

## **GUIDELINES FOR DIVIDING PRESBYTERIES**

The following guidelines were updated by MNA and approved at the 41<sup>st</sup> General Assembly.

### **GUIDELINES FOR FORMING NEW PRESBYTERIES THROUGH THE DIVISION OR MULTIPLICATION OF EXISTING PRESBYTERIES**

Background and Direction Provided by *The Book of Order*:

*Book of Church Order* Chapter 14 presents as one of the duties of the General Assembly: “To erect new Presbyteries, and unite and divide those which were erected with their consent;” (14.6.e). Historically, the General Assembly has viewed “with their consent” as the key phrase, and has therefore granted maximum latitude to Presbyteries in this process. Thus the burden falls upon the Presbytery to evaluate her own circumstances and resources in coming to a careful decision to proceed with division.

*Book of Church Order* Chapter 13, *The Presbytery*, describes the composition and duties of the Presbytery. As Presbyteries grow in the number of congregations and membership they include, there may come a time at which division of the Presbytery may be helpful. Of particular note when considering the division of a Presbytery is the list of responsibilities detailed in *BCO* 13-9. On the one hand, Presbyteries should be small enough that these responsibilities are manageable and can be carried out meaningfully. On the other hand, Presbyteries must be sure that they have the resources necessary to fulfill these responsibilities.

The guidelines which follow are presented to assist the Presbytery in evaluating when it may be time to divide, and what factors to take into consideration when making that decision. These guidelines are drawn from experience and observation since the inception of the Presbyterian Church in America.

These guidelines are only guidelines. By the vote of one or (if necessary) more Presbyteries and approval by the General Assembly, Presbyteries may be formed which do not meet these guidelines. In such situations where the guidelines will not be met, Presbyteries are urged to consider carefully whether or not God’s work will be advanced through the formation of the new Presbyteries.

The current Korean language Presbyteries represent an overlay with the English language Presbyteries geographically. The Korean language Presbyteries are geographical Presbyteries, and they are encouraged to follow the same guidelines in division and formation of new Presbyteries.

#### **General Guidelines for Dividing Presbyteries:**

- Consideration of the impact of a Presbytery division on the functions of the Presbytery, especially in her ability to grow and multiply churches:
  - Presbytery boundaries should be such that her member churches have a common commitment to the region within their boundaries and a deep commitment to their shared responsibility to cover the region with the Gospel through evangelism and church planting.
  - A Presbytery should have regional cohesiveness. The Presbytery should have a geographical spread that is as reasonable as possible to facilitate planting churches, encouraging fellowship, participating together in shared ministry and conducting the necessary business of the Presbytery. The specifics of the geographical considerations vary greatly according to density of populations and the number of PCA churches in each population center.
  - Care should be taken to ensure that the resulting new Presbyteries will be strong enough to grow in a healthy way. Toward that end, the burden falls on what will become the stronger

Presbytery to ensure that the weaker will have sufficient resources before moving toward division. The division should proceed only if there is a majority vote in favor of the division in both of the new Presbyteries that will be formed by the division.

- Numeric guidelines:
  - A Presbytery should have a minimum of 10 churches and mission churches.
  - A Presbytery should have a total communicant membership of at least 1,000.
  - A Presbytery should have at least 3 churches each having a membership of at least 125 communicant members.
- If Presbytery boundaries partition metropolitan areas, they should:
  - Follow the Edge City concept, so that each new Presbytery formed has opportunities for church planting that are cohesive within her boundaries.
  - Understand that cooperation across Presbytery boundaries will be necessary in planting churches, since opportunities for planting by one congregation may cross into the bounds of the other Presbytery.
  - Keep the Presbyteries united in some form of (formal or informal) church planting network, so that the resources of both Presbyteries can be utilized for church planting.

### **Counting the Cost: Time, Talent, and Treasure.**

The resources of the Presbytery include the stewardship of the time, talent, and treasure of the current and potential future Presbyteries.

- Care should be taken to ensure that there will be a good distribution of time, talent, and treasure in the new resulting Presbyteries.
- Church planting momentum usually declines following a Presbytery division unless church planting efforts remain coordinated in a formal or informal church planting network that combines the resources of both of the original Presbyteries.
- All essential positions must be replicated in the new Presbytery. Therefore, the number of leadership positions doubles. The additional cost of time, talent and treasure should be counted and carefully considered.

### **Procedures for Division**

- Special care should be taken to ensure that the division of a Presbytery is not made in haste or without adequate consideration of the needs of all parties involved. At the earliest stages of discussion of possible division (including informal discussion), those initiating the discussion:
  - should take care to ensure that all churches and teaching elders (including missionaries and other out of bounds members) who will possibly be affected are fully informed of the discussion as early as possible;
  - should communicate with the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery, who in turn should communicate with the entire Presbytery;
- Should be encouraged to contact General Assembly Mission to North America and the General Assembly Stated Clerk very early in the process as well, for any assistance the Permanent Committees may be able to offer in making a smooth transition and in giving advice that may be helpful to the planning process; and
- Should target the first meeting of a Presbytery in the summer or fall of the year so that they may be able to fully participate in the nominating process of General Assembly without undue delay.