

February 14, 2020

We write on behalf of the Administrative Commission formed by the 223<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly to address allegations of disorder in the Synod of the Covenant, which has engaged in a special administrative review of various aspects of the history and operations of the Synod of the Covenant and its relationship with its presbyteries and others within its boundaries. The AC has conducted individual listening sessions and held a hearing regarding actions under consideration. The AC now has made several decisions and taken action as a result of its review. This message is to communicate the AC's recent actions.

Prior to its hearing the AC has met with most of the senior leadership of the Synod, both individually and collectively as the Moderators' Committee. The AC reached out to and heard from interested persons within the Synod (current and former Commissioners, leaders, and executive staff) and its constituent Presbyteries. The AC conducted oral interviews and also received written comments. It also attended the Synod Annual Meeting in November 2019.

The AC has reviewed several thousand pages of documents. Materials were provided to the AC for its review by the Synod, Presbyteries, and individuals, and included the Synod bylaws, its Manual of Operations, the Synod Assembly minutes, minutes of the Moderators' Committee and of some other committees of the Synod, and internal and external correspondence and emails. The AC also examined the Synod website.

In its proceedings the AC has been guided by "*Seeking to Be Faithful Together*," a document adopted by the 204<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in 1992 and which serves as a resource for Presbyterians in times of disagreement. The AC commends this document to the Synod and its constituencies as they collectively move forward towards reconciliation and healing. A central aspect of *Seeking to Be Faithful Together* is for the parties to seek to stay in community with each other, even in the presence of tension and strongly held disagreements. This end – which must be held by all parties -- is pursued through mutual respect and trust, and an openness to listening to each other seriously and with a focus on ideas and suggestions.

Based on its review, the AC's findings are:

- Disharmony within the Synod is systemic and long-standing;
- The Synod and its presbyteries hold widely differing and inconsistent perspectives on their relationship and respective roles in common areas of ministry;
- There is a lack of clear, ample, honest, and loving communications;
- Relationships are strained;
- Work styles often clash;
- Policies and procedures are not widely accessible or understood and are unevenly applied;
- Affected parties do not share a common sense of purpose or vision;
- Divisions exist around deeply held organizational values and there is a lack of mutual trust; and
- The parties in conflict have largely disengaged from each other; while this has reduced overt discord, it does not reflect the notion of healthy engagement of all members of the body of Christ.

The Administrative Commission conducted a hearing at which those impacted were given opportunity to speak in an open forum on February 12, 2020. They were invited to address three potential actions under consideration by the AC:

1. The AC engages a Professional Mediator "*to promote reconciliation, healing, and restored unity between synod and its presbyteries.*"
2. The "*AC assumes original jurisdiction of the Synod as deemed necessary by the commission.*"
3. The AC "*recommends revisions to Synod procedures and institutes changes that are necessary to ensure fulfillment of the PC(USA) principles of participation and representation as outlined in F-1.0403 and G-3.0103.*"

We give thanks for all those who have participated in this process. The AC has also considered and inquired of interested parties regarding pathways to reconciliation, especially with the principles of *Seeking to Be Faithful Together* in mind. The AC examined several past instances in which efforts at reconciliation were unsuccessful in attempts to resolve disputes and grievances within the Synod. Those incidents made clear to the AC the need for broad education and reform and for comprehensive and systematic assessment of common goals and building of trusting relationships. In its current configuration, restoration and reconciliation are not possible.

Our discernment includes ceaseless prayers and reflection on scriptural texts, in particular Jeremiah 18:1-6 and 2 Corinthians 5:11-20.

**The Administrative Commission has taken specific actions and made these decisions at its meeting on February 12 and 13:**

1. The Administrative Commission has voted to assume original jurisdiction of the Synod of the Covenant. Therefore, the AC becomes the Synod Assembly replacing the existing commissioners and officers.
2. New officers have been elected and a corporate resolution has registered newly elected officers of the Synod of the Covenant. New Synod committees and moderators are also being elected from among the AC membership, acting as the newly configured Synod of the Covenant.
3. The newly formed Synod will engage a professional mediation consultant in the coming weeks to guide those impacted by the disorder toward healing and reconciliation in order to restore communion.
4. Staff members' service to the Synod of the Covenant has concluded. The AC, acting as the Synod of the Covenant has agreed to offer reasonable severance packages.
5. The Synod will continue to provide for judicial process and administrative review of the presbyteries. Programs and operations are temporarily suspended for a period of 6 months, through August 2020. That includes but is not limited to scheduled Synod assemblies for March, August and November 2020; and Mission to the USA, Mobile Health Fair, Grants and Scholarships, Cabinet on Ethnic Church Affairs (but not the caucuses that support People of Color and Indigenous People).
6. A meeting schedule of the newly constituted Synod Assembly will be published with a goal of transparency and welcome to all who desire unity of spirit and reconciliation.
7. Broad communications processes will be established to keep you all informed as we make progress toward communion.

We see this original jurisdiction as a temporary measure and desire that through healthy reconciliation, and operational stability, the Synod of the Covenant may become what God desires it to be. The AC did not take these steps lightly or easily. We will proceed carefully toward restoring governance of the Synod back to those who will lead into the future, whatever God ordains that to be.

May God bless all who labor with love for God's kingdom,

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The top signature is 'Patrice Hatley' and the bottom signature is 'Brady Radford'. Both are written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patrice Hatley and Brady Radford  
Co-Moderators of the Administrative Commission for the Synod of the Covenant