

Issues Facing PCA¹
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Having been in on the ground floor of the PCA as a “founding son” in 1973, I think I shared the expectation of many who were part of the nascent PCA in thinking that once the new denomination was launched we would be free from doctrinal controversy, that we would be able to devote ourselves to positive endeavors, and that PCA churches would rally to the support of the young ecclesiastical body. In retrospect, thirty-six years later,² it is evident that such was not a realistic expectation.

Because culture changes, aberrant ideas arise, well-intentioned but not-well-thought-through strategies succumb to the Law of Unintended Consequences, efforts to be on the intellectual cutting edge may slice off some of the edges of orthodoxy, because of the depravity of human nature, and because the path of orthodoxy is a road with ditches on both sides, not only on the left, but also on the right, the reality is that the Church will always be dealing with theological controversies in every generation.

It is inescapable that we have to deal with more than evangelism, church planting, discipleship, education, mercy ministries, and cross-cultural mission. As a denomination we cannot just pick the things in which we would like to be involved,³ we have to address moral failures, individual self interests, the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of structures, cultural relevance or irrelevance, the efficiencies of our operations, legal matters, and a myriad of other practical, yet unavoidable practical details, details on *all levels* of the Church. Both para-church ministries that have a limited ministry focus, or large churches and networks who originate with the assumption that they can do ministry without real involvement in a denomination, soon find themselves having to duplicate many of the unglamorous but essential services a denomination can offer.

The expectation that as the PCA grew and developed more churches would rally to support her cooperative ministries. That expectation has not been realized. We created a system whereby churches could enjoy all the benefits of being part of a denomination⁴ and have few responsibilities. Pastors and sessions are distressed to read surveys that in the average evangelical local church over forty percent give nothing whatsoever to the support of their church. Yet more than half of our churches give nothing at all to General Assembly ministries, and many give nothing to their Presbyteries either.

But with all our inconsistencies, the LORD has blessed us in spite of ourselves. The PCA is still a desirable place to be in the Presbyterian-Reformed sector of the Church in

¹ Most of this document was a report of the Stated Clerk to the Administrative Committee in October, 2008. The last section “the breadth of our circles of fellowship and cooperation” is an excerpt from the Report of the Interchurch Relations Committee to the 36th general Assembly, 2008.

² Sixteen years as a PCA pastor, ten years as an RTS seminary professor, and ten years as Stated Clerk in my own ministry.

³ It reminds me of a cartoon I saw once with a bride and groom standing before a minister and the bride says, “I’ll take ‘better’, ‘richer,’ and ‘health’.”

⁴ Credentialing and disciplining ministers, retirement program, denominational college and seminary, placement of pastors, campus ministry, church planting, cross-cultural ministry, conflict management, discipleship training, a foundation for channeling gifts, voting in Presbytery and General Assembly, sending overtures to General Assembly, serving on assembly committees and boards, receiving members due to the reputation of the denomination, etc., etc.

North America. We need to deal biblically, wisely, and effectively with the challenges before us. As I see it there are several issues we simply will have to face squarely:

- *Theological reflection within the context of a confessional Church.* The PCA is committed to theological fidelity. The ordination vows regarding the Scriptures and the *Westminster Standards* required of her officers reflect that doctrinal commitment (BCO 21-5, qq. 1, 2; 24-6, qq. 1, 2). Since the writing of the *Westminster Standards* in the 17th Century there have been two major intellectual paradigm shifts, first, the Enlightenment, the Age of Reason, or the Scientific Age, (1740s -1960s) and second, Post-Modernism or the Age of Relativism (1960s – present). Numerous issues not addressed or envisioned by the Westminster divines have arisen since the 17th century. In addressing such issues, one approach may be simply to collate statements the Church has made in the past that could be applied by logical extension to new issues. But theological reflection is more than collation. Another approach is to jettison the accumulated wisdom of the Church over the centuries and start with a clean slate. The promise of the Spirit to guide the Apostles into truth (John 14:16, 17; 15:26; 16:13) is understood not only to mean that the Apostles would be guided their writing of the New Testament, but also that the Church will be guided into a proper understanding of God’s truth. So it is both arrogant and foolish to ignore the Theological Consensus of the Church Universal forged in the crucible of controversy and mission over 2,000 years or to disregard the unique theological contributions of our Reformed tradition. Polar positions tempt us with simplistic answers to complex questions. Between those two polar extremes, the Church reformed and always reforming has to bring scripture and rigorous theological reflection to bear on current issues with an eye on the corporate witness of the Church heretofore, praying that the Holy Spirit will guide the Church in this present age. The PCA has certainly matured theologically since her founding but we need to have the courage to do serious theological thinking on current issues while maintaining our theological integrity.
- *Maintaining the priority of theology over polity.* As a *jure divino* Presbyterian, I believe that there are definite principles of church polity set forth in scripture (both OT & NT), and that the pattern of government for Christ’s Church is a representative, connectional government by a plurality of elders. I have published on that and I teach church polity each January at RTS. I agree with John Calvin’s position, that polity is not the highest priority for the Church. In writing *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, Calvin stressed that the Church needed reform in the theology (particularly the doctrine of justification), worship, sacraments, and government (a return to Presbyterian polity). Yet both he and John Knox advised some of their English brethren to accept bishoprics in the Church of England, if they could in good conscience do so, in order to effect reform in theology, worship and sacraments first.⁵ The denominational decline in North America seems to follow a pattern; doctrinal erosion, with a lack of discipline, often accompanied by a growing insistence on conformity to denominational policies, structures and procedures.⁶ Both the *Book of*

⁵ In fact, one such brother, William Grindal, became Archbishop of Canterbury in the reign of Elizabeth I (though he soon fell out of royal favor). Think of it; a Presbyterian Archbishop of Canterbury!

⁶ A sad example is what developed in the PCUSA. As a result of the Wynn Kenyon case in Pittsburgh a candidate was denied ordination because he would not endorse women’s ordination. As a result of the

Church Order and the *Westminster Standards* are parts of the Constitution of the PCA (BCO Preface, III. The Constitution Defined; 26-1). Yet we hold the doctrinal standards of the Church in higher regard than the polity of the Church.⁷ The Presbyterian penchant for procedures may tempt us into using BCO amendments, overtures, and the judicial process as a substitute for serious theological reflection.

- *Maintaining unity without requiring uniformity.* Tim Keller has on several occasions quoted George Marsden that there have always been three strands in American Presbyterianism, the doctrinalists, the pietists, and the cultural transformationalists. Keller goes on to observe that the PCA is one of the few, perhaps the only, American Presbyterian denomination that has not purged itself of one those groups. Keeping all three of those emphases in the same denomination over a period of time is not an easy task. But that is what we have to do. The argument of I Corinthians 12 regarding the value of different spiritual gifts for the common good of the Church could also be applied to the three strands within Presbyterianism.
- *Maintaining the uniqueness of PCA non-hierarchical, grass-roots Presbyterianism.* Even at the Westminster Assembly there were different types of Presbyterianism advocated.⁸ The PCA opted for a non-hierarchical version of Presbyterianism. The PCUSA developed into an hierarchical version of Presbyterianism.⁹ With the tendency of denominations in general and Presbyterians in particular to gravitate toward a more authoritarian polity, with the passing away of more of the Founding Fathers, and given the presence of brethren within the PCA who out of considered conviction want to move the PCA toward a polity more in keeping with Charles Hodge's perspective, maintaining the uniqueness of PCA polity will be a challenge.
- *Addressing the women's issue.* We have recently had several overtures to the 36th General Assembly¹⁰ and judicial cases arise to the SJC¹¹ regarding women being

Kasemann case in Capital Union Presbytery in D.C., a candidate could be approved who could not agree with an orthodox Christology. So in the PCUSA polity became non-negotiable but theology was negotiable.

⁷ For example, not all of the BCO has full constitutional status (portions of the Directory of Worship), but all of the *Westminster Standards* are fully constitutional; the ordination vow regarding polity is very general (BCO 21-5, q. 3, 24-6, q. 3) but the ordination vow regarding theology is much stronger (BCO 21:5, q. 2, 24-6, q.2); there is no specified procedure for dealing with stated differences with the BCO, but there is a detailed procedure for dealing with stated differences with the *Westminster Standards* (RAO 16-3, e. 5, c.); there is now detailed explanation of what affirming a belief in the general principles of biblical polity, but there is a detailed explanation of the meaning of subscription to the *Westminster Standards* (BCO 21-4); the requirements for amending the BCO (BCO 26-2) are lower than the requirements for amending the *Westminster Standards* (BCO 26-3), and we almost annually amend the BCO (much to my disgruntlement; I liked it when the BCO was hard-bound) and we have never amended the *Westminster Standards*.

⁸ Our second Stated Clerk, Paul Gilchrist, has well documented this in his study, *Distinctives of Biblical Presbyterianism*, Atlanta: World Reformed Fellowship, 2002.

⁹ The civil courts recognize only two types of church polity; hierarchical and non-hierarchical. The PCUSA has argued in recent civil cases involving church property that the PCUSA is an hierarchical denomination with the presbytery being tantamount to a bishop. The PCA, on the other hand, has successfully argued in court in MacDonald v. PCA that the PCA is non-hierarchical. See also my paper, *The PCA Non-hierarchical Presbyterianism* that has been accepted by courts in cases in NJ and FL.

¹⁰ Overture 9, from Philadelphia Presbytery, "Erect Study Committee on Deaconesses"; Overture 15, from Western Canada Presbytery, "Form Study Committee on Deaconesses"; Overture 17, from Rocky

involved in mercy ministries or leading women’s ministry. Addressing the issue of deaconesses and the role of women in the Church is one of the instances in which we have to do theological reflection within a Confessional Church (as noted above). Moreover, it is also an instance in which using polity or the judicial process to resolve a theological issue is quite alluring. It is not simply a theological-historical-logical issue; it is also has strong emotional elements. Some who want the issue considered feel¹² that a refusal to have a discussion on the matter which has some exegetical and certainly historical arguments is dismissive of women and dismissive of presbyters who have what they believe to be sound arguments (as evinced by earlier discussions in the RPCES and OPC). Some who want to prohibit sessions from commissioning (not ordaining) women to assist in mercy ministry and to forbid the use of the term “deaconess” for such women feel that allowing churches to have commissioned deaconess is the first step on a slippery slope that will inevitably lead to the ordination of women ruling elders and ministers.¹³ The General Assembly has taken the position that we do not ordain women (BCO 7-2; 24-1). But the Assembly has left the matter of exactly what women may or may not do within the ministry of a local church to the discretion of the respective sessions. This is in keeping with the PCA polity. **The default setting for PCA polity is that when the BCO is silent, the broadest discretion is left to the lower courts to make decisions within the bounds of biblical principles and constitutional parameters.** So the ways in which we handle the women’s issue impinges not only on how we do theological reflection within a confessional Church, it also touches on our unique polity. The recent articles in *byFaith* written by Tim Keller and Ligon Duncan are positive examples of how we may engage in civil discourse on this emotionally charged issue. Since there was no study committee appointed by the 2008 assembly, I expect that there will be overtures submitted to the 2009 assembly both to narrow and to broaden the relevant portion of the BCO (9-7).

- *Involving younger generations in ministry participation and leadership.* Every generation faces generation-gap issues. The Church is not exempt from that. It is exacerbated by the fact that generational mindsets and worldviews change about every ten years now, not every thirty years. There is a sense among some of our younger ministers and church leaders that the “ethos and direction”¹⁴ of the PCA are

Mountain Presbytery, “Expand Deaconess Study Committee’s Mandate”; Overture19, from Central Georgia Presbytery, “Decline to Elect Study Committee on Deaconesses.”

¹¹ Case 2007-13, TE David Kniseley v. Rocky Mtn. Presbytery (presbytery did not forbid a church to use the term “minister” to only ordained TEs); Case 2008-1 Crossroads Community Church v. Philadelphia Presbytery (presbytery licensed candidate who believes in but would not practice ordination of deaconesses), and Case 2008-10 Re Grasso et altera v. Philadelphia Presbytery (presbytery ordained licentiate candidate who believes in but would not practice ordination of deaconesses).

¹² I avoid using “feel” as a synonym for “think.” In this case I deliberately use “feel” for the emotional connotations of the word.

¹³ As someone remarked to me, “If we allow sessions to commission deaconesses, it is the first step toward women’s ordination. Ten years from now, we’ll be ordaining women ministers, and they’ll probably be lesbians!” The slippery-slope argument is not necessarily logically invalid; I am simply pointing out that it has some strong emotional connotations.

¹⁴ Both of which are vague terms, in my opinion, and therefore difficult to address constructively.

not conducive to theological reflection,¹⁵ biblical ecumenism, and cultural transformation. There is a lot of discussion in the blogosphere on the issue and a conference was held in St. Louis by younger leaders in February.¹⁶ Whether older PCA leaders agree with the perceptions or understand the underlying reasons for those concerns of younger leaders, it is an issue we cannot ignore.

- *Transforming the composition of the PCA to reflect more closely the population mix of North America.* By 2025 there will no longer be an Anglo majority in the USA. America will be a nation of minorities. We have expanded out of our southeastern geographical base and now have churches all over America and into portions of Canada. We have moved beyond our suburban and rural roots into some urban areas. We are no longer almost exclusively Anglo, Southerners. We have some ethnic diversity with Asian-Americans, African Americans, Latino Americans, etc. But will have to be more deliberate and persistent in our efforts if the PCA is to reflect the ethnic and socio-economic composition of the North American populace.
- *Ministry focus and funding.* The days of strong denominational loyalty are over. The post-WWII generations simply do not have that institutional loyalty. In a way that is advantageous to the PCA because we are able to gain a hearing among non-Presbyterians we could not have had before WWII. In other ways, it presents a challenge. Denominational ministries must now demonstrate both excellence and relevance to remain viable.¹⁷ In order for General Assembly ministries to gain the ongoing participation and support of PCA churches, the committees and agencies need to demonstrate both excellence (effective and efficient) and relevance (useful in accomplishing the mission of the Church and of local churches).
- *The breadth of our circles of fellowship and cooperation.*¹⁸ The PCA, on an assembly level, has related to other denominations via the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), the

¹⁵ A couple of examples younger men point out are (1) the Federal Vision Committee appointed by the moderator of the 34th General Assembly did not include anyone with a differing point of view. A point of order was raised on that issue when the committee reported to the 35th General Assembly. The point of order was not well taken because RRO, tenth ed. p. 481 recommends, but does not absolutely require that persons of differing views be appointed to a special committee. So the appointments were procedurally correct, but relationally flawed. There were concerns that the moderator did not secure the permission of the assembly to wait until after adjournment to make the appointments as is required by RRO (tenth ed., p. 479). But no point of order was raised on that requirement. The propositions set forth in the FV Report were overwhelmingly approved, but some younger men felt that the process used to appoint the committee was unfair, though they agreed with the conclusions of the report. (2) The 36th General Assembly did not erect a Study Committee on the Deaconesses issue even though there was a sizeable minority in the Overtures Committee and a close vote on the floor of the assembly. Some believe that the method of presenting overtures to amend the BCO is a more politicized method of dealing with the issue. Fairness of process and procedures, not detailed technical correctness, and hearing out others of differing views are strong values of the younger leaders.

¹⁶ See www.denominationalrenewal.org and www.commongroundsonline.com for discussions.

¹⁷ A prime example of the failure to realize the relevance factor in business is America television manufacturers. America produced the finest televisions in the world into the 1960s, but they were black and white TVs. The Japanese focused on developing and marketing color TVs and eventually cornered the TV market. American made B&W TVs were excellent, but irrelevant. American-made TVs today are actually assembled in America by Japanese or Dutch owned companies.

¹⁸ The following is adapted from the Report of the Interchurch Relations Committee to the 36th General Assembly of the PCA, 2008.

World Reformed Fellowship (WRF), and, by virtue of our membership in the NAE, the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA). Presently our only means of contacts with evangelical/Reformed churches and individuals in non-NAPARC denominations is through the NAE or WRF. We have no means at this time for assembly level contacts with other denominations outside of NAPRC, NAE, WRF, and WEA.

When **NAPARC** began, most of the participating denominations, with the exception of the CRC, were of relatively the same size in total membership (PCA, OPC, and RPCES). Now one-half of the member denominations have 5,000 members or fewer. Over the years the PCA and RPCES were combined, the CRC was dismissed, and several other denominations joined to create the present ten member churches.

Moreover, a prominent aspect of the basis of the council, its *raison d'être*, is "to hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice" (Constitution of NAPARC, II. Basis of the Council). As Reformed Christians we find ourselves in constraints. On one hand our desire to practice the purity of the Church may lead us at times to separate ourselves from an apparently irreparable denominational connection. Such was our separation from our former denomination that for us was a "tragic necessity."¹⁹ On the other hand our theology and polity continue to motivate us to seek union with others who hold to similar doctrine and church governance.²⁰

In the earlier years of NAPARC there were discussions of a possible four-way union of the PCA, Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod, Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Reformed Presbyterian Church North America, and the Christian Reformed Church. That four-way union did not occur²¹, but the Joining and Receiving of the PCA and RPCES in 1982 did come about. Later several additional denominations joined the council and the CRC membership in NAPARC was removed. In 2003 the PCA renewed the issue by adopting Overtures 24 and 25 to "Begin Church Union Conversations" and asked the NAPARC member Churches to consider union talks once more. Since that time there have been discussions of possible unions in the NAPARC annual meetings and among various denominations. The PCA-IRC has met with several of our counterpart committees in the last several years. The RCUS has advised us that they will not consider union conversations with the PCA due to the PCA's standards of doctrinal subscription (see Communication 1,

¹⁹ Church historian, Jaroslav Pelikan, used the term "tragic necessity" to describe the Protestant Reformation.

²⁰ John 17:1-26, Acts 15:1-16:5, I Cor. 12:12-31, Eph. 4:1-16; *WCF XXV*, *WLC Qq. 62-63*. While some separations within the Church may be justified by the need to preserve and protect the purity of the Faith, some ongoing divisions do not appear to be justified. There is much biblical data, as above, to move us to seek visible unity with other branches of the Church of like faith and order, but no biblical data may be adduced to prohibit us to seek visible unity with other branches of the Church of like faith and order.

²¹ In 1981 the PCA General Assembly extended an invitation for "Joining and Receiving" the OPC, but the required affirmative vote of three-fourths of PCA Presbyteries was not received (17 voted yes, 8 voted no) in 1982. In 1986 the issue received a majority vote in the OPC Assembly, but not the required two-thirds majority vote. The 1986 OPC General Assembly directed their Committee on Ecumenicity to give continued conversations with the PCA a high priority. The possible union with the CRC and RPCNA was never approved for advice and consent by the Presbyteries and Classes of the respective denominations.

Minutes of 33rd General Assembly PCA, p. 54). The OPC representatives have advised us that the OPC prefers to discuss and deliberate over a period of years before any union with the PCA could be brought about.²² The ARP and RPCNA prefer to discuss the matter of union between each other before they proceed with the PCA. The ERQ and KAPC prefer to focus on their ethnic-linguistic constituency.

NAPARC is composed of denominations originating from two streams of the Reformed Tradition; Scottish Presbyterian and Continental Reformed (Dutch Reformed, German Reformed, and French Reformed). There are great commonalities and similarities in theology and polity among the member denominations. But there are some differences in theology, polity, ethos, size and practice.

In short, after attempting to move the matter of union with other NAPARC denominations forward for several years, your Interchurch Relations Committee believes that the likelihood of the PCA's being able to effect a union with any of the NAPARC denominations within the next decade is slim to non-existent. The more likely scenario is that there will be a series of unions within the two branches of the Reformed families of NAPARC Churches, i.e. those of Scottish Presbyterian origins and those of Continental Reformed origins, before there is any union with the PCA. Since the issue of Church Union's being re-addressed by the PCA's 2003 action, there have been conversations among other NAPARC denominations that are promising for possible unions not involving the PCA. For example, the URCNA and CARC are discussing a federated union of the two denominations; the RPCNA and ARP have common historical roots and are in conversation. Additional conversations among NAPARC denominations are in the offing as well. Therefore, our wisest course now appears to be to encourage the developing conversations among the other NAPARC denominations, to pray that such conversations will be fruitful, to wait for some of union of denominations with most in common to occur, and to renew PCA conversations with other denominations at a later date.

The **World Reformed Fellowship** is the primary means by which the PCA maintains ecclesiastical contact with Reformed and Presbyterian Churches from all seven continents of the world. It meets every four years but recently has developed regional boards in Africa, Asia, Australia/New Zealand, Europe, Latin America and North America. The PCA's influence on the forming of this organization is evident in that eight of the twenty-six members of the Board of Directors are from the PCA. Dr. Craig Higgins of the IRC is the coordinator of the North America Regional Board.

- a. The WRF states that it “seeks to link those in the historic evangelical Reformed tradition of Christ's church in order to facilitate communication, collaboration and cooperation for mutual encouragement, support and advancement of Kingdom concerns. The WRF is not a council, but rather, as our very name affirms, a fellowship. Leaders and groups within the evangelical, Reformed tradition of Christ's church get to know and trust one another within this fluid network of relationships, developing mutually

²² The OPC spent forty years (1967-2007) on the revision of the *Directory of Worship* section of their *Book of Church Order*.

beneficial partnerships and assisting local believers with their vision of reaching their regions or nations for Christ. In many ways, the WRF fulfills the dream cherished by John Calvin in the 1500s, the Westminster Divines in the 1600s, and George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards in the 1700s, of truly worldwide cooperation among the Reformed branches of the Church.”

- b. “At the inaugural meeting of the World Reformed Fellowship, in Orlando in 2000, it was proposed that WRF should consider drawing a number of Reformed scholars from all over the world to write a new confessional statement for the 21st Century. That was agreed but due to a lack of resources and many other pressing matters, it was not until the General Assembly of the WRF in March of 2006 in Johannesburg, South Africa, that the proposal became a reality. In South Africa, it was agreed that this Statement of Faith would be the first responsibility of the WRF Theological Commission and the first members of the Commission were appointed...The WRF Theological Commission held its first official meeting in March of 2007 in Sao Paulo, Brazil. At that first plenary meeting the Commission established some core principles, agreed basic working practices and gave some preliminary consideration to the structure of the proposed Statement. It was also agreed that the day-to-day writing of the Statement would be committed to small working groups, who would prepare section drafts. The target completion date for the Statement is the WRF General Assembly in 2010, which is to be held in Scotland.” For more information on progress on the confessional statement, including the questions being asked by the committee, including: “What would a Reformed Statement of faith look like when written also by Christians from Africa, Asia, South America and elsewhere?” see the website at: <http://www.wrfnet.org/web/guest/commissions/theology>
- c. The North American Regional Board, among other things, is working “toward the development of resources for ministerial leaders in crisis. When 18,000 ministers of the Gospel in the United States leave the ministry each year, the church has a problem. And the problem is not restricted to those in pastoral positions. All kinds of ministry leaders seem under attack. We intend to work toward the creation of a program and a facility that will provide assistance to ministry leaders - before, during, and after times of actual crisis. Consultation is already underway with such organizations as Focus on the Family, the Association of Theological Schools, the Lilly Endowment, and numerous specific denominations.”

National Association of Evangelicals. The NAE has in its constituency 60 denominations representing about 45,000 churches. Its mission *is to extend the kingdom of God through a fellowship of member denominations, churches, organizations, and individuals, demonstrating the unity of the body of Christ by standing for biblical truth, speaking with a representative voice, and serving the evangelical community through united action, cooperative ministry, and strategic planning.*²³ According to its president: “We serve to make denominations strong and effective, influence society for justice and

²³ Its motto is “Cooperation without Compromise.”

righteousness, and gather the many voices of evangelicals together to be more effective for Jesus Christ and his cause.”

The First General Assembly (1973) approved the Committee on Mission to the World’s affiliation with the National Association of Evangelicals in order to benefit from their services and expertise of the Chaplains Commission, the World Relief Commission, and the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association. (Presbyterian and Reformed evangelicals were instrumental in the formation of the NAE in 1942 and have had various leadership roles in the NAE throughout its history). In the early years of the PCA, it was through the NAE Chaplains Commission that our military chaplains were endorsed. Throughout the years PCA churches have been major contributors to NAE’s World Relief Commission.

In 1986, after several years of study, the Fourteenth General Assembly approved the General Assembly’s entering into full membership of the National Association of Evangelicals. Through its affiliation with the NAE the PCA is also related to the World Evangelical Alliance (formerly called the World Evangelical Fellowship). It was under the umbrella of the World Evangelical Fellowship that the PCA participated in the formation of the World Fellowship of Reformed Churches in 1994. PCA Interchurch Relations Committee members been active in the life and work of the NAE serving on the Board of Directors and Executive Committee. The Stated Clerk of the PCA is presently serving as the Chairman of the Board of Directors and Executive Committee and as a *ex officio* member of the Board of the World Relief Commission

Through its participation in the NAE the PCA has contacts with other evangelical Christian denominations, organizations, individuals, and ministries, shares in the mercy ministries of the World Relief Commission, participates in world evangelization, and has a greater voice and influence in civic engagement through the NAE Office of Governmental Affairs in Washington D.C.

We have not recently addressed the issue of relations with and communications with other **non-NAPARC denominations and Christian Organizations**. (See chart below). The PCA was formed by reluctant separatists who had, over a period of decades, sought to reverse the theological decline, laxity in discipline, and trend toward a more hierachal type of Presbyterian polity²⁴ in our former denomination the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS). The PCA founders “in much prayer and with great sorrow and mourning . . . concluded that to practice the principle of the purity of the Church” they “reluctantly accepted the necessity of separation” and severed their ties with their Mother Church “with deepest regret and sorrow.”²⁵ In its “Message to All Churches” the PCA²⁶

²⁴ These and other factors are seen in the pattern of division and reunion division and reunion in American Presbyterianism. For a brief depiction of that pattern of division and reunion see Post, Don and Frost, Chuck. *History of Presbyterianism in America*. Atlanta: CE&P, n.d. The same pattern of division and reunion occurs in the denominations originating in the Continental Reformed Tradition as well.

²⁵ This is evinced in the “Message to All Churches” adopted by the First General Assembly (see Minutes of the 1st General Assembly, 1973, pp.40-42)

²⁶ Named, at first, the National Presbyterian Church, but changed to the Presbyterian Church in America by the Second General Assembly.

acknowledged that many Evangelicals chose to remain in the PCUS at that time and expressed the prayer that the LORD would use their remaining presence to reform and renew the PCUS and if such reformation and renewal were to occur, the PCA's separation from the PCUS [now the PCUSA] would be reassessed. Sadly, that has not occurred. The PCA could be rightly described as "reluctant and grieving separatists." The PCA has never been militant separatists, issuing annual denunciations of other denominations in our Assemblies²⁷, or secondary or tertiary separatists insistent upon having no fellowship with fellow Christians who may have close or distant connections with others with whom we would have significant disagreements.

In reflecting on the exodus of some of the Evangelicals from the Southern Church in 1973 against the backdrop of the exodus of some who left the Northern Church in 1936, Francis Schaeffer said in an article (*Presbyterian Journal*, 6 March 1974, pp. 7-8),

It would be tragic if the National Presbyterian Church [later called PCA] made the same mistakes which were made in the Presbyterian Church in the North. True brethren who have not felt led by the Lord to leave the PCUS should be treated with dignity and loving beauty. There are two reasons for this:

First, Jesus taught that the mark of the Christian is the observable love shown among all true believers. Second, by keeping the lines open to these men – not as a stratagem but as loving obedience to Christ's commands – the National Presbyterian Church will continue to offer a viable alternative. In the days ahead, the pressures will increase through the further growth of liberal control and almost certain coming union with the United Presbyterian Church USA.²⁸ I pray that the mistakes made years ago in the North will not be repeated today.

Dr. Schaeffer repeated and expanded upon those ideas when he preached to the PCA's Second General Assembly, September 18, 1974.

The National Presbyterian and Reformed Fellowship was a precursor to both the PCA and NAPARC and was influential in the formation of both entities. The NPRF existed 1971-1983 and included conservative Reformed folk from the PCUS, the UPCUSA, OPC, RCA, RPCES, CRC, RPCNA, ARP, and other groups. It was a fellowship and communication vehicle that connected Reformed brethren across denominational lines. With the formation of the PCA in 1973, the formation of NAPARC in 1975, and the Joining and Receiving of the PCA and RPCES in 1982, the NPRF passed off the scene.

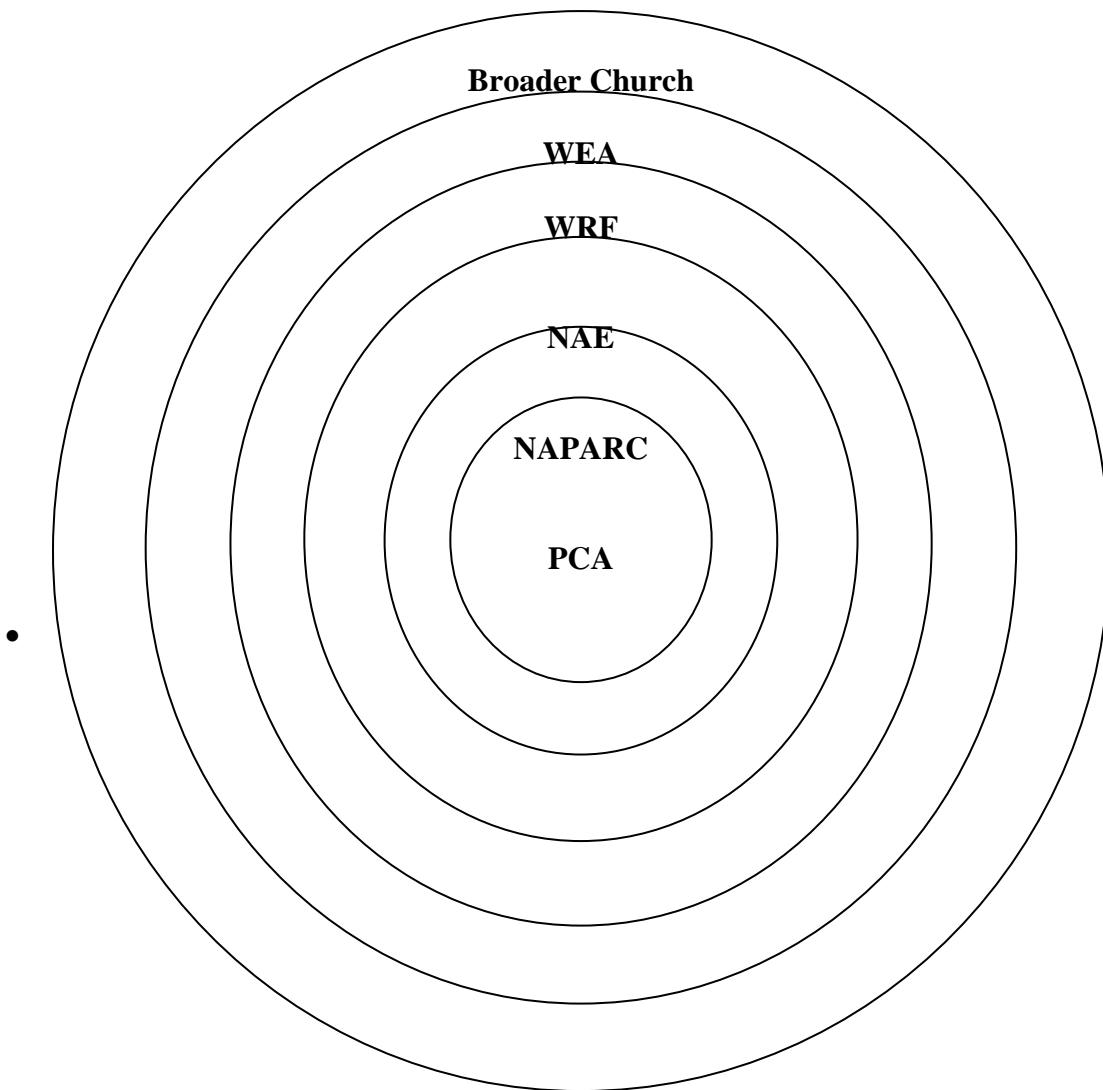
²⁷ For example the 12th General Assembly refused to adopt Overture 11 from Westminster Presbytery to declare the PCUSA apostate and to refuse to accept certificates of transfer from PCUSA Presbyteries (*Minutes of the 12th General Assembly*, 1984, pp. 41-42).

²⁸ The reunion of the Northern Church (UPCUSA) and the Southern Church (PCUS) did occur in 1983 to form the PCUSA.

In retrospect, the PCA, as a General Assembly, may not have taken the initiative to heed Francis Schaeffer's advice to maintain contacts with other conservative Reformed believers in the more theologically diverse denominations, though individual PCA members and local churches have certainly done so. However, we are reaching out beyond ourselves today with the closest facsimile to the NPRF today on a national basis which is the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals (which now includes Baptists, Anglicans, Congregationalists, and Independents of Reformed persuasion) and, on an international basis, the World Reformed Fellowship (which, like the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, now includes Baptists, Anglicans, Congregationalists, and Independents of Reformed persuasion).

“Christian Forum” gatherings have developed over recent years both nationally and globally that have broad representations from several streams of the Christian Tradition including Evangelicals, Charismatics, Mainline Protestants, Eastern Orthodox, and Roman Catholics. The doctrinal basis of the gatherings is an affirmation of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and that Lord Jesus Christ is God and Savior. The Christian Churches Together in the USA (CCT-USA) is the name of the national forum. The purpose of CCT-USA is “to enable churches and national Christian organizations to grow closer together in Christ in order to strengthen our Christian witness in the world. Participants in Christian Churches Together accomplish this purpose by rejoicing in our faith in the Triune God; discerning the guidance of the Holy Spirit through prayer and theological dialogue; providing fellowship and mutual support; affirming our commonalities and understanding our differences; fostering Christian evangelism faithful to the proclamation of the gospel; speaking to society with a common voice whenever possible; promoting the common good of society.” The CCT-USA began in 2004. The PCA-IRC was invited to attend (see 2004 IRC Report to the General Assembly), but did not do so. A Global Christian Forum had its roots in the 1990s and held a global meeting in Nairobi, Kenya in 2007. Its purpose is "To create an open space wherein representatives from a broad range of Christian churches and interchurch organizations, which confess the triune God and Jesus Christ as perfect in His divinity and humanity, can gather to foster mutual respect, to explore and address together common challenges." Though we have stayed abreast of these developments, we have not felt it appropriate to recommend participation.

PCA Relations with Other Churches and Christian Organizations



NAPARC = North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council composed of Evangelical Presbyterian and Reformed denominations in North America (est. 1975) who hold to the *Westminster Standards* or the *Three Forms of Unity*. A major aim of NAPARC is Church Union (ex. joining PCA & RPCES together in 1982).

NAE = National Association of Evangelicals (est. 1942) composed of Evangelical denominations, local churches, institutions, individuals and ministries who subscribe to the NAE Evangelical Doctrinal Statement, representing the Evangelical Community in the USA. The NAE Doctrinal Statement is widely used among Evangelical ministries.

WRF = World Reformed Fellowship composed of Evangelical denominations, local churches, institutions, individuals and ministries who subscribe to the WRF Reformed doctrinal standards.

WEA = World Evangelical Alliance (est. 1846) composed of Evangelical denominations,