



## Presbytery of Ohio Valley

1701 E. Second Street, Suite 100  
Bloomington, IN 47401

*From the Office of*

*The Stated Clerk*

June 7, 2011

by Sharon K. Youngs, Communications Coordinator, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

### **Presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have approved a new Form of Government**

*Trinity Presbytery became the 87th presbytery to approve the amendment*

**Louisville**—While the Office of the General Assembly awaits official tallies, it appears that a majority of the 173 presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have approved a new Form of Government.

At its meeting on Tuesday, June 7, 2011, Trinity Presbytery became the 87th presbytery to approve an amendment that will replace the current 18-chapter Form of Government with a new version that is six chapters in length. The Form of Government is one section of the *Book of Order*, which is part of the PC(USA) *Constitution*.

Along with the new Form of Government will be a new section of the *Book of Order* entitled “Principles of Presbyterian Polity,” which contains a large majority of the content of the first four chapters of the current Form of Government.

The proposed new Form of Government (FOG) was approved by the 219th General Assembly (2010) of the PC(USA). Two years earlier, a proposed revision had been presented to the 218th General Assembly (2008) by the FOG Task Force. That assembly reconstituted the task force and asked it to present a revised version to the 219th GA based on the feedback received at the 218th GA.

This is the first full revision of the Form of Government since the Presbyterian Church in the United States and the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America reunited to form the PC(USA). The current Form of Government had been amended over 300 times since reunion in 1983.

The new Form of Government will take effect July 10, 2011, one year after the adjournment of last summer’s assembly. It is anticipated that the transition from the current to the new FOG will take time.

In response to the vote, denominational leaders issued a letter to all congregations of the PC(USA). In it, they write, “While the new Form of Government will help the PC(USA) to be a faithful and responsive church in the 21st century, it also has a dimension of bringing us back to a truly constitutional document that contains broad governing and theological principles and emphasizes function over structure.”

The letter continues, “Many Presbyterians will see nothing suddenly or dramatically different with a new Form of Government. Worship services will go on as usual, and congregations will continue to teach the faith, serve their communities, reach out to those in need, and work to further God’s realm on earth. However, what will be different is that congregations, presbyteries, and synods will have the opportunity to tailor mission and ministry to fit their own particular contexts and challenges.”

*The Reverend Susan C. McGhee, Presbyter for Common Life*  
*The Reverend Lawrence Jackman, Stated Clerk*  
*Elder M. Jean Brown, Treasurer*

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Resources and guides about the new FOG, including "Frequently Asked Questions," are available at <http://oga.pcusa.org/formofgovernment>.

The full text of the churchwide letter:

*To congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*

*Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*While it is not official until the Office of the General Assembly receives notification from presbyteries that have voted, it appears that, as of June 7, 2011, the proposed new Form of Government (FOG) has been approved by a majority of our 173 presbyteries.*

*The new FOG will replace the current version within the Book of Order of the church's Constitution on July 10, 2011, one year after the adjournment of the 219th General Assembly (2010). The print edition of the new Book of Order will be available by late July.*

### **The new Form of Government at its core**

*A new section, Foundations of Presbyterian Polity, which contains the vast majority of the first four chapters of the current FOG, will also be added to the beginning of the Book of Order. Within it are these words:*

*In the power of the Spirit, Jesus Christ draws worshiping communities and individual believers into the sovereign activity of the triune God at all times and places. As the Church seeks reform and fresh direction, it looks to Jesus Christ who goes ahead of us and calls us to follow him. (F-1.0401)*

*The foundational message of the saving love of God through Jesus Christ is timeless. The writer of Hebrews reminds us, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (13:8). And yet, when the Spirit has moved the church to respond to "the sovereign activity of the triune God," the church has, in turn, worked to reshape itself to do so effectively.*

*While the new Form of Government will help the PC(USA) to be a faithful and responsive church in the 21st century, it also has a dimension of bringing us back to a truly constitutional document that contains broad governing and theological principles and emphasizes function over structure.*

### **What will change?**

*Many Presbyterians will see nothing suddenly or dramatically different with a new Form of Government. Worship*

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*services will go on as usual, and congregations will continue to teach the faith, serve their communities, reach out to those in need, and work to further God's realm on earth. However, what will be different is that congregations, presbyteries, and synods will have the opportunity to tailor mission and ministry to fit their own particular contexts and challenges.*

*The new FOG will also usher in changes in terminology. For example, ministers of the Word and Sacrament will be known as teaching elders, partnering in ministry with ruling elders who serve on the congregation's council (session).*

*It is a season of much change in the church, and change is often accompanied by anxiety. Making the transition from the current Form of Government to the new one will take time, patience, and grace. We will all be living gradually into these new dimensions of the church's governance. We commend to you the resources and guides at <http://oga.pcusa.org/formofgovernment> for assistance, including the "Frequently Asked Questions" document that accompanies this letter. Further resources will be made available over the course of the summer to help with this transition.*

*The best resources through this transition, however, will be each other. A new Form of Government puts all of us on the same page, as it were. Through conversation, cooperation, and collaboration, we will discover the most effective ways to move forward into this new and exciting chapter of the life of the church.*

*In the end, as affirmed in the Confession of 1967, "The church ... orders its life as an institution with a constitution, government, officers, finances, and administrative rules. These are instruments of mission, not ends in themselves" (9.40). The mission remains the same: to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed, and to work for the reconciliation of the world. With God's help, may this new Form of Government enable us to be ever more faithful to that mission.*

*In Christ,*

*Cindy Bolbach*

*Moderator of the 219th General Assembly (2010)*

*Gradye Parsons*

*Stated Clerk of the General Assembly*

*Linda Valentine*

*Executive Director, General Assembly Mission Council*

*Landon Whitsitt*

*Vice Moderator of the 219th General Assembly (2010)*

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### Helpful Resources:

**Frequently Asked Questions:** <http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/oga/pdf/faqnfog.pdf>

**Churchwide Letter:** <http://www.pcusa.org/news/2011/6/7/churchwide-letter-concerning-new-form-government/>

**+ On May 18, in preparation for a possible affirmative vote by a majority of the presbyteries, Lawrence Jackman, POV Stated Clerk, sent the following communication to moderators and clerks of session in the presbytery, concerning the need for congregations to establish a quorum for congregational meetings:**

### To All Clerks and Moderators of Session:

The proposal to create a new Form of Government for our church is still being voted. There are 30 presbyteries yet to vote. The unofficial count is that 12 of those need to vote in the affirmative for the change to happen. This is not at all a foregone conclusion as to outcome. It may or may not pass.

**If it does pass**, we have some very immediate needs. Some of those are on a presbytery level. Some are very specifically on a congregational basis. I write today about a single one of those which could generate real headaches if not addressed.

**The most critical issue has to do with the definition of a quorum.** The current Book of Order has an answer to that question, but if that book goes away, we are left with an impossible answer for many.

Currently, the quorum is 10% of the membership, but not less than 2(two) members. The congregation may set a higher number, but that would be the minimum. That is pretty easy to live with.

The new Form of Government does not include anything about a quorum. That means the definition falls to Roberts Rules of Order. That answer is a majority of the membership is a quorum. This is often a difficult goal to reach.

### Actions which need to happen immediately are as follows:

1. Check to see if your congregation (or any you moderate) has a defined quorum. Ask yourself and your session if this is a realistic number.
2. If the Roberts Rule of "a majority" or your current definition is unrealistic prepare to change it. Set a congregational meeting that can set a realistic quorum.
3. Accomplish this before July 10.

The "Catch 22" is that after July 10 (if the amendment passes) it will take a majority of the congregation to set a quorum of any size.

Below is a sample motion to set at the minimum which now exists. I will continue to be in touch as the vote continues on this issue. I will also contact you to follow up. If you would let me know how it stands in your congregations, it will help in follow up.

Possible motion: *The (blank) Presbyterian Church of the Presbytery of Ohio Valley, establishes a rule for congregational meetings and corporate meetings which stipulates that 10% of the membership must be present for such a meeting. No meeting shall be conducted with less than 3 members regardless of membership. Meetings of the session and other entities within the church must have 50 percent of the membership present in order to conduct business.*

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The session of each congregation must also establish a quorum for its own meetings and other groups which it may constitute.

Possible motion: *The session of (blank) Presbyterian Church of the Presbytery of Ohio Valley establishes a quorum rule which directs that all the session's business must be conducted with a quorum of at least 50% of the membership.*

Again, sisters and brothers, the numbers need to be realistic for your congregation.

Please, let me know when you have determined whether there is a current quorum which meets the requirements. If not, please let me know when you can address this issue.

Thanks to each of you for your work and labors.

Rev. Lawrence Jackman  
Stated Clerk