

## Notes from Fellowship speakers

These are rough notes from the Fellowship of Presbyterians Gathering in Minneapolis on August 25 – 26, 2001. They are not verbatims. Please consult the notes of others in this section of the website, visit <http://www.fellowship-pres.org/> (where video will be available) and participate in the meetings announced to get a fuller understanding of the Fellowship. Material in [brackets] are my comments. David Dawson

Jim Singleton...Why a “Fellowship of Presbyterians?” “We no longer expect to renew the PC(USA) by out-voting it. Battling back and forth has no future.” Fellowship values:

1. We are not mad...best solutions are not made in anger (Louisville staff best ever...[said 4 times for the whole group])
  - a. We seek “relief of conscience” – don’t want to fight any more
  - b. Join where you can (even sharing of staff) – differentiate where you must
  - c. A new “local option”
2. Humility...evangelicals are not growing either
3. Highest value is the congregation...but not congregationalism
4. Connect to PC(USA) whenever possible...differentiate whenever necessary...this is not about schism...we are calling no one apostate, but the other side has left us and we cannot stand for that any longer

Fellowship is not simply for social conservatives...we expect to “move back into the neighborhood” – missional church will be normative for those in the Fellowship [Partnership for the Missional Church approach to changing our congregations.]

4 tiers (1 – 3 mostly possible or can be changed by overture...#4 more complex)

1. Nurturing Mission and Ministry in Place – San Diego Presbytery, California
  - a. We can differentiate from where we are
2. Presbyteries within presbyteries – Mission Presbytery, Texas
  - a. Not possible without changes to the Book of Order
  - b. Middle Governing body Commission likely to recommend non-geographical presbyteries
  - c. [a friend noted that we embraced the Scottish model of geographical presbyteries, but not their model of geographic parishes...why are we such fundamentalist about geographical presbyteries?]
3. Affiliations and Councils
  - a. 2 separate COMs and CPMs (allowed by nFoG) [a friend said, “in my presbytery we would ordain a gerbil...all you have to do is claim that you have a ‘call’”]
  - b. An intra-presbytery option
4. New Reformed Body
  - a. Many of us have been in this fight for 30 years...it was handed to us...we must not hand it on to the next generation
  - b. Provides options:
    - i. Join and stay in PC(USA) – like a union presbytery

- ii. Join and get out of PC(USA) – not presently possible (working on this with Stated Clerk’s office) in the Book of Order, but this would be an affiliate status (as for members) [transfer to NRB which will likely affiliate with the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WARC), of which the EPC is a member]
- iii. [Fellowship clearly wants to avoid taking a position that amounts to declaring the PC(USA) apostate...we are in “communion” with the EPC and the UCC...the NRB wants to do the same]

Elements of the “New Reformed Body” (between now and January 12 – 14 meeting in Orlando)

1. We are not asking, we are claiming...now, “how do we make it work?” - anticipate proposing overtures for GA in Pittsburgh
2. Theological statements
3. Center-set, not boundary set...not subscriptionism, but naming essential tenets...if we are clear about the center we can spend less time policing the boundaries
4. What are we creating? not a “denomination”...hybrid (we have not done this before...so, it will be messy)...more covenantal than regulatory...experiments (adaptive, not technical) [as in Partnership for the Missional Church]
  - a. [denominationalism as we know it no longer works]...denominations were not built for superhighways or jets, much less Twitter and Facebook...when the last Shuttle mission was completed, it ended an era with the only space vehicle that many of us have ever known...this denomination is the only form of denominationalism that any of us have ever known
  - b. Not another denomination (that has been done: PCA and EPC...and that is not working) – no reason to disparage these efforts to respond to our “deathly ill” denomination, but they are not adequate responses to our situation. New Wineskins was on this track but got hijacked [by the Laymen] – virtually all congregations in Wineskins will be in EPC – starting a denomination from scratch (still the central work of the EPC) is very difficult and time consuming
  - c. This is also a generational issues...denominations mean nothing to those under 40...this is simply not the future for the church
5. Annual gathering that has much more celebratory and training (entrepreneurial leaders) rather than business – the Fellowship wants to raise the bar...even making conservatives uncomfortable...pushing us to do more than create an escape hatch
6. Sharing desired services with PC(USA): Board of Pensions, Foundation, World Mission, Theology and Worship, Evangelism)
7. Encourages smaller presbyteries where people will know each other
8. Deeply connected globally...2 million telling 90 million Presbyterians that they are wrong does not make sense [not to mention those other than Reformed Christians]
  - a. [Ethiopia – one year to see what PC(USA) does]
  - b. [Mexico – relationships severed by overwhelming vote]
  - c. [Ghana – no relationships with denominations approving gay ordination]
9. Differentiating in the main body...not severing relationships with the mother ship...dual citizenship in the near term...hybrid...not another denomination...already 20+ Reformed bodies in US (33,000 denominations worldwide)

10. Each congregation is in a different place...for some the brand is toxic (you don't need differentiation, you need separation)...context will determine what you need to do...if you are in a good presbytery it is different than if you are in a hostile one
  - a. [Clark Cowden said that in San Diego no one needs to "differentiate" themselves from the PC(USA) because that relationship is already irrelevant...it is a west coast-east coast difference.]
  - b. [Central Washington...32 of 42 churches could leave]
  - c. [Alaska...denomination is completely irrelevant]
11. New Reformed Body (NRB) is like a union presbytery...presently an empty warehouse that will begin to be stocked between now and January 12 – 14 constituting meeting in Orlando
12. We have friends on the other side...there are great differences, but we have much in common...it is not an issue with denominational officials, rather with the General Assembly...but we still have far more in common than differences...these are friends, but voted for 10-A... denominational officials are not the problem, they are listening to us and working with us (Lot and Abram need to co-exist by using separate fields...Genesis 13:8 – 12) We are a "Broadening Church" to the point that no central pole can support the tent.
13. It is important to make careful and wise decisions...some will take significant time to decide which of these options work for them...some will change from one direction to another over the coming years

Richard Mouw

- We are in a time of crisis...what to keep in mind as we explore the options
- Scots Confession...councils ere
- The "safe haven" image can be misleading...there is no safety, only missional fidelity
- Lay aside regulations so that we can talk
- Maintain contact with the wider body of Presbyterians
  - PC(USA) affirmation of women is critically important [extensive comments on this... although not explicit, it seems clear that he faults the EPC on this]
  - Must include the wider body...not our practice of this meaning conversations with the UCC...need to include the PCA...if we can have fellowship with the UCC, there is no reason why we cannot have fellowship with more conservative Presbyterians [those in the Global South]
- Noted Catholic value of spiritual orders...need a Reformed Order today
- Excited about "missional church" and new forms of post-denominationalism (that the Fellowship is proposing), but all will fail if we do not pay attention to good theology...revival of Reformed orthodoxy (person and work of Jesus Christ)
- Interpretation of scripture – options
  - Church interprets scripture
  - Reason interprets scripture
  - Sola scripture – it trumps both
    - Plain sense of scripture
    - Scripture interprets scripture

Ken Bailey – plenary Bible study on Friday – “Reprocessing Anger into Grace”

- Luke 14:15–24 Parable of the Great Feast...God’s anger becomes missional
- Isaiah 5:1-7, Luke 20:9-18 Parable of the Vineyard Owner...God’s anger leads to sending his son
- Luke 15 Parables of the Lost Coins, Sheep and Sons...God’s anger processed into grace
- I Corinthians – Paul had every right to despair over their theological and moral lapses

Break-out group on the Evangelical Presbyterian Church

- Alleghenies Presbytery
  - 14 churches (Harrisburg, Buffalo, Columbus, Pittsburgh)
- David Swanson – pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Orlando
  - Swanson clearly prefers NRB over EPC, but his session has been pushing for a long time...NRB will take longer than going to the EPC...his associate pastor (woman): “it allows my ordination, but does not celebrate my call”
  - Either the Fellowship provides an option (NRB) or we trickle away to the EPC
  - NRB will have less structure than the EPC
  - We have more leverage in the PC(USA)
- Mike Brewer
  - Helped start EPC in 1981
  - Presently 300 churches...80 of these from PC(USA) in recent years
  - The EPC’s issue/work: starting another denomination
  - When you are a conservative in a liberal denomination, you are constantly defining yourself...when a liberal in a conservative denomination, you are constantly defending your salvation
  - EPC needs time to decide if you fit...can’t just fax in your application for membership...take theology seriously (Westminster Confession is only one and pastors and elders have to decide what they will scruple...they are serious...it is subscriptionism)
  - 8 of 11 presbyteries ordain women...churches who want to can move to neighboring presbytery
  - There is some fear in the EPC of PC(USA) churches coming in and overwhelming them
  - In the US most people in our communities have no idea what denomination you are if you are “Presbyterian” – they will at least have to ask – overseas the name “Presbyterian” brings great respect
  - 7 reasons he prefers NRB
    - Allows for complete separation with ongoing relationship to Fellowship (not needed in good presbyteries)
    - Provides a realistic approach to starting a new denomination...allows for responding in different contexts
    - Provides strong theological foundations...we will name the essential tenets
    - Proactive and positive course forward...there is reason to be angry and frustrated, but we do not want to be defined by what we are against
    - Allows for a continuum of actions...from complete separation to “I am happy where I am”

- Advocates and allows for greater unity rather than further fragmentation
- A missional focus and congregational health purpose