church’s faith and life. Communities of believers from every time and place engage in a continuous discussion about the shape of Christian faith and life, an exchange that is maintained through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Today’s church brings its insights into an ongoing dialogue with those who have lived and died the Faith before us. Voices from throughout the church’s life contribute to the interchange - ancient voices that articulate the enduring rule of faith, sixteenth and seventeenth century voices that shape the Reformed tradition, and twentieth century voices that proclaim the church’s faith in challenging contexts. The confessions in the *Book of Confessions* were not arbitrarily included, but were selected to give faithful voice to the whole communion of saints.

The **Book of Confessions** is an appropriate expression of the Reformed commitment to honor our fathers and mothers in the Faith. It begins with two foundational creeds, shared throughout the whole Church. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is the decisive dogmatic articulation of Trinitarian faith. It establishes the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax of Christian theology. The Apostles’ Creed is the Baptismal creed that expresses the shared belief of the faithful as persons are incorporated into the body of Christ. Two Reformation confessions, Scots and Second Helvetic, and one Reformation catechism, Heidelberg, give voice to the dawning of the Reformed tradition. The seventeenth century Westminster standards powerfully express God’s sovereignty over all of life. The Theological Declaration of Barmen, the Confession of 1967, and A Brief Statement of Faith articulate the church’s fidelity to the gospel in the midst of uncongenial and sometimes hazardous cultures. These confessions, from widely different contexts, are complementary. They do not sing in unison, but in a rich harmony that glorifies God and deepens our enjoyment of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Are these the only voices that could be included in the church’s theological conversation? No, but they are faithful witnesses to the gospel and appropriate expressions of the Reformed perspective on Christian faith and life. Participating in their colloquy frees us from the narrow prison cell of our own time and place by listening to the voices of our brothers and sisters who struggled to be faithful in diverse circumstances. Through their confessions of faith we are privileged to hear their wisdom in the midst of our own struggle to be faithful. We overhear conversations among our forebears that expand and enrich our apprehension of the gospel. Sometimes we simply listen in on their discussion, at other times we pay particular attention to one of their voices, and many times we find ourselves participating actively in lively instruction.

The questions of our parents in the faith may not be identical to ours, but their different approaches enable us to understand our own questions better. Their answers may not be identical to ours, yet their answers startle us into new apprehensions of the truth. We may sometimes be puzzled by their particular questions or answers, but even that perplexity serves to clarify our own thinking and the shape of our faithfulness. Throughout the conversation we are aware that all councils may err, yet because we are not doctrinal progressives we acknowledge the confessions have a particular authority over us: we are answerable to them before they are answerable to us.
The confessions call the church to account. Because we are not traditionalists, we can be utterly honest about the church’s past failings - crusades and inquisitions, easy acceptance of Christendom and easy dismissal of the leadership of women, neglect of evangelistic mission and excess of missionary zeal. Because we are not idealists we can be utterly honest about the church’s current failings – marginalization of the Sacraments, indifference to theological labor, easy acceptance of cultural morality, neglect of evangelism, and inadequate mission. If we listen to our forebears in the Faith we will hear their hard questions addressed to us. Perhaps then we can be utterly honest about our own accommodations to the culture, our indifference to the proclamation of the gospel, and our abandonment of shared conviction and committed community in easy acquiescence to the individualism and localism of our time.

The confessions are not final authorities; Scripture is the authority that measures all doctrinal, confessional, and theological expression. The Reformed tradition has always understood that while confessional standards are subordinate to the Scriptures, they are, nonetheless, standards. They are not lightly drawn up or subscribed to, nor may they be ignored or dismissed. Being questioned by the confessions is not an exercise in servitude, but liberation from the tyranny of the present that enables us to live freely and faithfully within God’s will.

As subordinate standards, the confessions are not free-standing authorities. They are subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, who is known through Scripture, the word of God. Subordination to the Lord and to Scripture’s witness serves to locate confessional authority, however, not diminish it. The confessions provide reliable guidance to our reading and reception of Scripture, protecting us from self-absorbed interpretation, and opening us to Christ’s way, Christ’s truth, and Christ’s life.

The Book of Confessions itself is not problematic. The problem with the Book of Confessions is the church’s – the whole church’s – neglect and misuse of its theological treasure. Too often, we have treated the confessions of the church as museum pieces, historical artifacts of what people used to believe long ago and far away. Too many of us have imagined that our own thoughts are sufficient for faithful proclamation of the gospel. We have been guilty of what C.S. Lewis called “chronological snobbery, the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited.” We have also been guilty of reducing the confessions to theological and moral law books, selecting disembodied affirmations as elements in a logical proof. Our task is to put misuse of the confessions behind us, engaging in bold, faithful appropriations of the doctrinal and theological wisdom of the Book of Confessions, allowing them to enrich our faith and faithfulness.

The church’s confessions are not marginal details in the church’s life. The ordination vows made by most deacons, ruling elders, and teaching elders commit us to receive and adopt their essential tenets, and to be instructed, led, and guided by them. Our task is to be faithful to our vows, reading and studying the confessions, learning from them, teaching them, and living out their wisdom. Shared confession of faith shapes any serious community of faith, and the community’s ordered ministries bear a particular obligation to order their confession around the church’s creeds, confessions, and catechisms. Because confessional seriousness includes mutual responsibility and accountability, the church must be prepared to instruct, counsel with, or even discipline one ordained who rejects the faith expressed in the confessions.

ECO cannot imagine that it should or could disavow the Reformed confessional heritage. Whatever the church’s confessional and theological failings may be, they are the failings of all of us. The task now is to embody faithful ways of being Presbyterian. The most appropriate footing for a new venture is the faithful doctrinal and theological foundation provided by the creeds, confessions, and catechisms of the Book of Confessions.
Appendix: A Proposal for Ongoing Theological Conversations

Truth leads to duty, faith to practice. A church that wants to be a servant found faithful to its commission must be a steward of the Faith entrusted to its care. To be an effective witness to the gospel we must know the gospel. An apostolic church must not only live a life like that of the apostles, it must teach what the apostles taught.

Some generations of believers have tried to live faithfully without a shared Faith; all have failed. Our generation may be particularly tempted to try. Forging theological consensus is hard work in any generation, but ours seems to have concluded that it is impossible work. Private and partisan interpretations are now considered inflexible and intractable. We have forgotten the humble recognition that ambiguities exist and must be respected, and now dwell in a land where ambiguities are preferred and certainties are suspect. We are coached to celebrate diversity of theological conviction, rather than seeing this as a sign of important work yet to be done.

Theological debates in the church have not always been filled with grace, or even understanding, and many have been unnecessarily divisive. The formative ecclesial debates of earlier history are viewed as arcane. Doctrinal work is unfavorably compared to relationship building as if the two were mutually exclusive. Teaching elders attempt to teach how to live lives faithful to the truth without doing the required work of laying foundations of the truth in the hearts and minds of the congregation. Ruling elders are equipped to be managers of church life rather than able to teach the Faith.

Although these realities are manifest somewhat differently in churches and among leaders who identify themselves as progressive or evangelical, neglect of the substance of the Faith is wide and deep. As a result, all other matters suffer – the strength of disciples, the health of congregations, the effectiveness of councils. Disciplined attention to the Word gives gifts to the Church that it cannot receive elsewhere or by any other means.

Renewal of theological work at the core of our common life is not only an acknowledged need but, in the providence of God, may be a blessed provision. Throughout history, the reformation of the Church has followed theological work – work that grew from recommitment to the Faith. In turn, the reformation of the Church has fostered a recommitment to theological work.

Now is the time to reengage the theological work, for this moment, and for the next generations.
These three theological projects are offered for broad immediate consideration:

- Recommitment to a particular confessional heritage as an immediate core constituent of our renewed common life, however that common life is re-formed.
- Identification and affirmation of the essential tenets of the Reformed Faith.
- Commitment to re-engaging the theological enterprise broadly and deeply.

Further advance on these three projects will be made as we put our theology on the table for public discussion, deliberation, and decision; share best practices; form theological-missional relationships; build the structures; and covenant together.

Questions for immediate consideration:

Do we consider the proposal to reaffirm the Book of Confessions as we work to build and test theological consensus among us, to be the right judgment to make at this time? Is this an adequate and helpful articulation of the essentials of the Faith as expressed in Reformed ways, and will we sincerely adopt it? What theological friendships will we form, what practices will we commit to, and what structures will we build for mutual encouragement and accountability?

The theological project is required of the Church, and now is being re-engaged within the Church. The invitation is now offered. How will you respond?

ADDENDUM

Suggested questions for the covenanting gatherings of theological friends:

What has the Spirit gathered the Church to be? What has the Spirit sent the Church to do?
Always and everywhere; here and now.

What is the authority of Scripture in the actual life of the church? How will we teach and obey the Scripture?

What does it mean to be saved? What is the gospel we are to preach? What is the shape of our corporate and individual lives that are formed by that gospel?

Elders, ruling as well as teaching, are to be equipped to teach. Teach what, to whom, how? Ruling elders are to measure out the patterns of faithfulness for the congregation. What are those patterns, and how are they measured?

In a time of both ecclesial division and realignment, how can schism among parts of the church be diminished and how can reconnection with the whole church be increased?

The Church has a Faith without which she cannot live faithfully. What is that Faith? What is faithful living?
The mission of ECO is to build flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ.

OUR VALUES

Jesus-shaped Identity: We believe Jesus Christ must be at the center of our lives and making disciples of Jesus at the core of our ministry.

Biblical Integrity: We believe the Bible is the unique and authoritative Word of God, which teaches all that is necessary for faith and life. The prominence of God’s Word over our lives shapes our priorities, and the unrivaled authority of the Bible directs our actions to be in concert with Christ’s very best for our lives.

Thoughtful Theology: We believe in theological education, constant learning, and the life of the mind, and celebrate this as one of the treasures of our Reformed heritage.

Accountable Community: We believe guidance is a corporate spiritual experience. We want to connect leaders to one another in healthy relationships of accountability, synergy, and care.

Egalitarian Ministry: We believe in unleashing the ministry gifts of women, men, and every ethnic group.

Missional Centrality: We believe in living out the whole of the Great Commission – including evangelism, spiritual formation, compassion, and redemptive justice – in our communities and around the world.

Center-focused Spirituality: We believe in calling people to the core of what it means to be followers of Jesus – what “mere Christianity” is and does – and not fixate on the boundaries.

Leadership Velocity: We believe identifying and developing gospel-centered leaders is critical for the church, and a great leadership culture is risk-taking, innovative, and organic.

Kingdom Vitality: We believe congregations should vigorously reproduce new missional communities to expand the Kingdom of God.

www.eco-pres.org
Spring Hill Administrative Commission
Timeline of the Commission’s Work

August 25, 2012
Shenandoah Presbytery authorized a Review Team for Spring Hill Presbyterian Church based upon a communication from the church’s session that the church was contemplating leaving the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

August through November, 2012
Members of the Review Team were appointed according to the Dismissal Guidelines for Shenandoah Presbytery. Members of the Review Team were:

**Ruling Elders**
- Ellen Blose from Massanutten  ellenblose@gmail.com
- Peggy Roberson from Covenant  mroberson1@juno.com
- Mike Robison from Finley Memorial  miker@pff.net
- Don Roll from New Providence  dlr1087@msn.com

**Teaching Elders**
- April Cranford from Tinkling Spring  acranford@tinklingspring.com
- Jan Owen from Mount Olive  jangowen@msn.com
- Rob Sherrard from Windy Cove  wcpcp@cfw.com
- Randy Webb acting General Presbyter  presbyter@shenpres.org

November 7, 2012
The Review Team held an organizational meeting. Rob Sherrard was elected as Chair; April Cranford was elected as Secretary. The Team reviewed the Dismissal Guidelines and discussed their task.

November 19, 2012
The Review Team met with the Spring Hill Session. The Team listened to the concerns of the Session. The agenda for this meeting contained email contact information for all members of the Review Team.

November 23, 2012
Chair Rob Sherrard sent an email to Pastor Charles McFarlin to be passed along to the Session thanking them for their forthright discussion at the meeting on the 19th.

December 1, 2012
The Review Team met to assess what they had heard at the meeting with the Spring Hill Session and to plan a way forward.

December 7, 2012
The Review Team sent a letter to the Spring Hill Session restating what they had heard from the Session on November 19 and proposing opportunities for listening to members of the congregation. The letter also contained an invitation for interested persons to communicate with the Review Team by letter, email, or telephone. Contact information for Rob Sherrard, Randy Webb, and April Cranford was included with the letter.
January 13, 2013
The Review Team met with interested persons from the Spring Hill Congregation in a group setting. The Team also divided into smaller listening units and met privately with a few persons. Rob Sherrard met with Pastor McFarlin during the private meetings.

January 16, 2013
Rob Sherrard and Mike Robison joined Pastor McFarlin and a few persons from the Spring Hill Congregation for prayers in the afternoon and later in the evening. Between these times of prayer, Mike and Rob took Charlie and Trish McFarlin out to supper.

January 22, 2013
Subsequent to the meeting with the Spring Hill Congregation on January 13, the Review Team sent a letter to the Committee on Ministry and the Committee on Church Development. This letter outlined the work that the Review Team had done to this point in time. The letter recommended that the Review Team be appointed as a Commission of Shenandoah Presbytery to proceed under the Dismissal Guidelines.

February 9, 2013
Shenandoah Presbytery appointed the Review Team as a Commission of the Presbytery to proceed according to the Dismissal Guidelines.

February 17, 2013
Commission members Don Roll and Rob Sherrard met with the Spring Hill Session to review the Dismissal Guidelines with respect to our recent appointment as a Commission and the way forward outlined in the Guidelines. The next important step in our process was planning for a Congregational Hearing at Spring Hill. Subsequent to this meeting, the Spring Hill Session set the Congregational Hearing for Sunday, March 17, immediately following worship. Following that decision, the Session followed procedures outlined in the Dismissal Guidelines for notification of the Hearing.

February 20, 2013
The Spring Hill Session mailed notice of the Congregational Hearing to all active members of the congregation and subsequently published notice of the meeting in each Sunday’s bulletin.

March 3, 2013
The Commission met to discuss our participation in the Congregational Hearing.

March 13, 2013
Two times of prayer with the Spring Hill Congregation were held in anticipation of the Congregational Hearing on March 17.

March 17, 2013
The Congregational Hearing was held at Spring Hill following worship. Four members of the Commission attended the hearing. These members included April Cranford, Peggy Roberson, Don Roll, and Randy Webb. Don Roll spoke about the Dismissal Guidelines and Randy Webb gave a view of the present situation from Shenandoah Presbytery’s perspective. These presentations had been reviewed by the Commission in the two weeks prior to the Hearing. At
the Hearing the vote for proceeding with dismissal was 32 to request dismissal and 13 to not request dismissal. This vote represents 71% in favor of proceeding with dismissal. That percentage was more than the 2/3 majority required in the Dismissal Guidelines to initiate the next stage of our process.

April 2, 2013
The Commission met to consider the results of the Congregational Hearing and to devise a plan for moving forward under the Dismissal Guidelines. As a result of this discussion, we planned a meeting with the Spring Hill Session for April 24.

April 16, 2013
The Commission received notice by email that both the Spring Hill Congregation and Pastor McFarlin were ready to be received by the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians pending their dismissal from Shenandoah Presbytery.

April 24, 2013
Three members of the Commission met with the Spring Hill Session to outline the next steps in the Dismissal Guidelines and to begin preliminary negotiations toward a settlement between the Spring Hill Church and Shenandoah Presbytery.

April 30, 2013
The Commission met to determine exactly what financial information they would need from Spring Hill to move toward a negotiated settlement and how to care for the congregation during this critical period. The Commission decided to prepare two letters, one requesting specific financial information from the Spring Hill Session and another offering ongoing pastoral care for any members of Spring Hill Church who might need such care in the present situation.

May 14, 2013
Commission members Don Roll and Rob Sherrard met with Pastor McFarlin at the meeting of Shenandoah Presbytery as a courtesy to let him review the letters that were being sent to the Session and congregation.

May 15 and 16, 2013
The letter to the Spring Hill Session requesting specific financial information was sent on May 15, and the pastoral letter to members of the congregation was mailed on May 16.

June 12 and 13, 2013
The Commission received detailed financial information from the Spring Hill Session. This material included:
1. A list of real property with the appraised values taken from the tax rolls from Augusta County,
2. A list of restricted and unrestricted funds held in various accounts under the control of the church,
3. Budgets and actual disbursements for the last five years.

June 27, 2013
The Commission met to begin processing the financial information that we had received and to
discuss a rationale for any settlement that would be negotiated between Spring Hill and Shenandoah Presbytery.

[The work of the Commission did not progress during the month of July. Members of the Commission were on mission trips, vacations, and tending to other responsibilities during that time.]

**August 6, 2013**
The Commission worked out a preliminary framework for discussion with the Spring Hill Session for a negotiated financial settlement. This framework included a range of settlement figures based upon different formulas for calculating what would be a gracious financial settlement to be included as part of the plan of separation.

**August 12 and 13, 2013**
On August 12 Mike Robison and Rob Sherrard delivered to Pastor McFarlin the Commission’s letter to the Spring Hill Session outlining the preliminary framework. These three discussed the reasoning behind this preliminary framework. On August 13 Rob Sherrard followed up with an email to Pastor McFarlin at his request restating some of the points that had arisen in the preceding day’s discussion.

**August 24, 2013**
The Commission received a letter from the Spring Hill Session. It was hand delivered by Pastor McFarlin to Chair Rob Sherrard at a meeting of Shenandoah Presbytery and later distributed to the Commission members. This letter represented a proposal for a financial settlement.

**September 16**
The Commission met to discuss the proposal offered by the Spring Hill Session. However, only four members of the Commission were present. We discussed the proposal, but no action was taken.

**September 25**
Chair Rob Sherrard met with Pastor McFarlin and Elder Bill Baylor to discuss where the Session and Commission were at that present moment and to develop a timetable for moving forward.

**September 30**
The full Commission met together. After much discussion and soul searching, the Commission voted to make a specific offer of a financial settlement to the Spring Hill Session. With prayer the Commission sent Randy Webb, Mike Robison, and Rob Sherrard directly to Spring Hill to meet with Pastor McFarlin. These three members of the Commission made the offer which the Commission had agreed upon.

**October 3**
Pastor McFarlin and four members of the Spring Hill Session visited Chair Rob Sherrard at Windy Cove Church. These representatives of the Session said that the Session had met and would agree to the offer from the Commission.

**October 13**
Chair Rob Sherrard met briefly with the Spring Hill Session to thank them for their cooperation in reaching a negotiated settlement. He also outlined the final steps in the Dismissal Guidelines.
Spring Hill Administrative Commission
Summary of Spring Hill Finances

Liquid Assets

Designated Funds: 43,487.37
Undesignated Funds: 462,577.45

Total Liquid Assets: $506,064.82

Real Property Values from the Augusta County Tax Records

Church with immediately adjacent parking  999,600
Rental House including land  297,400
Cemetery Land and Picnic Shelter  234,800
Manse including land  206,500
House used by Church Sexton and land  133,700
Extended Parking Lot at the church  2,300

Total Property Value $1,874,300

In addition to the figures above the Commission reviewed the budgets, offerings, and expenditures of Spring Hill for the past five years. This review revealed the following information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rental Income</th>
<th>Regular Offerings</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Budget Expenditures</th>
<th>Over or (Deficit)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>6,150</td>
<td>80,570.38</td>
<td>86,720.38</td>
<td>126,476.75</td>
<td>(39,747.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>79,735.24</td>
<td>85,735.24</td>
<td>123,571.00</td>
<td>(37,835.76)</td>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>7,200</td>
<td>86,545.58</td>
<td>93,745.58</td>
<td>128,620.00</td>
<td>(34,874.42)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>7,200</td>
<td>79,386.05</td>
<td>86,586.05</td>
<td>125,731.00</td>
<td>(39,144.95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>7,200</td>
<td>85,462.45</td>
<td>92,662.45</td>
<td>113,706.00</td>
<td>(21,043.55)</td>
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</table>

This review revealed that, while Spring Hill does have considerable financial assets, the church has been using up their reserves to maintain a consistent level of ministry. Over the last five years the church has used $172,646.05 from reserve assets to maintain the current level of ministry.
Dear Session Members:

During the summer our Commission has been struggling to find the best way to complete our task of negotiating a settlement with the Spring Hill Congregation. The purposes of this settlement are to effect the gracious dismissal of Spring Hill from Shenandoah Presbytery to the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians and to promote the vitality of Christian mission within the bounds of the Presbytery. Balancing the needs and desires of the Presbytery and Spring Hill represents a significant challenge for our Commission.

In our discussions as a Commission, we have also been mindful of the fact that any settlement which the Spring Hill Session and our Commission agree upon must be submitted to the larger Presbytery for the approval of its presbyters. Any negotiated settlement is likely to appear too small for some presbyters and too large for others. Together Spring Hill and our Commission must strive to find the middle ground which will appeal to a majority of the presbyters who will attend the meeting at which the vote will be taken. Otherwise, Spring Hill and our Commission will find ourselves admonished to do our work again.

With these thoughts in mind, we invite the Spring Hill Session to join us in finding that middle ground. As we have looked at the financial situation at Spring Hill, as we have discussed the reasoning and theology of a dismissal settlement, and as we have looked at other churches and Presbyteries, we have seen different formulas used to reach such settlements. We offer the following examples as a basis for discussion which will allow Spring Hill and our Commission to find the middle ground which will accomplish our purposes.

1. Some Presbyteries have focused on the idea of a tenth of the total assets of the church. For Spring Hill this figure would be in the neighborhood of $235,000.

2. Other Presbyteries have used the idea of a tenth but only with respect to liquid assets, not including real property. For Spring Hill this figure would be around $48,000.

3. Our own Shenandoah Presbytery figures its "askings" from the churches on the basis of about $50 per active member to support the work of Presbytery. For one year of support, the figure for Spring Hill would be approximately $5,400. Since the Presbytery has understandably established reliance upon its member churches from year to year, ending this support over a period of about 5 years makes some sense. Over that period the formula would yield 5 x $5,400 = $27,000.

4. Although somewhat difficult to figure exactly, the average settlement throughout various Presbyteries appears to be approximately $300 per member. For Spring Hill this figure would be $32,400.

The long standing relationship between Spring Hill and Shenandoah Presbytery requires that we find a gracious way of ending their current relationship and affirming the continued ministry of each under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In this light we invite the Session at Spring Hill to consider the work that we have done together and to help us find that middle ground which will be acceptable to Spring Hill, to our Commission, and to Shenandoah Presbytery as a whole.

Respectfully,

Rob Sherrard
For the Commission
1. The Spring Hill Administrative Commission was originally appointed by Shenandoah Presbytery as a Review Team pursuant to the Dismissal Guidelines of the Presbytery. The Review Team met with the Spring Hill Session and with members of the congregation to listen to their concerns. These listening meetings revealed that a substantial majority of members at Spring Hill felt alienated from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and believed that in good conscience they should no longer be affiliated with our denomination. Throughout the course of these meetings, the Review Team heard from only a handful of individuals who disagreed in any material way with the majority view.

2. The Review Team was subsequently appointed as an Administrative Commission to proceed with the Dismissal Guidelines. In our work as a Commission, we developed some governing principles which helped to guide our decisions.
   a. We believed that our task was to effect a gracious separation between Spring Hill Church and Shenandoah Presbytery, one that honored God and did not cause scandal inside or outside the Church.
   b. We aimed to follow the intent and letter of the Dismissal Guidelines even though we were the first Commission to move into the latter stages of the policy.
   c. We believed that we should aid the Christian witness and ministry in the area of Spring Hill Church and within Shenandoah Presbytery.
   d. We tried to listen attentively to and care for the members of Spring Hill Church.
   e. We worked to negotiate a financial settlement that would not cripple the effective ministry that Spring Hill maintains in its community and around the world but which did recognize the long-standing relationship between Spring Hill Church and Shenandoah Presbytery including the trust clause for property in the Book of Order (G-4.0203). In this regard we firmly believed that it was not Spring Hill’s responsibility to solve the current financial problems of Shenandoah Presbytery.

3. With these principles in mind and after much work, discussion, prayer, and negotiation with the Spring Hill Session, the Administrative Commission recommends the following:
   a. That Spring Hill Presbyterian Church be dismissed from Shenandoah Presbytery on December 31, 2013 to unite with the Presbytery of the East of ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians contingent upon payment of $40,000 to Union Presbyterian Church for the restoration of their building. [Note: Union Church is the closest church in Shenandoah Presbytery to the Spring Hill community, and Union Church has a definite need to repair their floor in order to preserve their ministry in the general area.]
   b. That Spring Hill Church transfer all original Session minutes and other official records related to the church’s life in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to Shenandoah Presbytery;
   c. That Shenandoah Presbytery on behalf of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) relinquish any further claim upon property currently held or administered by Spring Hill Presbyterian Church;
      d. That Pastor Charles McFarlin be dismissed from Shenandoah Presbytery on December 31, 2013 to continue his ministry within the Presbytery of the East of ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians;
   e. That a pastoral letter be sent from Shenandoah Presbytery by the Stated Clerk informing all members of Spring Hill Church of actions a, b, c and d above and offering assistance to any members who might wish to relocate to another church affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.);
f. That, at a date convenient for those involved, a Worship Service of Endings and Beginnings be held at Spring Hill Church including representatives from Shenandoah Presbytery, the Presbytery of the East of ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, and Spring Hill Church.

g. That, having completed its work, the Spring Hill Administrative Commission be dismissed.
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