

Book of Church Order

THE
JOHN KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

2015

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 History

The John Knox Presbyterian Church holds as its confession the Westminster Confession of Faith which was drawn up 350 years earlier at Westminster in London; the 1647 Edition.

The English Reformers in the 16th century included those who desired a more thorough reformation than was then politically possible. Some of those who later fled to the Continent from the persecutions under Queen Mary found refuge in Geneva. When these returned to England in the reign of Queen Elizabeth their views soon spread. The influence of these Puritans, as they became known, was dominant by the time of the English Civil War. It was at that period that the Assembly of Divines met (1644 - 1647) and the Westminster Confession was produced. Presbyterianism was the polity favored by the majority of those present. The Confession was adopted in both England and Scotland, but Presbyterianism was only partially implemented in England. The restoration of Charles II brought an end to the widespread use of the Confession. The Act of Uniformity in 1662 forced some two thousand Puritan Ministers out of the National Church in England and made the practice of Presbyterian government impossible.

After the Act of Toleration in 1689, theological controversies and error undermined the possibility of an orthodox Presbyterian church.

In Wales in the 18th Century Methodist Awakening, the leaders were Calvinistic and the churches which arose there took an orthodox Presbyterian position.

Presbyterianism was reintroduced in England in the 19th century and in many ways derived from Scotland. It was particularly to be found in the North East (Northumberland and Durham), in Lancashire and in London; areas where it was strong even in the seventeenth century.

As was the case with most of the denominations, the higher criticism which came from Germany in the 1880s had devastating effects. By the time of the union of the English Presbyterian and Congregational Churches in 1972, as the United Reformed Church, there were very few evangelical Presbyterian congregations left in England.

At the same time the awakening of interest in Reformed understanding of Scripture in the 1950s brought the attention of many to the Presbyterian literature of earlier times. There was associated with this a growing awareness of the problems of the mixed denominations in the 1960s.

The historical origin of the John Knox Presbyterian Church begins at the founding of the New Testament Church in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. The early church was based upon a pattern of representative government. The word Presbyterian comes from the Greek term presbuteros meaning Elder. It refers to the Apostolic system of choosing leaders from among those who are the wisest members of the church, based upon biblical qualifications. It literally means ruling by Elders, based upon a representative system of government, that is, government by the consent of the people. As time passed, the church began to divert its government from a representative system to an Episcopal hierarchy in ecclesiastical authority. With the onslaught of degenerating morality and leadership in the government of the church, there came an outcry for reform. Reformation was a demand for the Bible to be translated into the language of the common people and a return to 'Gospel simplicity,' i.e., a representative system of government and a biblical form of worship.

In the sixteenth century, there came a divine working of God in the reforming movement of the church. However, the Roman Catholic Church was not about to give up its administrative system of centralized government. Nor was the Roman Church about to return to the Augustinian theology of the early church. As God continued to bless the pure preaching of His Word, there came into existence the establishment of what were called 'Reformed Churches.' The great reformer of the church, and its greatest systematician, was the French reformer of Geneva, Switzerland, John Calvin.

John Calvin was born in Noyon, France in 1509 and was a student of Latin, logic and philosophy at the University of Paris. Later he studied law and classical literature. About 1533, Calvin changed his theological views to those of the Reformation. After being involved in the French reformed movement, Calvin was forced to flee from Paris for his life. From 1534-1536 Calvin wrote the first edition of his Institutes of the Christian Religion. It was a systematic theology on the doctrinal teaching of the Reformation. God's providence led Calvin to Geneva where he ministered from 1536-1538, was exiled for three years and returned in 1541, where he remained pastor of St. Peter's Church until his death in 1564. It was this church at Geneva that became the model of Presbyterian Churches. It was here at Geneva the Scottish Reformer, John Knox, advanced his understanding of systematic and ecclesiastical theology under the instruction of John Calvin.

John Knox began to preach in Scotland at the St. Andrew's Castle Church. Having spent time imprisoned on a French galley, Knox was eventually freed and returned to northern England. Knox then became the chaplain to the Reformer-King, Edward VI, and soon after King Edward's death, was required to flee to Europe for his life. Knox was invited to pastor an English congregation in Frankfurt, Germany, the first independent church established outside the Church of England. However, a dispute soon erupted after Dr. Cox, a Minister of the Church of England, arrived at Frankfurt. Knox was falsely accused by Cox of undermining the Emperor. However, the dissension was over which prayer book the church would use in worship. Knox was desirous of using the Book of Common Worship developed in Geneva by Calvin and himself. Yet, Knox was forced to leave the church at Frankfurt and flee to Geneva, where another English church, which had been part of the Frankfurt Church, was established as independent of the Church of England. Upon his return to Scotland in 1559, Knox organized the Presbyterian Church as the official Church of Scotland. In 1560, John Knox led the Church of Scotland in developing a Confession and Covenants as its official religion and the Presbyterian Church as the official Church of Scotland. From Scotland, the Presbyterian movement spread westward to Ireland among the Scottish settlers and native Irish.

In the meantime, the Presbyterian movement was developing in England. From 1643 through 1647, there was assembled a group of 100 Ministers at Westminster Abbey in London. Here they formed a new confession, the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647 that was followed by the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. The Church of Scotland was well represented at this assembly by five of its leading theologians.

Soon the Presbyterian Church found itself in North America. Finally in 1706, the First American Presbytery was formed in Philadelphia, and in 1716, it became the Synod of Philadelphia. In 1729, the Synod of Philadelphia adopted the Westminster Confession and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms as its confession of faith. In 1788, the Synod adopted the official name of their church as "The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America" and held its first meeting in 1789. In 1857, the New School movement became divided over the issue of slavery and formed the United Synod of the Presbyterian Church. In 1861, the Old School movement of the South withdrew from the national church and formed the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America, a continuing church of the former body. Near the end of the War Between the States, the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America and a few smaller synods formed the Presbyterian Church in the United States. In 1972, a conservative movement removed itself from the Presbyterian Church in the United States to form the Presbyterian Church in America, a continuing church. In 1982, the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod merged with the Presbyterian Church in America. In 1983, a few churches in the North Georgia Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America withdrew from the denomination over purity of doctrine and ecclesiastical practices. Thereupon was formed Covenant Presbytery. In 1985, Covenant Presbytery formed the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States as a continuing church. In the 1990's, the Reformed Presbyterian Church General Assembly was formed due to continuing unresolved conflicts out of which the John Knox Presbytery removed themselves over the issue of Catabaptism. In 2008 the JKP left the RPCGA in peace, with their credentials intact, as a continuing church, maintaining the position of the orthodox Reformers in holding that baptism that is performed by a duly ordained Minister of the Gospel in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is a legitimate baptism.

1.2 Vision

The JKPC is committed to the proclamation of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ as it is plainly and fully set out in the Bible. We are a confessional reformed church, located in the United States of America.

1.3 The Nature of the Church

The nature of the church as the people of God and the bride of Christ is set out in the Scriptures (Eph 2:19-22 & 5:23-32, 1 Tim 3:15-16, 1 Pet 2:5-10). This teaching is expounded in Chapter 25 of the Westminster Confession. Chapter 26 refers to the members of the church as saints who enjoy a communion with one another. The JKPC is only a small part of Christ's visible and universal church. It seeks to give expression to the oneness of Christ's church under the headship of Christ in its own structure, and wherever possible with other orthodox evangelical churches. [4] The JKPC is confessional by its standard and Presbyterian in government.

1.4 A Common Order

A distinction is to be drawn between basic biblical principles of Presbyterianism and the outworking of those principles in particular practices. The outworking of the principles has differed according to the needs at particular times and in particular countries. M'Crie in referring to the Second Book of Discipline said "Its leading principles rest upon the express authority of the Word of God. Its subordinate arrangements are supported by the general rules of Scripture: they are simple, calculated to preserve order and promote edification, and adapted to the circumstances of the church for which they were intended". This book of order first sets out what the JKPC believes the basic principles to

be and then what it considers appropriate to its needs and what most appropriately expresses those fundamental principles.

2. BASIC PRINCIPLES OF PRESBYTERIANISM

The fundamental principles of Presbyterianism are held to be

2.1 The church is the body of Christ

2.1.1 Christ alone is the head of the church.

a. The JKPC maintains that Jesus Christ is the exclusive Head of the church and His authority alone is to be acknowledged by the church as her supreme lawgiver.

b. For this reason the JKPC endeavors to maintain the recognition of the separation of powers between the civil authority and the ecclesiastical authority.

c. In order to accomplish this, the JKPC rejects 1) the historic prelacy which was practiced by the Roman Catholic church which maintained that the pope had jurisdiction over civil matters and 2) the Erastian position of England in which the King (the civil ruler) had jurisdiction over the church.

d. In order to avoid this entanglement, the JKPC disallows her member churches and assemblies from incorporation; by which the civil magistrate grants legal existence to the church as a fictitious person. The JKPC maintains that the civil authority has no such jurisdiction over the Church of Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 4:15; 5:23.

2.1.2 Christ's body is joined together and this is to be expressed visibly.

2.1.3 Christ's headship of the body is displayed in the fact of government, and is seen in:

- the link between government and witness to the truth;
- the link between government and the sincere use of the sacraments;
- the link between government and practical godliness.

2.2 The church is to be controlled by Scripture.

2.2.1 A positive Scriptural basis is required for what is believed and taught.

2.2.2 A positive Scriptural basis is required for order or government in the church.

2.2.3 A positive Scriptural basis is required for the pattern of worship in the church.

2.3 The form of government

2.3.1 The form of government involves

- representative Elders freely elected by the male heads of household.
- plurality of Elders, as rule involves more than one Elder.

- parity of Elders, as Elders rule with equal authority.
- JKPC recognizes no distinction in authority between Ministers, but there is a high value to be placed on the preaching ministry.

2.3.2 The first expression of this government is in the local congregation.

2.3.3 The larger exercise of this government, as seen in the wider elderships of presbyteries and general assembly, is an expression of the unity and community of the body of Christ.

2.3.4 The John Knox Presbyterian Church rejects the following teachings and practices as unacceptable to the Gospel of Jesus Christ or the New Testament Church, and forbids the teaching and/or practice of such systems within the membership of the church.

- Charismatic theology and its unbiblical practices
- Dispensational theology
- Arminian theology in any form
- The practice of altar calls in the worship of God
- The participation in abortion in any form or type
- The teaching, practice, or promotion of homosexuality in any form or type¹
- Participation in any secret society which violates the Scriptures or Confession
- Neo-orthodox and neo-evangelical theology in any form
- Modernism and humanism in all forms
- The teaching practice and promotion of feminism
- The teaching of evolution in any form
- No one may be admitted to or remain in an office in the denomination who holds to converts to or consents to the teaching or practice of paedocommunion. This doctrine is not to be taught or practiced in any form or fashion in this denomination. Any such violation will result in the immediate ejection of that officer. Our position against paedocommunion is unalterable as it defends our doctrinal understanding of the Westminster Standards teaching on communion that is that one must profess to be born again and not be an "ignorant or scandalous person" and that upon examination his profession of faith must be deemed credible by the Session.

3. THE CONFESSION

The Word of God, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, is the supreme standard of the church. Chapter 1 of the Confession sets out the teaching of the church with regard to this.

The whole Westminster Confession is accepted as a faithful statement and summary of Scripture teaching and is the subordinate standard of the church.

Agreement with the Confession is required of all Elders. The Confession expresses the doctrinal position of the church. It is not expected of all members that they will understand nor necessarily fully assent to all parts of the Confession.

¹ This includes any form of lesbianism, sodomy, sex change operations, cross dressing and/or transvestitism.

Presbyterians have at various times declared a particular understanding of the Confession at a number of points. The JKPC declares

- that the civil magistrate does not have control over presbyteries in matters religious or moral.
- that though the claims of the bishop of Rome to be the head of the church and his legislating on false worship mean that the papacy should be recognized as part of antichrist, the identification of the antichrist exclusively with the papacy is a matter of individual interpretation.

All Elders are required to subscribe to the Confession recognizing these declarations of presbytery. The effect of these declarations is that the original form expresses the position of a subscribing Elder.

The Confession itself recognizes that all councils of men are human and as such are capable of error. It is in the light of this that subscription is made to the Westminster Confession of Faith. Nonetheless subscription is to be to the Westminster Confession of Faith as it stands, with the prevailing declarations. The Elders of the churches will not teach what is contrary to the Confession. They will be free to teach within the recognized declarations. Teaching concerning worship is to be within the parameters found in section 4.5.4, 4.5.9, and 8.3-8.5 but will not need to teach all the permitted position. Matters of understanding and legitimate theological debate may be brought to the presbytery and thereby the advice of the brethren be sought. Presbytery may then make statements which clarify understanding, and, where necessary, warn of any danger of departure from the Confession.

The Larger and Shorter Catechisms are part of the subordinate standards of the church and Elders are to recognize them as faithful expressions of Scripture and in accord with the Confession. They are to be employed by the church as an aid to instruction.

The JKPC recognizes the value of the confessions of the early church (the Apostle's, Nicene and Athanasian Creed) and the three forms of unity of its sister reformed churches (The Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Acts of the Synod of Dordt), and recommends that use should be made of them.

Additional statements may be adopted by particular congregations for their own use or by the whole presbytery to meet current disputes as long as they are in keeping with the Westminster Standards.

4. GOVERNMENT

4.1 The Congregation

The most visible expression of Christ's Church is the individual congregation. Government of the congregation is the most direct and immediate part of church government. Each congregation is governed by its own Elders (presbyters, bishops, overseers, shepherds or pastors). There should normally be more than one Elder. Where necessary presbytery may be asked to temporarily supply Elders (Elders acceptable to the congregation) until Elders are raised up from within the congregation. All Elders must be called and accepted by the clear majority of the male heads of household of the congregation. The Elders of a particular congregation are referred to as the session.

4.2 Presbytery

The presbytery consists of Elders from each of the congregations of the presbytery. A moderator is appointed every year to chair all meetings. A clerk or secretary is appointed every three years to keep records of presbytery. A treasurer is appointed every three years to keep financial records of presbytery. Presbytery may appoint a commission or commissioner to act in its name. The moderator is often in effect called upon to act as a commissioner of presbytery. Presbytery may also appoint a committee to produce reports and advice for its consideration.

Commission activities are subject to approval by the full presbytery and committee recommendations are subject to approval by the full presbytery. Presbytery meetings are normally open to the public. Meetings may be attended by observers except where the presbytery decides to act in closed session. Other members may be specially invited by the presbytery and may be co-opted to its committees. Only Elders may vote.

4.3 The Relationship of Congregational Government and Presbytery

The relationship involves the principles of subsidiarity (Subsidiarity is a concept for the division of legislative powers at the lowest possible and efficient level.) and of acting in decent and orderly fashion. The individual congregation is not dictated to by the presbytery but there is mutual submission in matters of common concern. The pattern of their relationship may be seen in a summary of their roles

4.3.1 Local Eldership (the Session)

- Spiritual care of the congregation
- Admission to membership and sacraments
- Discipline of all members
- Oversight of all meetings, literature work, evangelism
- Providing advice to members on family, social and moral matters.

4.3.2 Wider Eldership (the Presbytery)

- Spiritual fellowship of the church at large and especially of the Elders
- Admission to the eldership
- Appeals concerning discipline
- Oversight of matters of mutual concern such as Elder training, wider diaconal work, missionary endeavor
- Providing eldership in the congregations with
 - advice on questions raised
 - rulings on matters of doctrine and discipline
 - common financial guidelines
 - parameters for biblical worship

4.4 The Role and Responsibilities of the Session

These are:

4.4.1 To oversee the spiritual life of the congregation and care for the spiritual welfare of its members.

4.4.2 To guard all congregational teaching and worship including preaching, administration of sacraments and singing of praise so that they are biblical, in accord with the Confession and within such parameters as are agreed by presbytery to be biblical.

4.4.3 To examine and admit to membership believers and their children, on a credible profession of faith or by transfer from a sister congregation.

4.4.4 To administer discipline of the members. This, when necessary, will proceed through the following stages,

4.4.4.1 Warning them of those things which are not in keeping with their profession.

4.4.4.2 Rebuking them in private and then in public.

4.4.4.3 For matters of unrepented immorality or heresy, suspending and then excommunicating them until they repent.

Initial self discipline should also be exercised within the session for ruling and teaching Elders as part of mutual care for one another.

4.4.5 To oversee the financial affairs of the congregation. This should be within the common guidelines set out by presbytery. In particular the Elders should ensure the church faces its financial responsibilities concerning buildings and Ministers according to salary scales recommended by presbytery.

4.4.6 To encourage material provision to be made in cases of individual hardship in the congregation and oversee the election, ordination and work of Deacons.

4.4.7 To promote missionary endeavor, including local church planting.

4.4.8 To oversee such additional teaching as members of the congregation may need in addition to the regular public preaching and especially of covenant children.

4.4.9 To oversee literature work including magazines and such publications as the congregation may need.

4.4.10 To oversee all meetings of the church.

4.4.11 To be alert to the Lord's raising up of spiritually gifted men in the congregation; in the light of this to oversee the free elections of such men to eldership and to ensure no Elder is imposed against the will of the congregation.

4.4.12 To consider all decisions of the presbytery and, where necessary, to warn of any doctrinal deviation. If absolutely necessary, by due process Elders should be prepared to withdraw the congregation from the presbytery, but only after they have given sufficient evidence of serious doctrinal deviation.

4.5 The Role and Responsibilities of the Presbytery

These are:

4.5.1 To be a means of spiritual fellowship and encouragement of the brethren.

4.5.2 To guard matters of doctrine, especially those affecting the Confession and any additional statements of doctrine that may be needed, and to rule on these matters of doctrine.

4.5.3 To examine and ordain Elders freely chosen by the congregations, including candidates for the ministry, and to record details of their subscription to the Confession. This may be done by the whole presbytery or by commissioners acting on its behalf

4.5.4 To receive and mediate appeals concerning the acts of the sessions. This would cover the administration of discipline and unresolved questions concerning matters of doctrine, worship or behavior. Such matters should have previously been raised by members with their local eldership.

4.5.5 To control finance in matters of common concern (funds raised from congregations according to targets approved by presbytery) and to set out guidelines for the proper management of congregational finances.

4.5.6 To promote links between congregations, and provide a mechanism for stronger congregations to aid weaker congregations for the financial support of Ministers.

4.5.7 To promote and oversee matters of common concern, i.e.

- training of Elders and Deacons
- church planting undertaken collectively
- conferences
- publications, including a common magazine
- public comment on moral and social matters
- relations with other bodies
- such other matters as may be agreed

4.5.8 To discuss matters of common spiritual concern to the churches and to advise congregational sessions on any question raised by them.

4.5.9 To consider the biblical parameters of worship for the congregations, recognizing the diversity which is consistent with our confessional standards.

4.5.10 To ensure no Elder or Deacon is imposed against the wishes of the congregation.

4.5.11 To take due care not to multiply bureaucratic structures which are either not strictly necessary or not under full presbytery control.

4.5.12 To oversee the orderly dissolution of the relationship of a congregation and the presbytery where there is a complete breakdown of relationship. This may be either as a result of deviation by a congregation or as a result of withdrawal by the congregation. This would require two attempts at reconciliation from the time of written notification.

5. ELDERS

Elders are God's provision for the government of Christ's church. They are also known as presbyters, bishops, overseers, shepherds or pastors. There are differing understandings in Presbyterian churches as to the nature of Elders. Elders holding to these different

views would have the right to express their position, but the position taken by the JKPC as a whole is that all Elders are viewed as biblical presbyters.

5.1 Training for the Eldership

Ideally all Elders would benefit from appropriate training. Churches and presbytery should give thought to the ongoing needs for appropriate training of Elders.

5.1.1 Applicants for eldership must normally have the support of the Elders of the congregation in which they are members. The Elders must be able to confirm that there are indications that they are likely in future to display the qualifications for an Elder.

5.1.2 There must be evidence of spiritual and intellectual gifts suitable to the eldership.

5.1.3 There must be a conviction of a call to the work of the preaching ministry.

5.1.4 Normally applicants will be required to have undertaken or to undertake theological study at a college approved by Presbytery.

5.2 Calls and Ordinations to the Ministry

5.2.1 The Elders of a congregation have the responsibility of considering suitable men for a position of a Minister within that congregation. They need to be open to suggestions from the male heads of household of the congregation, as well as from those outside able to advise it.

5.2.2 All Elders must be called to serve in a congregation by the clear vote of the male heads of household of the congregation. A congregation frequently underlines this by a list of members' signatures of those supporting the call.

5.2.3 Ministers from outside the JKPC can be considered so long as they are able to subscribe to the Confession. Their suitability would need special consideration by the presbytery. Ministers in good standing in bodies committed to the Westminster Confession can also be seconded to the JKPC without prejudice to matters covered by their subscription within their own denomination, assuming they are prepared to operate within the conditions operating in the JKPC.

5.2.4 The intention of a congregation to issue a formal call to a Minister must be taken to presbytery for approval, though the Minister concerned is to be informed of this beforehand. The call will be conveyed to the Minister from the Elders of the congregation. If the Minister is already serving another congregation which is a member of the JKPC then its Elders should also first be informed.

5.2.5 Men whose call has been approved in this way must be given reasonable time to reflect prayerfully on all that it implies for them, their families and their existing congregation.

5.2.6 Where a call has been accepted, the presbytery, in conjunction with the session, will proceed to ordain and/or install the Elder.

5.2.7 An applicant has to satisfy the presbytery of his theological competence and preaching gifts. This may involve interviews, reports of preaching, and where necessary written examination both before and after training.

5.2.8 An applicant will be formally recognized by being taken under care of the presbytery and the presbytery will seek to guide him through his training for the ministry. Where there is transfer from a ministry outside the JKPC the initial formal recognition will not be necessary, though there is wisdom in allowing a period of time between receiving an application and approval. Ordination will take place following acceptance of a call to a specific work.

6. DEACONS

6.1 Deacons may be elected by the male heads of household to help the Elders in the physical and social needs of the members and in maintaining the meeting place. Their work is to enable the Elders to give their time to the spiritual welfare of the congregation. Particular responsibilities of the Deacons will be determined by the Elders according to the needs of the congregation. In Acts 6 we're given the basis and essential nature of the diaconal

ministry. At its core the diaconate is a ministry of relief within the context of the overall gospel ministry. First and foremost the diaconate relieves the ordained Ministers of the word of God from being excessively distracted from their primary calling to preaching the word of God and prayer by the various physical needs that arise within a congregation. Yet those needs that do arise within a congregation must be taken seriously as each congregation seeks to "bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ". Here too the diaconate provides the needed relief as they duly consider these needs and seek to provide effective relief through the God-given resources within their respective congregations. Deacons also provide relief by assuming management responsibility of the upkeep and general maintenance of any real property held and/or donated within a congregation. By their wise and godly stewardship of this property they provide relief of mind both to the ordained Ministers, who have the oversight; as well as the church members at large, who faithfully bring in their tithes and offerings. In these ways the ministry of relief is fulfilled within the diaconate and is an expression and fruit of the gospel itself.

6.2 The New Testament letters to Timothy and Titus set out the spiritual qualities necessary for a Deacon. Teaching concerning the office and work of Deacons is to be provided prior to any elections being held.

6.3 Deacons must be freely elected by a clear majority vote of the male heads of household. The Elders should be open to the suggestions of the members. The men nominated must be in membership in the congregation and sound in the faith.

6.4 Deacons are not assistant Elders and they do not exercise rule in the congregation. Though their work is under the oversight of the Elders, they do not need the immediate involvement of the Elders in all their work. There is no necessity that all meetings of the diaconate require the presence of the Elders but there is need for some meetings to be with one or all of the Elders. A record of their activities is to be kept and to be accessible to the Elders.

6.5 As they are not members of Presbytery, the oversight of their ordination is in the hands of their own congregation's Elders. The term of office is perpetual. The form of their examination is determined by the session.

7. MISSIONS

7.1 Introduction

All churches are responsible to the Lord to take his gospel to all men. In this the glory of God is made known. Without Christ mankind is lost and faces a lost eternity. Particular circumstances affect the opportunities and direction of this gospel endeavor. Each congregation has this responsibility as its week by week concern and as part of its normal life. In addition it is fitting, as opportunity allows for presbytery, at the request of a congregation to plant a congregation in another area. It is also an endeavor in which congregations can act together and it is one of the many strengths of Presbyterianism that congregations can act as one in order to further the cause of the gospel. It is then an act of Presbytery to endeavor to establish congregations in new areas. This church planting is often referred to as home missions. Presbytery and individual congregations may also seek to plant churches in other lands or may co-operate with others in doing so. Such gospel work is usually called foreign missions.

Congregations not yet able to have their own elected Elders are referred to as Mission Churches.

7.2 Co-operation

The JKPC recognizes the many other congregations, denominations and missions engaged in true gospel work. All these gospel endeavors are Christ's work and are worthy of respect. Sadly there are times when the gospel itself is impoverished and where Christ's church is compromised. The JKPC is unable to support work directly associated with the World Council of Churches (WCC), National Council of Churches (NCC) or with any other group that confuses the gospel with ritualism and liberal theology. It seeks to co-operate with other reformed churches that hold to the historic reformed faith as set forth by the Confession.

7.3 Home Missions

7.3.1 Oversight

Mission churches planted by a presbytery have the Elders of the parent congregation as their own. Mission churches planted by presbytery have temporary Elders appointed by presbytery including the church planter as its temporary Minister.

7.3.2 Formal Constitution

Under the guidance of the church planter and the other temporary Elders a mission church may ask the presbytery to allow for the election of Elders and so formally constitute it as a regular congregation with normal representation at presbytery. Presbytery would make full enquiry as to the timeliness of this action, bearing in mind numbers, stability and suitable eldership gifts.

7.3.3 Committee for Church Planting.

Presbytery as a whole has the immediate responsibility for all church planting other than that carried out by a single congregation. It is advised by its committee for church planting (which includes the church planter for the particular mission church under consideration). That committee offers whatever help it can to members of presbytery laboring with other missionary bodies

7.4 Foreign Missions

7.4.1 The Nature of Foreign Missions

The chief work of foreign missions is the preaching of the gospel. This requires the same high standards and calling as for other Ministers or ruling Elders. The distinctive difference is that it involves church planting in another culture and in co-operation with other Christians from that culture.

7.4.2 Presbytery Responsibility

Presbytery has a collective responsibility to promote foreign missions. It seeks in the light of providence to identify those geographical areas where it will be able to make a distinctive contribution as well as encouraging a concentration of support for existing missionary endeavor. At the same time individual congregations are free to support those with whom they have specific links.

Ministers or Elders appointed by presbytery to work in foreign mission churches are responsible to presbytery and should provide reports to it and, through it for its congregations. Where the mission church belongs to the presbytery the missionary church planter is supported out of the presbytery's foreign mission fund. Missionary Ministers of the gospel working for other missions recognized by presbytery may also apply for support as funds may allow. They may be associated with the presbytery when home visits permit, and asked to provide reports and financial accounts.

The wider diaconal work of mission receives financial support as funds permit. These workers have access to such expertise and help as the church planting committee may develop. They are also asked to submit reports.

Ministers and Elders of the JKPC are free to work in approved missions outside that of the presbytery. All missionary Ministers and Elders remain under the care of the presbytery.

8. WORSHIP

The JKPC recognizes that there is diversity in the worship carried out in reformed churches and that there is also a need to recognize parameters within which this diversity is acceptable.

8.1 The regulative principle distinguishes Reformed from Lutheran or Anglican as well as Charismatic worship. It is accepted as one of the fundamentals of Presbyterianism. It distinguished Worship in Geneva at the time of Calvin. It was the guiding principle for the Puritans and for the Scottish Church from the time of Knox on. The regulative principle is the recognition that God has appointed in his word the way in which he must be worshipped. Only those things which are commanded by God for his present church,

either directly or by inference in his word, are to form part of our worship. The church which exists now must recognize that Christ, who is the heavenly pattern of the temple, has now come in the flesh to be the head of the church. It is this, not taste, which determines the characteristic simplicity of reformed worship.

8.2 The Westminster Confession works out the principles concerning worship in Chapter 1 section 6 and Chapter 21. The sufficiency of Scripture is stated. The components of worship are given as:

- prayer
- the reading of scripture
- preaching
- singing of psalms
- sacraments
- the keeping of the Lord's Day
- benediction

and on special occasions,

- religious oaths and vows,
- fasting and
- thanksgiving.

A distinction is drawn between these commanded constituents of worship and the circumstances in which the worship is conducted.

8.3 Reformed churches have shown variation in worship as they have differed in the application of this principle as well as in many of the circumstances concerning worship. For that reason the JKPC accepted the vision of unity which embraced such differences. Particularly in mind was the legitimate debate concerning what Scripture precisely commands (and so what is recognized by the Confession). It was such matters as whether our sung praise is to be psalms only or psalms and hymns, whether the singing is accompanied or unaccompanied, whether there should be any responses or none, which was in view. Such differences were accepted as arising from a different application of the regulative principle. It was not recognized that worship was a matter of taste nor merely avoiding what is specifically forbidden. At the beginning of the JKPC it was also accepted that there is a need to determine the parameters within which there is legitimate debate as to whether a matter is biblical and in accord with our Confession.

8.4 Stating the parameters within which variation may occur requires positive and negative consideration. These need to reflect current concerns and will therefore need frequent updating.

8.4.1 Positively we should recognize that

- Worship should seek to show wholehearted delight in glorifying God and in making him the center of worship
- Praise is to combine awe and joy
- Preaching and reading of the word are at the heart of our public worship
- Discipline must be exercised regarding the sacraments both as to who is to be baptized and who is allowed to the table in communion
- In the singing of praise the use of psalms should form a significant part of worship. They are biblically required, part of the reformed tradition, and laid down in the Confession.

- All that occurs in public worship should always be under the control of the eldership

8.4.2 Negatively, recognizing that the whole counsel of God being either set down in Scripture, or deducible from it, and God's former ways of revealing his will unto his people being now ceased" (WCF 1:1.6). we accept that:

- There is no place for any supposed prophesying, speaking in tongues or organized miracle workings
- The purpose of worship is primarily to glorify God, not to entertain the congregation
- Musical accompaniment, when present, is to aid the singing of praise not to replace it. It should be suitable for the serious, reverential worship of a Holy God.
- Dance and mime have no place in worship.

8.5 Doctrine and worship are intimately related. It is important for presbytery to debate trends in worship without it being seen as an attempt to impose a uniform pattern. The need is not to provide a prescriptive 'straitjacket' but to gain the collective insight of the brethren, as vital matters of substance are often involved.

9. FINANCE

The present practice of the presbytery is that each congregation is responsible for the salary of its own Minister and for the ownership of its own buildings.

10. ACCESSION OF ESTABLISHED CONGREGATIONS

The JKPC has arisen at a time when there is turmoil in the older theologically mixed denominations and isolation of many evangelical congregations outside them. It recognizes the many legitimate concerns and the wariness of congregations who have a common theological position with it. It is of the essence of its Presbyterian position that it welcomes applications of congregations for membership of the presbytery. It would seek to be sympathetic to factors arising from the past history of the congregation.

The basis of membership is acceptance of the Westminster Confession. Contact should first be made with the clerk of presbytery. The Elders of the congregation applying would be invited to attend presbytery as observers and, when ready to do so, to present their request together with an account of the history of the congregation. A commission of presbytery would visit the congregation. If the request is accepted Elders would be asked to subscribe to the confession, but would not be reordained. The formal acceptance of the congregation into the presbytery would then be recognized.

At the same time presbytery would like to maintain contacts with like minded congregations outside the presbytery.

Any group of believers wishing to become a congregation would be able to approach the presbytery in the same way. It would then be treated as a church planting work of the presbytery.

11. PRESBYTERIES AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Provision is made for more than one presbytery. The geographical spread of the United States means that more than one presbytery will be necessary as the numbers of churches increase. Provision is made for the subdivision of the existing presbytery to divide.

The first place or primacy is always given to the session of each church. In the wider expression of the unity of the church, the presbytery is the radical court. There are matters which are common to the presbyteries which need to be addressed by a Synod or General Assembly. Such matters would include training for the ministry, publications, missions, addresses to the government and other authorities and hearing of appeals on matters of discipline previously dealt with in the presbyteries. These matters would need to be debated and accepted as the legitimate concern of the assembly. The principles which affect the relationship between the congregations and the presbytery apply to the relations between the presbytery and the assembly.

Matters agreed upon at Assembly which change the constitution of the JKPC or address matters to do with the Confession would be sent back to presbyteries for acceptance, and would only be ratified after debate on all relevant matters raised by the presbyteries.

12. FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

12.1 Only God may rule over the conscience, He rules through his Word. We must obey Scripture, but are not bound to believe, or to do in worship, anything men teach or require that is against God's Word or added to it.

12.2 We see in Scripture that all believers together form one universal church. There is one body, one temple and one people of God, the bride of Christ.

12.3 The general principles of church government are taught in Scripture. The most important principles are these:

- The church is governed by Elders who are properly chosen and ordained.
- Believers are to submit to one another, both within the local congregation and in the wider church.
- An individual, congregation or lower court has the right to appeal to a higher church court.

12.4 Many details of church government are the same as in other human institutions. They are determined by common sense as in other institutions, but must always be based on the fundamental rules of Scripture.

12.5 Our Savior has given the office of Elder for the growth of the church. Elders do not only preach the gospel and administer the sacraments, but also shepherd the flock of God by example and encouragement. When necessary, they exercise discipline so that truth and holiness may be preserved.

12.6 For the good of the visible Church our Savior has given the office of Deacon so that material needs may be met and physical suffering relieved.

12.7 Some practices are not essential to the gospel and do not disturb the harmony of the church. They are matters about which spiritual and biblical Christians may disagree. In these areas Christians must be restrained and tolerant towards one another.

12.8 The officers of the church are recognized by the congregation, ordained by presbytery, and received by the local body. They must be men who have the character and qualifications required in Scripture for their office.

12.9 Censure and Restoration.

In judicial discipline there are four degrees of censure: admonition, rebuke, suspension and excommunication. Censures shall be pronounced by the moderator on behalf of the trial judicatory, in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, as an act of the whole church.

If the accused that has been adjudged guilty refuses or fails to present himself for censure at the time appointed, the trial judicatory shall cite him to appeal at another time. If he does not appear after this citation, the censure shall be pronounced in his absence.

12.9.1 **Admonition**

Admonition consists in tenderly and solemnly confronting the offender with his sin, warning him of his danger and exhorting him to repentance and to greater fidelity to the Lord Jesus Christ. An admonition does not require written charges or a trial.

12.9.2 **Rebuke**

Rebuke is a form of censure more severe than admonition. It consists of setting forth the serious character of the offense, reproving the offender and exhorting him to repentance and to greater obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. A rebuke does not require written charges or a trial.

12.9.3 **Suspension**

Suspension is a form of censure by which an officer or other member of the church is deprived of certain privileges, for a definite or indefinite period of time. Suspension of an officer from the privileges of membership shall always be accompanied by suspension from office, but the latter does not necessarily involve the former. When an officer has been indefinitely suspended, the judicatory shall immediately notify all presbyteries. The suspension of a member does not require written charges or a trial. However, the suspension of an officer does require written charges and a trial.

An officer or other member of the church, while under suspension shall be the object of deep solicitude and earnest dealing, the goal being that he may be restored. When the trial judicatory, which pronounced the censure, is satisfied with the penitence of the offender, or when the time of suspension has expired, the censure shall be removed and the offender restored. This restoration shall be accompanied by a solemn admonition. Restoration to the privileges of membership may take place without restoration to office.

12.9.4 **Excommunication**

Excommunication is the most severe form of censure, and is only resorted to in cases aggravated by persistent impenitence. It consists of a solemn declaration by the

presbyterial judicatory that the offender is no longer considered a member of the Body of Christ. Erasure is excommunication without full process.

12.9.4.1 Erasure from a Particular Church

Erasure is the removal of a person from the membership rolls of a mission or particular church without a full trial. Erasure is ordinarily excommunication without a full trial, according to the Book of Church Order of the John Knox Presbyterian Church. A member who has been erased by the Session will be ordinarily considered by the Congregations, Presbyteries and Assembly of this denomination to be outside of the visible body of Christ and cut off from Holy Communion. Erasure must be established with evidence that reconciliation was sought by the Session taking this action.

12.9.4.2 A member may be erased from the membership roles of a mission or particular church by the session based on one of the following criteria:

- a. If members join themselves to another denomination that violates the Book of Church Order, they shall be erased from the roles of the church with censure.
- b. If members join themselves to another denomination of like faith and practice and they refuse to transfer membership, and then they shall be erased from the roles of the church with censure. If members join themselves to another denomination of like faith and practice and the receiving body refuses to transfer membership, then said member shall be erased from the roles of the church without censure.
- c. Any member who refuses to meet with the session to give reason for leaving shall be, after six months and clear warning, erased with the censure of contumacy.
- d. If members join themselves to a denomination that has been declared apostate by the General Assembly they shall be erased from the roles of the church with censure.
- e. If a member can no longer be located having moved from the immediate geographical area, if he was in good standing, he shall be erased from the roles of the church without censure.
- f. Any member that fails to attend worship for six months (without legitimate excuse) and does not transfer shall be erased (with censure, if he is not attending a church of like faith and practice).
- g. If a member living at home under the authority of his parents is removed from the jurisdiction of the church by his parents, without proper cause (transfer to another church of like faith and practice or moving from the geographical area), then he shall be erased from the roles of the church without censure.
- h. If members ask to be dropped or removed from church membership, rather than being transferred to a church of like faith and practice, then they shall be erased from the church roles with or without censure pending an investigation by the Session, as to where and whether they are or are not attending church services.
- i. If members ask to be erased based on a change in doctrine that would affect their membership, in this denomination, they shall put into writing the conflict of doctrine as they understand it from the Scripture. If they refuse to maintain the correct doctrine of the church as set forth in the Westminster Standards and our BCO, they shall be erased from the roles of the church with or without censure.

12.9.5 Deposition

A. Deposition is a form of censure more severe than suspension. It consists of a solemn declaration by the trial judicatory that the offender is no longer an officer of the church.

B. When an officer is deposed from his office, the presbytery shall erase his name from the roll of presbytery and dismiss him to a particular congregation. Deposition of an officer may be without charges upon the request of the deposed.

C. Deposition of a pastor or his suspension for an indefinite time involves the dissolution of the pastoral relation. The sentence of deposition or suspension shall be read before the congregation, and the pulpit shall be declared vacant. In case of suspension for a definite period, the presbytery, after giving the session an opportunity to be heard, shall decide whether the pastoral relation shall be dissolved.

D. When an officer has been indefinitely deposed, the judicatory shall immediately notify all presbyteries.

12.9.6 Procedural Considerations

The indefinite suspension, deposition or excommunication of an officer or other member of the church shall be announced to the church body in which the officer holds office, or in which the member holds membership. These censures shall always be accompanied by prayer to God, that He may graciously use this discipline for the restoration of the offender, the edification of the church and His own glory. After one year, if a person suspended indefinitely has failed to manifest repentance, it shall be the duty of the judicatory to consider whether suspension should be continued or more severe censure should be imposed. The judicatory may proceed to deposition or excommunication, or both, without further trial.

12.9.7 Restoration

An officer or other member of the church, who has been censured because of a commonly known offense, shall be restored only after the judicatory has assured itself that the restoration will not be attended by injury to the cause of the Gospel. An officer who has been deposed cannot resume his former office without being ordained again.

Restoration shall always be accompanied by a prayer of thanksgiving to God for His redeeming grace.