

1. General Principles of Presbyterian Polity

A. Key Resources

1. Gray & Tucker Presbyterian Polity for Church Officers, 3rd Ed. Foreword, Intro. & pp 1-11

B. Key Concepts

1. Definition of Polity – the system of rules that governs a church
2. Three kinds of Polity
 - a. Congregational – government of the church by the people. Each local church is autonomous. No binding connectional relationships and no higher governing bodies. Based on an early church model
 - b. Episcopal – government of the church by the highest ranking bishop, delegated downward through the clergy. Based on apostolic succession.
 - c. Presbyterian – government by presbyters of the church: elders and ministers of Word and Sacrament. Government is exercised by groups of presbyters and not by individual. There is no hierarchy of presbyters; elders and ministers are equals only differing in function.
3. Fundamentals of Presbyterian Polity
 - a. Representative
 - b. Constitutional
 - c. Relational
4. Powers and Responsibilities of Governing Bodies
 - a. The power that the church exercises rightfully comes from Jesus Christ. [G-1.0100a]
 - b. The power of the church is strictly that of moral and spiritual influence. [G-9.0102a, G-1.0308]
 - c. The particular powers of governing bodies are only those stated in the Constitution. [G-9.0102b]
5. Core Theological Affirmations behind our polity
 - a. The Covenant
 - divine initiative in relationship to God's people. God chooses us
 - nature of faith is a community bound together, in relationship with each other
 - b. The Law
 - An orderly means for the people of God to live together in grace
 - Thus, the Book of Order is not an operations manual but a way of becoming the community of faith together.
 - Leaders study and implement the Book of Order to safeguard and guide the community of faith
 - c. Sin
 - Sin is pervasive even in the lives of well intended believers. Indeed the church is not immune to the ravages of sin.
 - Therefore, the need for "*ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*" – the church reformed, always being reformed. The Book of Order makes provision for minority voices and room for the prophetic voice in our church polity.
 - The temptation for the corruption of individual power has lead the church to adopt a policy of not vesting too much power in any one individual. Thus, decision making is vested in governing boards.
 - d. Called to Serve
 - Our sense of gratitude for God's grace sends us out into the world in mission.
 - Corporate sense of community suggests that when the whole of the church participates in the mission of a particular part.
 - e. The Sovereignty of God
 - God freely chose to create the world and redeem humankind.
 - Therefore, all authority rightly belongs to God.
 - All out sources of power and authority are derivative.
 - God alone is Lord of the conscience. {Westminster 6.109}. God alone has claim to our complete obedience. As seen throughout history, God's will may be communicated directly to particular people and communities of faith. This enables the church to stand within the living tradition of the church all the while seeking to change a particular, historically bound interpretation of the tradition, including scripture.

2. Head of the Church

A. Key Resources

1. Book of Order G-1.0100

B. Book of Order

1. Christ is the Head of the Church
 - *All power in heaven and earth is given to Jesus Christ by Almighty God, who raised Christ from the dead and set him above all rule and authority, all power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. God has put all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and has made Christ Head of the Church, which is his body. [G-1.0100a]*
2. Christ Calls the Church into Being
 - *Christ calls the Church into being, giving it all that is necessary for its mission to the world, for its building up, and for its service to God. Christ is present with the Church in both Spirit and Word. It belongs to Christ alone to rule, to teach, to call, and to use the Church as he wills, exercising his authority by the ministry of women and men for the establishment and extension of his Kingdom. [G-1.0100b]*
3. Christ Gives the Church Its Faith and Life, as set forth in Scripture
 - *Christ gives to his Church its faith and life, its unity and mission, its officers and ordinances. Insofar as Christ's will for the Church is set forth in Scripture, it is to be obeyed. In the worship and service of God and the government of the church, matters are to be ordered according to the Word by reason and sound judgment, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. [G-1.0100c]*
4. Christ is the Church's Authority
 - *In affirming with the earliest Christians that Jesus is Lord, the Church confesses that he is its hope and that the Church, as Christ's body, is bound to his authority and thus free to live in the lively, joyous reality of the grace of God. [G-1.0100d]*

3. The Great Ends of the Church

A. Key Resources

1. Book of Order G-1.0200

B. Book of Order

The great ends of the church are:

1. The proclamation of the gospel for the salvation for humankind;
2. the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God;
3. the maintenance of divine worship;
4. the preservation of the truth;
5. the promotion of social righteousness;
6. and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

4. Historic Principles of Church Order

A. Key Resources

1. Book of Order G-1.10300

B. Book of Order

1. God alone is Lord of the Conscience [G-1.10301]
2. Each Christian Church has rights to its own polity [G-1.10302]
3. Officers bound by truth and duty [G-1.10303]
4. Truth leads to right duty; faith to right practice [G-1.10304]
5. Mutual forbearance in differing views [G-1.10305]
6. Officers are elected by the people [G-1.10306]
7. Church power is ministerial and declarative: [G-1.10307]
 - a. Holy Scriptures is only rule of faith and manners
 - b. No Church governing body can bind the conscience
 - c. All decision should be founded on the revealed will of God
8. Ecclesiastical discipline must be moral and spiritual, not attended with any civil effects [G-1.10308]

5. The Historic Principles of Church Government

A. Key Resources

1. Book of Order G.-1.0400

B. Book of Order

Fundamental and Basic Principles of Church Government based on example of apostles and early church

1. Church is made up of different congregations
 - *That the several different congregations of believers, taken collectively, constitute one Church of Christ, called emphatically the Church; [G.-1.0400]*
2. Larger part of Church governs the smaller
 - *that a larger part of the Church, or a representation of it, should govern a smaller, or determine matters of controversy which arise therein; [G.-1.0400]*
3. Government is representative
 - *that, in like manner, a representation of the whole should govern and determine in regard to every part, and to all the parts united; [G.-1.0400]*
4. Majority governs with appeals from lower to higher governing bodies
 - *that is, that a majority shall govern; and consequently that appeals may be carried from lower to higher governing bodies, till they be finally decided by the collected wisdom and united voice of the whole Church. [G.-1.0400]*

6. The Church and Its Confessions

A. Key Resources

1. Book of Order G.-2.0000

B. Book of Order

1. Purpose of Confessional Statements
 - a. Enables the church to bear witness to God's grace in Jesus Christ to its members and to the world
 - who and what it is,
 - what it believes
 - what it resolves to do [G.-2.0100a]
 - b. Guides the church in its interpretation of the Scriptures [G.-2.0100b]
 - c. Summarizes the essence of Christian Tradition [G.-2.0100b]
 - d. Directs the church in maintaining sound doctrine [G.-2.0100b]
 - e. Equips the church for its work of proclamation [G.-2.0100b]
 2. Central Doctrines in the Confessions – 10 of them
 - a. With the Universal Christian Church, we affirm
 1. Trinity
 2. Incarnation
 - *In its confessions, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) give witness to the faith of the Church catholic. The confessions express the faith of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church in the recognition of canonical Scriptures, and the formulation and adoption of the ecumenical creeds, notably the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds with their definitions of the mystery of the triune God and the incarnation of the eternal Word of God in Jesus Christ. [G-2.0300]*
 - b. With those aligned with the Protestant Reformation, we affirm:
 3. Justification by grace through faith
 4. Scripture as final authority for salvation and life of faith
 - *In its confessions, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) identifies with the affirmations of the Protestant Reformation. The focus of these affirmations is in the rediscovery of God's grace in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures. The Protestant watchwords – grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone – embody principles of understanding which continue to guide and motivate the people of God in the life of faith. [G-2.0400]*
 - c. With those who aligned with the Reformed Tradition, we affirm:
 5. God's Sovereignty
 6. Election for salvation and service
 7. Covenant life
 8. Stewardship
 9. Sin of Idolatry
 10. Transformation of society – seek justice and live in obedience to Word of God
 - *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 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:*
 - (1) *The election of the people of God for service as well as for salvation;*
 - (2) *Covenant life marked by a disciplined concern for order in the church according to the Word of God;*
 - (3) *A faithful stewardship that shuns ostentation and seeks proper use of the gifts of God's creation;*
 - (4) *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.*
- Thus, the creeds and confessions of this church reflect a particular stance within the history of God's people. They are the result of prayer, thought, and experience within a living tradition. They serve to strengthen personal commitment and the life and witness of the community of believers. [G-2.0500]*