



# PRESBYTERY OF NEW COVENANT

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

*Growing congregations that passionately engage their community to make disciples.*

Mike Cole

*General Presbyter*

Mary Marcotte

*Associate General  
Presbyters*

Lynn Hargrove

*Stated Clerk*

H. Richard Siciliano

*Executive Emeritus*

Jack H. Boelens

T. Stewart Coffman

*General Presbyter Emeriti*

Dear Presbyters and Colleagues:

Most of us are aware that last week there was an event in Orlando, Florida with simultaneous meetings of the Fellowship of Presbyterians and the formation of a new reformed denomination (Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians). I'm writing to share information with you so that all of us are fully informed on what happened. This is **NOT** meant as an endorsement of either the FOP or the ECO, but is our best effort to inform you of decisions made elsewhere that will impact our denomination.

I have attached a bulletin insert from [The Presbyterian Outlook](#), which our presbytery has purchased for your use in reporting and interpreting these events. You have permission to use this attachment any way you wish – as a bulletin insert, for distribution to your session or congregation or even in an email publication. This insert provides an accurate report of the events so that we are all working with the same information.

In addition, I share these first-hand observations. The Fellowship of Presbyterians (FOP) will exist as an organization that stands both inside and outside the PCUSA. It will be primarily a way for evangelical Presbyterians (mostly PCUSA, but others are welcome) to gather for worship, workshops, and connecting evangelical Presbyterians, many of whom are at odds with recent changes within the PCUSA. The vast majority of the 2100 who gathered in Orlando came to participate in the FOP and to observe the formation of the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians (ECO). At the conclusion of the FOP, attendees were asked to indicate their interest in one of three options: join the FOP; form a “union” congregation (PCUSA and ECO); or leave the PCUSA and join ECO. By one estimate, about 75% of those in attendance expressed an intention to join the FOP; 12 congregations indicated a desire to form a “union” congregation; and 30 congregations are preparing to leave the PCUSA and join ECO.

While I see the usefulness and appeal of the FOP, I am dismayed with the formation of the ECO and will continue to encourage congregations in our presbytery to remain within the PCUSA because God is still leading us into exciting and energizing mission. Those who need to differentiate themselves theologically may find the FOP to be an appropriate means of expressing their theological convictions in a similar way that Covenant Network is a gathering place for those with a more progressive theology.

For those who are curious about the polity details of the ECO, here are a few of the specifics, some of which are still “fluid” and changeable. The new denomination will have a mandatory initial per capita of 1% of the church budget. The structure will be “flat” with synods but no General Assembly. Initially, there will be three presbyteries – East, Central and West and presumably, one synod. A

presbytery may be constituted with a minimum of ten congregations and a maximum of 20 congregations. Voting members of presbyteries will be congregations, pastors serving congregations, pastors with validated ministries and honorably retired ministers. All property will be held by the congregation and presbyteries will not be allowed to guarantee loans. ECO will recognize and celebrate the gifts of women for ministry. It will seek membership in the World Communion of Reformed Churches. Its polity (a 30 page "book of order") will not be finalized until an August meeting. Candidates for ministry will be expected to complete an undergraduate degree and ordinarily a master's degree from an accredited seminary. It will reinstitute the office of Assistant Pastor, called either by the session or the pastor/Head of Staff.

The "Theological project" of the ECO (a 12 page document) adopts all Confessions in our current constitution. All officers will be expected to adhere to written "essential tenets" (but only the major points in **bold** and not necessarily the details of each tenet). As with the polity, the theology of the ECO will be unfolding in the future.

I remain committed to the PCUSA not because it is an institution but because it is a vibrant part of the Body of Christ. I firmly believe that our presbytery can continue to lead the way in our denomination with outstanding adaptive leadership and missional focus. Even at the FOP, I heard from numerous people that the Presbytery of New Covenant is one of the healthiest presbyteries in our denomination. I am blessed to be in partnership with you as we seek to take the gospel into all the world. To God be the glory!

In Christ's service,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mike Cole". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed text "In Christ's service,".