

### III. Presbyterian Government

#### An Introduction to Presbyterian Government

*Denominations have different ways of governing themselves.*

#### **How many - - - does it take to change a light bulb?**

How many **Episcopalians** does it take to change a light bulb?

10. One to actually change the bulb and 9 to say how much they like the old one.

How many **Catholics** does it take to change a lightbulb?

None. They always use candles instead.

How many **Calvinists** does it take to change a light bulb?

None. God has predestined when the lights will be on.

How many **Pentecostals** does it take to change a light bulb?

10, one to change it and 9 others to pray against the spirit of darkness.

How many **Presbyterians** does it take to change a light bulb?

What, change?!?

How many **Presbyterians** does it take to change a light bulb?

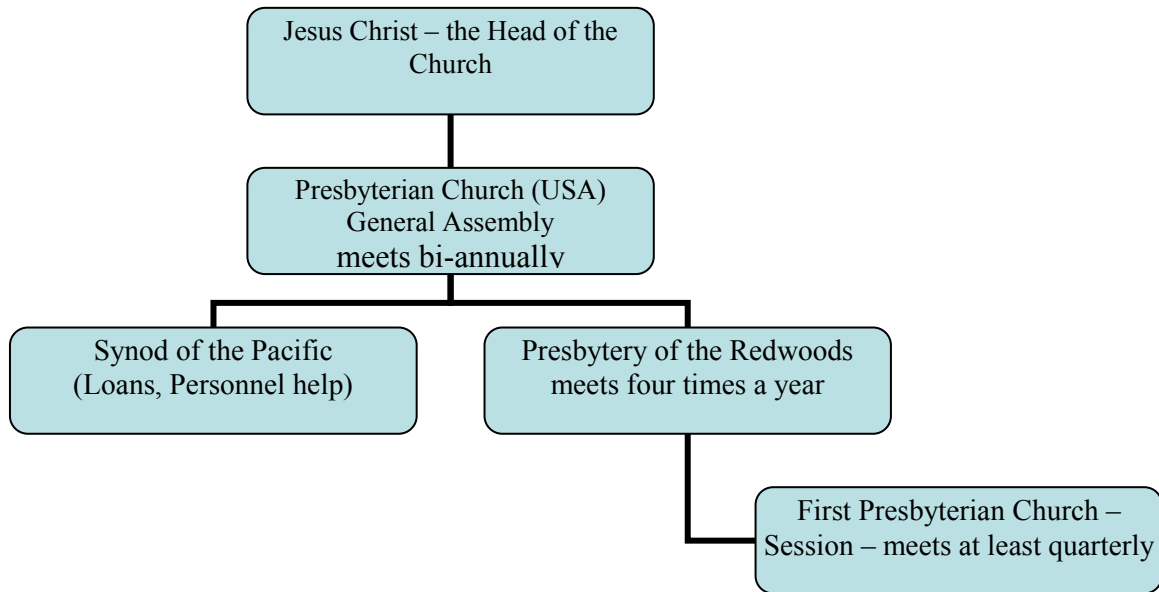
Well, it should require about five committees to review the idea first. If each is staffed with half a dozen members, that's what ... 30?

How many **Presbyterians** does it take to change a light bulb?

At least two, one teaching and one ruling. There must be a plurality and parity of light bulb changers.

How many **Southern Baptists** does it take to change a light bulb? Seven on the Light Bulb Task Force, appointed by the 15 on the Trustee Board. Their recommendation is reviewed by the Finance Committee Executive of 5, who place it on the agenda of the 18 member Finance Committee. If they approve, they bring a motion to the 27 member church board, who appoint another 12 member review committee. If they recommend that the Church Board proceed, a resolution is brought to the Congregational Business Meeting. They appoint another 8 member review committee. If their report to the next Congregational Business Meeting supports the changing of a light bulb, and the congregation votes in favor, the responsibility to carry out the light bulb change is passed on to the Trustee Board, who in turn appoint a 7 member committee to find the best price in new light bulbs. Their recommendation of which hardware has the best buy must then be reviewed by the 23 member Ethics Committee to make certain that this hardware store has no connection to Disneyland. They report back to the Trustee Board who, then commissions the Trustee in charge of the Janitor to ask him to make the change. By then the janitor discovers that one more light bulb has burned out.

## **An Organizational Chart: The Presbyterian Church (USA)**



### **G-4.0300 3. Principles of Presbyterian Government**

#### **G-4.0301 Presbyterian Polity**

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) reaffirms, within the context of its commitment to the Church universal, a special commitment to basic principles of Presbyterian polity:

G-4.0301a. The particular churches of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) wherever they are, taken collectively, constitute one church;

G-4.0301b. This church shall be governed by presbyters (elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament, traditionally called ruling and teaching elders);

G-4.0301c. These presbyters shall come together in governing bodies (traditionally called judicatories or courts) in regular gradation;

G-4.0301d. Presbyters are not simply to reflect the will of the people, but rather to seek together to find and represent the will of Christ;

G-4.0301e. Decisions shall be reached in governing bodies by vote, following opportunity for discussion, and a majority shall govern;

G-4.0301f. A higher governing body shall have the right of review and control over a lower one and shall have power to determine matters of controversy upon reference, complaint, or appeal;

G-4.0301g. Presbyters are ordained only by the authority of a governing body;

G-4.0301h. Ecclesiastical jurisdiction is a shared power, to be exercised jointly by presbyters gathered in governing bodies;

G-4.0301i. Governing bodies possess whatever administrative authority is necessary to give effect to duties and powers assigned by the Constitution of the church.

#### **G-4.0302 Presbyterian Unity**

The nature of Presbyterian order is such that it **shares power and responsibility**. The system of governing bodies, whether they have authority over one or many churches, sustains such mutual relationships within the structures as to express the unity of the church.

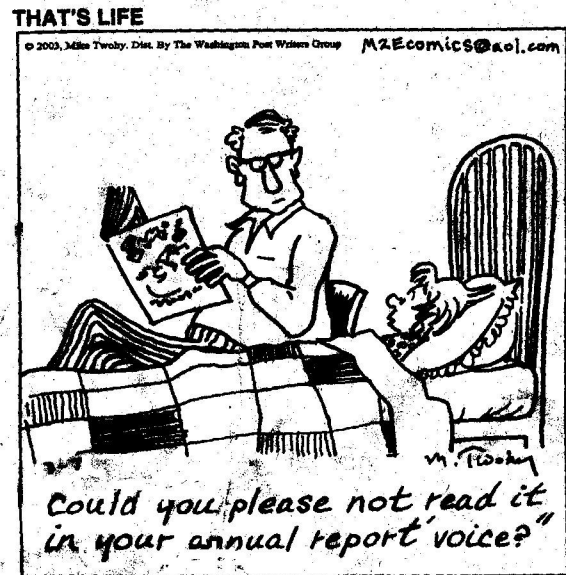
### More from the Book of Order:

#### G-14.0103 Servant Style

The purpose and pattern of leadership in the church in all its forms of ministry shall be understood not in terms of power but of service, after the manner of the servant ministry of Jesus Christ.

#### G-14.0203 Office Is Perpetual

The limitations placed by G-14.0201a, upon the period for which elders or deacons may be elected and may serve, apply to active service on the session or board of deacons. In all other respects the office of elder or deacon is perpetual and no one can lay it aside at pleasure or be divested of it except as provided in the Rules of Discipline. Elders or deacons being once ordained are not divested of office by the circumstance of not being reelected to serve on the session or board of deacons of a particular church, or by ceasing to be a member of that church. Elders shall be entitled to represent in presbytery the particular church of which they are members if appointed by its session, and to serve as a member of the synod or the General Assembly when duly elected whether or not they are in active service on the session.



### Roberts Rules

Our Book of Order states that Presbyterian meetings are to be held using Roberts Rules except where the Book of Order differs. It may seem silly or legalistic, but there are good reasons for having parliamentary rules. These rules enable honest debate, where both sides of an issue can be heard. They enable quieter members to be heard. Have you ever been in a meeting where only two or three members talked? Or where one appeared to have all the power? Roberts Rules evens the playing field.

### WHAT IS PARLIAMENTARY LAW?

- Parliamentary Law is common sense and courtesy developed over many centuries of practice.
- Parliamentary Law is the original model for conflict resolution and is still a working model, when used correctly .
- Parliamentary Law is not law, but, rather, is a body of conventions and customs used to aid decision making in deliberative assemblies.
- Parliamentary Law is subordinate to the bylaws of the governing body and both are subordinate to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).
- Parliamentary Law, when properly used, is designed to provide:

- A– accuracy
- E – efficiency
- I – impartiality
- O–objectivity
- U– uniformity

Here’s an online tutorial:  
 Puzzled by Parlipro? Tongue-tied by motions? Perplexed by whether a motion is debatable or amendable? Who came up with the rules of parliamentary procedure anyway? <http://www.parlipro.org/tutorial.htm> courtesy of the public domain version of Robert's Rules of Order Revised, Fourth Edition.

Roberts Rules Online:  
<http://www.rulesonline.com/>



## Who Decides?

*Session can delegate authority to elders, commissions or staff. For up-to-date information about who decides what, check the Standing Rules for Session and Commissions (Section 7: Session)*

### What can be decided by a Ministry Team?

Prayer for ministries and leaders

When Ministry Team will meet, agenda, what motions are needed for Commission and possibly, Session.

Schedule Events for your area of ministry. (Please coordinate events with affected department leaders and with the church calendar-on our website).

Use of already approved budget.

Who will be in the ministry team.

Recruitment of teachers, small group leaders, other helpers.

### What can be decided by a Commission?

Prayer for ministries and leaders

When commission will meet, agenda, what motions will be brought to Session

Schedule Events for your area of ministry. (Please coordinate events with affected department leaders and with the church calendar-on our website).

Spending decisions are made by the elder or commission unless spending goes beyond budget.

### **What must be decided/approved by the Deacon Board**

*Deacons serve under the authority of the Session.*

How the Deacon Fund will be used

Benevolence Requests

### **What must be decided/approved by Session**

Purchases that go over budget.

Examination and Ordination of Elders and Deacons

Examination of New Members

Selection of higher level Paid Staff (See “Standing Rules for Session and Commissions for details; Section 7: Session)

Sacraments: Baptisms and Communion (See *Book of Order*, G-4).

Commission and Committee members are reported to Session.

Fund-raisers and special offerings

### **What must be approved by the Congregation**

*These are set forth in the Book of Order.*

Selection of Pastor, Associate Pastor (nominated by Pastoral Nominating Committee)

Pastor's Salary – each year.

Nomination and Election of Officers – Elders, Deacons and Nominating Committee (Nominating Committee brings nominees to Congregational Meeting for election, then orientation period, then Session interviews them and votes.)

The buying and selling of land or buildings must be approved by the congregation and presbytery.

### **What must be approved by Presbytery**

*These are set forth in the Book of Order.*

Ordination and Installation of Ordained Pastor(s)

Planting and chartering of churches

Local Church property issues (sale, purchase, lease, insurance...)

Mediation of major church conflicts

### **What must be approved by the General Assembly**

*These are set forth in the Book of Order.*

Changes in the *Book of Order* or the *Book of Confessions*

Ordination Standards for Ministers, and church officers

Oversight of National Church Officers, Missionaries...

Question: Who decides what will go into the bulletin, newsletter or website?

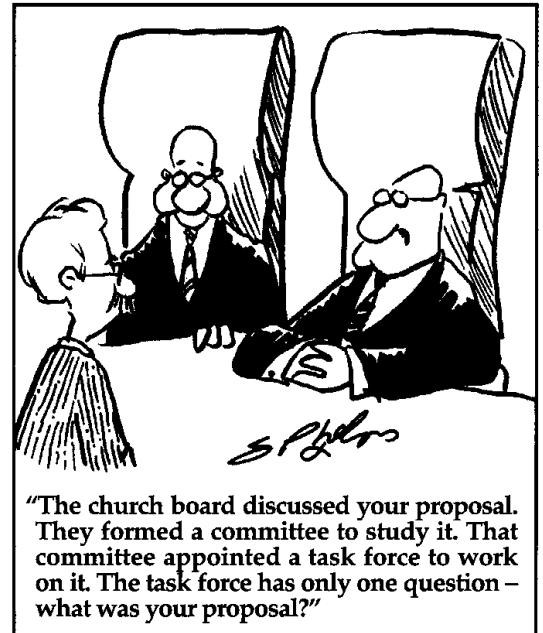
Answer: The editor of each makes decisions, but may appeal to the pastor or Membership Commission when in doubt about a particular submission. The Membership Commission has oversight for the newsletter (The Bridge) and website. The Worship Commission has oversight for the bulletin and announcements page.

## What is a Commission? What is a Ministry Team?

Dave Weidlich, January 2008

### Why Team Ministry?

- **Sharing ministry.** In many churches, 80% of the work is done by 20% of the people. Team ministry seeks to share the ministry load by sharing responsibility **and authority**. Most members are not honored or inspired by committee involvement. This is especially true of younger adults.
- **Results oriented.** Jesus called us to minister – to love and make disciples. Ministry teams exist for - and measure their success by - the ministry that is done.
- **Gift-based ministry.** Ministry teams are formed with people who have spiritual gifts and skills for the ministry to be performed.
- **Church growth.** Just as a church can hit a growth cap because of limited seating space or parking, a church can hit a growth cap because of its leadership structure. A growing church requires a different leadership structure than a stable church of 150.
- **Active, effective ministries** attract healthy people who are eager to make a difference.



from *The Joyful Noiseletter*  
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### So, What's the Difference?

At the risk of over-generalization, here are some differences between committees and ministry teams:

	<b>Committee</b>	<b>Ministry Team</b>
<b>Looks like</b>	A committee looks like a study group in a library.	A team looks like a M*A*S*H unit at the front lines.
<b>Goal</b>	Committees seek to <b>oversee, regulate, and control</b> other people. Makes recommendations, suggestions & does some of the work	Ministry teams are <b>empowered to do the ministry</b> , recruit and empower others. Decisions are made by those doing the ministry.
<b>Members</b>	Leader is appointed by another committee/board. Often the members are also appointed by another committee. A committee often makes use of these gifts: "Talker," "Sitter," "Devil's Advocate" and often one "doer."	Members are gathered by the leader. Usually, the leadership comes from within the team. A team makes use of the gifts of the people who are there, but <b>all must be "doers,"</b> "encouragers."
<b>Gifts &amp; Skills</b>	Represents a <b>diversity of desires</b> and abilities. Focus on filling the proper number of slots (by anyone). Ministry attempted by those who do not have the needed spiritual giftedness or preparation results in burnout.	<b>Common desires, vision,</b> complementary abilities. Better to have a few gifted people than to have many who are not gifted for the ministry needed. Result: Joy-filled ministry.
<b>Structure</b>	Structure and rules set by higher committee, board. It is important that all decisions go through "proper channels," which often involves waiting for the needed meetings to be scheduled.	Structure is flexible. Most decisions can be made along the way, without undue waiting and red tape.
<b>Accountability</b>	Accountable to a higher committee/board for actions and, sometimes, results.	Accountable for results to a higher committee or board, but within defined boundaries.

<b>Relationships</b>	<b>Functional life</b> with some community along the way. Begins and ends with an obligatory prayer.	<b>Relational community life.</b> Team sees mutual support and spiritual growth as part of its reason for being. May spend whole meetings in prayer.
<b>Meetings</b>	<b>Regular meetings</b> , often according to calendar. Communication through the taking and distribution of “minutes,” which record decisions made.	<b>Meets as necessary</b> for optimal planning and communication. Teams often meet <b>more often</b> than committees when needs are greatest. Record keeping is essential, but the structure is more flexible, depending on the need.
<b>Decision-making</b>	Hierarchical decision-making. Roberts Rules – all actions must be made through motion and vote. Decisions are made <b>for</b> those who are doing the ministry.	Consensus (but, not unanimity). A slight majority is insufficient for effective ministry. Decisions are made <b>by</b> those who are doing the ministry.
<b>Results</b>	Maintenance minded. Committees are effective at maintaining good ministry. But, committees sometimes can outlive their purpose. The ministry has diminished or disappeared, but the committee keeps on meeting and taking minutes.	A ministry team focuses on specific human hopes and hurts and works hard to ensure that the human needs are met. Success is measured by needs that are met, rather than the programs.
<b>Staff</b>	A Staff person usually serves on a committee as a non-voting member. Usually, the staff member is the one who carries out the decisions of others on the committee.	A staff member has full voice, vote and, if capable and available, leadership.
<b>Practical</b>	All FPCP commissions and committees (20) must be chaired by a Session member, according to current Standing Rules for Session and Commissions.	Currently, ministry teams may be led by a Session member, a non-Session elder, a church member or a <b>staff person</b> .

### ***Is Team Ministry Biblical?***

The Bible provides little in the way of governing structure for a church. Elders are to be appointed for each church and we know Deacons were added soon after. Decisions in churches were often made through teaching, prayer, fasting, and discussion, and occasionally by vote (or casting of lots). Churches in various cultures and times show a diversity of governing styles.

### ***Can Presbyterians Do This?***

The Presbyterian Book of Order requires that every church have a Session, made up of the pastor(s) and elders, to govern the church. In addition, a Session may appoint a Deacon Board and a Board of Trustees, but these are not required. **The Book of Order does not require any committees or commissions beyond the Session.**

### ***Are Committees a Thing of the Past?***

Our church needs many ministry teams and enough commissions/committees to provide adequate oversight, policy-boundaries and spiritual leadership. The goal should be to grow ministers, some of whom are administrators. Administration is one of the spiritual gifts. For those of us who are so gifted, administration is our ministry. But, administrators exist to support the ministers/members.



**What about meetings?** Moving towards Ministry Teams does not mean the end of meetings. Ministry Teams require effective communication, so meetings are essential. Meetings are designed for the need, whether that be decision-making, communication, training, prayer or mutual support. A ministry team might go three months without a meeting, but will step up meetings when needs are greatest. For example, a Sunday School Team might meet weekly during the month preceding Fall Kick-off. One meeting might be for curriculum planning. Another meeting might be for training and curriculum implementation, etc.



## Vision for FPCP

We do committees well. We are stronger than most when it comes to governing and the number of people involved in governing, relative to our church's size. But the question we will be asked at the end of life is not, "Did you serve my church as a committee member?" Instead we will be asked something of the order of, "Did you feed the hungry, clothe and shelter those in need, visit the sick and imprisoned?" "Did you lead people

to Jesus?"

We won't need a revolution to turn our strong, functional church into a **dynamic, growing church** that exalts and glorifies God in ways that bring wholeness and salvation to our community.

**1. We have many ministry teams already.** The Bridge to the Future Team and the Alpha Planning Team were two very effective examples in 2007. Ongoing teams include the Audio-Video-Lighting (AVL) Team, Youth Teams, Choir, and Praise Band. Let's not shackle them with policies and rules, but release them to minister as they see fit, within minimal, clear and reasonable boundaries.

**2. Some of our "commissions" function as ministry teams already.** They can be freed from administrative guilt and released to maximize those actions that lead to changed lives. They can be released to involve those who will come alongside to serve in their area of giftedness, no matter their office. Don't just change the name; change the mandate.

**3. We need an ever-growing number of ministry teams.** Let's build on the models we already have. Let's support the ministry teams we have and provide them with the resources they need for ministry. And let's release our people to form new ministry teams to meet newly perceived needs (an example is the need for effective fellowship ministry for seniors).

**4. We need some of our boards, commission and committees.** A church of 210 average attendance (and roughly 210 actively involved members) can (and must!) get by with less than our current 22 boards, commissions, committees. We need to choose the commissions and committees we really need for a growing church of our current size, and let go of the rest. We have stressed out the 10%-20% who feel the compunction to "cover" these positions and we still have not been able to fill all the seats (One example is the Endowment Committee. Since all actions must be approved by this non-existent committee, we have no new endowments!).

Too many chefs...in the church, make many tired, beat-up members. No more!

## Where Does This Leave Session?

**As long as there is a church, there will be a Session.**

**How big?** The size of the Session should be appropriate for the size of the church and the nature of the Session's tasks, which will increasingly involve spiritual leadership. The Session should not be forced to fill positions so



**"A round table? But we've done it that way before!"**

that it achieves a previously dictated size, but should be flexibly sized, according to the availability of appropriately gifted members. The Session should be **large and diverse enough** to adequately represent the whole church, but **small enough** to function efficiently. **Studies of group dynamics demonstrate that when the group size is 6-10, more people usually speak and contribute** than when the group size is larger. Larger groups are more prone to a few dominant personalities.

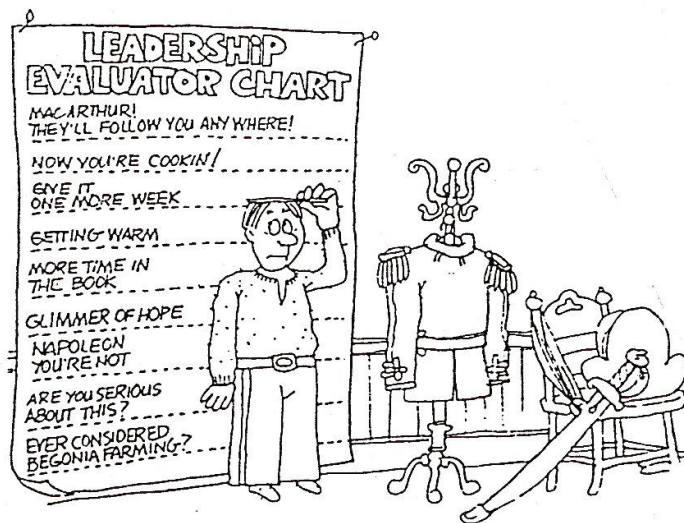
**More work? Less work?** Neither. It will require a different kind of work. The time an elder spends on Session-related work will continue to depend on the needs of ministry and the availability of the elder. But Session will increasingly devote its time to spiritual leadership: prayer, vision and strategic planning, policy-making and, when necessary, problem-solving. Session will need elders who do these tasks well. Spiritual gifts of administration, leadership, discernment, wisdom will be essential. Diversity of gender, age, ethnicity and life experience are Christian values that should be visible on Session. Diversity of spiritual maturity is not essential. All must be spiritually grown-up and growing followers of Jesus Christ. Though we may differ on many points of belief, it remains essential that all Session elders “sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith...” (from the Ordination Vows in the Book of Order)

## **Leadership Development and the Nominating Process**

Leadership development is critically important for the health and growth of a church. Leadership development includes such things as:

- Providing discipleship ministries so that people can grow in their relationship with God, their knowledge of God's Word, in their attitudes and actions. (classes, small groups, conferences)
- Placing believers strategically in ministries according to giftedness, spiritual maturity, experience and training. (vs. "filling slots" with a willing, warm body)
- Providing leadership training for those who have been identified with leadership gifts.
- Providing leadership-apprentice experiences for those who have been identified with leadership gifts. (serving as a co-leader of a ministry or an apprentice chair to a committee, leading in worship and discipleship)
- Nominating proven servant-leaders to Session. Nominating proven servants, who have compassionate and skills to serve on Deacon Board. This is where the Nominating Committee fits into the leadership development strategy.

In churches without an over-arching leadership-development strategy, or in churches where the nominating



committee works in isolation of that strategy, a Nominating Committee will typically pull names out of the church directory, agree on members who are likely to say, “yes,” call them and sign them up. They consider themselves successful when there is a name for every slot. These churches are rarely, if ever, healthy and growing. Sadly, most Presbyterian churches fit into this category.

In healthy, growing churches, a leadership development strategy is in place. When the Nominating Committee works within such a strategy, the placement of officers works wonderfully.

**Resources:**

The Parish Paper: "Ministry Teams Are Not Committees!": by Herb Miller, October 2002 Volume 10, #4.

*Beyond Church Growth*, by Robert Logan, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 1989.

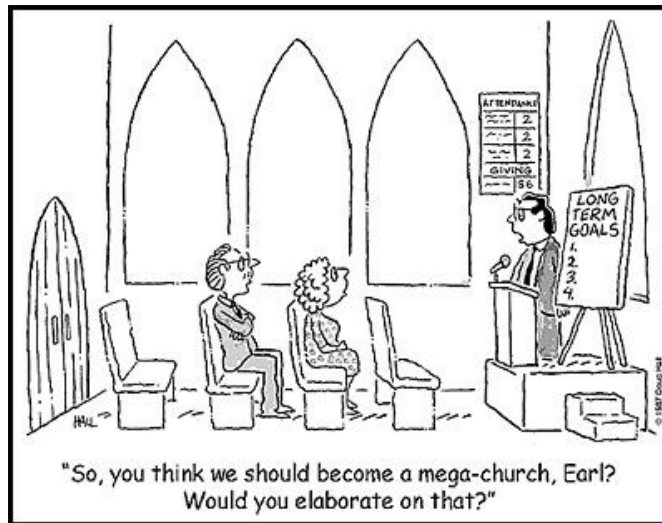
*The 17 Essential Qualities of a Team Player*, by John Maxwell.

*Effective Church Leadership- Keys for creating a mission team approach to ministry*, by Kennon L. Callahan, pp 203-221.

*Growing Spiritual Redwoods*, by William Easum and Thomas Bandy, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997.

*The Coming Church Revolution: Empowering Leaders for the Future*, Carl George, Grand Rapids: F.H. Revell, 1997.

*Prepare Your Church for the Future*, by Carl George, Grand Rapids: Revell, 1992.

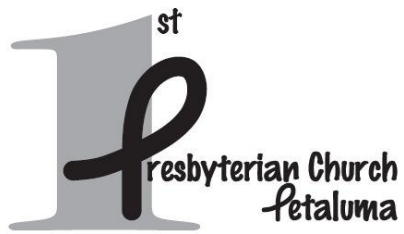


## Issues Facing the Presbyterian Church (USA) Today

- Declining numbers of Membership
  - Declining churches in declining rural areas
  - Churches leaving the denomination over disputes about Biblical authority, sexuality.
- Aging of Membership in many churches
- Declining dollars for Presbyterian missions, cutbacks, lack of clarity regarding evangelism.
- America moving from Christian culture to Post-Christian culture
  - From Mainline Denomination to Sideline Denomination
  - From centralized organization to local church autonomy
- Where is our authority? The role of Scripture (and Tradition, Science, Public Opinion)
- What does it mean to be Reformed in worship?
- Leadership Vacuum – 1/3 of pulpits are not filled (with "installed pastors").



## Issues Facing the First Presbyterian Church Today



***For Discussion:***

What are some of the more urgent issues we face in the coming year?

What difference do you hope to make in our church?



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[Presbyterian Church \(USA\)](http://www.pcusa.org)  
denomination  
[www.pcusa.org](http://www.pcusa.org)



[The Presbytery of the Redwoods:](http://www.redwoodspresbytery.org)  
[www.redwoodspresbytery.org](http://www.redwoodspresbytery.org)



[www.synodpacific.org/](http://www.synodpacific.org/)



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