

# #1

## Restoring and Guarding our Diversity

We, the Session of Desert Hills Presbyterian Church, Carefree, AZ, overture the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly to:

- 1) Rescind the “Social Creed for the Twenty-First Century” and all related actions, including but not limited to publicity material, curriculum development, and directives to the General Assembly Council, Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, the Washington Office and others.
- 2) Amend “**G-4.0403 Full Participation**” in the Book of Order by adding the words *social and political* so that it reads as follows [current wording Bold; words to be added in Italics]:

**The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall give full expression to the rich diversity within its membership and shall provide means which will assure a greater inclusiveness leading to wholeness in its emerging life. Persons of all racial ethnic groups, different ages, both sexes, various disabilities, diverse geographical areas, different theological, *social and political* positions consistent with the Reformed tradition, as well as different marital conditions (married, single, widowed, or divorced) shall be guaranteed full participation and access to representation in the decision making of the church. (G-4.0403)**

Or if nFOG is approved, insert the words *social and political* in 1.0403 to read as follows:  
**The unity of believers in Christ is reflected in the rich diversity of the Church’s membership. In Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God unites persons through baptism regardless of race, ethnicity, age, sex, disability, geography or theological, *social or political* conviction.**

### Our Rationale for Rescinding the Social Creed:

The Book of Order states, “The church in its witness to the uniqueness of the Christian faith is called to mission and must be responsive to diversity in both the church and the world” (G-4.0400). As the “Social Creed for the Twenty-First Century” is currently stated, it limits the ability of particular churches, presbyteries and others to be responsive to the diversity within their own membership and communities. In establishing for the next one hundred years “a synopsis of current policy,” the social creed inhibits the ability of future generations to be responsive to yet unforeseen concerns and to adapt with the changing times.

The “Social Creed for the Twenty-First Century” must be rescinded. This will affirm that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is truly open to a diversity of social views that are equally valid as Presbyterian. The “Five Fundamentals” (Bodily Resurrection of Jesus, Virgin Birth, validity of Jesus’ Miracles, the Inerrancy of Scripture, and Christ’s death on the cross for human sin) were rescinded in the 1920’s, not as a sign of rejecting the five beliefs, but as a sign of openness to broader perspectives on these “great facts and doctrines.” (Auburn Affirmation) So, too, the rescinding of the Social Creed is not a rejection of the views it presents, but a declaration of openness to broader perspectives on social issues within the Presbyterian family of faith. Are we still committed to a vision begun in the 1920’s of being an inclusive “Big Tent” denomination?

## **Our Reasons for Changing G-4.0403 in the Book of Order:**

The fact is that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is now composed of individuals and groups that hold a wide variety of views and even contrary views on social issues. As a result, when the General Assembly makes a Statement of Policy or Resolution on a Social Witness matter, it inevitably offends someone and some group within the denomination. One's reputation in the world and an allegiance to the denomination are inevitably bound to the General Assembly's social witness policies and resolutions. In addition, they dictate where the limited resources of the denomination will be directed. For those who disagree with the Policy or Resolution, it gives rise to the question, "Well if that's what Presbyterians' believe, how then can I/we be part of them? I don't want to financially support this agenda."

The Book of Order states that "The church is called: to a new openness to its own membership, by affirming itself as a community of diversity, becoming in fact as well as in faith a community of women and men of all ages, races, and conditions, and by providing for inclusiveness as a visible sign of the new humanity" (G-3.0401b). The "Social Creed for the Twenty-First Century" unnecessarily inhibits membership in particular churches because those interested in membership, who hold differing views on social and political policies, are reluctant to or refuse to affiliate with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Providing such inclusiveness on non-essentials is required to address the declining trends of denominational membership and giving.

Surely, if we are open to "different theological positions consistent with the Reformed tradition" (G-4.0403), we can "assure a greater inclusiveness" of different social and political positions consistent with that Tradition.

The "Social Creed for the Twenty-First Century" has accomplished a division among us. Looking at just the article on "universal, accessible, and affordable healthcare," and then looking at our society as a whole, one could anticipate the division. Other articles of the Social Creed are equally exclusionary of other perspectives. And for some, the absolute silence of the Social Creed on certain matters is troubling. "Why wasn't our historic understanding of marriage put into the Social Creed if all these others are historic positions?"

The General Assembly has the responsibility to guard this openness and inclusivity because our natural tendency is to want a church of like-minded people. Amending G-4.0403 by adding the words "social and political" will help ensure the full expression of our richly diverse memberships.

## #2

# Amending the Process for Establishing Social Witness Policy and Resolutions

**We, the Session of Desert Hills Presbyterian Church, Carefree, AZ, overture the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly to:**

- 1) Amend the process for forming social policy spoken to the world in the appropriate section of the Book of Order or the New Form of Government to read “All Policy Statements or Resolutions on Social Witness approved by the General Assembly shall be sent to all the Presbyteries for study and ratification by a majority. ”
- 2) Direct the Mission Council of the General Assembly to add the following step to the process by which Policy Statements and Resolutions on Social Witness are approved: “Once a Policy Statement or Resolution on Social Witness is approved by the General Assembly it shall be sent to all the Presbyteries for study and ratification by a majority.”

### **Our Rationale:**

Policy Statements establish the fundamental principles that guide the denomination’s social witness whereas Resolutions apply existing policy statements to new circumstances -- both of which are the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) speaking **to** the world for us all. Study Documents, Social Involvement Reports, and Advice and Counsel Memorandums are not included as they are the church speaking **to** itself.

Ownership is what is being sought by The Advisory Committee on Social Witness as it seeks and receives feedback from congregations during the study process and from the Synod Consultation on its initial paper. However, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness can make changes as it develops its final draft and sends it to the General Assembly. In addition, the General Assembly through amendments or a substitute motion may significantly change a Policy Statement or Resolution before it is finally approved. Commissioners to the General Assembly may also present a commissioner’s resolution on Social Witness that has not benefited from the feedback of congregations or the input from a Synod consultation. Therefore, the ownership of the final Policy Statement or Resolution is currently limited to a single General Assembly.

While Social Witness Policy Statements and Resolutions are not binding on the conscience of individual members within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), one’s reputation in the world and an allegiance to the denomination are inevitably bound to the General Assembly’s social witness policies and resolutions. In addition, they dictate where the limited resources of the denomination will be directed. Requiring General Assembly approved Policy Statements or Resolutions to be sent to the Presbyteries for study and ratification by a majority, assures that the end product is truly owned by a broader part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

It increases awareness of our Social Witness as each Presbytery engages in study prior to voting. Even if the Policy Statement or Resolution is not ratified by the presbyteries, the process has brought us to a better understanding of the issues.

In addition, requiring ratification by the Presbyteries strengthens the voice of those who advocate on our behalf the Policy Statement or Resolution in society, government, and law. It assures that curriculum and other materials developed by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are based upon convictions more broadly held within the denomination rather than merely the views of a single General Assembly. It establishes a greater stability to our Social Witness without having a single General Assembly being able to undo or redirect our voice and efforts.

Finally, the ratification process provides the checks and balances that are needed as we direct the use of the limited resources of time, talent, and treasure within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The need for healthy particular churches is essential to the fulfillment of the Great Ends of the Church. The average number of new churches started in a year has decreased from 40 to 20 since the inception of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), a 50% reduction. In addition, General Assembly support for Native American churches within our denomination has been decreasing and will completely be eliminated by 2013. Where do we need the resources? Since these decisions directly affect the ability of Presbyteries and particular churches to fulfill the Great Ends of the Church in their particular context, a ratification process is logical and necessary.

Surely we can be the “Church Reformed, Always Reforming” in how we establish Social Witness and not limit ourselves by the seven deadly words of the church: “We’ve never done it that way before.” Let us strengthen our Social Witness by making it **our** witness.

### #3

## Key Christian Principles for Social Witness

**We, the Session of Desert Hills Presbyterian Church, Carefree, AZ, overture the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly to adopt the following Key Christian Principles for Social Witness and to direct the Mission Council to amend its processes to include the “Key Christian Principles for Social Witness.”**

The Church’s Social Witness is made:

- In response to God’s love for a fallen world. (Jn. 3:16)
- In obedience to Jesus’ command to “love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mt. 22:39)
- And in the power of the Holy Spirit to make us witnesses to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

Therefore, we shall be guided by the following key Christian Principles:

- Scripture Alone** - (G-2.0400) (Bk of Conf. 6.004) (nFOG F-2.04)
  - All scripture is inspired by God and is the only rule of faith and manners. (II Tim. 3:16, II Pt. 1:20-21; G-1.0307)
  - Where the Scriptures speak with clarity and consistency, our social witness is called to show forth with equal clarity and consistency. (Jn. 14:21)
  - We shall live out what we know while waiting for God to bring clarity to our disagreements. (Phil. 3:15-16)
- Christ Alone** – (G-1.0100, 1,a; -3.0102; -3.0300, b) (Bk of Conf. 4.020, 6.039, 6.089, 7.142) (nFOG F-1.0201, 1.0205)
  - All authority in heaven and earth is given to Jesus Christ who alone is Lord and Savior. (Mt. 28:18; Acts 4:12; G-1.0100.a)
  - Our social witness shall proclaim no other Lord or Savior than Jesus Christ, and call women and men to salvation in His name alone. (Acts 4:12)
  - In Christ’s name alone we shall bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free. (Lk.4:18)
- Grace Alone** – (G-2.0400) (Bk of Conf. 5.107) (nFOG F-2.04)
  - It is only by God’s free gift of grace in Jesus Christ that we are saved, and not by any work on our part (Eph. 2:8)
  - Mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2:13)
  - Our Social Witness must proclaim in word and deed that salvation in human society is found only where God’s grace triumphs over social justice, yet in such a way as to establish justice.
- Faith Alone** – (G-2.0400) (Bk of Conf. 5.110; 5:114; 10.4, lines 52 - 60) (nFOG F-2.04)
  - It is through faith alone in Jesus Christ that we are justified. (Gal. 2:16)
  - “When the Son of man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8)
  - Our Social Witness will demonstrate our faith in the Lord and in the Holy Spirit working in the lives of others.
- Glorify to God Alone** – (G-2.0500, G-3.0400) (Bk of Conf. 6.088; 9.53, 10.1) (nFOG F-2.05)
  - “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory...” (Ps. 115:1)
  - “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” (Mt. 5:16)

- iii. Our Social Witness shall not focus on self-promotion or our agendas, but the promotion of God's Kingdom and glory.

### **Rationale:**

It was a Commissioner's Resolution approved by the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly that initiated the process that ultimately led to the "Social Creed for the Twenty-First Century." The Commissioner's Resolution called for "key Christian principles to guide 21<sup>st</sup> century Presbyterians and others in addressing major and likely future concerns." The Resolution sought broad principles that could be applied in current as well as unforeseen future concerns, but instead this Social Creed is merely "a synopsis of existing policy."

Rather than providing a framework of principles to assist future generations in their discernment around social issues, this Social Creed locks the Denomination into holding select current positions for the next 100 years, thereby barring future generations from the discernment process. Let us establish "key Christian principles" that can be used by Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods and others who wrestle with social concerns in their own context and time.

"Quality public education for all" is no more a key Christian principle than "quality religious education for all." "Universal, affordable, and accessible healthcare" is no more a key Christian principle than "free market healthcare providers." Immigration that starts with "keeping families together" is no more a key Christian Principle than immigration that starts with "respect for internationally recognized borders." Each of these may be a conclusion an individual comes to using Christian principles, but they are not the Key Christian Principles. The mandate approved by the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly was not fulfilled.

We caution others and ourselves that too often we take the name of the Lord our God in vain when we attach it to our agendas and causes. Having our political views cloaked in the garment of the Kingdom of God enables us to ignore, discount, and discredit all other views. When we do so, we free ourselves from the Christian responsibility of being quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger. We believe that the diversity of political opinions is healthy to our society and has the potential of producing through civil dialogue something that is better than anything one group alone could produce.

We want to leave principles to our heirs that can be used by others and **not** require that they hold our views on politics. We want to set people free to wrestle for themselves and to reach conclusions on their own. The Social Creed dictates positions that must be held for the next 100 years. We trust the Spirit of God is working in the lives of congregations and individual members to lead them to what is most needed for a Christian witness in their time, context, and circumstances.

Therefore, what was handed down to us, "The Five Solas of the Reformed Tradition," we pass along to each other and future generations as sufficient guides for an effective social witness. These are the essential Key Christian Principles for Social Witness. In making this affirmation, we acknowledge with our fore parents, "Truth is in order to goodness; and the great touchstone of truth, its tendency to promote holiness, according to our Savior's rule, 'By their fruits ye shall know them.'" (G-1.0304)

## #4

# Strengthening the Role of Particular Churches

**We, the Session of Desert Hills Presbyterian Church, Carefree, AZ, overture the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly to:**

- 1) Amend G-7.0102 in the Book of Order by removing the stricken words and adding the italics.

~~**Congregations serve as essential mission arms of the presbytery and of the larger church.**~~  
*The presbytery and the larger church serve as essential mission arms of the congregation.*

Or if nFOG is approved, strike sentence in G-1.0103, which reads, **The members of a congregation put themselves under the leadership of the session and the higher councils (presbytery, synod, and General Assembly).** And replace it with *The leadership of the session and higher councils (presbytery, synod, and General Assembly) exist to serve and support the members of a congregation.*

If nFOG is approved, delete the first sentence in G-1.02, which reads, **A congregation in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) can be organized only by the authority of a presbytery and shall function under the provisions of this Constitution.**

- 2) Establish a Task Force to recommend to the 220<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in 2012 ways to strengthen the role of particular churches in the Presbyterian Church (US.A.) and to recommend changes to the Book of Order, procedural manuals, and other systems. The Task Force shall specifically consider encouraging and empowering particular churches to exercise greater initiative in the following areas:
  - a. The formation of new churches.
  - b. Partnering for the redevelopment and/or revitalization of each other's ministries and witness.
  - c. Ways to welcome a particular church's social witness without making it normative for, or affirmed by, the whole.
  - d. Recommendations that require all Social Witness Policies and Resolutions to provide an impact analysis on particular congregations, church membership, as well as financial implications.
  - e. Review and recommend changes to the Book of Order, denominational manuals, and other procedural documents to empower particular churches.

### **Rationale:**

We find the new Form of Government (nFOG) even more abhorrent as each individual member of a congregation must submit to the hierarchical leadership of the church.

A truly authentic Presbyterian government is driven by particular churches that intentionally connect together through the Holy Spirit for encouragement and support, for effectiveness in witness, for mutual accountability, and praise to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. When the first Presbyterians arrived in the American Colonies it was local communities of faith that drove everything. It was not a presbytery that started the particular churches, but the particular churches that started the presbyteries. It was not a

General Assembly that directed or coordinated the Social Witness, but particular churches partnering to witness together to society. Presbyteries, Synods, and the General Assembly were created to extend the reach of the mission arms of the particular churches. The essential heart of the Presbyterian Church (USA) is particular churches striving together in diverse contexts to fulfill the Great Ends of the Church.

We live in changing times, in which the local church and higher governing bodies are in need of finding new ways of being together. The last thing we need is to lock ourselves in with the phrase, “That is not our historic way of being Presbyterian.” The fact is that our society and with it our denomination are far more diverse than at any other time in history. We need to be more responsive to this diversity. (G-4.0401)

One way to resolve the struggles among our diverse views and ministries is to emphasize our hierarchal nature. This approach, which is currently being followed, brings resolution by having decisions made from the top down declaring what will be “Presbyterian.” The Social Creed for the Twenty-First Century is but one of several recent decisions that testifies to this desire for greater conformity and like-mindedness without concern for the impact on particular churches.

Another approach is to recognize an older vision of what it means to be Presbyterian. In this model the particular church carries a vital responsibility in the mission of the church. (G-7.0102) The major role of the higher governing body is to empower particular churches to carry out the Great Ends of the Church in their unique context. (G-1.0200) It requires the recognition that the particular churches are not the arms of the higher governing bodies, but that the higher governing bodies are meant to support and extend the arms of the particular churches under their care.

In addition to the above change to the Book of Order that affirms and encourages this historically Presbyterian way, a task force needs to be developed to bring additional recommendations to the 2012 General Assembly.

We are especially concerned with the fact that the Book of Order empowers only a Presbytery to start new churches. As a result, church sessions and mission committees seldom discuss ways they can initiate or even participate in new church development. Just as an apple tree produces other apple trees, it should be natural for local churches to start other local churches. It was natural for our congregations when they first arrived in the new world. Our current structure, however, has produced too many sterile congregations.

A similar approach is taken with congregational redevelopment and revitalization, which is seen as the responsibility of the Presbytery. Rather than healthy congregations in a presbytery coming alongside a struggling church, the task is given to a committee of the presbytery. Ministry is best learned when it is modeled and engaged in together rather than learned in a conference or seminar. Iron sharpens iron.

Particular churches are to be social witnesses responding to the diversity within their membership and communities. As a result, there are within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) a wide variety of social witness activities that may be appropriate within their context but disruptive to the witness within another community. When higher governing bodies “affirm” or “adopt” a particular church’s social witness, at times it hinders the social witness of another particular church. A way needs to be found to welcome or recognize, without necessarily “affirming” or “adopting,” the social witness of a particular church. This applies only if the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) still desires to be a “Big Tent Denomination.”

Currently, recommendations to the General Assembly are to be accompanied with a financial cost assessment. It seems that the assessment should also include how the proposal will impact the membership and ministries of local congregations. Will this strengthen and empower the local churches or will it adversely impact their membership and ministry? The General Assembly will make its decisions informed of the implications to the overall life of the particular churches.