

EPC to vote on non-geographical, transitional presbytery to receive New Wineskins churches

Report: PCUSA 'compromised its own confessions and constitution'

By Craig M. Kibler

Staff Writer

The Layman Online

Tuesday, January 16, 2007

A new report by the New Wineskins Association of Churches says that the Evangelical Presbyterian Church will vote in June on establishing a transitional, non-geographic presbytery to receive those churches that disaffiliate from the Presbyterian Church (USA).

A strategy team, established by delegates to the New Wineskins Association of Churches' convocation in Tulsa in July 2006, [issued a report](#) that will be reviewed during the group's Winter Convocation, which is scheduled Feb. 8-9 at First Presbyterian Church in Orlando.

"In order to fulfill the mission of the Church of serving the Kingdom of God by proclaiming and adhering to Biblical truth, which we believe obedience to Christ requires of His disciples," the report's authors say, "we are compelled to recommend the Biblical solution of separation from our present denomination.

The report says this recommendation for "graceful disaffiliation" is due to historical, Biblical, spiritual, missional, congregational, legal and strategic reasons, and that, "It is time for those who are ready to realign with an evangelical, Reformed body that is more faithful to Christ, obedient to Scripture and seeks a missionally-focused partnership with us than what we presently experience in the PCUSA."

The 155-page report offers a range of options – both for congregations that wish to stay within the PCUSA and those that wish to align with the EPC – and includes a "concrete and comprehensive" examination of Biblical, spiritual, missional, congregational, strategic and legal considerations, including the request for dismissal of a congregation from its presbytery.

"We believe that this report gives specific and strategic steps that a congregation can take, whether it prayerfully is called to remain or realign," New Wineskins Association of Churches' co-moderators D. Dean Weaver and Gerrit Scott Dawson wrote in a cover letter to the report.

"We believe it is time to implement the strategy our Lord has given us to transform the world. It is time for an Acts 1:8 Church!" they write. "It is time for a church whose members are being equipped as missionaries; sent by God to live and proclaim the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ in their own world. It is time for a reproducing community of authentic disciples. It is time to be united with those who confess Biblical truth through a polity that serves Christ's mission, which is the Great Commission."

Winter Convocation scheduled

The New Wineskins Association of Churches will hold its Winter Convocation on Feb. 8-9 in Orlando, Fla.

The convocation will be held at [First Presbyterian Church in Orlando](#), with the Rev. Dr. Sameh Maurice as the preacher and teacher. More complete information is available on the [Web site of the association](#).

The PCUSA, the report says, "compromised its own confessions and constitution" at the 217th General Assembly in Birmingham by receiving a report on the Trinity and approving the report of the Task Force on Peace, Unity and Purity.

By these actions, the PCUSA "embraced a *de facto* confessional position which encourages the worship of a god unknown in the Scriptures, a god of man's own making whose names appeal to the sensibilities of contemporary philosophy, politics and a culture that asks the Church to validate rather than redeem that culture," the report says, adding:

"It also adopted an authoritative interpretation of the *Book of Order* that, while affirming the existence of standards for ordination, takes the step of making the enforcement of those standards optional on the local level. This new reality allows local judicatories to determine that such departure from revealed truth is a non-essential for ordination."

Clear teaching of the Scriptures

The report charges that the denomination now allows ministers, elders, deacons and, "by logical extension, church members to embrace beliefs that are inconsistent with the clear teaching of the Scriptures and the doctrines from our own *Book of Confessions*. We now believe that the PCUSA has eroded Reformed orthodoxy and Presbyterian practice to a point where the collective conscience of many no longer allows us to remain aligned with this thinking."

If the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, during its General Assembly June 20-23, votes to establish transitional, non-geographic presbyteries, the New Wineskins Association of Churches will petition the General Assembly to create a New Wineskins presbytery, overseen by a General Assembly Commission, that will be authorized to "immediately receive" New Wineskins churches into that presbytery.

Four key points about this presbytery, according to the report:

- It will be self-governing under the New Wineskins Constitution. It shall have authority, for example, to ordain, install, receive and dismiss pastors.
- New Wineskins pastors and staff shall be eligible to participate immediately in the EPC's pension and medical plans.
- Each New Wineskins church will own its own property and will elect and ordain elders and deacons from the members of its own congregations.
- The presbytery shall have the authority to plant churches.

In addition, a General Assembly Commission – comprised of New Wineskins and EPC members – will work "collaboratively on the strategy and actions that will establish an evangelical, missional stream of Reformed Presbyterianism. We believe this will become the new thing the Father has ordained, and we have been led by the Spirit to pursue."

Saying that the New Wineskins churches' stand at a "historic juncture" their relationship with the PCUSA, the report includes several references to [documents](#) known as "The Louisville Papers," two strategy papers in which the denomination's "leadership secretly advised presbyteries to take harsh and un-Biblical action against churches suspected of considering the possibility of disaffiliation. Such actions included personal attacks on pastors and elders, as well as pre-emptive moves to seize control of congregations and their property."

These documents and Advisory Opinion #19, the report says, "has increased the erosion of trust between congregations and the PC(USA). Congregations and individual members no longer feel secure in their own

churches, the one place in a troubled world that ought to be a sanctuary of peace and confidence."

"For years we have mourned our denomination's unfaithfulness and we have grieved its actions," the report says, concluding that there are "two faithful options" for evangelicals:

- To realign with an evangelical, Reformed body that is more faithful to Christ, obedient to Scripture and seeks a missionally-focused partnership with us than is the PCUSA.
- To stay in place within the PCUSA while working for the Reformation and renewal of that part of the Body of Christ if so led by the Holy Spirit.

The PCUSA, or any other denomination, is not the Church, the report says, adding:

"When denominational polity, procedure, practice and devotion depart from Scriptural injunctions, we are conscience-bound to correct it. If we are unable to do so, we must unyoke ourselves from that man-made entity and once again turn our hearts to Christ's Church."

Craig M. Kibler is the Director of Publications for the Presbyterian Lay Committee and Executive Editor of The Layman and The Layman Online. He can be reached at cmkibler@layman.org.

[Respond to this article](#)

[Home](#) ▪ [Archives](#) ▪ [The Layman](#) ▪ [PLC Publications](#)
[Presbyterian Lay Committee](#) ▪ [Feedback](#) ▪ [Links](#)