

The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity

Book of Order, Section F

Three Chapters

- Chapter One: The Mission of the Church
- Chapter Two: The Church and Its Confessions
- Chapter Three: Principles of Order and Government

Chapter One: The Mission of the Church

- F-1.01 God's Mission
- F-1.02 Jesus Christ Is Head of the Church
- F-1.03 The Calling of the Church
- F-1.04 Openness to the Guidance of the Holy Spirit

F-1.01 God's Mission

- *This is the opening statement for the entire Book of Order:*

The good news of the Gospel is that the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—creates, redeems, sustains, rules, and transforms all things and all people. This one living God, the Scriptures say, liberated the people of Israel from oppression and covenanted to be their God. By the power of the Spirit, this one living God is incarnate in Jesus Christ, who came to live in the world, die for the world, and be raised again to new life. The Gospel of Jesus Christ announces the nearness of God's kingdom, bringing good news to all who are impoverished, sight to all who are blind, freedom to all who are oppressed, and proclaiming the Lord's favor upon all creation.

The mission of God in Christ gives shape and substance to the life and work of the Church. In Christ, the Church participates in God's mission for the transformation of creation and humanity by proclaiming to all people the good news of God's love, offering to all people the grace of God at font and table, and calling all people to discipleship in Christ. Human beings have no higher goal in life than to glorify and enjoy God now and forever, living in covenant fellowship with God and participating in God's mission.

F-1.02 Jesus Christ Is Head of the Church

- F-1.0201 The Authority of Christ
 - “The Church’s life and mission are a joyful participation in Christ’s ongoing life and work.”
- F-1.0202 Christ Calls and Equips the Church
 - “Christ calls the Church into being, giving it all that is necessary for its mission in the world...”
- F-1.0203 Christ Gives the Church Its Life
- F-1.0204 Christ Is the Church’s Hope
 - “In affirming with the earliest Christians that Jesus is Lord, the Church confesses that he is its hope...”
- F-1.0205 Christ Is the Foundation of the Church

F-1.03 The Calling of the Church

- F-1.0301 The Church Is the Body of Christ
 - “Christ gives to the Church all the gifts necessary to be his body...”
 - “The Church is to be a community of faith, entrusting itself to God alone, even at the risk of losing its life.”
 - “The Church is to be a community of hope, rejoicing in the sure and certain knowledge that, in Christ, God is making a new creation...”
 - “The Church is to be a community of love, where sin is forgiven, reconciliation is accomplished, and the dividing walls of hostility are torn down.”
 - “The Church is to be a community of witness, pointing beyond itself through word and work to the good news of God’s transforming grace in Christ Jesus its Lord.”

F-1.03 The Calling of the Church

- F-1.0302 The Marks of the Church
 - The Unity of the Church (F-1.0302a)
 - “Because in Christ the Church is one, it strives to be one.”
 - The Holiness of the Church (F-1.0302b)
 - “Because in Christ the Church is holy, the Church, its members, and those in its ordered ministries strive to lead lives worthy of the Gospel we proclaim.”
 - The Catholicity of the Church (F-1.0302c)
 - “Because in Christ the Church is catholic, it strives everywhere to testify to Christ’s embrace of men, women, and children of all times, places, races, nations, ages, conditions, and stations in life.”
 - The Apostolicity of the Church (F-1.0302d)
 - “Because in Christ the Church is apostolic, it strives to proclaim this gospel faithfully.”

F-1.03 The Calling of the Church

- F-1.0303 The Notes of the Reformed Church
- Where Christ is, there is the true Church. Since the earliest days of the Reformation, Reformed Christians have marked the presence of the true Church wherever:
 - the Word of God is truly preached and heard,
 - the Sacraments are rightly administered,
 - and ecclesiastical discipline is uprightly ministered.
- F-1.0304 The Great Ends of the Church
 - The great ends of the Church are:
 - the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind;
 - the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship;
 - the preservation of the truth;
 - the promotion of social righteousness; and
 - the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

F-1.04 Openness to the Guidance of the Holy Spirit

- F-1.0401 Continuity and Change
- F-1.0402 Ecumenicity
- F-1.0403 Unity in Diversity
- F-1.0404 Openness
 - As it participates in God's mission, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) seeks:
 - a new openness to the sovereign activity of God in the Church and in the world, to a more radical obedience to Christ, and to a more joyous celebration in worship and work;
 - a new openness in its own membership, becoming in fact as well as in faith a community of women and men of all ages, races, ethnicities, and worldly conditions, made one in Christ by the power of the Spirit, as a visible sign of the new humanity;
 - a new openness to see both the possibilities and perils of its institutional forms in order to ensure the faithfulness and usefulness of these forms to God's activity in the world; and
 - a new openness to God's continuing reformation of the Church ecumenical, that it might be more effective in its mission.

Chapter Two: The Church and Its Confessions

- F-2.01 The Purpose of Confessional Statements
- F-2.02 The Confessions as Subordinate Standards
- F-2.03 The Confessions as Statements of the Faith of the Church Catholic
- F-2.04 The Confessions as Statements of the Faith of the Protestant Reformation
- F-2.05 The Confessions as Statements of the Faith of the Reformed Tradition

Chapter Two: The Church and Its Confessions

- F-2.05 The Confessions as Statements of the Faith of the Reformed Tradition
 - In its confessions, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) expresses the faith of the Reformed tradition. Central to this tradition is the affirmation of the majesty, holiness, and providence of God who in Christ and by the power of the Spirit creates, sustains, rules, and redeems the world in the freedom of sovereign righteousness and love. Related to this central affirmation of God's sovereignty are other great themes of the Reformed tradition:
 - The election of the people of God for service as well as for salvation;
 - Covenant life marked by a disciplined concern for order in the church according to the Word of God;
 - A faithful stewardship that shuns ostentation and seeks proper use of the gifts of God's creation; and
 - The recognition of the human tendency to idolatry and tyranny, which calls the people of God to work for the transformation of society by seeking justice and living in obedience to the Word of God.

Chapter Three: Principles of Order and Government

- F-3.01 Historic Principles of Church Order
- F-3.02 Principles of Presbyterian Government
- F-3.03 Foundational Statements
- F-3.04 The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Defined

F-3.01 Historic Principles of Church Order

- F-3.0101 God Is Lord of the Conscience
- F-3.0102 Corporate Judgment
- F-3.0103 Officers
- F-3.0104 Truth and Goodness
- F-3.0105 Mutual Forbearance
- F-3.0106 Election by the People
- F-3.0107 Church Power
- F-3.0108 The Value of Ecclesiastical Discipline

F-3.02 Principles of Presbyterian Government

- F-3.0201 One Church
- F-3.0202 Governed by Presbyters
- F-3.0203 Gathered in Councils
- F-3.0204 Seek and Represent the Will of Christ
- F-3.0205 Decision by Majority Vote
- F-3.0206 Review and Control
- F-3.0207 Ordination by Council
- F-3.0208 Shared Power, Exercised Jointly
- F-3.0209 General Authority of Councils

F-3.03 Foundational Statements

- The statements contained in this section, “The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity,” describe the ecclesiological and historical commitments on which the polity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) rests. Provisions of any part of this Constitution are to be interpreted in light of the whole Constitution. No provision of the Book of Order can of itself invalidate any other. Where there are tensions and ambiguities between provisions, it is the task of councils and judicial commissions to resolve them in such a way as to give effect to all provisions.

F-3.04 The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Defined

- **The Book of Confessions includes:**
 - The Nicene Creed
 - The Apostles' Creed
 - The Scots Confession
 - The Heidelberg Catechism
 - The Second Helvetic Confession
 - The Westminster Confession of Faith
 - The Westminster Shorter Catechism
 - The Westminster Larger Catechism
 - The Theological Declaration of Barmen
- The Confession of 1967
- The Confession of Belhar
- A Brief Statement of Faith—
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
- **The Book of Order includes:**
 - The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity
 - The Form of Government
 - The Directory for Worship
 - The Rules of Discipline