The Need For Restructuring

Restructuring Workshop Screen Share

1. We find ourselves in a divided denomination. This is the case regardless of what happens to the Remits.

    a. The theological divide is evidenced in the report from the 2019 General Assembly's "Special Committee Regarding Implications of Option B (Inclusion)" which read in part, "In truth we differ theologically on many things; the role of scripture, the virgin birth, the resurrection, the place of children, of women and the priorities of the church…"

    b. This is not to minimize the importance of the Remits Decision on the life of the PCC. The effects of the remits on marriage and ordination adopted by the 145th General are crucial. They have been submitted to presbyteries under the Barrier Act to enshrine in church law and culture two very different understandings of marriage and ordination, which if ultimately adopted, requires space be found for those holding these different understandings to live and practice these different two understandings with integrity in Christian community, in both congregations and presbyteries.

    c. We are ethnically and theologically diverse and need to respect the two streams in secure spaces, allowing for effective work and witness, and appropriate accountability to those with whom we agree theologically.

    d. There are some presbyteries which are internally divided theologically, seriously impeding effective advances in ministry to fulfill Christ's mission.

2. Restructuring creates an organization structure that puts the dual understanding of the remits into effect. Or, if the remits do not receive approval, restructuring reduces the conflict that has continued for many years between denominational leaders with different theological understandings – conflict that has detracted from our ministries.

3. Precedents
    a. There is precedent for "elective-affinity presbyteries" (among Presbyterians in the United States in the 1830s) enabling those with differing theological convictions and practices to collaborate together, maintaining those convictions and practices within respective presbyteries while still functioning within one national General Assembly structure, at least for a time.
    b. There are already existing presbyteries formed along a combination of geographical and non-geographical considerations (Eastern and Western HanCa); and we know that the business of the Court can be considered by videoconference, as the pandemic has shown us.

4. Value in Restructuring apart from theological separation
   a. There are 45 presbyteries in the PCC some of which are too unpopulated to be able to function effectively and optimally. Restructuring would allow all presbyteries to be stronger and more united in mission and ministry.

5. There are some national functions that are common to all, regardless of theological considerations (e.g. pensions and benefits, Leading with Care policy, archives, PWS&D relief efforts, etc.).

6. Why take the "winner take all" approach to the Sexuality/Theology/Marriage debate, to see who will leave the denomination, likely including all our non-anglo congregations at a minimum? Why not restructure to actually include both sides of the issue, if inclusion is indeed a high value to the denomination? (We may have a small window to make a GA decision to restructure since people who disagree with the remits, or are tired of the debate, will leave the denomination. And conservatives who do not feel the need to separate theologically at this time, may close the opportunity forever.)

   a. General Assembly's approval of "Remit B, 2019" and Remit C, 2019", if the approval is granted without a corresponding, theologically based, organizational separation, has been deemed, by legal opinion provided to all presbytery clerks, though not shared with all presbyters, not to provide ministers and congregations with liberty of action on marriage in Canada's secular courts – a failure which negates the liberty of conscience and action that "Remit B, 2019" and "Remit C, 2019" ostensibly provide.

   b. The erosion of our denomination's traditional beliefs, which are the traditional beliefs of most Christian churches worldwide, leaves many congregants feeling that they must change their beliefs or leave the denomination. [This is not appropriate as a "Whereas" clause. Each court of the church will need to appeal based on knowledge of the people it represents.]

   c. The lack of organizational separation sends a clear message that today's "liberty of conscience and action" is a temporary step on a continuing path of our denomination's eroding beliefs.

   d. There is a long-term trend of diminishing membership in the PCC (a reduction of 30,000 between 2010 and 2020), which will be further weakened by departures for theological reasons.

Note: On PSALT Facebook, "Future-of-Denominationalism (2)" by Peter Bush. There are "nuts and bolts" of HOW to achieve this to be worked on, but this gives a good background and historical PCC info that will be helpful if we move towards restructuring the PCC into two Synods/affinity Presbyteries.

Other Thoughts

1. The concept of mutual accountability and empathetic collegiality is at the heart of Presbyterianism. Such a concept demands integrity – integrity that is lacking unless the elders participating in a presbytery share a single theology for ordination, teaching, preaching and practicing.
2. Upon ordination, we agreed to what we believed and still believe. We are now being told we must leave our understanding of the Word of God. This is something we cannot do. And, as a consequence, our mutual accountability and empathetic collegiality will lack integrity: our presence within The PCC is painful and disheartening.
3. What choices do we have? We can stay and suffer, and hope that our presence is a light to others in the denomination. We can leave The PCC en masse – leaving our buildings and devastating our ministries. Or we can seek a place within The PCC where like-minded individuals, whose beliefs have not changed with the times, may continue to seek mutual accountability and empathetic collegiality. This is our hope – a safe place based on restructuring The PCC to achieve theological separation.

What are we seeking at GA?

1. authorize the formation of presbyteries along theological lines with accommodating geographic boundaries; and
2. initiate steps to form two national synods, each with autonomy in matters of doctrine, ordination, teaching and discipline; and
3. confine General Assembly responsibilities, when the two synods gather together, to matters common to both synods;
   AND (a plea from some)
4. immediately authorize and encourage congregational leaders to connect with other congregational leaders of like mind and heart to form presbyteries of care and missional vision, compassion and accountability, for consideration and homologation at the next General Assembly.