

**WHY AND HOW THE CHURCH
MAKES A SOCIAL POLICY WITNESS**

**A REPORT
ADOPTED BY THE 205TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY (1993)
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)**

Why and How the Church Makes a
Social Policy Witness
with Study Guide

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Adopted By The 205th General Assembly (1993)
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

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April 1994

To: Pastors of Churches and Clerks of Sessions Where There Is No Installed Pastor, and Stated Clerks and Executives of Presbyteries and Synods

Dear Friends:

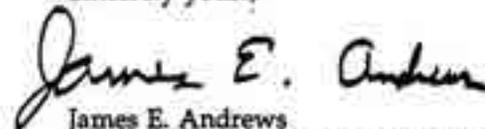
The 205th General Assembly (1993) has directed the Office of the General Assembly to send you a copy of the policy statement, "Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness," with a study guide.

This document sets forth a clear vision for social policy and social witness, with a sound basis for churchwide social witness policy development and implementation. Significant attention is devoted to the process of social policy discernment in the church with thirteen principles of discernment and patterns of formulation offered.

The study guide is especially helpful in describing the "why" and "how" of social policy formation and witness for small groups, classes, and seminars. It should also prove to be an excellent resource for leadership development studies as it explains and interprets Reformed patterns of social witness.

Additional copies of "Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness" may be ordered from Distribution Management Services, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202-1396, or by calling 1-800-524-2612 outside of Louisville; 502-569-5000, ext. 2503 in Louisville. Please specify order #OGA-93-019.

Sincerely yours,



James E. Andrews
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly

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FORMING SOCIAL POLICY

1. Definitions

Entities of the General Assembly use the following documents to make a social witness policy:

- a. A "policy statement" establishes the fundamental principles that guide the denomination's social witness. From this policy base a strategy is developed, a program is defined, and personal social witness is empowered. The most current policy document produced in conformance to the requirements of 2.a.-g. of this document and adopted by a General Assembly shall be the policy in force. Any previous policies and statements, having been examined and considered by the group producing the new policy, shall be superseded by the adoption of the most current policy. When requests for policy statements are made, the most recent policy statement shall be given; however, past statements shall be included in full response to requests for information.
- b. A "resolution" applies existing policy statements to new circumstances.
- c. A "study paper" is designed to stimulate churchwide study of a social concern, social witness policy, or social witness. It does not need to be an elaboration of existing policy statements.
- d. A "social involvement report" evaluates Presbyterian social witness in light of particular social concerns and existing policy statements.

2. Requirements

All social witness policy documents developed by General Assembly entities, including special committees of the General Assembly (see section 1. above) must meet the following requirements:

- a. The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy will be responsible for the process of developing and recommending social witness policy to the General Assembly. If any other entity is involved in processes of developing and recommending social witness policy, then appropriate consultation and linkage with the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy shall be undertaken.
- b. The body writing a document (i.e. task force, study group, or subcommittee of the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy) shall be selected in such a manner that persons of diverse viewpoints, expertise, and social experience are participants.
- c. A social witness policy document may include a section of recommendations that guide the work of divisions and related entities of the church. If approved by an assembly, recommendations shall be referred to the General Assembly Council for implementation in accordance with the practices defined in the General Assembly Council Operations Manual. These recommendations may suggest the ways in which the document is to be distributed.

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d. The annual narrative reports of the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy and other entities shall not propose policy nor recommend witness. Moreover, narrative reports are not considered social witness policy documents and are exempt, therefore, from the requirements of these guidelines.

e. A document shall clearly identify its type of social witness (i.e., policy statement, resolution, study document, or social engagement report).

f. All social witness policy documents shall use language that implies the conscience of individual members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is bound by General Assembly statements or recommendations.

g. All social witness policy documents, listed in section 1, above, shall have an initial distribution by the Stated Clerk and be sent with an official cover letter that indicates the nature of the document, specific recommendations approved by the assembly, and an affirmation of the freedom of a believer's conscience.

3. Policy Statements Requirements

In addition to section 2, on p. 61, "policy statements" must meet the following requirements:

a. A prospectus defining the social issue(s) to be addressed by a policy statement shall be developed, adopted, and published by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy or other entity. This prospectus shall be distributed to the Presbyterian News Office, *Monday Morning*, and other appropriate media. A brief (one-page) summary of the prospectus describing the problem to be addressed, information on where to obtain a full prospectus, and an invitation to respond with comments and suggestions, shall be sent to all synods and presbyteries. This prospectus shall be distributed to all presbyteries with sufficient copies for all congregations, encouraging input from the presbytery and the congregations and indicating how input can be made.

b. A task force called to develop a policy statement shall be appointed from nominees submitted from the church.

c. The task force shall develop and make known to the whole church a plan indicating the manner in which the whole church can participate (advise, offer input, etc.) in its deliberations.

d. The task force shall listen to the

- (1) voices of the biblical text;
- (2) wisdom of theological discourse;
- (3) guidance of the Reformed confessions;
- (4) insights of sociopolitical disciplines;

(5) tradition of past policy statements;

(6) advice of members and all governing bodies of the church;

(7) insights of people who are poor, victims of existing policies, and those who have not had a voice in the councils of the church; and

(8) counsel of ecumenical partners.

e. The task force shall cause a policy statement to be written that

(1) explicates its recommended social witness policy based on biblical scholarship;

(2) defines its recommended social witness policy in light of theological reflection;

(3) is consistent with the confessions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.);

(4) reports relevant policy statements adopted by prior General Assemblies and the manner in which church and society have participated in the development of its policy statement;

(5) details the contextual situation that prompted its witness;

(6) states the ethical norms upon which its guidance is premised;

(7) describes the social witness the church, its governing bodies, and members are called to make; and

(8) describes the manner in which society should change.

f. The task force shall provide a summary (one-page maximum) of its policy statement that

(1) explains what caused the document to be written;

(2) outlines the document's conclusions; and

(3) suggests how the document might be used, what impact it ought to have on the church, and what consequences it ought to have in the public order.

g. The task force may cause a series of recommendations to be written for consideration by the General Assembly. The recommendations may include a strategy for distribution of the policy statement.

h. The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy shall submit a penultimate draft of the policy statement for consultation as described in section 3.a on p. 62.

(1) The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy may augment the number of participants gathered in consultation for purposes of inclusivity and expertise.

(2) The consultation may create a report, including suggested changes to the proposed policy statement, which shall be received by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy.

(3) The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy may amend the proposed policy statement, refer the proposed policy statement back to the task force, or reaffirm the original policy statement.

i. The policy statement shall be distributed with an official cover letter from the Stated Clerk that says, in part:

In exercise of its responsibility to witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in every dimension of life, the (number) General Assembly (year) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has approved this policy statement. It is presented for the guidance and edification of the whole Christian Church and the society to which it ministers. It will determine procedures and program for the units and staff of the General Assembly. It is recommended for consideration and study by other governing bodies (sessions, presbyteries, and synods). It is commended to the free Christian conscience of all congregations and the members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for prayerful study, dialogue, and action.

4. Resolution Requirements

In addition to section 2, on p. 61, "resolutions" must meet the following requirements:

a. A resolution shall clearly identify the policy statement(s) upon which it is based.

b. A resolution shall be distributed with an official cover letter from the Stated Clerk that says, in part:

In exercise of its responsibility to witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in every dimension of life, the (number) General Assembly (year) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has approved this resolution. It is presented for the guidance and edification of the whole Christian Church and the society to which it ministers. It will determine procedures and program for the entities and staff of the General Assembly. It is recommended for consideration and study by other governing bodies (sessions, presbyteries, and synods). It is commended to the free Christian conscience of all congregations and the members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for prayerful study, dialogue, and action.

5. Study Document Requirements

In addition to section 2, on p. 61, "study documents" must meet the following requirements:

a. A study document may not contain recommendations for consideration by a General Assembly.

b. A study document shall provide bibliographic and interpretive resources. This material shall reflect and represent various ethical stances found within the Christian Church.

c. A study document may make a coherent, thoroughgoing argument for a particular ethical stance. In addition, however, a study document shall include a fair presentation of alternative ethical stances in either the main body of text or its appendixes.

d. A study document shall be distributed with a cover letter that states who is invited to respond, a study guide, a "user-friendly" response form, the address and phone number of the body responsible for receiving responses, and a schedule that allows at least twelve months for completion.

e. A study document shall include an official cover letter that says:

A study document of the General Assembly seeks to stimulate study and discussion within the church on particular social issues. It is not to be construed as a social witness policy of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Therefore, nothing in this document can be used to direct the mission program of the church.

f. A study document shall state the intended outcome of a study process by adding to the above paragraph one of the following:

(1) This study document is distributed to stimulate study and discussion as an end in itself; or

(2) This study document is distributed to inform and help prepare a policy statement; or

(3) This study document is distributed to inform and help revise the policy statement, [name], passed by the [number] General Assembly [year].

g. The report, based on responses to the study document, shall not be presented to the General Assembly until at least eighteen months have elapsed since the study's initial distribution.

6. Distributing a Social Involvement Report

In addition to section 2, on p. 61, "social involvement" reports shall be distributed with an official cover letter that says, in part:

A social involvement report of the General Assembly seeks to stimulate discussion on particular social issues and the church's response to these issues. It is not to be construed as a social witness policy of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Therefore, nothing in this document can be used to direct the mission program of the church.

7. Guidelines

The church's social witness is multidirectional and multilateral. To guide entities preparing the General Assembly's social policy, the following statements encourage appropriate attitudes and behaviors:

- a. No social witness policy may purport to bind the conscience of individual members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).
- b. A social witness policy document is a minute of a governing body meeting. It may be extracted from the minutes for publication. If it is extracted, it shall be treated in the same manner as any other minute. (The nature of debate and the final vote are irrelevant.)
- c. A social policy document shall include instructions for its distribution (i.e., to all governing bodies, the president of the United States of America, the president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, or the secretary general of the United Nations).
- d. The Stated Clerk and directors of divisions or related entities shall respond to emerging mission needs that require an "official" Presbyterian social witness by explicating the most current General Assembly social witness policy.
- e. The General Assembly council is prepared to respond to invitations to consult on regional social policy development in the manner defined by Book of Order, G-9.0404. The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy shall participate and represent the council in these consultations.
- f. All governing bodies are communities of correspondence and may direct social witness material to the assembly. The General Assembly Council refers correspondence concerning social witness policy development and supporting documents to the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy for response.

[Rev. 212th General Assembly (2000), Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)]

PART ONE

WHY AND HOW THE CHURCH MAKES A SOCIAL POLICY WITNESS

Summary

The report on "Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness" explores and responds to the discomfort experienced by some members and congregations with the social witness policies and programs of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The task force was appointed in 1988 by the Committee on Social Witness Policy (CSWP). The CSWP sent this report to the 204th General Assembly (1992) for purposes of study. A consultation between the General Assembly Council and the sixteen synods was held November 6-8, 1992, and the text was amended based on its results. The CSWP now submits the report and invites the 205th General Assembly (1993) to adopt its recommendations and approve its background paper.

The report provides a brief history of the task force and a review of comments received from governing bodies and individuals. The history of the task force suggests that an effort was made to involve the whole church in its work. Many presbyteries, congregations, and individuals participated. The task force makes several suggestions for improving inter-governing body communication.

A Brief Statement of Faith was approved by the 203rd General Assembly (1991) (*Minutes*, 1991, Part I, p. 94). A Brief Statement of Faith has become a framework for the task force's Vision for Social Policy and Social Witness. The section on Affirmations of Why and How the Church Makes a Social Witness, likewise, takes a confessional form.

An extended section on Reformed Discernment and a Social Witness explores biblical and theological themes. This section is an exposition of the doctrine of the church as applied to policy formation. It suggests that Presbyterians are engaged in a discipline of discernment that precedes and informs social witness policy formation and resulting programs.

The recommendations of the report contain several useful proposals on policy development practices and employee behavior. To bridge between the theological material and the practical proposals, the report lists thirteen principles. Of particular concern to members of the General

Assembly is Recommendation 1.b., a proposed revision of Standing Rule 57.

Recommendations

The Committee on Social Witness Policy submitted the following "Report on Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness." The 205th General Assembly (1993)

a. Approved the Summary, Background, Appendix A, and Appendix B.

b. Adopted the following recommendation concerning the proposed revision of Standing Rule 57:

Shall Standing Rule 57. of the *Manual of the General Assembly* be amended by striking the existing text and inserting in its place the following:

"a. Entities of the General Assembly use the following documents to make a social witness policy:

"(1) A 'policy statement' establishes the fundamental principles that guide the denomination's social witness. From this policy base a strategy is developed, a program is defined, and personal social witness is empowered.

"(2) A 'resolution' applies existing policy statements to new circumstances.

"(3) A 'study paper' is designed to stimulate churchwide study of a social concern, social witness policy, or social witness. It does not need to be an elaboration of existing policy statements.

"(4) A 'social involvement report' evaluates Presbyterian social witness in light of particular social concerns and existing policy statements.

"b. All social witness policy documents developed by General Assembly entities, including special committees of the General Assembly [see Standing Rule 57.a.(1)-(4)], must meet the following requirements:

"(1) The Committee on Social Witness Policy will be responsible for the process of developing and recommending social witness policy to the General Assembly" (*Structural Design for Mission, 1992, p. 27*). If any other entity is involved in processes of developing and recommending social witness policy, then appropriate consultation and linkage with the Committee on Social Witness Policy shall be undertaken.

"(2) The body writing a document (i.e. task force, study group, or subcommittee of the Committee on Social Witness Policy) shall be

selected in such a manner that persons of diverse viewpoints, expertise, and social experience are participants.

"(3) A social witness policy document may include a section of recommendations that guide the work of ministry units and related bodies of the church. If approved by an assembly, recommendations shall be referred to the General Assembly Council for implementation in accordance with the practices defined in the G.A.C. Operations Manual. These recommendations may suggest the ways in which the document is to be distributed.

"(4) The annual narrative reports of the Committee on Social Witness Policy and other entities shall not propose policy nor recommend witness. Moreover, narrative reports are not considered social witness policy documents and are exempt, therefore, from the requirements of Standing Rule 57.

"(5) A document shall clearly identify its type of social witness (i.e. policy statement, resolution, study document, or social engagement report).

"(6) No social witness policy documents shall use language which implies that the conscience of individual members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is bound by General Assembly statements or recommendations.

"(7) All social witness policy documents, listed in 57.a.(1)-(4), shall have an initial distribution by the Stated Clerk and be sent with an official cover letter that indicates the nature of the document, specific recommendations approved by the assembly, and an affirmation of the freedom of a believer's conscience.

"c. In addition to 57.b. above, 'policy statements' must meet the following requirements:

"(1) A prospectus defining the social issue(s) to be addressed by a policy statement shall be developed, adopted, and published by the Committee on Social Witness Policy or other entity. This prospectus shall be distributed to the Presbyterian News Office, Monday Morning, and other appropriate media. A brief (one page) summary of the prospectus describing the problem to be addressed, information on where to obtain a full prospectus, and an invitation to respond with comments and suggestions, shall be sent to all synods and presbyteries. This prospectus shall be distributed to all presbyteries with sufficient copies for all congregations, encouraging input from the presbytery and the congregations and indicating how input can be made.

"(2) A task force called to develop a policy statement shall be appointed from nominees submitted from the church.

"(3) The task force shall develop and make known to the whole church a plan indicating the manner in which the whole church can participate (advise, offer input, etc.) in its deliberations.

"(4) The task force shall listen to:

"(a) the voices of the biblical text;

"(b) the wisdom of theological discourse;

"(c) the guidance of the Reformed confessions;

"(d) the insights of sociopolitical disciplines;

"(e) the tradition of past policy statements;

"(f) the advice of members and all governing bodies of the church;

"(g) the insights of people who are poor, victims of existing policies, and those who have not had a voice in the councils of the church; and

"(h) the counsel of ecumenical partners.

"(5) The task force shall cause a policy statement to be written that:

"(a) Explicates its recommended social witness policy based on biblical scholarship;

"(b) Defines its recommended social witness policy in light of theological reflection;

"(c) Is consistent with the confessions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.);

"(d) Reports relevant policy statements adopted by prior General Assemblies and the manner in which church and society have participated in the development of its policy statement;

"(e) Details the contextual situation that prompted its witness;

"(f) States the ethical norms upon which its guidance is premised;

"(g) Describes the social witness the church, its governing bodies, and members are called to make; and

"(h) Describes the manner in which society should change.

"(6) The task force shall provide a summary (one-page maximum) of its policy statement that:

"(a) explains what caused the document to be written;

"(b) outlines the document's conclusions; and

"(c) suggests how the document might be used, what impact it ought to have on the church, and what consequences it ought to have in the public order.

"(7) The task force may cause a series of recommendations to be written for consideration by the General Assembly. The recommendations may include a strategy for distribution of the policy statement.

"(8) The Committee on Social Witness Policy shall submit a penultimate draft of the policy statement for consultation as described in Standing Rule 57.c.(1).

"(a) The Committee on Social Witness Policy may augment the number of participants gathered in consultation for purposes of inclusivity and expertise.

"(b) The consultation may create a report, including suggested changes to the proposed policy statement, which shall be received by the Committee on Social Witness Policy.

"(c) The Committee on Social Witness Policy may (1) amend the proposed policy statement, (2) refer the proposed policy statement back to the task force, or (3) reaffirm the original policy statement.

"(9) The policy statement shall be distributed with an official cover letter from the Stated Clerk that says, in part:

"In exercise of its responsibility to witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in every dimension of life, the (number) General Assembly (year) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has adopted this policy statement. It is presented for the guidance and edification of the whole Christian church and the society to which it ministers. It will determine procedures and program for the units and staff of the General Assembly. It is recommended for consideration and study by other governing bodies (sessions, presbyteries, and synods). It is commended to the free Christian conscience of all congregations and the members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for prayerful study, dialogue, and action."

"d. In addition to 57.b. above, 'resolutions' must meet the following requirements:

"(1) A resolution shall clearly identify the policy statement(s) which it is based.

"(2) A resolution shall be distributed with an official cover from the Stated Clerk that says, in part:

"In exercise of its responsibility to witness to the Lordship of Jesus in every dimension of life, the (number) General Assembly (year) of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has adopted this resolution. It is intended for the guidance and edification of the whole Christian church and the society to which it ministers. It will determine procedures and program for the units and staff of the General Assembly. It is recommended for consideration and study by other governing bodies (sessions, conferences, and synods). It is commended to the free Christian conscience of all congregations and the members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in prayerful study, dialogue, and action."

"e. In addition to 57.b. above, 'study documents' must meet the following requirements:

"(1) A study document may not contain recommendations for consideration by a General Assembly.

"(2) A study document shall provide bibliographic and interpretive resources. This material shall reflect and represent various theological stances found within the Christian church.

"(3) A study document may make a coherent, thoroughgoing argument for a particular ethical stance. In addition, however, a study document shall include a fair presentation of alternative ethical stances in the main body of text or its appendixes.

"(4) A study document shall be distributed with a cover letter that states who is invited to respond, a study guide, a 'user-friendly' response form, the address and phone number of the body responsible for receiving responses, and a schedule that allows at least twelve months for completion.

"(5) A study document shall include an official cover letter that says:

"A study document of the General Assembly seeks to stimulate study and discussion within the church on particular social issues. It is not to be construed as a social witness policy of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Therefore, nothing in this document can be used to direct the mission program of the church."

"(6) A study document shall state the intended outcome of a study process by adding to the above paragraph one of the following:

"(a) This study document is distributed to stimulate study and discussion as an end in itself;

"(b) This study document is distributed to inform and help prepare a policy statement; and

"(c) This study document is distributed to inform and help revise the policy statement, [name], passed by the [number] General Assembly [year].

"(7) The report, based on responses to the study document, shall not be presented to the General Assembly until at least eighteen months have elapsed since the study's initial distribution.

"f. In addition to 57.b. above, 'social involvement' reports shall be distributed with an official cover letter that says, in part:

"A social involvement report of the General Assembly seeks to stimulate discussion on particular social issues and the church's response to these issues. It is not to be construed as a social witness policy of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Therefore, nothing in this document can be used to direct the mission program of the church."

"g. The church's social witness is multidirectional and multilateral. To guide entities preparing the General Assembly's social policy, the following statements encourage appropriate attitudes and behaviors.

"(1) No social witness policy may purport to bind the conscience of individual members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

"(2) A social witness policy document is a minute of a governing body meeting. It may be extracted from the minutes for publication. If it is extracted, it shall be treated in the same manner as any other minute. (The nature of debate and the final vote are irrelevant.)

"(3) A social policy document shall include instructions for its distribution (i.e., to all governing bodies, the president of the United States of America, the president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, or the secretary general of the United Nations).

"(4) The Stated Clerk and directors or ministry units or related bodies shall respond to emerging mission needs that require an 'official' Presbyterian social witness by explicating existing General Assembly social witness policy.

"(5) The General Assembly Council is prepared to respond to invitations to consult on regional social policy development in the manner defined by G-9.0404. Committee on Social Witness Policy shall participate and represent the council in these consultations.

"(6) All governing bodies are communities of correspondence may direct social witness material to the assembly. The General Assembly Council refers correspondence concerning social witness policy development and supporting documents to the Committee on Social Witness Policy for response."

c. Adopted the following recommendation on proposed revision to Standing Rule 42.:

Amend Standing Rule 42. of the Manual of the General Assembly by amending by inserting the phrase ", known as a commissioners' resolution," after the words "an item of business" in the first sentence. Also, amend the second sentence that reads "No commissioner may sign more than two resolutions." insert a new sentence "In the preparation of a resolution, commissioners are urged to be aware of existing General Assembly policies relevant to their proposal and, where appropriate, to make reference to these policies." Standing Rule 42. shall now read:

42. New Business. Any two commissioners may propose an item of business, known as a commissioners' resolution, for assembly consideration by delivering it in writing to the Stated Clerk or the clerk's designee no later than noon on the third day of the session of the General Assembly. No commissioner may sign more than two resolutions. In the preparation of a resolution, commissioners are urged to be aware of existing General Assembly policies relevant to their proposal where appropriate, to make reference to these policies. The Stated Clerk shall not transmit as new business any resolution that deals with an item of business already before the General Assembly nor transmit a resolution whose purpose can be achieved by the regular process of amendment and debate. If the proposed resolution . . ." [the rest of Standing Rule 42. remains the same].

d. Adopted the following recommendation on proposed revision to the Personnel Policies for General Assembly Entities and Guidelines for Governing Bodies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):

Refer the following additions to the Personnel Policies for General Assembly Entities and Guidelines for Governing Bodies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to the General Assembly Council:

Amend Section 13.00 Other Employment Practices of the Personnel Policies for General Assembly Entities and Guidelines for Governing Bodies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) be amended by adding a new section 13.11 to read as follows:

13.11 Employee Social Witness

Employees may be required by virtue of their job description to make a social witness by advocating and implementing the social policies of the

General Assembly. Such a witness should be made in the name of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and make reference to the General Assembly policy on which the social witness is based. The following guidelines do not prevent an employee from carrying out this work.

"In addition, the following does not support a personal social witness by a General Assembly employee that contradicts the policies guiding an employee's work. In the event that an employee feels that he or she cannot carry out necessary job functions for reasons of conscience, the employee may request a change of assignment or may exercise his or her right to resign the position.

"a. Individuals employed by the church do not lose their right to make a personal social witness.

"b. When making a personal social witness, an employee shall not make reference to his or her employee status. However, if questioned, an employee may acknowledge employed status without using that status to make a claim of authority. Accordingly, it is not permissible for an individual employee making a non-job related, personal statement, to use professional stationery, claim expertise by virtue of employment in the church, or hold press conferences on church property.

"c. It is permissible for persons employed by the church to identify their personal affiliation while making a personal social witness. Thus, it is permissible for a General Assembly ministry unit director to claim membership in _____ Presbyterian Church of _____ or the Presbytery of _____.

"d. It is beneficial to the whole church if individuals employed by the church, and making a personal social witness, inform the governing body (session or presbytery) of personal accountability and their on-the-job supervisor of their personal social witness activities.

"e. The possibility of dissent from a social witness policy and the resulting social witness of the General Assembly is not alienated by employment with the church. This is a reasonable expression of the freedom of conscience. However, dissent that diminishes work effectiveness is limited by these personnel policies. It is beneficial to the whole church, and mandatory for church officers that dissent be expressed to the governing body (session or presbytery) of personal accountability, and, in addition, the on-the-job supervisor should be informed of each action."

e. Urged the General Assembly Council and its Education and Congregational Nurture Ministry Unit, in cooperation with the Committee on Social Witness Policy, to use the resources of this report

chapters 1, 3, and 5 of the study document, *Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness*, by:

(1) Publishing a brief educational guide to social policy formation and witness for small groups, classes, and seminars;

(2) Publishing a leadership development resource which explains and interprets Reformed patterns of social witness; and

(3) Including, where appropriate, information about reformed patterns of social witness in youth, adult, and leadership development curricula.

f. Urged the General Assembly Council and its Church Relations Ministry Unit to make available copies of this report and encourage discussion of social witness among participants in young persons' seminars.

g. Requested a social involvement report be submitted by the Committee on Social Witness Policy to the 208th General Assembly (6) that evaluates the state of social policy development in the denomination.

h. Directed the Office of the General Assembly to reproduce report and to distribute it, with a study guide, to the governing body of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

i. Urged the Committee on Social Witness Policy to dismiss the Force on Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness as an appropriate expression of gratitude for its contribution to the life of the whole church.

j. Thanked the following presbyteries that submitted the oversights and commissioners who submitted the resolutions that caused this report to be written.

Appendix A: Statement of Faith for Social Policy and Social Witness

A Brief Statement of Faith of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is a theological confession found on the lips of believers gathered in worship and engaged in mission. This setting inspires our vision in words drawn from the church's social witness, and the policies which guide that witness in worshiping communities. Voices, joined in concert, make confession: nothing can separate us or all creation from the love of Christ Jesus our Lord.

Listen to the words of the Brief Statement of Faith augmented by task reflections:

(1) "... [T]he Spirit gives us courage to pray without ceasing ..."
(Book of Confessions, 10.4, lines 66-67)

We are a people of prayer. We delight in and praise God for the creation. We rejoice in God's love, a love that will not let us go.

In prayer, we confess and confront our sin: our destruction of this earth, our violation and abasement of one another. We own up to our fear of justice and our avoidance of responsibility. We even discover an unwillingness to care for ourselves, for our health, and for our vocational commitments. And, before the last sigh of confession, we discover an assurance of pardon and a reassurance of grace that can come only from the God who participated with us in creation through Jesus Christ.

Our prayer aches for God's intercession, for the disappeared of Brazil or those who died in drug drive-by shoot-outs, for the child with too little food or the child with too much, for those in positions of responsibility that they might rule justly, and for those subject to the torture and terror of tyrants.

Our prayer is unceasing. We seek the restoration of creation and the just ordering of society. We seek health for the ill and release for the captives. We seek the freedom we have discovered in Jesus Christ for all humanity. Our prayer, one-sided at its first impulse, becomes a dialogue with the divine. In silence, we listen. We wait. Rushing words yield and become: Your reign come. Your will be done.

(2) "... to witness among all peoples ..."
(Book of Confessions, 10.4, line 68)

We live in a world of many and diverse faiths, centers of value and power. Each claims truth and meaning. We are tempted to shout louder, to drown out the diversity.

Not confident in our ability to shape or articulate the common good, we are tempted to turn our attention inward. We are tempted to fall silent.

But the Sovereign One is no stranger to human experience. Our courage is drawn from the fullness of this faith. No part of human life, history, or interaction with nature is exempt from the claims of God. No economic condition, no amount of political power, no race, no region, no gender is beyond the love or justice of God.

Our courage does not deny our humanity. Our prophetic voice seeks to echo that of Jesus. But, it is not infallible. We fail. We err. We miss the mark. We wake up to new understandings. As we witness among all peoples, we seek to do so with humility and with the Spirit's reforming presence.

(3) "... to unmask idolatries . . ." (Book of Confessions, 10.4, line 69)

The fear of God does not come easily to us. It did not come easy to our parents in the faith. Other dreams and other visions offer comfortable answers, provide more permissive values, and confirm our own self-interests and prejudices. Effortlessly, humanity embraces idolatries.

We do not live in isolation. We are born into families, live in human and natural communities, and work for institutions. We give allegiance to country, state, and city or town. Each individual, community, and institution lives by values and visions. Some, maybe many, embrace idolatry.

Often the church is assigned the task of providing theological cover for non-Christ-like behavior. Often it is asked to proclaim peace where there is no peace. Often it is condemned for speaking truth to purveyors of unrighteous or righteous power to manipulators of illicit power.

Discipleship, therefore, is not for the weak of heart. Indeed, it requires bold willingness to speak tough words to communities, corporations, and states, to overturn the tables of those who would make the church a haven for self-profit. The Spirit gives us courage to unmask idolatries. The Spirit calls us into communions to speak truth to power.

(4) "... to hear the voices of peoples long silenced . . ." (Book of Confessions, 10.4, line 70)

The interests of society are fickle and ephemeral. One week it is hospitality to the homeless. The next, hiding the homeless to make our streets clean and our stores inviting. The next . . .

The Spirit gives the people of God courage to value the voices of people long silenced, people with no hope of redress and no dream of redemption, people who often do not have a place to sleep at night or a community of defense for day, people whose condition never makes it to the front page of the local paper. The people of God listen year in and year out.

Fundamentally, the social witness of this communion announces that no matter how long silenced are the dreams of justice or the voices of people, history is in the hand of God. A new heaven and a new earth are being sent. In between, our witness says that nothing can separate us, or our communities, or our nation, or any other nation, from the love and life of God.

(5) "... to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace . . ." (Book of Confessions, 10.4, line 71)

We are compelled, by the Spirit, to seek a compassionate culture. Our societies may be marked by growing displacement, poverty, economic

precariousness, destruction of the natural order, and ethnic and racial violence. But the vision of peace, the dream of freedom, and the hope of justice are the church's imperative.

We see hopelessness and death before our very eyes, on our doorsteps, and on our television screens. The struggle for peace and freedom and justice are urgent matters for the majority of humanity. A social witness and the policies that guide the witness are a matter of life and death.

The community in which we live and work is a gift of God. We are not alone. We are not isolated. The body of Christ, we discover, is tied tightly together in communities of discernment, conversation, and witness made one by the Spirit. In Christ, even governing bodies unite, speaking with one voice in solidarity, with courage, to witness.

Affirmations of Why and How the Church Makes a Social Witness and Develops a Social Witness Policy

Reformed teaching sustains a witness and guides the process used to develop its policy. It is constantly being renewed and reformed by the Spirit. Certain explicit affirmations are employed as the church makes a social witness and develops policy for such witness:

- We affirm that Jesus Christ proclaimed the reign of God. His witness compels us to bring good news to the poor and release to the captive. We affirm that God is active, redeeming creation with acts of justice and mercy. We affirm that the Spirit gives us courage to work with others to transform church and society with witnesses of justice, freedom, and peace.

- We affirm the authority of Scripture for our faith and life, not only as individuals but also as a witnessing community in the world.

- We affirm the responsibility and authority of the church to make a social witness and develop policy which guides that witness. The church, if it is to remain true to its biblical roots, theological heritage, and contemporary practice, must not fall silent. It must speak faithfully, truthfully, persuasively, humbly, boldly, and urgently.

- We affirm the full priesthood of believers and the common discipline of biblical study in the context of community. We affirm a range of responsible methods used to interpret the biblical text in our governing bodies.

- We affirm that God alone is Lord of the conscience.

- We affirm an apostolic pattern and the Reformed practice for making a social witness through the action of governing bodies of the church. This process draws upon the ancient model of the Jerusalem councils, reflects the need of this church to order its common life, and gives coherence and

ection to the witness of the community and its members (Acts 6 and 7). Social witness and the policies that guide the witness emerge from the struggle of the people of the church engaged with the world, gathered in governing bodies, and open to the Spirit. By vote the body tests the church's discernment of the Spirit's prompting.

- We affirm that governing bodies edify and persuade. Their authority is pastoral and prophetic. They nurture, teach, challenge, and empower.
- We affirm that a social witness is always open to reformation.
- We affirm that social policy development processes are open to reformation by the Spirit moving in the church's governing bodies.
- We affirm the appropriate place of conflict within the church over social matters. We know that this conflict is not simply over individual policies or denominational processes, but also over the prerogative of the church to engage in activities of witness. This conflict is not necessarily a mark of sin, but a mark of diversity within the body of Christ. The church's task is to develop ways of making conflict constructive by developing a consultative, collegial, and communal process or procedure to respond to the reality of these conflicts.

Reformed Discernment and a Social Witness

Churches in the Reformed tradition are sustained by worship, make corporate confessions of faith, and are known for their engagement with public order. This is not without reason. For Reformed Christians, God is at the center of life in all its varied facets. God is active in the world as creator and redeemer, neither staying on the sidelines nor being confined within certain boundaries. Churches seek to witness to God in public life because God is present there. "... God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation."¹

Presbyterians agree that we are called to witness to God in every aspect of daily life, including the often complicated and ambiguous spheres of political, economic, and social life. We also disagree with one another on occasion about what the character of the witness should be and where it should be exercised. The tension here, which may be viewed as a source of creativity as well as troublesome controversy, poses sharply the question of discernment.

The Church as a Community of Discernment

The context is set by Paul's words to the church at Philippi:

... It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless

for the day of Christ, filled with the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Phil. 1:9-11 RSV)

Discernment in the New Testament is practiced in the community of the church. It involves the testing or proving of ourselves and our society in the light of God's transforming grace toward us. It flows from love and issues in justice, guided by discriminating wisdom along the way. As God tests our hearts (1 Thess. 2:4), so we test ourselves (2 Cor. 13:5), and seek actively to discern and prove the form of our faithful witness to God's redeeming work in our world.

How may Presbyterians discern what God is calling us to be and to do in our engagements with social structures? A Reformed understanding of the church is crucial as we struggle with this question. Presbyterians understand the church in covenantal terms. God has established a covenant in the calling of Abraham, the commandments of the Exodus, and anew in the gift of Jesus Christ. Through this relationship, believers are also bonded to each other in love and shared ministry.

The notion of covenant expresses the powerful insight that the Christians' relationship with God through Christ links them together in community. For Reformed Christians, the life of faith is communal. Discernment of what God is calling us to be and to do takes place in the community of the church. The believing community is also the community of discernment.

The Westminster Confession makes this point with unmistakable clarity:

... All saints that are united to Jesus Christ their head, by his Spirit and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory; and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces; and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.¹

In this community, discernment of God's will for all human life, including the public realm, takes place.

Discernment Through Dialogue with the Word of God in Scripture

The church seeks guidance for its responsibility in the world by engaging in continual dialogue with the living Word of God through the witness of Holy Scriptures. This is not simply a matter of interpreting an ancient text. It means hearing that word afresh in our time by the guidance of the Holy Spirit as it speaks to us out of the events and the teachings of the biblical witness.

In this dialogue, Christians bring questions to the Scriptures from the experience of persons in today's world. Christians believe persons are

questioned by the Word of God in Scripture as well. Readers raise questions and are themselves questioned.

The first characteristic of this dialogue is that believers themselves are judged by the Word of God. We are judged, forgiven, and transformed by the gospel we proclaim. The well-known admonition of Paul is pertinent:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:2, NRSV).

The redeeming grace of God in Jesus Christ not only reconciles persons with God but also frees persons from the powers of this age that unite, divide, and destroy. We are not to be conformed to these powers. Our discernment can no longer be controlled by these powers. Instead, through the transforming impact of the gospel on persons' hearts and minds, we may discern and bear faithful witness to God's will.

The second characteristic of this dialogue is to take seriously the experience of persons whose questions and insights about Scripture have been ignored. Here we are including women, persons of color, the poor, powerless, and others. These sisters and brothers of faith have helped us see how Scripture can be used to accept or justify injustice and oppression. We need to listen to these voices in order to discern God's call today. We need to learn from these voices how Scripture encourages powerless people to move from oppression to liberation.

The third element of this dialogue is that we are not permitted to pay attention to only those biblical texts that support our own point of view and ignore those that do not. The Word of God speaks through Scripture in its diversity and in its entirety. It confronts, questions, and challenges. It resists being manipulated by us to legitimate our own narrow interests. The Word communicates the saving power of God that can renew who we are and redirect our lives. It is a word that leads us into communion with Christ and into participation in the promised reign of God.

Discernment of God's Call to Social Witness

Why is the church called to the task of social witness? In the church's dialogue with God's Word in Scripture, we encounter inescapable themes. Communities of faith are brought into being by the initiating movements of God's grace. In response, these communities worship the God who has reached out in love. From true worship flows righteousness and compassion in community relations.

We can see this pattern in the powerful experience of the exodus. This is a formative event in the Hebrew faith tradition. The exodus was God's

mighty act that freed the Hebrews from bondage and reconfirmed a covenant relationship. The exodus was at the center of the community's worship, in its understanding of history and its moral responsibilities as specified in the Ten Commandments and other moral codes.

It was the memory of God's deliverance in the exodus that gave to the prophets the ability to discern the requirements of justice. The Psalmist champions the cause of the poor by appealing to the God of justice revealed in the exodus, and by praying for a king who would execute justice like Yahweh (Psalm 72, et al.). The God of the exodus liberates people from bondage and requires justice and righteousness as the ordering principles for human communities.

The Hebrew prophets continually remind God's people of their responsibility "to do justice, . . . love [mercy], and . . . walk humbly with [their] God" (Micah 6:8, NRSV), and to ". . . let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream" (Amos 5:24, NRSV). They do not hesitate to speak the Word of God to the political, religious establishment. Specific warning is given to those who seek only their own well-being and ignore the well-being of the marginalized and oppressed. Patronizing charity is deemed an unworthy response to human need. Israel's failure to be just and righteous is clearly seen as disobedient to God and the reason for national decay and destruction.

In the New Testament, Jesus is pictured in ways that are in profound continuity with the exodus tradition and prophetic witness of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Magnificat in Luke sings of the One who "has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree" (Luke 1:52, RSV). Jesus draws on Isaiah's vision, deeply rooted in the exodus, to provide an interpretation of his own calling: ". . . Jesus proclaimed the reign of God: preaching good news to the poor and release to the captives, . . ."

Jesus frequently witnessed to the priority of the poor in the reign of God. He challenged the rich young man, he sharply criticized the hard-heartedness of religious leaders, and he taught that those who reached out to marginalized persons were serving him (Matt. 19:16-24 and Luke 10:25-37).

With the death and resurrection of Jesus comes the bountiful gifts of divine healing, forgiveness, reconciliation, and empowerment. Believers are called to live the life made possible by resurrection faith. In this life, hope is more powerful than death. Works are the fruit of grace. The social witness imperative in Jesus's life, death, and resurrection is unavoidable.

This conviction is inspired further by Jesus' missionary commission to the first disciples.

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:18-20, NRSV)

This commission is complete and inclusive. All authority in heaven and on earth is in the hands of the risen Christ. The work of the church is to make this known, in order that not only individuals, but nations—that people in all their social, economic, political, and natural or environmental groupings—may enter into responsible relationship with the reigning Christ.⁴

Social witness is an expression of this gospel. It is inseparably coupled with evangelism in a faithful enactment of the church's mission. In the words of the Confession of 1967:

To be reconciled to God is to be sent into the world as [God's] reconciling community. This community, the church universal, is entrusted with God's message of reconciliation and shares [the] labor of healing the enmities which separate men [and women] from God and from each other. . . .⁵

The church is commissioned to bear witness to the God we know in Christ who judges, forgives, and transforms this world. It is a world of power and structures, of processes and relationships, of individual persons and communities, of human and natural environments. This is the world that God loves deeply, and empowers Christians to engage responsibly. The letter of Ephesians states the church's witness in this way:

. . . to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. (Eph. 3:8-10, NRSV)

The church is given the responsibility to discern the work of Christ in the world and for the world, and to act on what it believes. Faithfulness to Christ entails. This is the evangelical and the social mission of the church. We are not called to witness to an ideal world, nor to sanctify any particular social system or political organization. This requires not just good intentions but discipline as well; the discipline of discernment.

Gifts, Graces, and Disciplines of Discernment

We have expressed the conviction that discernment is a communal undertaking and responsibility of a covenanted people.

The church gathers to praise God, to hear [God's] word for [humankind], to baptize and to join in the Lord's Supper, to pray for and present the world to [God] in worship, to enjoy fellowship, to receive instruction, strength, and comfort, to order and organize its own corporate life, to be tested, renewed, and reformed, and to speak and act in the world's affairs as may be appropriate to the needs of the time.⁶

This brings its own set of problems and possibilities that need to be addressed. Discernment requires valuing the gifts and graces of diverse peoples, and the disciplines for ordered inquiry, deliberation, and decision making.

Understanding the church in light of the metaphor of "body" helps us appreciate the different gifts and ministries through which the mutual service and mission of the church are carried out. Christians are not "individuals" but "members," representing the church and responsible to it for their various ministries in the world. Members are entitled to the guidance and support of the whole Christian community, even as they in their own competencies and spiritual discernment, help to form the mind of the church.⁷

Both evangelistic and social witness can be seen in this understanding of the church. Personal witness is expressed through countless acts of faithfulness in the lives of believers. It is carried on in sermons that preach the word and in the labor of Christian scholars. Witness happens in the work of believers who struggle for social justice, and of those who take leadership in public life.

Corporately, witness takes place in confessions of faith, in social policy statements adopted by governing bodies, and in the organized work of the church in mission and service to the world. None of these expressions of witness is final or absolute. The church in its confessions, policy statements, and acts of ministry is always being reformed by the judging and redeeming Word of God. The church's witness must always be tested by the faithfulness and integrity of its discernment of the work of the triune God in human life.

Governing bodies cannot claim to speak for all members in their jurisdiction. They do not, and cannot, compel assent by members. Neither can dissenting members dismiss the actions of governing bodies as meaningless and worthless because they disagree with them. Members cannot separate themselves from actions of governing bodies as though they are not part of the same body.

The exercise of a free conscience by church officers, in the discernment process, is both bound and informed by ". . . the essentials of the Reformed faith and polity as expressed in the *Book of Confessions* and the *Form of Government*" (G-6.0108). Additional constraints limit scriptural interpretation by requiring that the freedom of conscience be exercised, ". . . without serious departure . . . [from the] standard[s] of the Reformed faith and polity) . . . the rights and views of others, and . . . [the ongoing] constitutional governance of the Church . . ." (*Book of Order*, G-6.0108a).

This direction of conscience is commended to the church by apostolic practice and required for the development of community life. The integrity of the officer is not demeaned but more fully expressed by this direction and by the solidarity that results in and with the body of Christ. The Form of Government says that

... in becoming a candidate or officer of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) one chooses to exercise freedom of conscience within certain bounds. His or her conscience is captive to the Word of God as interpreted in the standards of the Church so long as he or she continues to seek or hold office in that body. . . . (Book of Order, G-6.0108b)

Often we experience a tension between the unity of the church in Christ and the diversity of its members. It is both a humbling and inspiring experience when we allow our religious and social viewpoints to be challenged and even changed through interaction with people in other cultures and conditions of life. As the church has participated in the ecumenical movement and world mission in the past century, this has had a transformative impact on its discernment of God's call to social witness.

Historically, Presbyterians have sought to develop structures and processes for discernment that embody its covenantal theology. This may be called a conciliar model in contrast with other church forms that invest authority in bishops, a pope, an infallible document, or a single congregation.

By "conciliar" we mean that discernment of what the church is called to be and to do is entrusted to governing bodies that are constituted by elected membership. The mind of the church is formed as sessions, presbyteries, synods, and assemblies gather to deliberate and make decisions. Governing bodies are called to the disciplines of the interpretation of Scripture and guided by the historic confessions of the church. They are called to communicate with the church universal through the ecumenical movement. They are also called to listen and respond to the concerns of the stewards of public office and responsibility, the caretakers of creation, and to the voices of the poor and powerless through which God is speaking with special urgency today.

The initiation of a social witness policy can occur at many different points: in a church session, in a presbytery, in an advocacy group, in the experience of Christians in mission, in the challenge of a Christian community at home or abroad, in a meeting of the ecumenical church. However, Presbyterians believe that decisions about the church's social witness need to be made by persons gathered in governing bodies (session, presbytery, synod, and General Assembly). These individuals are elected to exercise their responsibility on behalf of the whole church, and are commissioned . . . not simply to reflect the will of the people, but rather to seek together to find and represent the will of Christ . . ." (Book of Order, G-4.0301d).

Social witness policy is forged in environments in which open debate is expected. We also recognize there is a time to bring deliberation to a provisional conclusion by means of vote. We have not insisted on unanimity in discernment as a condition of corporate action. Instead, Presbyterians have provided structures that acknowledge the value as well as the inevitability of conflict. There is no claim to infallibility in the votes of governing bodies, but Presbyterians believe that faithful discernment is most likely when elected representatives meet in community to interpret the Word of God in relation to contemporary challenges, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The church's discernment of God's call through the work of governing bodies is intended to provide guidance to members in their personal exercise of public witness, and to direct corporate witness by designated units of the connectional church body. This model of discernment requires genuine processes of dialogue among believers with varied and even conflicting experiences and convictions. A conciliar model depends on the insights of a faithful and diverse membership. Interaction among members and councils, laity and clergy, governing bodies from sessions to General Assemblies, is crucial in fashioning faithful social witness.⁴

For Presbyterians, few theological affirmations are as important as: "... God alone is Lord of the conscience. . . ." It is absolutely clear that governing bodies cannot bind the conscience of any member. Presbyterians are free to disagree with the social witness policy of any governing body. Members are finally accountable to God alone. Moreover, dissenting voices may contribute to the ongoing responsibility of the church to discern the mind of Christ in its engagement with the public order.

It should come as no surprise that the discernment of governing bodies is different from the views of some church members. This means neither that the governing bodies are wrong, nor that the dissenting members are wrong.

The church's call to public witness will necessarily bring controversy—within the public arena and within the church. It is important for the church to display love and fairness in its social witness. For members who disagree with governing bodies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), this means respect for the judgments of the bodies, a willingness to struggle seriously with their discernment of God's call, a readiness to understand the theological basis for decisions, and a commitment to serve the peace, unity, and purity of the church in dissent. For those who agree with particular decisions of governing bodies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), this means recognizing and respecting the pain and anger such decisions may cause among those who dissent.

For governing bodies, love and fairness require respect for the diverse views of members, readiness to listen to discernments that are at variance with proposed policies, opportunities for members to participate in honest and open debate, special attention to the voices of the poor and powerless, and a commitment to serve the church in advocacy. Governing bodies and members are challenged to keep the focus on the question: What is God calling the church to be and to do in contexts of urgency in which issues are a matter of life and death for peoples created in God's image?

The church's insight into discernment, diversity, dissent, fairness, and love is both theoretical and practical. Theological reflection leads to behavioral guidelines; a vision of interdependence gains clarity in patterns of decorum. Therefore, we affirm that:

- It is appropriate for all Christian believers to make a personal social witness. It is appropriate for all governing bodies of the church to make a corporate social witness.
- It is permissible for members of congregations and presbyteries to affirm their personal affiliation while making a personal social witness. Thus, it is permissible to say, "I am a member of First Presbyterian Church." It is not permissible to say, "I speak for First Presbyterian Church," unless authorized to do so by the session.)
- It is wise for a personal social witness to show evidence of study of relevant governing body social witness policy.
- It is beneficial to the church if members making a personal social witness inform a governing body (session or presbytery) of the reasons for their activities.
- Dissent is a potential outcome of a believer's assessment of a governing body's social witness and the policies that guide it. This is a reasonable expression of the freedom of conscience. It is beneficial to the whole church (and mandatory for church officers) for dissent to be expressed in to the governing body (session or presbytery) of which one is a member.
- On occasion, a member is so disquieted by a governing body's social witness policy or the resulting witness that he or she entertains the thought of resignation from membership in the Presbyterian community. An urge should never be acted out in isolation. The believer gains membership in congregation or presbytery by vote of session or presbytery. The decision to resign likewise should invite a corporate assessment of the will of God. It is entered into after prayerful dialogue—which may prompt a session or presbytery to enter into correspondence with other governing bodies.

This paper addressed these concerns on pages 8–9 of this report, where appropriate patterns of behavior for officers and employees were introduced.

Principles of Discernment and Patterns of Formulation

This report has discussed the vision, teaching, and purpose of the church as the body of Christ. It has stated that the church is compelled to interact with the realities of our times. It has encouraged the church to emulate the model of Christ who engaged the realities of his time and made a witness. Now we focus on questions of process. How shall we order our corporate life to discern Christ's will? How do we put Christ's will into practice with sufficient power to be a credible witness in our time? How does the church make its social witness?

The *Structural Design for Mission*, Section XII, states that social witness policy shall be developed by the Committee on Social Witness Policy:

... through a process which recognizes the global context in which the church is called to witness, solicits the special insights of people who are poor and oppressed, seeks the wisdom of ecumenical partners, uses the relevant expertise of persons in specialized fields and solicits the views of the governing bodies. . . ."

In addition, the committee shall provide for

... careful exploration of social issues, analyzing both the biblical and theological foundation as well as the secular context. . . ."

What follows is:

- a practical expression of the above theological discussion of "Reformed Discernment and a Social Witness," and
- an invitation to broad participation in the formulation of social witness policies by all Presbyterian governing bodies.

The following principles, informing and delimiting each other, constitute a basis for the procedures used to discern the mind of Christ for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as it develops social witness policy and makes a social witness. All governing bodies pursue the tasks of social witness in light of manuals of operation, mission context, and stewardship resources.

An Unavoidable Responsibility

All Presbyterian governing bodies (sessions, presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly) are responsible for formulating social witness policies and directing the ensuing social witness.

A Task Undertaken on Behalf of the Whole Church

Each governing body formulates its social witness policy and directs ensuing social witness on behalf of the whole church. Therefore, a session, like any other governing body, is understood as a particular expression of the universal or catholic church, and is required to represent the face of the whole church in the development of social witness policies (Book of Order, G-4.0102).

Cooperation and Communication

The development of social witness policies and the implementation of witness programs are best completed in cooperation with other governing bodies and ecumenical partners. Communication among all parts of the church is required for the good of the enterprise. Thus, the patterns of policy development found in the Presbyterian community can be described as a bilateral and multidirectional cooperation and communication system serving the whole church of Jesus Christ.

Cooperative formation of policy between two or more corresponding governing bodies is to be encouraged. The Committee on Social Witness Policy encourages, for instance, simultaneous policy formulation and witness between a presbytery and a synod.

This principle means that a governing body cannot ignore the social witness policies of any other governing bodies. A responsible governing body takes note of, and pays attention to, the witness of colleague governing bodies.

Corporate Witness

A governing body's social witness is a communal act undertaken in response to the Spirit's movement. The hopes and concerns of individuals and/or communities, both private and public, are carried into the labor of policy formulation. While individuals may choose to put corporate policies into action in their personal social witness, discernment of governing bodies is decisive in the Presbyterian process of discovering the mind of Christ in social witness.¹¹ A social witness is a continuing process of dialogue, formulation, action/testimony, and reflection. This process of discerning witness is one of ongoing deliberation in community.

Faithful to Scripture

A social witness and the policies that guide the witness emerge from study of Holy Scripture, are counseled by the Reformed confessions,

informed by human experience, and tested within the community of faith under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We reaffirm that Presbyterian interpretation of Scripture involves seven guiding principles:

- Jesus Christ, as our Redeemer, is the center of Scripture and it is to Christ that the church witnesses.
- We interpret and apply God's message through the act of the Holy Spirit.
- All interpretation must accord with the twofold commandment to love God and our neighbor.
- The living, doctrinal tradition of the church, expressed in theology and confessions, guides us.
- Our appeal should be to the plain text of Scripture, to the grammatical and historical context, rather than to mere subjectivity.
- Interpretation of the Bible requires earnest study in order to establish the best text, and to interpret the influence of the historical and cultural context in which the divine message has come.
- Interpretation of any portion of Scripture is made in the context of the meanings of the rest of Scripture and in light of the whole text.¹²

Inclusive of Others

Governing bodies frequently do not include those who are identified as the poor and the marginalized of society. Therefore, it is particularly important to involve such persons in the development of the church's social witness policy, so that these voices may be heard and their insights shared. Care must be taken to include those who are affected by a social witness and those who take responsibility for their neighbor in public as well as private life. The commitment to bring such diverse perspectives to bear can sanction the church's process of social policy development and the resulting witness.

Informed and Knowledgeable

A social policy development employs the full range of expertise available to the church. Biblical, theological, and ethical scholarship is sought. If essential information is not internally available, the body developing a policy is obliged to seek it elsewhere. This search is catholic or universal, reaching all Christian communions of the Northern and Southern hemispheres. As the situation requires, we also seek the insights of other faith and ideological traditions, and secular disciplines.

Aware of the Past and Present

The formation of a social witness policy includes understanding past policy, if any, related to the area of concern, and discussion of the current factors, circumstances, or situations that support the need for the policy's formulation or reformulation. An awareness of differing contexts and a respect for freedom of conscience engender understanding rather than condemnation when Presbyterians differ over social witness policy formulations.

Faithful in Disagreement

Disagreement, and even dissent over a social witness and the policy that guides the witness, does not astonish a Presbyterian. Disagreement, when present between governing body and believer, invites responsiveness and dialogue, not blind assent or withdrawal from membership. All forms of communication among persons and governing bodies must remain open. This denomination invites dissent with respect, reflection, communication, prayer, and conscientious activity. It calls upon those who disagree or dissent to continue in dialogue and remain a part of the church.

Reformed and Always Being Reformed

A statement of social witness policy is not conclusive and no process is perfect. Given the finitude and imperfection of human endeavor, a social witness policy statement is not final. Existing policies should be continually enriched with new gifts of faithfulness, knowledge, and experience. Over time, as Presbyterians and others continue to seek the mind of Christ in changing social contexts, old truths will become outmoded. The continuity of Presbyterian social witness policy statements consists in seeking the mind of Christ, rather than in similarities among the various discernments of that mind.

Accountable Process

The church's social witness is subject to at least three types of accountability intended to enhance the integrity of that witness:

- A social witness policy is formed and reformed in a manner that is consistent with the standards and principles approved by a governing body. Once adopted, a social witness policy remains in effect until it is either reformed or rescinded by a subsequent action of that governing body. For the General Assembly, these standards and principles are found

in the *Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*, *Structural Design for Mission*, and the *Manual of the General Assembly*.

- A social witness is implemented by a governing body of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Thus, a General Assembly, meeting in a known location at a specific time, votes its own witness. The ministry units and related bodies of the General Assembly give programmatic content to that witness. The officers and employees of the General Assembly interpret and fulfill that witness. Future assemblies retain the ability to review and evaluate actions taken toward the fulfillment of that witness.

- A social witness policy and its resulting witness are evangelical, resulting in mission activity; they engage church and society. Governing bodies are urged to discern the effectiveness of their social witness, being sensitive to the critique of those affected by or engaged in social witness and especially those long silenced in the church or society. As the Spirit speaks through such persons, social witness can be reformed to become more effective.

Collegial Patterns

Presbyterian social witness policies address all believers as maturing members of the body of Christ. Baptism incorporates the faithful into one household; all are partners in Christ's ministry. While other traditions may envision the collegial practice of ministry as a relationship among the ordained, our tradition broadens the vision: all baptized members are respected participants in the process of witness."

A social witness and its guiding social witness policies respect the integrity of those whom it confronts with a calling and command of God. It does not engage in judgmental rhetoric about persons or governing bodies. Instead, it seeks to draw Presbyterians from differing geographical and cultural contexts and perspectives into a mutual struggle for social righteousness.

Ecumenical Process

Those engaged in a social witness and the development of the policies defining that witness seek the wisdom of other church bodies. We are not alone when making a social witness. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) joins our Christian sisters and brothers in acts of witness, recognizing that there are points at which we will respectfully disagree and bear different witnesses.

Ecumenical partnerships shape Presbyterian social witness in two major ways: as a source of information and insight, and as initiators of collaborative witness ministries. Adequate social policy homework shows an

wareness of the responses, interests, and perceptions of other denominations. It results in strengthened witness by the church catholic in the public life of nations and international agencies.

Concluding Reflection

By heritage and conviction, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is compelled to hold fast to the excellence of its social witness policies and programs. The ancient words of biblical prophets and poets have not become less persuasive in the last few days. The redeeming witness of Jesus of Nazareth still sways the course of history—even as the third millennium begins. The work of the church, with its two-thousand-year history of success and failure, remains incomplete.

A witness to the vision of social righteousness in a compassionate culture is needed. It is needed in this generation. The violence of war, the suffering of the poor, the abuse of creation, and the dangers confronting our children allow no escape. Faithfulness requires that the church witness to the peace, freedom, and justice that God has promised in Christ.

Appendix A

Members of the Task Force on Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness

Task Force Members

1. Robert I. Long, pastor, St. Matthew Presbyterian Church, Silver Spring, Md., chairman of the Task Force on Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness, member of the Presbytery of National Capital.
2. Elizabeth D. Beck, interim pastor, 1987-91 moderator of Social Justice and Peacemaking Ministry Unit committee, Synod of Lakes and Prairies, member of the Presbytery of Northern Waters.
3. Virgil Cruz, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, member of the Presbytery of Louisville.
4. Ned Edwards, pastor, Forest Hill Church, Cleveland Heights, Ohio, member of the Presbytery of the Western Reserve.
5. P.C. (Buddy) Erni, pastor, The Reformed Church, Bronoxville, N.Y. and member of the Committee on Social Witness Policy, member of the Presbytery of Hudson River.
6. Robert Guthrie, Fulton, Mo., member of Old Auxvasse-Nine Mile Presbyterian Church.
7. Hugh F. Halvenstadt, McCormick Theological Seminary, member of the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee.
8. Lois Gehr Livezey, McCormick Theological Seminary, elder, member of University Presbytery, Chicago, Ill.

9. Mary Grace Rogers, Miami, Fla., member of the Committee of Women of Color, member of the Myrtle Grove Presbyterian Church.

10. Sheryl Sheraw, Albany, N.Y., member of the First Presbyterian Church.

11. Gary D. Torrens, executive presbyter and member of the Presbytery of East Iowa.

12. Charles West, Princeton Theological Seminary, member of the Presbytery of New York City.

B. Task Force Members Serving Partial Terms

1. Martha E. Coleman, outreach director, Interfaith Center to Reverse the Arms Race, Pasadena, Calif., member of All Saints Church.

2. Richard Kelsey, Columbus, Ohio, member of Columbus Bethany Presbyterian Church.

3. Kent Organ, recent pastor, St. Mark's Presbyterian Church, Tucson, Ariz., and current pastor, Fairmount Presbyterian Church, Cleveland, Ohio, member of the Presbytery of the Western Reserve, recent chair, Committee on Social Witness Policy.

4. Patricia Lloyd Sidle, former interim pastor, East Lansdowne, Pa., and associate for Mission to U.S.A., the Global Mission Ministry Unit.

C. Staff Serving the Task Force During Its Tenure

1. James Hudson Beumler, former research consultant, Committee on Social Witness Policy.

2. Vernon Broyles, liaison from Social Justice and Peacemaking Ministry Unit.

3. Ruth Draba, associate director, Committee on Social Witness Policy.

4. Kenneth G.Y. Grant, director, Committee on Social Witness Policy.

5. Dieter T. Hessel, former director, Committee on Social Witness Policy and resident member of Center of Inquiry, Princeton, N.J.

6. Lisa Johnson-Houston, Committee on Social Witness Policy staff.

7. Sarah Stephens, associate for Administration, Planning, and Resources, Committee on Social Witness Policy.

8. William R. Philippe, interim director, Committee on Social Witness Policy.

The task force was assisted during the writing of this document by Dana Wilbanks, member of the Committee on Social Witness Policy and the Presbytery of Denver.

Appendix B

Models of Witness for Governing Bodies

The Task Force on Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness, as it completed its work for the Committee on Social Witness Policy, received reports and heard stories from various governing bodies describing patterns of social witness. The following examples of congregations and governing bodies suggest ways in which Presbyterian witness has made a difference in the public arena. They illustrate the fact that each governing body must struggle to identify the process, content, and various patterns of a witness while remaining faithful to the principles that have been listed in previous portions of this report.

A. The Witness Ministry of Forest Hill Church, Cleveland Heights, Ohio

For over twenty-five years, the session and leaders of Forest Hill Church have involved members in a coordinated program of education, policy development, leadership

elopment, and public witness on issues of social righteousness. This process has been carried out through churchwide study and conversation leading to action on such issues as sin, race relations, assistance to refugees from Central America, public education, peacemaking, and environmental stewardship. The congregation has participated in networks with its churches in our denomination to share ideas and experiences regarding many social issues, and has developed its own statements of policy after in-depth studying of issues created by higher governing bodies. It has also initiated policies on issues of critical importance to citizens in the immediate area, sharing those policies with public officials and institutions.

The basis of this ministry of social witness is articulated in the Mission Statement of the church and is shared with all new members. Clear definitions of the community, the theological basis, the relationship of the church to the denomination, and responses to policy are articulated in the Mission Statement. This statement has been updated from time to time to reflect new understandings of this mission.

The forms of action include letters and/or letter-writing campaigns to political representatives at all levels of government urging a specific action, recommendations for action to all members, policy positions that affect the programmatic and administrative procedures of the church, and corporate responses to policy, to name a few. To be involved in a social witness is native in this congregation and has resulted in significant impact in the community in which the church serves.

Rural Congregations and Animal Welfare

In the midst of the farm credit crisis in the Midwest, several elders at the Hope Presbyterian Church in Keldron, South Dakota, became concerned about animal welfare. The vocal animal rights movement was beginning to impact sale of livestock, the primary livelihood in that region.

The session invited four other nearby Presbyterian churches to join them in sponsoring a force to do a biblical study on the care and treatment of domestic farm animals. Experts in agriculture and animal husbandry, as well as biblical studies, were consulted. Farmers and others in the area were invited to join in the study.

The initial task force met for approximately two years and produced a paper with significant questions responding to specific biblical passages, as well as standard practices in the stock industry. Satellite study groups of farmers and ranchers in nearby communities were given this paper and asked to share responses to the questions. After collating the responses to this study, the original task force produced a paper entitled, "The Care and Treatment of Domestic Farm Animals." It included ethical guidelines for domestic farm animal production.

The five sessions approved the report and then made overture to the Presbytery of South Dakota to adopt this document and its recommendations as a policy statement. A result of action—the presbytery transmitted the study to the Synod of the Lakes and Prairies, which adopted it and recommended it to all congregations.

When the statement was approved, the agricultural press highlighted the study in various articles. Within the livestock industry, this study is still being distributed and cited regarding the ethical procedures it recommended. Changes have been made in various segments of the livestock industry as a direct result of the impact of this study.

Intercultural Crisis Response by a Local Church

In the midst of renewed tension and outbreaks of violence among Native American fishermen, resort owners, and sports fishing enthusiasts, a Wisconsin presbytery's justice committee set up consultations to listen to some members of several churches most deeply affected by the crisis. The consultations were designed to gather data regarding the various perspectives of the issues, and were meant to include primarily church members. Over one hundred citizens from the Bayfield and Manitowish Waters communities came seeking an opportunity to talk about the ethical implications of the positions expressed.

As a result, the session of the Community Presbyterian Church of Manitowish Waters initiated a task force to study treaty rights issues. The task force included members of the congregation drawn from various sectors of the socioeconomic community, as well as invited participants from public and private organizations and tribal governments.

The task force sought guidance from presbytery, synod, and ecumenical consultants. Later, it made recommendations to members of the local church and civic organizations on ways to transform the crisis from a confrontation to a creative opportunity for building a base for reconciliation.

Follow-up strategies, including a plan of implementation and study, are still in progress. Nonetheless, the success of this project was revealed by the large numbers of citizens who sought to come and observe the proceedings, and by a greater degree of cooperation during recent spearfishing seasons. The presbytery and synod justice committees have sought to encourage and support this local initiative, and apply principles learned there to other areas where treaty rights are challenged.

D. Forums to Discuss Social Witness Policies

One of the overtures to General Assembly that gave birth to the Task Force on Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness came from the Presbytery of Missouri Union. It was a result of dissatisfaction about how social witness policy was developed within the denomination. Two studies sent to local churches for response—one from the Peacemaking Program, "Are We Called to Resistance?" and the other, "Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age"—raised concerns that resulted in the establishment of a presbytery task force. The task force was assigned the job of determining an appropriate means for responding to both papers.

Town meeting-style forums were held at several locations across the presbytery, with an impartial presentation of the content of the papers being discussed. Large numbers of church members from around the presbytery attended these forums. They openly expressed their view on the topics.

The result? The task force developed and the presbytery approved an overture that was sent to the General Assembly. The assembly referred the overture to the Committee on Social Witness Policy in 1987.

E. Conclusions

There are many other examples that could be demonstrated here. Churches in Youngstown, Ohio, helped local people buy a closed steel mill. Some congregations have banded together in large cities to minister with, and advocate for, the HIV/AIDS community and their families. In urban areas or on Native American reservations, jobs are being created as a result of witnesses made by sessions in response to unemployment, discrimination, and poverty.

In at least one urban center, new congregations have chosen to relate to our denomination, in part because of a concern for social welfare. The Presbytery of Boston became a governing body supporting sanctuary after listening to people worshipping in its congregations and interacting with people who have experienced injustice in their homelands.

The list of governing bodies engaged in creative witness ministries is long. In each situation, church members, ordained leaders, and community members are seeking to respond conscientiously to needs that are shared within the church. That is what a social witness is all about—responding ethically to needs in God's world. Or, to say it again, the Presbyterian community is lending its voice to God's call to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our Creator.

Appendix C

Background for the Report

Reason for the Why and How Task Force

The Task Force on Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness was formed during days of transition and controversy over the social witness of the reunited church. It was appointed by the Committee on Social Witness Policy in 1988, which was acting on instructions from the 9th General Assembly (1987). The assembly acted after receiving four resolutions from presbyteries questioning the authority of and procedures used by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as it makes a social witness.

The Presbytery of Missouri Union urged that committees and task forces of the General Assembly present in their reports:

... a broad spectrum of positions on the issue ... [clear] reasons for the proposed conclusions ... [and] alert presbyteries and local congregations of studies in process, so that the entire church may be involved in the studies.¹⁷

The Presbytery of Congaree proposed an overture noting that the conular or corporate nature of Presbyterian governance was undermined by individuals perceived as speaking or acting on behalf of the whole church.¹⁸

The Presbytery of Tres Rios took note of the disquiet of some Presbyterians over the social witness policies of the General Assembly. The Presbytery asked the General Assembly to affirm the right of individual Presbyterians to dissent from governing body policies, while lifting up the importance and integrity of the church's social witness.¹⁹

The Presbytery of Grace observed that most North Americans were ignorant of the fine points of Presbyterian polity and practice. It was time to tell the truth. Policy statements reflect "corporate decisions [made] by the governing bodies of the Church," have limited authority, and never bind the conscience of the individual Presbyterians.²⁰

The General Assembly summarized these overtures saying that the task force must address the recurring theme of:

... An apparent unrest among some PC(USA) particular churches caused by some General Assembly policy statements which do not express the conscience of many individuals who sincerely and thoughtfully disagree.²¹

It was time to respond.

The Committee on Social Witness Policy formed the task force and invited them:

... [to address] the concern of particular churches which do not agree with or do not feel that their Christian convictions have been considered in some General Assembly Policy statement; [and]

... [to recommend ways] how to communicate to the secular press and the denomination's members-at-large when General Assembly policy statements are made that neither the General Assembly nor the Stated Clerk speaks for all the members of the PC(USA) (G-1.0300).²²

Each believer makes a "personal social witness" to church and society. A personal witness is not the prerogative of a few, of the expert, or of the connected. It is for all members of the body of Christ. At its best, a personal witness is informed by (but does not have to be conformed to) the church's social witness policy.

Each governing body (session, presbytery, synod, and General Assembly) develops and adopts "social witness policies" that speak to the concerns and needs of church and society. In Presbyterian communities, these policies are developed in a manner that seeks to discern the prompting of God's spirit and honors the corporate nature of Reformed governance.

Each governing body makes a social witness when its programs of advocacy, education, and service are defined and guided by social witness policies. It is not sufficient for a Presbyterian program entity to engage in a witness to church and society, no matter how effective, without the validation of policies adopted by its governing body. Hence, patterns of administration in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) recognize the corporate nature of the church and limit individualistic action by its representatives. In similar fashion, the energetic witness of program entities and representatives give appropriate testimony to a governing body's social policy.

Since the General Assembly and Committee on Social Witness Policy did not wish to focus narrowly on personal witness or the policies of governing bodies, but on the more complete witness that includes persons, governing bodies, policy, and program, it named the group the Task Force on Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness.

A Brief History

A nationwide search for task force members was begun in 1987 and completed in 1988. The search was extensive. Individuals known for their theological expertise were pursued. Nominees who symbolized the church's diversity were sought. Leaders with long ecclesiastical experience were invited. The task force was appointed on July 5, 1988.²³

The Task Force on Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness held its first meeting in September 1988. At the second meeting, in December 1988, the task force faced the potential of recommending an inclusive, consultative pattern of policy development while acting in a noninclusive, non-consultative manner. Thus, a decision was made to model openness of process in its own deliberations. The whole church

would be invited into the task force's work. A dialogical pattern would be used.

The Task Force on Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness organized two subcommittees to complete its work.

One subcommittee prepared a study paper, *Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness: A Background Paper for Churchwide Study and Discussion*, which was distributed throughout the church. Responses that were received by September 28, 1990, were tabulated. The work yielded a marginal sampling: 2.3 percent of all sessions returned comments; only 13.3 percent of the denomination's 171 presbyteries and 16 synods responded.

The other subcommittee developed procedures for gathering responses from the church. A hearing was held in Louisville on April 13, 1989. Hearings were also held at the 201st General Assembly (1989) and at the 202nd General Assembly (1990). Additional events were held in numerous middle governing bodies. Often, the background study paper was used.

The Task Force on Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness met in April and December of 1989, in November of 1990, and in September, October, and November of 1991. Various members of the task force conducted governing body forums across the church in 1989 and 1990. The final report, based on all these findings as well as much discussion and debate, was submitted to the Committee on Social Witness Policy for consideration in January 1992.

Responses of Governing Bodies and Individuals

The number of written responses to the background study paper was disappointing. In contrast, the Task Force on Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness was pleased with the quality of responses at hearings and forums. With few exceptions, the paper evoked healthy discussion, debate, and feedback in these settings. Often, responses evidenced an intense interest in Presbyterian social witness and an understanding of its centrality in the life of Reformed Christianity. There was a sense of excitement: the church was seeking information from all governing bodies and renewing its social witness.

The task force has come to believe that the lack of response to the background study paper by sessions, presbyteries, and synods probably reflects (in addition to other reasons) the need for education and training of church officers. This training should begin before ordination (*Book of Order*, G-14.0205). It is important to introduce those ordained to leadership in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to the roles of governing bodies in the practice of policy formation and social witness.

Governing bodies are communities of churchly correspondence and communication, among other tasks. In this function of correspondence and communication, they should make clear the connectedness of the body of Christ. This interactive pattern, essential for Reformed governance, is not well understood or practiced. It is unfamiliar to those immersed in a society known for its individualism.

On the other hand, the task force discovered that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is ready for a renewal of connectedness. When correspondence was made easy or face-to-face opportunities for conversation were offered, dialogue came alive, and Reformed patterns of governance were affirmed. Indeed, the 203rd General Assembly (1991) revised the pattern of policy formation to increase the amount of correspondence among governing bodies.²²

The data gathered at General Assembly hearings and at the invitational hearing for ministry units and special interest groups provided additional insight. The Task Force on Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness found that some of the most creative interaction occurred during hearings attended by believers of differing theological, economic, regional, or political backgrounds. The conversation became more interesting when participants were invited from afar and brought divergent insights.

In similar fashion, the information gained by the Task Force on Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness was deepened by contact with the Social Justice and Peacemaking, Women's, Theology and Worship, and Global Mission ministry units. Many constituency groups gave significant guidance to the task force as this report took shape. Finally, the experiences gained by various members of the task force as each went out to synod and presbytery gatherings to conduct forums and educational events were most helpful. The candid observations of participants in all regions of the church helped the task force discover the local issues that divide Presbyterians as well as the common threads that bind us together in the task of making a social witness.

Responses to Overtures and Referrals

The following is a list of responses to overtures and referrals that the Committee on Social Witness Policy reports to the 205th General Assembly (1993).

The Committee on Social Witness Policy received ten referrals from the General Assembly and the General Assembly Council. Eight of these were overtures and two were commissioners' resolutions. A brief synopsis of their content and the response of the Committee on Social Witness Policy

allows. If appropriate, the section of this document that responds to or discusses each referral is also provided.

(1) *Overture 5-87. On Reports by Committees and Task Forces preparing Pronouncements for Consideration by the General Assembly—From the Presbytery of Missouri Union (Minutes, 1987, Part I, p. 738).* [The 199th General Assembly (1987) adopted this overture.]

... [The General Assembly urges] committees and task forces preparing pronouncements for the consideration by the General Assembly to present in their reports a broad spectrum of positions on the issue, and clearly point out the reasons for the proposed conclusions; and that the General Assembly alert presbyteries and local congregations of studies in process, so that the entire church may be involved in the studies. (*Minutes, 1987, Part I, p. 738*)

Response: The Committee on Social Witness Policy understands that the "pronouncements" referred to in *Overture 5-87* are "policy statements" defined by proposed Standing Rule 57.b.(1) of the *Manual of the General Assembly*. This report has affirmed at several points the critical importance of developing policy statements through a discernment process, which will explore a broad spectrum of positions. A policy statement will seek to articulate an adequate and coherent position that is likely to reflect one than one of the positions considered, but may exclude others. We affirm that, in the decision process, it is instructive for the governing body to know the reasons for including some positions and excluding others. In subsequent use of policy statements for education throughout the church, it may also be helpful to know why a particular policy statement was selected from among several options.

The Committee on Social Witness Policy affirms, with the 199th General Assembly (1987) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), that presbyteries and sessions need to be informed about and involved in the process of policy statement development. It further affirms that when their governing bodies (sessions, presbyteries, and synods) are engaged in similar processes, their work can be enriched by involving governing bodies above and/or below them.

The Committee on Social Witness Policy notes that it has followed a pattern of churchwide notification at the moment a prospectus is adopted. The proposed Standing Rules 57.d.(1) and (2) guarantee that this pattern continues.

The report of the Task Force on Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness, especially the section on the Principles of Discernment and Patterns of Formulation, supports and comments on the liturgical practice of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) offered by *Overture 5-87*.

(2) *Overture 69-87. On Clarifying Who May Make Public Pronouncements and Enter into Litigation on Behalf of the Presbyterian Church*

(U.S.A.)—From the Presbytery of Congaree (*Minutes, 1987, Part I, pp. 766-67*). [The 199th General Assembly (1987) adopted this overture.]

... [The presbytery asked the General Assembly] to clarify who may make public pronouncements for or enter into litigation on behalf of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), under what conditions, and by what process of accountability; and further, that the General Assembly determine a procedure which insures that such statements and decisions are made by persons regularly elected to governing bodies or agencies rather than professional staff personnel. (*Minutes, 1987, Part I, p. 767*)

Response: The writers of this report were not charged with the task of defining the conditions under which the denomination enters litigation. The reader is referred to Standing Rule 32. of the *Manual* and the Office of the Stated Clerk. Since 1989, the Advisory Committee on Litigation has met to assist the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly as he has involved the denomination in litigation.

This report affirms the historic role of governing bodies in the development, consideration, and approval of policy statements. The reader is referred to the *Structural Design for Mission* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The elected entity, called the Committee on Social Witness Policy, has responsibility for developing social witness policy documents. This body is elected by and reports directly to the General Assembly.

No constitutional or rule-based material exists, to the knowledge of the Committee on Social Witness Policy, that authorizes professional staffpersons to generate social witness policy for the PC(USA). Further, the role of professional staffpersons and elected officers in the interpretation and dissemination of the church's social witness and the policies that guide the witness are defined in the *Manual of the General Assembly*, and previous actions of the General Assembly, including the *Structural Design for Mission*, and the *General Assembly Personnel Manual*.

(3) *Overture 90-87. On Requesting the General Assembly to Produce a Statement Upholding the Integrity of the Church and Liberty of Conscience of Individual Presbyterians—From the Presbytery of Tres Rios (Minutes, 1987, Part I, p. 774).* [The 199th General Assembly (1987) adopted this overture.]

... [Tres Rios requested] a statement which would uphold the integrity of the church and liberty of conscience of the individual Presbyterian and define and emphasize the statements of governing bodies in relation to the liberty of individual conscience, providing guidance to the church and world as to the meaning and understanding of governing body actions . . .

[It further asked.] . . . that upon adoption of such a statement, that the General Assembly devise a means whereby a brief interpretation of its content be appended to General Assembly pronouncements so as to offer assistance both to individual members and to secular interpreters as to the nature of such documents. (*Minutes, 1987, Part I, p. 774*)

Response: The Committee on Social Witness Policy affirms the intent of the overture from the Presbytery of Tres Rios. It agrees with the presbytery's insight that a Reformed social witness enhances and engages the

ministries of both individuals and communities. It attempts, in this document, to uphold both the integrity of the church's governing bodies and the liberty of conscience guaranteed to individual Presbyterians. It asserts that both individuals and corporate entities make, by virtue of their reformed identity, a social witness.

To help clarify the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) pattern of development for social witness policy, the committee proposes a revised Standing Rule 57. If adopted, it will:

- Assert that individuals and governing bodies of the Reformed tradition make a social witness.
- Define the limits that pertain to governing body witness and affirm that no social witness policy binds the conscience of an individual.
- Provide an official cover letter that shall be added to the policy statement during distribution and that defines the responsibility as well as the limits of governing body action.
- Require a task force drafting a policy statement to provide a short summary statement that can be used to interpret the document to members and nonmembers alike.

(4) *Overture 120-87. On the General Assembly Issuing an Inherent Declaration of the Intent and Scope of Deliverances, Statements, and Pronouncements Made by the General Assembly, Officers, Agencies, and Employees—From the Presbytery of Grace (Minutes, 1987, Part I, pp. 784-85). The 199th General Assembly (1987) adopted this overture.*

The presbytery asked General Assembly to develop and issue

... declaration of the intent and scope of deliverances, statements, and pronouncements made by the General Assembly, its officers, agencies and employees when addressing matters of moral, social, cultural and economic import, being particularly careful to distinguish personal convictions and commitments from actions reflecting corporate decisions by the governing bodies of the Church or determinations made through constitutional process, and always making careful note of the inalienable right of liberty of conscience. (*Minutes, 1987, Part I, p. 785*)

Response: The Committee on Social Witness Policy observes that officers, agencies, and employees do not offer "deliverances, statements, and pronouncements" in the church's social witness. Only governing bodies have this authority. For the General Assembly, this authority is limited and guided by Standing Rule 57. of the *Manual of the General Assembly*.

The committee understands that all church officers exercise their freedom of conscience within certain bounds as specified in *Book of Order*, 6.0108. The recommendations attached to this report define, through the *General Assembly Personnel Manual*, employee decorum and suggest policy appropriate governing body entities.

(5) *Overture 30-88. On Amending Standing Rule 57b, 8, and Instructing the Office of the Stated Clerk to Conduct a Denominationwide Study of General Assembly Social Policy Formation and Implementation—From the Presbytery of Missouri Union (Minutes, 1988, Part I, p. 987). [The General Assembly referred this overture to the Task Force on Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness.]*

The presbytery asked that Standing Rule 57.b.(8) be replaced with:

(8) *A policy statement may be considered by the General Assembly only after a balanced study document has been distributed and responses received and reviewed in accordance with 57.f. (Minutes, 1988, Part I, p. 987)*

And, the following addition made:

(9) *A policy statement shall include a separate implementation resolution which shall specify agency person and governing body accountability for interpretation and advocacy. (Minutes, 1988, Part I, p. 987)*

The presbytery also asked:

... That the Office of the Stated Clerk, in consultation with the Social Justice and Peacemaking Ministry Unit, be instructed to conduct a denominationwide study of General Assembly social policy formation and implementation, holding hearings and consultations, seeking broad input from many persons, being informed by our Reformed traditions and theology, reporting progress annually to the General Assembly meeting, and recommending any further revisions of the *Manual of the General Assembly* at a subsequent meeting of the General Assembly. (*Minutes, 1988, Part I, p. 987*)

Response: The Committee on Social Witness Policy concurs with the commitment of the Presbytery of Missouri Union to an open, inclusive process during the development of policy statements. It notes, however, that not all potential policy statements are equally controversial. In fact, some statements begin life with an overwhelming consensus within the church.

The committee's proposed revisions to Standing Rule 57. guarantee whole church access to the policy statement development process. One method of involvement included in the proposed rule is the use of balanced study papers.

The committee would not require a full study paper for each policy statement. The cost of distributing study documents and receiving response forms is high both in time and dollars. Where policy statements seem to have consensual support, this expense is not good stewardship. Therefore, we do not require, but give permission for study papers. We trust that those charged with developing policy statements will throw open the process to the fullest, using appropriate methods of participation for each policy statement.

The Presbytery of Missouri Union's second suggestion would require a "separate implementation resolution," which shall specify agency, person, and governing body accountability for interpretation and advocacy. The committee recommends language in its proposed revision to Standing

ule 57.d.(1) that causes recommendations to be clearly identifiable in the text. It further asks the General Assembly Council to specify who or what is accountable for the activities listed in the recommendations.

The presbytery's final request would establish a new annual audit of social witness policy development to be performed by the Social Justice and Peacemaking Ministry Unit (SJP) and the Stated Clerk.

The committee believes that the Presbytery of Missouri Union's 1988 venture was time specific. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) was new. Its patterns of communication, review, and accountability were untested.

Today, the Committee on Social Witness Policy has had several years of practice. Its annual report to the General Assembly details progress in the development of social witness policies. It works collaboratively with the General Assembly Council, the Social Justice and Peacemaking Ministry Unit, and the Office of the Stated Clerk to audit implementation efforts after the adoption of social witness documents. It provides the General Assembly with regular advice and counsel including suggestions for changes to the *Manual of the General Assembly*. To duplicate Committee on Social Witness Policy efforts by assigning a new responsibility to the Stated Clerk or SJP is unwise.

(6) *Overture 235-87. On Making Policy and Position Statements—From the Presbytery of Hanover (Minutes, 1987, Part I, p. 827; and Minutes, 1988, Part I, p. 972).*

The presbytery asked the General Assembly to:

1. Make only policy and position statements which declare to the membership the teachings of [the] Holy Scripture and of our Reformed Confessions which bear upon the issues addressed; and
2. Use caution and care so that policy and position statements do not appear to bind the consciences of members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); by dictating what these authors believe to be an appropriate response, or by calling for specific responses to such issues; and
3. Ensure that, when engaging the whole church in the formation of policy and position statements, all churches and governing bodies be genuinely included. (*Minutes, 1988, Part I, p. 972*)

Response: The Committee on Social Witness Policy concurs with the presbytery's request for policy statements that "... declare to the membership the teachings of [the] Holy Scripture and ... Reformed Confessions ..." (*ibid.*, 972) Proposed Standing Rule 57.d. instructs those charged with drafting policy statements to do no less.

The committee affirms the persuasive, educational nature of a social witness. A policy witness does not coerce. It teaches. It does not bind the will. It persuades. This document, the committee believes, reaffirms the liberty of conscience, a reaffirmation sought by the Presbytery of Hanover.

The Committee on Social Witness Policy, however, does not concur with the Presbytery of Hanover's request for a nonspecific social witness. Evangelical teaching leads to mission and the practical decisions implied in mission. To have validity, the church's social witness must be able to name names explicitly, decry evil precisely, and describe good concretely. A Reformed witness does not embrace generalities. It speaks boldly, confidently, and with specificity.

On the other hand, the committee does not advocate the imposition of a writing group's private position on the Committee on Social Witness Policy or a General Assembly. A governing body speaks for itself. In its integrity, it follows the pattern outlined in the proposed Standing Rule 57.d. (This is not to suggest that the General Assembly is required to replicate the severity of work required for a body drafting policy statements. It is to say that Reformed governance requires, normatively, that the assembly claim a proposed statement as its own using the elements of discernment listed.) A governing body receives the work produced, scrutinizes its content, reforms, and in the end, disposes of it. A Reformed policy development process refutes the notion that a governing body has been misled by its policy advisors.

Finally, the Committee on Social Witness Policy agrees with the presbytery's desire for an open policy formation process. To that end, it recommends the adoption of its proposed revisions to Standing Rule 57.

(7) *Overture 49-88. On Amending Standing Rule 57.b. (1) and (2) Regarding Social Policy Statements—From the Presbytery of St. Andrew (Minutes, 1988, Part I, p. 997).*

The presbytery asked the General Assembly to amend Standing Rule 57.b. so that it would read, in part:

1. People of diverse viewpoints must be a part of and have access to the body developing the policy statement. ...
2. There must have been notification to the church-at-large that a policy development process was under way and that consultation shall take place using the principles of consultation as outlined in G-9.0404 (*Minutes* incorrectly cite G-9.0403). It is required that such notification shall indicate how advice and input can be made to the body developing the policy statement. The final report of the General Assembly shall indicate the particular methods used to enable churchwide participation. (*Minutes, 1988, Part I, p. 997*)

Response: This overture, in a subsequent submission, was approved by the 203rd General Assembly (1991) in Baltimore (*Overture 91-34, Minutes, 1991, Part I, pp. 934-35*).

The Committee on Social Witness Policy recognizes that consultation, as required by the *Book of Order*, G-9.0404, is an addition to Presbyterian governance, a gift of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). It is delighted to have an opportunity to help shape the content of consultations for social witness policy development.

The revisions to Standing Rule 57, proposed for consideration subscribe to the notion that consultations are official conversations among governing bodies. Consultations are accomplished by representatives of governing bodies. They take place prior to the final adoption of a social witness policy. A consultation speaks for itself and provides advice to its sponsoring body. This pattern of governance gives evidence to the connectedness of Christ's body and is a sign that Christian communities are communities of communication and correspondence.

An argument could be made for a consultation at the onset of the policy development process. The committee, however, recommends a consultation at the end of a development process for the following reasons:

- First, the research of the Task Force on Why and How the Church makes a Social Policy Witness suggests that the almost-final draft of a policy statement gains the church's attention and has the most impact on the community's life. It is this material that governing bodies want to critique and change.

- Second, the non-consultative steps proposed in these revisions to Standing Rule 57, compel sufficient conversation between the Committee on Social Witness Policy, a task force charged with developing a policy statement, and the whole church (see revised Standing Rule 57.c.(1)-(4) on pages 5-6 of this report). The Committee on Social Witness Policy urges the denomination to reserve the term "consultation" for official events only. Thus, the proposed Standing Rule 57, does not claim that other types of input in the policy development process are consultations. For instance, a hearing held at a General Assembly is a hearing, not a consultation.

- Third, stewardship requires that the probable outcome of a consultation justify its expense.

Therefore, the committee recommends a consultation be called to study the penultimate draft of a policy statement. This recommendation does not rule out other possibilities for communication and dialogue to the extent that budgetary constraints allow.

The section titled, "Principles of Discernment and Patterns of Formulation" of this report (pp. 23-28), further defines the committee's understanding of the inclusive nature of dialogue during the formation of policy statements. The General Assembly Council's executive committee, meeting in January 1992, voted to call a consultation in advance of formal submission of this report to the 205th General Assembly (1993).

(8) *Overture 50-88. On Amending Standing Rule 57.d. Regarding Study Papers—From the Presbytery of St. Andrew (Minutes, 1988, Part I, pp. 97-98).*

The presbytery asked the General Assembly to amend Standing Rule 57.d. so that it would read:

d. A study document shall provide resource materials, bibliography, and aids which set forth the issues with fair representation of the diverse viewpoints within the church in order to facilitate its use by the church.

It shall state whether its purpose is

a. to stimulate study and discussion as an end in itself, or

b. a step in preparation or revision of a policy statement. (*Minutes, 1988, Part I, pp. 97-98*)

Response: The 203rd General Assembly (1991) approved this overture, in a subsequent submission (*Overture 91-31, Minutes, 1991, Part I, p. 933*). The committee affirms the action of the 203rd General Assembly (1991).

The Committee on Social Witness Policy recognizes that the version approved by the 203rd General Assembly (1991) did not limit the word "church" to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Here the word "church," which defines the parameters of diversity, is broadly ecumenical. The 203rd General Assembly (1991), therefore, broadened the pool of potential viewpoints included in social witness policy development. This definition of the body of Christ is most appropriate for a social witness policy. It guarantees that a free exchange of theological ideas will exist to strengthen the Presbyterian community's witness. It encourages coincidental witness among communions.

The aforementioned section on "Principles of Discernment and Patterns of Formulation" explores the inclusive nature of Presbyterian viewpoints and affirms their place in the community of witness. Revised Standing Rule 57, continues the patterns suggested by the Presbytery of St. Andrew and approved by the 203rd General Assembly (1991).

(9) *Commissioners' Resolution 28-88. On Amending Standard Rules Relating to Social Policy (Minutes, 1988, Part I, pp. 1071-72).*

The commissioners' resolution asks the General Assembly to amend Standing Rule 57, by adding a new paragraph b.(9):

Where the study process indicates that a Policy Statement does not or will not reflect a consensus of informed Presbyterian thought on the issues which it addresses, the Policy Statement shall so indicate, and all copies of the Policy Statement which are distributed shall identify those alternative approaches which are grounded in Christian beliefs and Reformed tradition and which are held by a significant minority of members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). (*Minutes, 1988, Part I, p. 1072*)

Response: The policy development process, as outlined in this report and summarized in proposed Standing Rule 57., stresses the importance of churchwide conversation. The process affirms that, after having heard the input and considering alternatives, the General Assembly will adopt policy statements that it discerns to be appropriate for mission, and faithful to the will of God. It is the right and responsibility of the General Assembly to adopt such policies. The principle behind this is the power and right of a governing body to exercise its responsibilities.

The notion that a governing body, the General Assembly in this case, should acknowledge that an alternative might be more widely accepted is explicitly rejected. Churchwide consensus, which is likely to be elusive at best, is not what policy formulation processes are about, nor is it to be the basis upon which governing body decisions are based. Instead, commissioners gathered in governing bodies are asked to discern the will of Christ and make a policy witness based on that discernment.

(10) *Commissioners' Resolution 90-7. On Conscience and Pronouncements* (Minutes, 1990, Part I, p. 836).

The commissioners' resolution asks:

... That all future General Assembly committee study papers, position papers, and pronouncements by the Moderator, council, or Stated Clerk that are published for churchwide distribution or release to the press carry a preceding qualifying statement in bold print stating emphatically that the views presented therein are the sole opinions of the writers, do not carry the authority or weight of church law, and are not binding on the conscience of the individual member, congregation, or presbytery. (Minutes, 1990, Part I, p. 836)

Response: The Committee on Social Witness Policy thanks the commissioners for identifying a gap in Standing Rule 57. coverage: study papers, heretofore, have not been required to provide an official cover letter that describes authority, purpose, and limits of a social witness policy and the fitness that it describes. If revised Standing Rule 57. is adopted, this will be remedied.

The committee notes that, on the one hand, a social witness policy document is more than the opinion of individuals. It is a witness made by governing body after a careful, often painstaking, process of discernment and correspondence. On the other hand, a social witness policy document is not definitive constitutional guidance that is binding on all who enter into membership.

The commissioners used the phrase, "authority or weight of church law" in their resolution. Church law, in reformed practice, is normatively defined by the Constitution, our Book of Order. A social witness policy is not a constitutional amendment. Therefore, it does not and cannot carry the authority or weight of church law.

The proposed revision of Standing Rule 57. provides the best balance of process. It affirms the identity of governing bodies, claiming for them an apostolic character of discernment and correspondence. It carefully defines the steps of policy formation from onset to conclusion. It enhances the appropriate ambiguity of Presbyterian governance. It specifies a statement defining the authority, purpose, and limits of social witness that responds to the concerns of this commissioners' resolution.

Endnotes to the Report of the Task Force on Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness

(Endnotes 15-22 are located in Appendix C)

1. *Book of Confessions, A Brief Statement of Faith—Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*, 10.3, line 40.
2. *Book of Confessions, The Westminster Confession of Faith*, (UPCUSA version), 6.131.
3. *Book of Confessions, A Brief Statement of Faith*, 10.2, lines 9-11.
4. See *Minutes*, 1991, Part I, pp. 671-82, *Turn to the Living God: A Call to Evangelism in Jesus Christ's Way*, a joint resolution of the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit and the Global Mission Ministry Unit. The resolution was approved and adopted by the 203rd General Assembly (1991).
5. *Book of Confessions, The Confession of 1967*, 9.31.
6. *Book of Confessions, The Confession of 1967*, 9.36.
7. *Book of Confessions, The Confession of 1967*, 9.38.
8. See Appendix B: Models of Witness for Governing Bodies of this report.
9. Please see G-1.0001 and G-6.0108 in the *Book of Order*.
10. *Structural Design for Mission*, 1992, p. 27.
11. *Structural Design for Mission*, 1992, p. 27.
12. Please see "An Unavoidable Responsibility" on page 23 of this report.
13. See "Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture," found in the *Minutes*, UPCUSA, 1982, Part I, p. 326.
14. Please see *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*. Copyright 1982, World Council of Churches.
15. *Overture 5-87. On Reports by Committees and Task Forces Preparing Pronouncements for Consideration by the General Assembly—From the Presbytery of Missouri Union* (Minutes, 1987, Part I, p. 738).
16. *Overture 69-87. On Clarifying Who May Make Public Pronouncements and Enter into Litigation on Behalf of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)—From the Presbytery of Congo* (Minutes, 1987, Part I, pp. 766-67).
17. *Overture 90-87. On Requesting the General Assembly to Produce a Statement Upholding the Integrity of the Church and Liberty of Conscience of Individual Presbyterians—From the Presbytery of Tres Rios* (Minutes, 1987, Part I, p. 774).
18. *Overture 120-87. On the General Assembly Issuing an In Thero Declaration of the Intent and Scope of Deliverances, Statements, and Pronouncements Made by the General Assembly, Officers, Agencies, and Employees—From the Presbytery of Grace* (Minutes, 1987, Part I, pp. 784-85).
19. *Minutes*, 1987, Part I, p. 103.
20. *Minutes*, 1987, Part I, p. 104, and cited again in the narrative report of the Committee on Social Witness Policy on their instructions to the Task Force on Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness (Minutes, 1989, Part I, p. 506).
21. *Minutes of the Committee on Social Witness Policy*, 1988-6. Please note that the list of participants in the Task Force on Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness is available in Appendix A of this report.
22. *Overture 91-34. On Amending Standing Rule 57.3(1) and (2) Regarding Social Policy Formation—From the Presbytery of St. Andrew* (Minutes, 1991, Part I, pp. 934-35).

PART TWO

STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

This study guide is intended to interpret and study the report, "Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness." The study guide is an educational piece designed to take participants through a process to gain an understanding about what social witness policy is and why the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) engages in it. All will benefit from this study, especially those in leadership positions who are challenged by members of their congregations in the development of session policy and the interpretation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) social witness policy. You are encouraged to include youth in this study.

This is a four-session study guide. Sessions 1 and 2 look at why the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) does social policy witness. Sessions 3 and 4 shift the focus to how such policy is made. The study can be done in a variety of settings, including church school classes, officer training sessions, a special mid-week study, or a congregational retreat. You are encouraged to photocopy the report, "Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness," and make copies available so that participants can read the full report.

The importance of the role of the leader(s) for this study cannot be overemphasized. As with educational pieces in general, the sessions in this study require advance preparation. For this educational piece in particular, the leader(s) needs to be willing to prepare in advance to lead this study. In general, most sessions will require at least sixty minutes. Depending on the group and the setting, more or less time may be needed, especially since each session includes ample opportunities for discussion. Estimations of time have been included throughout the study guide; however, as the leader prepares, he or she should consider the particulars of the group and the material to be covered and gauge time accordingly.

It is strongly recommended that the leader(s) carefully read Part One of this document, "Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness," adopted by the 205th General Assembly (1993). Being familiar with this report will enhance the leadership of this study. Also, it is important that the leader(s) has experience in leading group discussions, in dealing with conflict, and is able to be sensitive and open to people expressing a variety of opinions.

In addition, it is helpful for leaders to have a working knowledge of Presbyterian polity so that he or she is capable of teaching it to the participants. Some resources to assist in dealing with Presbyterian polity include *Presbyterian Polity for Church Officers* (second edition), by Joan S. Gray and Joyce C. Tucker; *How to Spell Presbyterian*, by James Angell; the *Book of Order* (1993-94 edition); and the *Companion to the Constitution: Polity for Local Church* (1992-93 edition). Contact your presbytery's resource center for these and additional resources, as well as the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, for further information needed to best present this study on social witness policy. The leader(s) may find it important to adapt the sessions of this study guide to meet the specific needs of your congregation's particular situation, such as expanding various activities where further study is needed.

As Christians in general, and as Presbyterians in particular, we affirm that we are called by God to be involved in all arenas of life. Social witness policy is one of the important ways in which the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) helps to direct and empower our involvement. May this study guide facilitate the opening of minds, generate enthusiasm to face issues that confront the church today, and help in our being willing to commit our energies toward the social witness to which we are called.

SESSION ONE

Called by God to Be Involved

Preparing for the Session

Before participants gather, prepare the following:

- Write the following quote from the Confession of 1967 on newsprint or chalkboard: "Wherever the church exists, its members are both gathered in corporate life and dispersed in society for the sake of mission in the world" (*Book of Confessions*, 9.35).
- For Activity 1, have ready to post the phrases from the Confession of 1967 that can be found in the *Book of Confessions*.
- For Activity 2, have available at least six Bibles (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV] translation).
- For Activity 3, reproduce the task force's five reflections based on portions of A Brief Statement of Faith, which can be found on pages 10-13 of Part One, under the heading "Vision for Social Policy and Social Witness." Each reflection should be on a page by itself.
- For Activity 4, have recent newspapers to distribute to participants.
- For Activity 5, have available copies of A Brief Statement of Faith for participants. It can be found in the *Book of Confessions*.
- Have available newsprint and markers or chalkboard and chalk.
- Have available pencils and paper.

Laying the Foundation (15 Minutes)

1. *Introducing Social Policy Witness*

When you are ready to begin, tell the participants that they are beginning a study on the report, "Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness." Share with them that the term "social policy witness" refers to "the positions adopted by General Assembly to express its stance on and to guide response to issues in the public order, including their relation to the church's own life" (*Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness: A Background Paper for Churchwide Study and Discussion*, Committee on Social Policy Witness, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), p. v.).

To order this document, call 1-800-524-2612 and request DMS 331-89-002.]

Also, explain to the participants that Presbyterian social policy statements seek to "help the church offer a faithful public witness, to express institutional integrity, and to enlist the attention and energy of members in response to God's yearning for justice and peace" (*Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness: A Background Paper for Churchwide Study and Discussion*, p. 26).

Engaging in social policy witness is an essential dimension of the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as illustrated in one of the confessions of the church, the Confession of 1967 (*Book of Confessions*). Have the participants read silently or aloud in unison the quote from the Confession of 1967 that you have written on newsprint or chalkboard. Then ask for a volunteer to read the following portion from this same confession:

The church gathers to praise God, to hear [God's] word for [humankind], to baptize and to join in the Lord's Supper, to pray for and present the world to [God] in worship, to enjoy fellowship, to receive instruction, strength, and comfort, to order and organize its own corporate life, to be tested, renewed, and reformed, and to speak and act in the world's affairs as may be appropriate to the needs of the time. [Revised, using inclusive language.] (Book of Confessions, 9.36)

After a minute or two of silent reflection, divide the participants into smaller groups of no more than five people and give each group pencils and paper. If the total number of participants is less than ten, keep the group undivided. Place on newsprint or chalkboard the following phrases that were read aloud from the Confession of 1967:

- "to praise God";
- "to hear [God's] word for [humankind]";
- "to baptize and to join in the Lord's Supper";
- "to pray for and present the world to [God] in worship";
- "to enjoy fellowship";
- "to receive instruction, strength, and comfort";
- "to order and organize its own corporate life";
- "to be tested, renewed, and reformed";
- "to speak and act in the world's affairs as may be appropriate to the needs of the time."

Then, ask the participants to discuss the following questions about the phrases:

- Is it possible to prioritize this list? If so, what would be your order and why?
- In what ways, if any, are these items interrelated?

- Do you feel that any of these items do not belong in the list? Why or why not?

- Which of these item(s) relate to the church's involvement in social witness policy?

If the group discussed the questions in small groups, invite them to share the highlights of their discussion, drawing particular attention to their answers to the last question. Next, ask the group to develop its own working definition of the term "social policy witness." Write the definition on newsprint or chalkboard.

Developing an Understanding of Social Policy Witness (40 Minutes)

2. Studying the Biblical Tradition

If small groups were used, have the participants gather again in their same groups. Make sure that each small group has at least one Bible (preferably an NRSV). Share with the participants that the report on "Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness" cites certain explicit affirmations as the church makes a social witness and develops policy for such witness. One of those affirmations is "the authority of Scripture for our faith and life, not only as individuals but also as a witnessing community in the world" (p. 13 of Part One of this document). Tell them that both the Old and New Testaments contain within them a tradition of social witness.

Distribute the following Scripture passages among the small groups, giving no more than two passages per group. If the total number of participants is less than ten, have the participants work as one group on two or three passages. The Scripture passages are as follows: Ex. 3:1-12; Ps. 146; Isa. 42; Micah 6:6-8; Matt. 28:16-20; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 21:1-4; John 1:6-9; John 3:16-17; John 8:2-11; Acts 1:6-8; Acts 22:6-16; Rom. 8:12-17.

Ask them to read the passages and discuss the following questions:

- Who is the speaker(s) in this passage? The listener(s)? What are the circumstances?
- What is the social witness within this passage?
- What message does this passage have for the church today?

If the group discussed the passages in small groups, ask each group to report briefly to the total group about their Scripture passages. Afterward, ask the total group to identify any characteristics of social witness that they gleaned from the Scripture passages studied. Record the characteristics on newsprint or chalkboard.

3. *Reflecting on the Confessional Tradition*

Share with the participants a brief history of the report, "Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness" (Appendix C of Part One, p. 32), and that this report will be the basis for their study together over the next few sessions. Tell the participants that the task force who wrote the report, "Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness," selected a portion of A Brief Statement of Faith from the *Book of Confessions* as a foundational piece for their report.

Place the participants into no more than five groups and distribute to each group one or more of the five task force reflections on A Brief Statement of Faith that you prepared in advance for this session. Ask each group to read the particular reflection(s) given to them and to discuss the following questions among themselves:

- The reflection is written using the pronouns "we," "our," and "us." Who are the "we"? Do you identify yourself as part of the "we"? Why or why not?
- To whom is the reflection addressed?
- In your own words, what is the message of the reflection? Do you agree or disagree with it? Why?
- Would you consider the message of the reflection a "social witness"? Why or why not?
- Which sentence in the reflection is the most important one to you? Which sentence causes you to feel the most uneasiness? Which sentence gives you the greatest hope?
- What questions, if any, do you have about the reflection?

Next, as a total group, have each smaller group share their discussions. The leader(s), try to identify common threads that you feel are pertinent among the five reports and write them on newsprint or chalkboard. You may want to pay particular attention to the way the participants identify the "we" in the first question, and help them to see that the "we" is larger than their own local faith community.

4. *Identifying Social Witness Issues for Today*

Distribute to the group the newspapers you have collected over the last week(s). Tell the participants that reading a newspaper is a daily routine for many people, probably including themselves. Yet, it may be that a large number of people do not consciously read a newspaper through the eyes and/or within the context of a community of faith. In other words, what kind of meaning does our being members of a community of faith have to what we read in a newspaper?

Ask the participants to take a few minutes to read only the stories that appear on the front page of the newspapers that you have given them and to do so from the perspective of being part of a community of faith. Then have participants gather in pairs or small groups (depending on the number of participants) and decide upon one particular front-page news story and answer the following questions about it:

- What difference, if any, does it make to read this story through the eyes of a community of faith?
- Using the reflections from A Brief Statement of Faith that were discussed earlier, is there anything in this news story that should prompt a community of faith to "pray without ceasing"? To "witness among all peoples"? To "unmask idolatries"? To "hear the voices of peoples long silenced"? To "work with others for justice, freedom, and peace"?
- If possible, identify one specific way in which a community of faith might make a social witness in response to this news story.

Have participants or small groups share the main points of their discussion with the entire group. Record on newsprint or chalkboard the news stories selected and the specific ways in which a community of faith might make a social witness in those situations.

Concluding the Session (5 Minutes)

5. *Affirming Our Faith*

Review with the participants the discussions from this session:

- what is meant by social policy witness,
- a selected review of the tradition of social witness in the Scriptures,
- reflections from the report, "Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness," and
- the relationship of front-page news stories to a community of faith.

Tell them that the process they have gone through in this session is one that has begun to lay a foundation for doing social policy witness.

Tell the participants that the remaining sessions in this study will "flesh out" the meaning of social policy witness within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Tell them that their discussions may, and hopefully will, demonstrate their God-given diversity and broad range of perspectives that, in and of themselves, are important elements in developing social policy witness.

Because of the nature of the study and the way in which each session will tend to build upon the previous session, ask the participants to join

in making a covenant to be present for every session of this study. You may choose to make this covenant verbal or written.

Close this session by distributing copies of A Brief Statement of Faith from the *Book of Confessions* to the participants. Have them read aloud together this document in its entirety.

Preparing for the Next Session

If you are doing this study on a weekly basis, ask participants to read newspaper or newsmagazine each day of the coming week from the perspective of a community of faith, using the reflections that were discussed in this session. (If you are doing this study in a retreat setting, encourage participants to develop a regular habit of reading a newspaper or newsmagazine from the perspective of being part of a community of faith.)

As the leader(s), gather the front-page news stories that were discussed in this session for use in Session 4. You may want to consider mounting them on poster board to display in the room for the duration of this study of the report "Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness."

SESSION TWO

Responsible for Helping to Heal A Broken World

Preparing for the Session

Before participants gather, prepare the following:

- For Activity 1, write the following paragraph on newsprint or chalkboard:

We become members of the Christian church through faith in Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, Lord of all life. As Presbyterian Christians we seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we are informed by the Bible, the Reformed tradition, the *Book of Confessions* and *Book of Order*, the ecumenical church and the world. (*Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness: A Background Paper for Churchwide Study and Discussion*, p. 1)

- For Activity 2, photocopy the resource section on pages 15-16 of this session.

- For Activity 2, Activity 3, and Activity 4, have available three copies of the current *Book of Order*.

- Have available newsprint and markers or chalkboard and chalk.

- Have available pencils and paper.

Laying the Foundation (10 Minutes)

1. *Understanding the Larger Context*

When you are ready to begin, review briefly with the participants the focus of the last session and discuss any questions or insights they may have. Conclude your review by saying that the last session laid part of the foundation for understanding social policy witness by helping participants to see a connection between individual Christians in a community of faith and the social context in which they find themselves.

Share with the participants that this session will continue to lay the foundation for understanding social policy witness by looking at the larger community of faith known as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its tradition of doing social policy witness.

Ask the participants to join you in reading aloud the paragraph from *Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness: A Background Paper for Churchwide Study and Discussion* that you have written on newsprint or chalkboard. Then circle the elements in the paragraph by which we as Presbyterian Christians are informed (the Bible, the Reformed tradition,

Book of Confessions and Book of Order, the ecumenical church, and the world).

Remind the participants that they discussed in the last session how the Book of Confessions contains a tradition of social witness. They also illustrated how they were informed by the world through the reading of newspaper articles.

They will delve into the elements that remain (the Reformed tradition, the Book of Confessions and Book of Order, and the ecumenical church) and their importance to Presbyterians in relation to social policy witness.

Developing Our Understanding of Social Policy Witness (48 Minutes)

1. Reviewing the Reformed Tradition

Engage in a brief discussion with the participants about the themes of the Reformed tradition as outlined in G-2.0500 of the Book of Order. You may want to use newsprint or chalkboard to write down important words and phrases from G-2.0500. Include in your discussion the following questions:

- Which of these themes of the Reformed tradition relate to the instrument of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in social policy witness?
- What example(s) in your society/world illustrate “the recognition of the human tendency to idolatry and tyranny”? How does this relate to social policy witness?
- If you were to paint a picture of “the transformation of society,” what would it look like? (Examples might include an end to gang violence, universal health care for all people, and sustainable development in two worlds.)

Next, tell the participants that particular expressions of the Reformed tradition for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are found in its Constitution, which consists of the Book of Confessions and the Book of Order. Share with them that it is in the Word of God and the constitutional standards that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) grounds its social policy witness, and that it is the Constitution that they now turn to.

Divide the participants into two groups. Distribute copies of the Scripture for this session in the following way: Group One—the Book of Confessions; and Group Two—the Book of Order. Ask both groups to read the material and discuss the following questions among themselves in preparation for reporting to the other group:

- What in these excerpts lays claim to the Presbyterian tradition of social policy witness in the world?

- These excerpts tell us that the church, of which we are a part, is responsible for helping to heal the broken world in which we live. Give specific examples of the brokenness in the world today. Are these specific examples potential areas for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to engage in social policy witness? Why or why not?

When the two groups have finished their discussion, have them report briefly to each other. After both groups have reported, ask the participants to identify common themes for social policy witness in both the Book of Confessions and the Book of Order. Write the themes on newsprint or chalkboard.

3. Examining Presbyterian Polity

Share with the participants that a crucial element in understanding why and how the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) makes a social policy witness is understanding Presbyterian polity. It is through a working knowledge of polity that an understanding of who speaks for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is formulated. (Note: Because an understanding of social policy witness hinges in large measure upon an understanding of Presbyterian polity, you as the leader(s) will want to judge how much time to spend on polity with your particular group of participants. You may find that additional study is needed beyond these sessions for an adequate understanding of Presbyterian polity.)

Engage in a discussion with the participants about Presbyterian polity, emphasizing the elements that are most important in understanding social policy witness. You may want to put on newsprint or chalkboard the key words contained within these elements. These include the crucial principles of shared power and a representative government (Book of Order, G-4.0301), the unity of the governing bodies (G-9.0103), and the initiating role of any governing body to do tasks like social policy witness (G-10.0102o).

Tell the participants that, while a session, presbytery, synod, or General Assembly can initiate social policy witness, a specific interest for many Presbyterians in a discussion about social policy witness is the role of the General Assembly. Ask for a volunteer to read G-13.0103b and G-13.0103d from the Book of Order. Then read to the participants the following paragraph from *Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness: A Background Paper for Churchwide Study and Discussion*:

Here is the specific authorization for General Assembly to be concerned for witness ministries. Social policy witness has historically been an important part of our witness. Technically, General Assembly mandates social mission implementation by its agencies, and advises the synods, presbyteries, session members, and the society at large. We see here also the role of General Assembly in developing objectives and strategies for

mission that will guide the church at every level. Thus, it seems appropriate for General Assembly to be concerned with implications of social policy for synod, presbytery, and sessions, to seek to find ways whereby the other governing bodies can have input into social policy development, and to guide the governing bodies in implementation of social policy. (*Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness: A Background Paper for Churchwide Study and Discussion*, p. 46)

Ask the participants for feedback to this statement.

4. Reaffirming Liberty of Conscience

Review with the participants the various elements that have been discussed in this session about the role of social policy witness within the context of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s Reformed tradition and its polity. Tell them that one essential element remains to be discussed in this session—liberty of conscience.

Divide the participants into three smaller groups. Provide each small group with pencils and paper, a copy of the *Book of Order*, and one of the following references from the *Book of Order*:

- G-1.0300 and G-1.0301;
- G-1.0300 and G-1.0307;
- G-6.0108.

Ask the participants to read their assigned reference among themselves, paraphrase the reference in their own words, and then share their paraphrase with the rest of the group.

Tell the participants that liberty of conscience means that Presbyterians are free to disagree with the social policy witness of any governing body, and that governing bodies cannot bind the conscience of any member. This social tension is built into Presbyterian polity. It can lead to conflict and tension, which, when done within a context of mutual respect and openness from both sides of the issue at hand, can ultimately lead to a more faithful social policy witness on behalf of the entire church.

5. Agreeing—and Disagreeing

Make sure that each participant has pencil and paper. Tell the participants that this session and the previous session have helped to lay a foundation for understanding why and how the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) engages in social policy witness. As a way to bring closure to the previous discussions they have had in these two sessions, tell them you want to read to them a number of statements. Ask them to write "agree" or "disagree" after each statement that you read. (Note: Each statement is

from the report "Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness" found in Part One of this document.)

- "It should come as no surprise that the discernment of governing bodies is different from the views of some church members. This means neither that the governing bodies are wrong, nor that the dissenting members are wrong" (p. 21).
- "Social witness is . . . inseparably coupled with evangelism in a faithful enactment of the church's mission" (p. 18).
- "Members cannot separate themselves from actions of governing bodies as though they are not part of the same body" (p. 19).
- "There is no claim to infallibility in the votes of governing bodies, but Presbyterians believe that faithful discernment is most likely when elected representatives meet in community to interpret the Word of God in relation to contemporary challenges, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit" (p. 21).
- "It is appropriate for all Christian believers to make a personal social witness. It is appropriate for all governing bodies of the church to make a corporate social witness" (p. 22).
- "All authority in heaven and on earth is in the hands of the risen Christ. The work of the church is to make this known, in order that not only individuals, but nations—that is, people in all their social, economic, political, and natural or environmental groupings—may enter into responsible relationship with the reconciling Christ" (p. 18).
- ". . . a governing body cannot ignore the social witness policies of any other governing bodies" (p. 24).
- "A policy witness does not coerce. It teaches. It does not bind the soul. It persuades" (p. 40).
- "A social witness is a continuing process of dialogue, articulation, action/testimony, and reflection. This process of discerning truth is one of ongoing deliberation in community" (p. 24).
- "A social witness and the policies that guide the witness emerge from the study of Holy Scripture, are counseled by the Reformed confessions, informed by human experience, and tested within the community of faith under the guidance of the Holy Spirit" (pp. 24-25).
- "Churchwide consensus, which is likely to be elusive at best, is not what policy formulation processes are about, nor is it to be the basis upon which governing body decisions are based. Instead, commissioners gathered in governing bodies are asked to discern the will of Christ and make a policy witness based on that discernment" (p. 44).
- ". . . on the one hand, a social policy witness document is more than the opinion of individuals. It is a witness made by a governing body after

careful, often painstaking, process of discernment and correspondence. On the other hand, a social policy witness document is not definitive constitutional guidance that is binding on all who enter into membership" (p. 44).

When you have finished reading the statements, tally the responses from the participants for each statement. Then briefly discuss the statements that prompted the least unanimity among the participants. Be careful to ensure that every person who speaks is treated with respect and openness by the other participants.

Concluding the Session (2 Minutes)

6. Asking for Guidance

Close this session with the following prayer based on portions of the Confession of 1967 and A Brief Statement of Faith:

God of wisdom and compassion, we thank you that you have called the church into being and commanded us to be engaged in the world. In each time and place there are particular problems and crises through which you call the church to act. May your Spirit guide us as we seek to discern your will and learn how to obey in these concrete situations. Help us not to shrink back from the world, but to witness boldly to your reign of justice, freedom, and peace, and to claim all of life for Christ, in whose name we pray.

Resource for Session Two

1. Group One—from the Book of Confessions

We confess and acknowledge that God has given to [humankind God's] holy law, in which not only all such works as displease and offend [God's] godly majesty are forbidden, but also those which please [God] and which [God] has promised to reward are commanded. . . . to save the lives of the innocent, to repress tyranny, to defend the oppressed, to keep our bodies clean and holy, to live in soberness and temperance, to deal justly with all [people] in word and deed, and, finally, to repress any desire to harm our neighbor, are the good works of the second kind . . . [revised for inclusive language] (*Book of Confessions*, Scots Confession, 3.14).

We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords—areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him (*Book of Confessions*, Theological Declaration of Barmen, 8.15).

In each time and place there are particular problems and crises through which God calls the church to act. The church, guided by the Spirit, humbled by its own complicity and instructed by all attainable knowledge, seeks to discern the will of God and learn how to obey in these concrete situations (*Book of Confessions*, Confession of 1967, 9.43).

2. Group Two—the Book of Order

All power in heaven and earth is given to Jesus Christ by Almighty God, who raised Christ from the dead and set him above all the rule and authority, all power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. God has put all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and has made Christ Head of the Church, which is his body (*Book of Order*, G-1.0100a).

The great ends of the Church are the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world (*Book of Order*, G-1.0200).

c. The Church is called to be Christ's faithful evangelist . . .

- (1) participating in God's activity in the world through its life for others by
 - (a) healing and reconciling and binding up wounds,
 - (b) ministering to the needs of the poor, the sick, the lonely, and the powerless,
 - (c) engaging in the struggle to free people from sin, fear, oppression, hunger, and injustice,
 - (d) giving itself and its substance to the service of those who suffer,
 - (e) sharing with Christ in the establishing of his just, peaceable, and loving rule in the world. (*Book of Order*, G-3.0300)

SESSION THREE

Discerning Steps Along the Way

Preparing for the Session

Before participants gather, prepare the following:

- For Activity 2, write the following quote from the report "Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness" on newsprint or chalkboard: "Discernment . . . involves the testing or proving of ourselves and our society in the light of God's transforming grace toward us. It flows from love and issues in justice, guided by discriminating wisdom along the way" (Part One of this document, p. 15).
- For Activity 3, have available at least six Bibles (preferably NRSV).
- For Activity 5, reproduce the thirteen principles of discernment found on pages 23-28 of Part One (from "An Unavoidable Responsibility" through "Ecumenical Process") so that each principle is on a page by itself.
- Have available newsprint and markers or chalkboard and chalk.
- Have available pencils and paper.

Laying the Foundation (5 Minutes)

1. Reviewing the Place of Social Policy Witness in the Church

Begin this session by reviewing the previous two sessions with the participants. Remind them of the definition they developed for "social policy witness" and the place of social policy witness among the various items that God has called the church to be and to do (worship, prayer, etc.), according to the Biblical tradition, the Reformed tradition, and the *Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*. At the conclusion of your review, ask the participants the following questions:

- In light of what you have studied and discussed in the previous sessions, do you have a different understanding of social policy witness from when you began this study? If so, how has your understanding changed?
- In your opinion, from what you have discussed in this study, is there an area of the world's life in which the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) should refrain from being involved? The nation's life? Your community's life? Why or why not?

- What is the significance of liberty of conscience within the context of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s tradition of social policy witness?

Developing Our Understanding of Social Policy Witness (50 Minutes)

2. Defining Discernment

Tell the participants that the previous sessions in this study have dealt with "why" the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) engages in social policy witness. This session begins to shift the focus from why to "how" social policy witness is made.

Share with them that an important discipline that needs to accompany the making of any social policy witness is the discipline of "discernment." In general terms, discernment has to do with having a clear perception.

As a way to develop the concept of discernment, ask the participants to give you synonyms for the word "discernment." (Synonyms include insight, judgment, differentiation, comprehension, understanding, and discernment.) Write the group's synonyms on newsprint or chalkboard and leave them displayed for the group throughout this session. (You may want to add the synonyms listed above to the group's synonyms.)

Tell the participants that the report, "Why and How the Church Makes Social Policy Witness," offers a definition of discernment within the context of making social policy witness. Ask for a volunteer to read the quote from the report that you put on newsprint or chalkboard in preparation for this session. Afterward, ask the participants the following questions:

What does it mean "to prove ourselves . . . in the light of God's transforming grace toward us"? What does it mean to "prove our society" in the light of that same grace? What would proving our society look like?

Which do you think is easier: proving ourselves or proving our society? Is one more important than the other? Why or why not?

What examples of "discriminating wisdom" come to mind?

3. Studying the Biblical Tradition

Next, tell the participants that both the Old and New Testaments contain stories that help to illustrate the importance of discernment on the part of individuals.

Divide the participants into two smaller groups. Ask one group to read Joshua 2:1-7. Ask the second group to read Luke 10:25-37. Ask each group to discuss among themselves the following questions about their passage:

- Do you see discernment being exercised within this passage? If so, how?

- List all of the factors you can imagine the main character within this story had to consider before deciding upon the action that he or she took.

- Did the main character's work of discernment involve his or her social context (e.g., setting, other characters)? If so, how did the social context make a difference in the decisions that he or she made, or in the actions that he or she took?

- In your opinion, was the discernment on the part of the main character wise? Why or why not? How can you imagine the story would have turned out if the main character had made a different decision(s)?

- Can you identify a broader social issue(s) in today's world to which you could relate this story? If so, which ones come to mind?

When the participants have finished their work, ask each group to share the highlights of their discussions with each other. Record on newsprint or chalkboard any points from their discussions that you think may be beneficial to have in front of the participants as they continue with this session.

4. Moving from the Individual Toward the Communal

Next, tell the participants that the discipline of discernment is important in the lives of each individual person as he or she responds to God's call to involve himself or herself in personal social witness. Share with them that the discipline of discernment is just as crucial for a community of faith as a whole (from the local church level to the General Assembly level) as it engages in social policy witness.

Suggest to them that the experience of the exodus within the history of God's people, and the justice and righteousness by which God commanded the children of Israel to establish their new community at that point in time, established precedence for the importance of communal discernment. (For a discussion of the significance of the exodus in this context, refer to pages 16ff of Part One.)

Share with the participants that the writers of the report, "Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness," refer to the church as a "community of discernment" within the context of doing social policy witness. They write that discernment "is a communal undertaking and responsibility of a covenanted people" (see Part One, p. 18). They continue by asserting that discernment "requires valuing the gifts and graces of diverse peoples, and the disciplines for ordered inquiry, deliberation, and decision making" (see Part One, p. 19).

Ask the participants to consider the following questions:

- What do you think it means to be a covenantal people? Does being covenantal people make a difference within the context of social policy witness? If so, how?
- Do you find it easy to value the gifts and graces of diverse peoples? Why or why not? Why do you think the writers would find this aspect important when doing social policy witness?

As you conclude this particular discussion, affirm that the discipline of discernment is indispensable to the church as it engages in social policy witness.

5. *Looking at Principles of Discernment*

Next, point out that the report, "Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness," outlines various elements, or principles, by which a community of faith can be guided in its discipline of discernment as it moves through the process of doing social policy witness. These principles serve as a checklist to ensure that the process of discernment—and the resulting social policy witness—is comprehensive and inclusive of all of the elements that need to be considered as a community of faith engages in social policy witness.

Distribute to participants or small groups the thirteen principles of discernment that you prepared in advance of this session.

Tell each participant or small group that they will be the "teacher(s)" in this activity: Ask them to study the particular principle you have given them so that they can then explain it to the rest of the participants. Tell them that they will have a total of two minutes to make their presentation.

Make available newsprint and markers or chalkboard to small groups if they may want to use it for their presentation. Make sure that, after each presentation, participants are given the opportunity to ask questions about the principle that has been presented, and that their questions are answered, if possible.

Including the Session (5 Minutes)

6. *Asking for Discernment*

As a final activity, review with the participants that the focus of this session has been about the indispensable role of discernment within the context of doing social policy witness. Remind them of the importance of discernment within the biblical tradition, as seen from the stories of Rahab

and the Good Samaritan. Comment about the concept of communal discernment and how crucial it is for the doing of social policy witness. Finally, name again, with the participants, the thirteen principles of discernment.

Close this session by inviting the participants to join you in a period of silent prayer. Ask them to use their own words in the silence of their hearts to pray for God's Spirit of discriminating wisdom to be with them and with all of those who engage in social policy witness at all levels of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

SESSION FOUR

Doing Social Policy Witness

Preparing for the Session

- Before participants gather, prepare the following:
 - For Activity 2, photocopy Standing Rules 57, and 42, of the *Manual of the General Assembly* (found on pp. 2-8 of Part One) so that participants have copies.
 - For Activity 3, gather the front-page news stories that were discussed from Session One.
 - Also for Activity 3, list on newsprint the thirteen principles of dissent that were discussed in Session Three.
 - For Activity 4, have available copies of *A Brief Statement of Faith* for participants.
 - Have available newsprint and markers or chalkboard and chalk.
 - Have available pencils and paper.

Setting the Foundation (15 Minutes)

1. Interpreting the Role of Social Policy Witness

When you are ready to begin, review briefly with the participants the contents of the previous sessions. Remind them that Sessions 1 and 2 focused on "why" the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) feels called by God to engage in social policy witness, and that Session 3 shifted the focus from "why" to "how" the church makes a social policy witness. Tell the participants that this final session continues the focus on how the church makes a social policy witness and includes the opportunity for them to be part of the actual process of doing social policy witness.

Divide the participants into smaller groups of no more than three people. Give each small group pencils and paper. Tell the small groups to imagine that they have been asked by a major newsmagazine to write a paragraph that interprets the role of social policy witness within the context of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The only stipulation is that the paragraph must contain the following words (write the following words on newsprint or chalkboard as you share them with the small groups):

- discernment;
- diversity;
- dissent;

- fairness;
- love.

When the small groups have finished their paragraphs, invite them to read their paragraphs to the rest of the participants. As the paragraphs are read, take note of any areas within them that indicate that the participants may be confused about certain aspects of social policy witness. Spend time discussing these areas in an attempt to clarify the confusion so that the participants will feel more confident to begin the actual process of doing social policy witness. (Note: You may want to consider using the paragraphs in the church newsletter as a way of informing the congregation about the important area of social policy witness.)

Developing Our Understanding of Social Policy Witness (40 Minutes)

2. Looking at Other Things to Know

Share with the participants that the remainder of this session will be devoted to some of the actual steps that need to be considered to engage in social policy witness, the first of which they have already taken—becoming familiar with why and how the church makes a social policy witness. But first, tell them that there are a few other things that are important to know in preparation for engaging in the work of social policy witness. They are:

- To know the makeup and function of the Advisory Committee on Social Policy Witness. (Divide the participants into smaller groups of no more than four people. Provide copies of Standing Rule 57, of the *Manual of the General Assembly* to each small group, along with pencils and paper. Ask them to read Standing Rule 57, and to write down any questions they have about the document. When they are finished, engage in a discussion with the participants about the questions they may have about Standing Rule 57.)¹

- To know the role of church employees in relation to social policy witness. (Ask the small groups to regroup. Provide each small group with a copy of Standing Rule 42, of the *Manual of the General Assembly*, and ask them to do with Standing Rule 42, what they did with Standing Rule 57. Entertain any questions raised by the small groups when they have finished studying the document.)

¹The General Assembly Council and the Office of the General Assembly are clarifying the wording of Standing Rule 57.c(1) and 57.c(8) in regard to presbyteries making available summaries of the prospectus to congregations. Action will probably be taken by the 206th General Assembly (1994).

3. *Beginning the Process*

Next, tell the participants that they are ready to begin the process of social policy witness. Tell them that the "mock" process they are going to walk through for the remainder of this session is intended to serve as a catalyst for them to engage in the actual work of social policy witness by the conclusion of this study.

Show the participants the array of front-page news stories that were read in Session 1. Ask the group to select one of the stories and to imagine that they have been so moved by it that they have decided it is an issue that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) should speak and act. Share with them that the group within their congregation with which they would finally need to confer about their interest is the session—their local church governing body. (As a review, you may want to ask the participants why they would need to take this step—e.g. what is the role of governing bodies in making social policy witness?)

Tell the participants that the next step, assuming that their session is in agreement with them about the need for the church to address this social issue, would be to begin a background study. Review with the participants the thirteen principles of discernment (you have written on newsprint or chalkboard in advance of this session) they would want to keep before them as they engage in their study of this issue. Ask them to help you list (on newsprint or chalkboard) the items to be included in such a study. They would include:

- a study of biblical texts that inform the issue—ideally presented by persons who would interpret the texts from more than one perspective;
- theological discourse on the issue—again, by persons offering more than one perspective, especially persons whose voice has not been listened to (e.g. women, racial ethnic persons, the poor and dispossessed);
- a review of the *Book of Confessions* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.);
- a dialogue with experts in other sociopolitical disciplines that have a connection to the issue;
- a review of any past policy statements on the issue by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.);
- conversations with other members of the congregation as well as other governing bodies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.);
- conversations within an ecumenical setting that would offer insights from other faith traditions.

After the list is finished, tell the participants that an important factor to consider as they go about the process of completing the items on the list

is their time frame. Remind them that engaging responsibly in social policy witness is a lengthy process. It is important to allow flexibility within their time frame if, for example, their conversations within an ecumenical setting prompt further study of additional biblical texts.

Ask the participants to establish an imaginary time frame to accomplish the items they have listed, reminding them that engaging in the kind of background study they have outlined may require more time than they think. Write their time frame on newsprint or chalkboard.

Tell the participants that the next step in the process is to write a document that pulls together all of the background information they have gathered—along with the reason(s) they are doing the study and any recommendations they would have for the church. The document would then be presented to the session for their deliberation and approval.

As a review of Presbyterian polity, ask the participants to help you map out the path the document would travel from the session to the Advisory Committee on Social Policy Witness—once the session has approved the document.

Tell the participants that, as a way of bringing together study and mission, it would be as important to strategize ways to implement the recommendations of their study into their own life as a community of faith as it would be to do their study. Share with them some of the models of patterns for social witness found in Appendix B on page 29 of Part One. Ask them to brainstorm concrete ways in which they might live out the social witness they would address in their study.

Concluding the Session (5 Minutes)

4. *Reaffirming Our Faith*

Tell the participants that you would like to conclude this final session in the same way that you concluded Session 1—by reading together A Brief Statement of Faith. Ask that, as they read this confession of faith together, they would be aware of any difference in the depth of meaning the words might have as a result of having participated in this study on why and how the church makes a social policy witness.

Close with a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the opportunity God has given the church to engage in social witness, as well as asking God for the courage to be faithful witnesses of Christ in every aspect of our lives.