

9th General Assembly, 1981, Appendix M, p. 304.

JOINT STATEMENT ON JOINING AND RECEIVING

Report of the Ad Interim Committee to Discuss areas of Agreement,
Differences and Difficulties with the
Orthodox Presbyterian Church, The Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod
and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America
to the Ninth General Assembly of the
Presbyterian Church in America

The Ad Interim Committee to Discuss ... has endeavored to fulfill a mandate given it by the Eight General Assembly in order to inform the members and friends of the Presbyterian Church in America and to make recommendations concerning the "joining and receiving" of the denominations that have responded to the invitation of the Eight General Assembly to effect one church.

With gladness and gratitude to God we report that two sister denominations, the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, by action of the Synod, and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, by action of its Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations, have answered our invitation, by expressing a sincere desire to pursue the possibility of a "joining and receiving" which will bring the three denominations into organizational unity under the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America. Further, we have discovered that these churches are fully committed to the Westminster Standards and Presbyterian polity. Though the representatives of each of the three denominations readily confess to various weaknesses and failures in their denominations, this Committee believes that we are truly one in our commitment to obey Jesus Christ, the King and Head of His Church, who governs us by His Word and Spirit.

Aware that there are differences among us in the practical application of the principles of Presbyterianism, we have given careful attention to these and are pleased to report that no difference in practice or emphasis seems to present an insurmountable obstacle in the way of effecting one church. Obviously, however, these differences will require mutual patience and forbearance as we adjust to each other and learn to profit from the interchange of the insights and experience brought to the union by the three bodies. (In one section of this report we attempt to illustrate how some of these differences may be overcome by suggesting possible procedures our presbyteries and committees might follow in the movement of the denominations into the Presbyterian Church in America.)

The Committee entered into extensive discussions with the Committee on Fraternal Relations of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, and the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The exchanges were made with the utmost honesty, candor, and openness in an atmosphere of mutual respect, Christian love, and sincerity.

At the final meeting of the Ad Interim Committee of the Presbyterian Church in America, the Committee on Fraternal Relations of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, and the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the following joint statement was approved.

JOINT STATEMENT

We have sought to fulfill the mandates given us by our respective major assemblies in order to make recommendation concerning the reception and joining of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in and with the Presbyterian Church in America.

With joy and thankfulness to the Lord of the Church we recognize that our churches have a common and sincere commitment to the inerrant Word of God and to the Westminster Standards as faithfully expressing the system of truth taught in Holy Scripture. Further, we recognize that our churches are Presbyterian in their order and practice. But above all, we find clear evidence that each of our churches desires to be faithful to our primary standard, the Bible, and to our secondary standards as true to the Bible. We acknowledge our weaknesses and failures, but we are one in our commitment to obey the Lord Jesus Christ in His rule over us through His Word and Spirit.

We recognize, however, that due in part to differences of historical development, there are differences among us as to how our common Presbyterian convictions are applied in practice. We have given careful attention to those that have been referred to us, and have provided a comparison of similarities and differences that we have discussed. No doubt there are variations of practice that have little or no theological significance, but would require mutual forbearance and understanding during a period of adjustment in the augmented church. It is also true that there are differences of emphasis among our churches that are to be found within each of them, as well as between them; some of these have their roots deep in the history of Presbyterianism.

It is apparent to us that, just as within our churches there has been a deep and continuing desire to be constantly reforming ourselves in conformity to the Word of God, so too in the augmented Presbyterian Church in America this commitment would be not only continued, but heightened by the reception of the other churches. These churches whose ministry would be joined with that of the Presbyterian Church in America would be called upon to follow the faith and order of the church that they enter; the Presbyterian Church in America, on the other hand, would further strengthen its life and witness by welcoming the insights and experience represented by the entering churches and seeking to profit from differences in striving for a more perfect Biblical faith and practice.

In receiving these denominations, the Presbyterian Church in America recognizes the history and the respective denominations as part of her total history and receives their historical documents as

valuable and significant material which will be used in the perfecting of the Church.

We, therefore, as committees of our churches, recognize that unity of faith and practice which our churches have through the grace of God. This unity must draw us together as the body of Christ and enable us to remove the barriers that would prevent us from full communion of life and love in an undivided church. We also recognize our need for the grace of the Spirit and the love of Christ as we seek to reconcile differences and remove practical barriers. We, therefore, do severally and jointly:

1. Commend to our respective churches that we become one in organization in accordance with the invitation of the Presbyterian Church in America;
2. Urge upon our respective churches the necessity of resolving in the thus-augmented church the differences among us, and others that may arise, in kindness and forthrightness begotten of love, with the determination that by the grace of the Spirit of God through the teaching of His Word we shall "all come in the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God unto ... the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (Eph. 4:13)

And further, we, as committees of our respective churches, do severally and jointly agree that the above committees of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod shall recommend to their respective major assemblies in 1981 that the necessary constitutional actions be taken to begin the process required to join the Presbyterian Church in America in accordance with its invitation; that the above-named committee of the Presbyterian Church in America will, if the invitation is accepted by either or both of the other churches, recommend to the General Assembly that the acceptance(s) be approved, that the procedures stated elsewhere be followed for the incorporation of the several agencies of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod into the Presbyterian Church in America; that out of respect for these churches' integrity the approval of their acceptance of the invitation shall be understood to honor such commitments as the several churches may have, and to continue the ministries presently conducted by the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, subject to the review of the permanent committees and the approval of subsequent General Assemblies, and that the incorporation of agencies shall endeavor to provide for just treatment of those who may not be able, for reasons of conscience, to participate in the acceptance of the invitation.

