



Centreville Presbyterian Church

Reformed Denominations Team Report  
21 August 2015

Accepted by Session 12 September 2015

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## Executive Summary

Three of the five members of the Reformed Denominations Team recommend seeking dismissal to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, while the other two members of the Reformed Denominations Team recommend seeking dismissal to the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians. All five members of the Reformed Denominations Team agree that both denominations are viable candidates to which CPC can seek dismissal.

## Introduction

At its stated meeting on May 19, 2015, the Session of Centreville Presbyterian Church formed a team to research Reformed denominations to which CPC might request to be dismissed. This Reformed Denominations Team consists of the following individuals:

Rev. J. Robin Bromhead  
John Evans  
Stephen Hiemstra  
Bill Hudspeth  
Mitch Kirsch

In June 2015, Rev. Bromhead requested, and the Session agreed, to change his role on the Reformed Denominations Team from a full participant to the following roles:

1. A consultant for when questions such as "is denomination XYZ's statement of faith reformed?" arise that the Reformed Denominations Team can't answer on its own.
2. The participant in any "pastor to pastor" or "finalist candidate denomination Committee on Ministry to pastor" meetings the Team might engage in with the finalist candidate denominations.
3. A final filter / sanity check to review the finalist candidate denominations identified by the Reformed Denominations Team, and provide his input on the suitability of each finalist candidate denomination.
4. A voting member to cast his vote for which finalist candidate denomination(s) the Reformed Denominations Team will recommend to the Session.

The Reformed Denominations Team met four times (June 29, 2015; July 16, 2015; July 30, 2015; August 13, 2015), and this report documents the Reformed Denominations Team's process, findings, and recommendation to the Session.

## Overview of Process

The process employed by the Reformed Denominations Team can be summarized as follows:

1. Create a list of initial potential candidate denominations, only considering reformed bodies.
2. Create a list of mandatory criteria that each initial potential candidate denomination must pass in order to be considered as a finalist candidate denomination.
3. Create a list of differentiating criteria that each finalist candidate denomination will be evaluated against.
4. Adopt a list of Essential Tenets of the Reformed Tradition.
5. Define Presbyterian Polity.
6. Apply the mandatory criteria against each initial potential candidate denomination to generate the list of finalist candidate denominations.
7. Evaluate each finalist candidate denomination against the differentiating criteria and generate a list of advantages and disadvantages for it.
8. Submit the results of steps 1-7 above to the Session, with the understanding that said results could be one of two forms:
  - a. A single denomination, if only one finalist candidate denomination remained after the mandatory criteria were applied against each initial potential candidate denomination.
  - b. Two or more denominations, each with a list of advantages and disadvantages generated by applying the differentiating criteria against the finalist candidate denomination.

## Results of Process

### 1. List of Initial Potential Candidate Denominations

Since NCP's *Process for Use When a Church Wishes to Disaffiliate from the Presbyterian Church(USA)* states that a church can only be dismissed to another Reformed denomination<sup>1</sup>, only Reformed denominations were considered for inclusion on the list of initial potential candidate denominations. Using two major resources:

- a. *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*  
Frank S. Mead, Samuel S. Hill, and Craig D. Atwood  
Abingdon Press (2010). ISBN 1426700482
- b. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Reformed\\_denominations\\_in\\_North\\_America](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Reformed_denominations_in_North_America)

the following list of initial potential candidate denominations was generated:

Full Name	Abbreviation	Year Founded	Website URL
Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church	ARPC	1803	<a href="http://arpchurch.org/">http://arpchurch.org/</a>
Christian Reformed Church in North America	CRC or CRCNA	1857	<a href="http://www.crcna.org/">http://www.crcna.org/</a>
Cumberland Presbyterian Church	CPC	1810	<a href="http://www.cumberland.org/">http://www.cumberland.org/</a>
Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians	ECO	2012	<a href="http://eco-pres.org/">http://eco-pres.org/</a>
Evangelical Presbyterian Church	EPC	1981	<a href="https://www.epc.org/">https://www.epc.org/</a>
Orthodox Presbyterian Church	OPC	1936	<a href="http://www.opc.org/">http://www.opc.org/</a>
Presbyterian Church (USA)	PC(USA)	1983	<a href="https://www.pcusa.org/">https://www.pcusa.org/</a>
Presbyterian Church in America	PCA	1973	<a href="http://www.pcanet.org/">http://www.pcanet.org/</a>
Reformed Church in America	RCA	1754	<a href="https://www.rca.org/">https://www.rca.org/</a>
Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America	RPCNA	1774	<a href="http://reformedpresbyterian.org/">http://reformedpresbyterian.org/</a>
Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America	CPCA	1874	<a href="http://www.cpcachurch.org/">http://www.cpcachurch.org/</a>
United Reformed Churches in North America	URCNA	1996	<a href="http://www.urchna.org/">http://www.urchna.org/</a>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.thepresbytery.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/NCP-Process-for-Disaffiliation-2-26-14-from-SC.pdf>, section A.5, page 5.

## 2. List of Mandatory Criteria

The following list of mandatory criteria was generated:

1. The denomination shall not prohibit the ordination of women as officers. In addition, if the denomination's stance on women in ministry was that of *local option*, then:
  - a. CPC shall include as an article in its by-laws that it permits the ordination of women to the office of deacon and elder.
  - b. CPC shall be permitted to join a presbytery<sup>2</sup> that permits the ordination of women to the office of minister of Word and Sacrament.
2. The theology of the denomination shall be Calvinism, not Arminianism<sup>3</sup>.
3. The denomination shall be confessionally based.
4. The denomination's constitution shall include its Essential Tenets of the Reformed Faith.
5. The denomination shall be willing to accept CPC if CPC is dismissed to it.
6. The local congregation, not the denomination, shall own all church property and assets.
7. The denomination's Essential Tenets of the Reformed Faith shall agree with CPC's Essential Tenets of the Reformed Faith. In particular, the denomination shall subscribe to:
  - a. The Authority of Scripture
  - b. Jesus Christ as the Only Way of Salvation
8. The denomination shall not support gay/lesbian marriage or ordination.

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<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this report, the words *presbytery* and *classis* are interchangeable.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calvinism> and <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arminianism> for information on how the two theologies differ.

### 3. List of Differentiating Criteria

The following list of differentiating criteria was generated:

1. How does the denomination spend its time during its highest assembly meetings?
  - a. How much time was spent in prayer and worship?
  - b. How many missionaries were given the opportunity to speak?
  - c. What types of overtures did it address (in particular, was it spending all of its time discussing social justice and peacemaking issues)?
2. The denomination's mission is the Great Commission of Matthew 28:16-20, to make disciples of all nations. To that end:
  - a. How many home missionaries does the denomination have?
  - b. How many foreign missionaries does the denomination have?
  - c. What percentage of the denomination's total budget is allocated for missions?
  - d. What amount of financial support does the denomination give to its missionaries?
3. The size of the denomination:
  - a. The number of members
  - b. The number of presbyteries
  - c. The number of churches
4. The number of confessions in, and the consistency of the denomination's polity with, its confessional standards.
5. Church planting is a priority.
6. The number of pastoral opportunities in the denomination, primarily focusing on the number of other denominations that it is in correspondence with.
7. The change (especially cultural) that will be incurred by joining the denomination.

#### 4. List of Essential Tenets of the Reformed Tradition

The Reformed Denominations Team adopted the following items<sup>4</sup> from the September/October 2003 edition of *Theology Matters* (a publication of Presbyterians for Faith, Family, and Ministry) as its list of Essential Tenets of the Reformed Tradition:

1. The Authority of Scripture
2. God
3. Humanity – Original Righteousness and Fall into Sin
4. Jesus Christ – Incarnation of the Eternal Word
5. Jesus Christ – His Atoning Work
6. Salvation by Grace through Faith
7. Sacraments

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<sup>4</sup> The Reformed Denominations Team also adopted as its definition of each item the full text listed for the item in the September/October 2003 edition of *Theology Matters*.

## 5. Presbyterian Polity

The Reformed Denominations Team adopted the following definition for Presbyterian Polity:

*Presbyterian Polity -- the form of government of the PC(USA) -- consists of at least four basic principles, all of which are derived from, and are subservient to, the Authority of Scripture:*

1. *The authority of the confessional standards of the church for all theological matters.*
2. *The unity of the church through representative assemblies (the fundamental Presbyterian principle of representative church government was rooted in Calvin's anthropology, which insisted on one hand that no person was good enough to be entrusted with rule and on the other that the mass of people were not qualified to make the critical decisions that must be made in the life of the church).*
3. *Parity of the ministry ("as for the Ministers of God's Word, they have equally the same power and authority wheresoever they are, as they are all Ministers of Christ, the only universal Bishop, and the only Head of the Church").*
4. *Right of the people to call a pastor and elect officers.*

*The Reformed Tradition has always hesitated to declare itself fully in regard to the office of deacon, and for this reason the office of deacon cannot be made a principle of Presbyterianism.*

Please note that the above definition of Presbyterian Polity is a modified version of the characteristics of Presbyterian Polity documented in chapter V of:

*Introduction to the Reformed Tradition: A Way of Being the Christian Community*

John Leith

John Knox Press (1981). ISBN 0-8042-0479-9

## 6. Results of Applying the Mandatory Criteria

Applying the mandatory criteria against each member of the list of initial potential candidate denominations produced the following results:

1. The following candidates were eliminated, because they prohibit the ordination of women as ministers of Word and Sacrament, elders, and/or deacons:
  - a. Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church
  - b. Orthodox Presbyterian Church
  - c. Presbyterian Church in America
  - d. Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America
  - e. United Reformed Churches in North America
2. The following candidates were eliminated, because their theology is Arminianism, not Calvinism:
  - a. Cumberland Presbyterian Church
  - b. Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America
3. The following candidate was eliminated, because of growing support within the denomination for gay/lesbian marriage and ordination<sup>5</sup>, and because of denominational ownership of church property and assets:
  - a. Reformed Church in America
4. The following candidate was eliminated, because of growing support within the denomination for gay/lesbian marriage and ordination:<sup>6,7,8</sup>
  - a. Christian Reformed Church in North America
5. The following candidate was eliminated, because of not being confessionally based, not including its Essential Tenets of the Reformed Faith in its constitution,

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<sup>5</sup> <http://chalcedon.edu/research/articles/the-reformed-church-in-america-can-it-stay-reformed-part-i-of-ii/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.calvin.edu/chimes/2013/06/12/crc-to-form-committee-on-homosexuality-but-wont-revisit-official-position/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.thebanner.org/news/2014/09/grand-rapids-event-advocates-full-participation-of-practicing-gay-church-members>

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.swierenga.com/Africa\\_pap.html](http://www.swierenga.com/Africa_pap.html)

not subscribing to the Authority of Scripture, not subscribing to Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation, and supporting gay/lesbian marriage and ordination:

a. Presbyterian Church (USA)

The list of finalist candidate denominations became:

- i. Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians (ECO)
- ii. Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC)

## 7. Results of Evaluating via the Differentiating Criteria

Evaluating each finalist candidate denomination against the list of differentiating criteria produced the following results:

1. How does the denomination spend its time during its highest assembly meetings?

The main difference between the two finalist candidate denominations here is that the recently formed ECO spends a great deal of its time and energy on establishing the foundations for its polity, confessional standards, and denominational administration.

2. The denomination's mission is the Great Commission of Matthew 28:16-20, to make disciples of all nations.

ECO: no missionaries at the national level (that is, the number of missionaries supported by ECO is the total number of missionaries that ECO churches are supporting)

entire asking budget for ECO in 2015 is \$1.33M

EPC: 70 missionaries at the national level (each of these missionaries must raise 100% of his/her support from local churches and other sources)

entire actual budget for EPC in 2014 was \$2.17M; the missions budget is 1.5 x the administrative budget

3. The size of the denomination.

From the following table:

Denomination	# Members	# Presbyteries	# Churches
ECO	60,000	9	215
EPC	160,000	13	570

one can see that while EPC is roughly 2.5 times the size of ECO, the latter has attained its current membership numbers over a period of just three years, while the former has been around since 1981. Since neither finalist candidate denomination was an order of magnitude larger than the other<sup>9</sup>, the raw size of the denominations did not produce any noticeable differences. On the other hand, a comparison of the presbyteries that we would find ourselves in and the number of local churches<sup>10</sup>:

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<sup>9</sup> The PC(USA) currently has 1,667,767 members, 171 presbyteries, and 9,829 churches; these figures are an order of magnitude larger than either of the finalist candidate denominations.

<sup>10</sup> A *local church* is defined as being within a 50 mile radius of zip code 20120.

Denomination	States in Presbytery	# Local Churches	Closest Church
ECO	AL, DC, GA, KY, MD, NC, SC, VA, TN, WV	0	Richmond, VA (4)
EPC	NC, SC, VA, WV	6	Haymarket, VA Reston, VA

reveals that the EPC presbytery is less than half the size of the ECO presbytery in terms of geographic footprint (here, smaller is better, at least in terms of travel distances and times to Presbytery meetings!), and there are six EPC local churches versus zero ECO local churches.

4. The number of confessions in, and the consistency of the denomination's polity with, its confessional standards.

- a. EPC has one confessional standard:

The Westminster Documents

and its church polity is consistent with its confessional standards.

- b. Even though it adopted the pre-Belhar Confession version of the PC(USA)'s Book of Confessions, ECO's confessional standards really consist of its Essential Tenets (ECO is currently investigating what role, if any, the Book of Confessions will play in its confessional standards), and its church polity is consistent with its confessional standards.

5. Church planting is a priority.

Church planting is a priority with both finalist denomination candidates.

6. The number of pastoral opportunities in the denomination, primarily focusing on the number of other denominations that it is in correspondence with.

- a. ECO is not involved in official correspondence with other denominations. Rather, if an ECO ordained minister wishes to be installed as a pastor in another denomination, each request is reviewed individually.

- b. EPC is in official correspondence with the PC(USA) and a number of other reformed denominations.

7. The change (especially cultural) that will be incurred by joining the denomination.

- a. Being dismissed to ECO would entail the smallest change:

- i. It has adopted the same Book of Confessions as used by the PC(USA), except for the Belhar Confession

- ii. It consists primarily of churches and pastors who have left the

PC(USA) over the last three years

- iii. Its relationship with the Fellowship of Presbyterians keeps it in constant touch with PC(USA) churches and pastors
  - iv. Its stance on the ordination of women is the same as the PC(USA)'s
- b. Being dismissed to the EPC would entail more change than ECO, even though it is in a fraternal correspondence with PCUSA, and has welcomed many congregations dismissed from the PC(USA) before ECO was formed:
- i. Its confessional standards are the Westminster Documents (i.e., it deliberately chose the Westminster Documents over the UPCUSA's Book of Confessions)
  - ii. Its stance on the ordination of women is local option

## Recommendation to Session

Three of the five members of the Reformed Denominations Team recommend seeking dismissal to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church for the following reasons:

1. EPC returns CPC to the PCUSA circa 1925 in terms of its theology and confessional standards.
2. EPC is larger, better established, and has six local churches within 50 miles of area code 20120.
3. The EPC presbytery that CPC would become a member of is smaller in geographic area and consists of less than half the number of states than the corresponding ECO presbytery.

while the other two members recommend seeking dismissal to the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians for the following reasons:

1. ECO has a stronger commitment to women's ordination than EPC (EPC has adopted local option, with eleven of the thirteen EPC presbyteries supporting the ordination of women as ministers of the Word and Sacrament).
2. ECO brings the excitement of a new denomination, and the opportunity to assist in the formation of its theology, polity, and confessional standards.
3. The transition to ECO should be easier than to EPC, since CPC is far more familiar with ECO than EPC (due to CPC's and ECO's involvement with the Fellowship of Presbyterians).

All five members of the Reformed Denominations Team agree that both denominations are viable candidates to which CPC can request dismissal.

## Glossary of Terms

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Arminianism	A system of theology based on the theological ideas of the Dutch Reformed theologian Jacobus Arminius and his historic supporters known as the Remonstrants.
Calvinism	A system of theology based on the theological ideas of French Reformed theologian John Calvin and other Reformation-era theologians.
Classis	Same as <i>Presbytery</i> .
Confessionally Based	The denomination requires officers to subscribe to one or more confessional statements (such as the Westminster Confession of Faith) as proof of the orthodoxy of their beliefs.
Confessional Standards	The documents adopted by a denomination that articulate the beliefs of that denomination.
CPC	Centreville Presbyterian Church
Differentiating Criteria	A criteria that will assist in the evaluation of strengths and/or weaknesses of a denomination.
ECO	Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians, founded in 2012
EPC	Evangelical Presbyterian Church, founded in 1981
Finalist Candidate Denomination	A denomination that was not eliminated by the application of the mandatory criteria, and thus will be submitted to the Session for consideration as the denomination to which CPC wishes dismissal.
Initial Potential Candidate Denomination	A denomination included in the initial (first) list of candidate denominations generated by the Reformed Denominations Team.
Local Option	Each local church determines whether or not it will ordain women as deacons and elders, and each presbytery determines whether or not it will ordain women as ministers of the Word and Sacrament.
Mandatory Criteria	A criteria that an initial potential candidate denomination must satisfy before it will be considered as a finalist candidate denomination.
NCP	National Capital Presbytery
PCUSA	Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, in existence from 1789 to 1958
PC(USA)	Presbyterian Church (USA), founded in 1983, of which CPC is a member
Polity	The form of government of a religious denomination
Presbytery	The assembly / council of a denomination directly above the local church, normally consisting of a group of churches that are in the same geographic area.
Reformed Denominations Team	The team formed by the Session to research and recommend denominations to which CPC might request dismissal.
UPCNA	United Presbyterian Church of North America, in existence from 1858 to 1958, a church of Covenanter-Seceder tradition
<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
UPCUSA	United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, in existence from 1958 to 1983, formed by the union of the PCUSA and the UPCNA