

March 8, 2018

TO: All Entities and Individuals of the Presbytery of Mackinac
CC: Members of the Synod of the Covenant Administrative Commission for the Presbytery of Mackinac
RE: Coordinating Council Action on Behalf of the Presbytery

As part of the leadership of the presbytery one of my goals has been, and continues to be, that the presbytery is informed of what is happening. My goal is that actions taken by the Coordinating Council, especially actions taken on behalf of the presbytery, are clearly understood by the presbytery.

There are times when business that needs to be acted upon quickly due to pending deadlines comes to the attention of leadership in the presbytery. For instances such as these, the presbytery has empowered the Coordinating Council to act on its behalf. There was such a piece of business presented to the Coordinating Council at its most recent meeting on Tuesday, March 6, 2018.

The Presbytery of Cincinnati, through their General Presbyter the Reverend Doctor Nancy Kahaian, reached out to the Presbytery of Mackinac to request concurrence on an overture to General Assembly. Each overture that a presbytery wishes to send to General Assembly for consideration requires a concurrence, an endorsement of the overture, from another presbytery. The Presbytery of Cincinnati was seeking concurrence on the overture that's included with this letter. To summarize, the overture requests "the 223rd General Assembly (2018) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to establish an Administrative Commission to address disorder in the Synod of the Covenant." There are multiple allegations of disorder within the overture including: "failure to adequately support the ministry and mission of its presbyteries, failure to adequately facilitate communication with and among its presbyteries, and loss of trust and mutuality between the Synod and its constituent presbyteries." There are additional allegations of disorder that you can read more fully in the overture itself.

Ideally, this concurrence would come from the presbytery directly. However, this overture has financial implications (funding needed for the commission) and therefore, from what I understand, is due to the Office of the General Assembly 90 days before the assembly convenes. The assembly convenes on Saturday, June 16, 2018 which means that the 90-day deadline is Friday, March 16, 2018. Due to this deadline, the council decided to act on behalf of the presbytery in this matter.

After much discussion, the council voted to concur with the overture from the Presbytery of Cincinnati. This was not an easy conclusion at which to arrive, it was not reached without a lot of debate, and it was not a unanimous decision. The motion to concur passed by a vote of seven in favor and five against. Having concurred with the overture, the Presbytery of Mackinac can send one individual to General Assembly as an overture advocate, someone "to provide information on the background and intent of the overture to the assembly committee to which the overture is referred." Again, due to time constraints, the council completed this action on behalf of the presbytery and elected me to serve as the overture advocate.

I wanted to make you aware of this action as soon as possible. As previously stated, the language of the overture and the Presbytery of Cincinnati's rationale for the overture are included with this letter. If you have any questions or concerns, I urge you to contact me. It is my goal to continue to lead with openness and honesty and so I welcome your thoughts and input. I also ask that you keep the council, the synod, the administrative commission we're working with, and the General Assembly in prayer, that we may continue to be guided by the Spirit in all that we do.

Grace and Peace,

Rev. Jessica L. Paulsen
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ON APPOINTING AN ADMINISTRATIVE COMMISSION FOR THE SYNOD OF THE COVENANT

The Presbytery of Cincinnati overtures the 223rd General Assembly (2018) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to establish an Administrative Commission to address disorder in the Synod of the Covenant, as provided in G-3.0109b(5) of the *Book of Order* and Standing Rule K.2. of the *Manual of the General Assembly*. The Commission, which shall consist of not fewer than seven (7) persons appointed by the Moderator (or Co-Moderators), shall:

1. Conduct Special Administrative Review (G-3.0108b; Standing Rule K.2.) for the purpose of inquiring into and settling the following allegations of disorder:
 - a. Failure to determine a satisfactory method to fulfill the principles of participation and representation found in F-1.0403 and G-3.0103 in proposed amendments to the by-laws of the Synod, or adequately to consult with the presbyteries and racial-ethnic caucuses of the Synod in the preparation of said by-laws;
 - b. Failure to adequately support the ministry and mission of its presbyteries as they seek to support the witness of congregations (G-3.0401);
 - c. Failure to adequately facilitate communication with and among its presbyteries (G-3.0401a);
 - d. Failure to adequately exercise pastoral care among its presbyteries in order that the synod may live in the unity represented in the Sacraments (G-3.0401b);
 - e. Conflict between the Synod Executive and the Racial-Ethnic Caucuses of the Synod, and with the Cabinet on Ethnic Church Affairs of the Synod;
 - f. Loss of trust and mutuality between the Synod and its constituent presbyteries;
 - g. Loss of trust and mutuality between the Synod Executive and multiple presbyteries of the Synod;
 - h. Loss of trust and mutuality between the Synod Executive and the elected and/or administrative leadership of multiple presbyteries of the Synod.
2. In its exercise of Special Administrative Review, and in consultation with the Personnel Services Committee of the Synod, conduct a comprehensive performance review of the Synod Executive, including feedback from Commissioners, Synod Staff, Racial-Ethnic Caucuses, Presbyteries, Presbytery Executives, and others as it may determine helpful to its task; and to direct the Synod regarding the remediation of performance deficiencies, which may include recommendation to terminate employment if it deems the mission of the Synod imperatively demands it.
3. Have full authority to enforce the findings and recommendations of its Special Administrative Review, granting fair notice and an opportunity to be heard to all parties. The process for termination of employment, if recommended, shall conform to the Personnel Policies of the Synod in effect at the time the request for Special Administrative Review was initially filed.
4. Refer to judicial process any irregularities or offenses it may discover in the conduct of its review that cannot be remedied through administrative review.

RATIONALE

The Synod of the Covenant is experiencing serious conflict and dysfunction. At its August 2017 Synod Assembly, amendments to the Synod By-Laws were introduced which would have the effect of disempowering and marginalizing the racial-ethnic caucuses of the Synod from the decision-making processes of the Synod. These by-laws were constructed and presented with little, if any, consultation with the persons directly affected, and with no

consultation with the presbyteries of the Synod. The given rationale was that "When a synod meets, it shall be composed of commissioners elected by the presbyteries" (G-3.0401), disregarding the Synod's obligation stated in the very same paragraph, "[to] determine a plan for the election of commissioners to the synod, *as well as the method to fulfill the principles of participation and representation found in F-1.0403 and G-3.0103; both plans shall be subject to approval by a majority of the presbyteries in the synod*" (emphasis added). The proposed by-laws have never been distributed to the presbyteries, nor are they available on the Synod website. The process seems set up to exclude the very voices synods are charged to protect. The proposed by-laws remove racial-ethnic voices from the council commissioned to make decisions for the body between Assemblies, on which persons elected by the Synod (as opposed to the presbyteries) may legally serve (see Request 90-1, Minutes, 1990, Part I, p. 254).

The process for the proposed amendments to the by-laws reinforces perceptions that they are a response to ongoing conflict between the Synod Executive and the racial-ethnic caucuses of the Synod which comprise the Cabinet for Ethnic Church Affairs (CECA). In defending the proposed by-laws at the August 2017 meeting, the Synod Executive allegedly accused those registering objections as being "greedy for power."

In addition, the qualities of trust and mutuality in the relationships between the presbyteries and the Synod, and presbytery leaders and the Synod Executive, have strained to the point of breaking. The Presbytery of Mackinac was recently blindsided by a request for a called meeting of the Synod to appoint an administrative commission to take original jurisdiction of the presbytery without any prior consultation or inquiry. Only threatened ecclesiastical suits alleging a violation of due process prompted the presentation of a substitute motion limiting the Commission's powers to inquiry only. No rationale, other than the receipt of four anonymous letters – the contents of which were withheld – were presented for the motion in the call.

Several presbyteries, including Maumee Valley, Scioto Valley, and Detroit have withdrawn some or all of their participation in the life of the Synod. Serious conflicts exist between several presbytery executives and the Synod Executive. Recently all five female presbytery executives refused to participate in an executive forum because of conflicts or concerns involving the synod executive.

There are serious, chronic problems in the dissemination of information from the synod to presbyteries and their leaders. Some presbytery executives have been told directly that they are not permitted at Synod Assemblies. Information regarding the timing and location of upcoming Assemblies, as well as agendas and supporting documents, are neither sent to the executives nor posted on the synod website.

At the November 2017 meeting of the Synod, the Personnel Services Committee indicated they had conducted a job performance review of the Synod Executive and a pay raise was being recommended to the Synod on the basis of that review. Email correspondence documentation indicates that the Personnel Services Committee did not meet in 2017, in direct contrast to their report filed in November 2017.

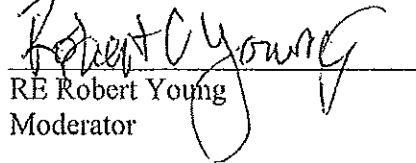
In November 2017, a question was publicly posed to the Chair of the Personnel Services Committee during a Synod meeting, inquiring if that committee would be willing to meet with the presbytery executives of the Synod of the Covenant. A direct response was deferred. The question was presented on additional occasions in email communication subsequent to the November 2017 Synod meeting, and the response from a Synod officer indicated it was inappropriate to make such a request. In addition, in December 2017, a Presbytery Executive

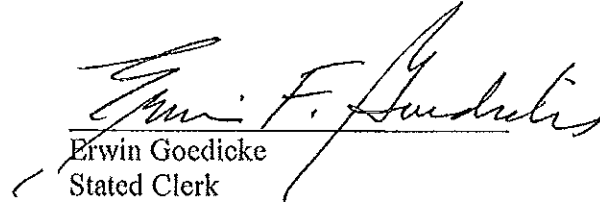
requested a meeting between Presbytery Executives and the Synod Executive, and that direct invitation was refused by the Synod Executive.

Due to the severity of the issues involved, we believe time is of the essence in conducting this review.

Adopted by the Presbytery of Cincinnati at its stated meeting held in at Madeira-Silverwood Presbyterian Church, Cincinnati, Ohio, on Saturday, February 24, 2018.

Attest:


RE Robert Young
Moderator


Erwin Goedicke
Stated Clerk