

**Covenant of Understanding**  
**Regarding the Role and Relationship of Caucuses and Councils**  
**Serving Communities of Color within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**

Caucuses and Councils Serving Communities of Color, in varying forms, have been a significant part of the history and ethos of the Presbyterian Church at least since the 1800s. The first known recorded caucus was organized in New York City by black clergy in 1856. The caucus was organized to advocate for racial justice in the church and community, and to maximize black participation in the life and mission of the Presbyterian Church, along with other goals. (Adapted from a paper by Dr. Gayraud S. Wilmore, entitled *The Black Presbyterian Caucuses-Passing on the Heritage – 1998*)

As our church and society became more racially diverse, the development of Caucuses and Councils Serving Communities of Color increased in the church during the early 1970s to include Asian, Hispanic, Native American, and more recently Middle-Eastern Presbyterians. These caucuses had an advocacy and programmatic role, strengthened by a working relationship with the General Assembly, through Racial Equity and Intercultural Ministries, as well as other judicatories (now mid councils). In many instances, the Synod was a primary link for the caucuses in relating to and working with their constituencies at the congregational level.

With the continuing changes taking place within the life of the denomination, the Caucuses and Councils Serving Communities of Color are experiencing a serious sense of having lost both their relationship and a clear role within the church. While the caucuses are related to the General Assembly through the Presbyterian Mission Agency and Racial Equity and Women's Intercultural Ministries, there is no clear understanding of what that relationship means and the expectations of that relationship.

Since the reunion in 1983, which created the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), there has been a lack of clarity about both the advocacy and missional role of the caucuses and their relationship to the denomination at all levels.

**PURPOSE OF "THE COVENANT OF UNDERSTANDING"**

This "Covenant of Understanding" is an attempt to reestablish a proactive, trusting relationship built upon collaboration, shared beliefs, complementary visions, and mutual respect. It is also the intent of the Covenant to bring clarity to the appropriate role and relationship of Caucuses and Councils Serving Communities of Color within the PC(USA), particularly with the General Assembly, the Office of the General Assembly, the Presbyterian Mission Agency, and Mid Councils at this time in our changing life together.

It is the desire of the Caucuses and Councils Serving Communities of Color to partner with the PC(USA) in its commitment to "guarantee full participation and representation in its worship, governance, and emerging life to all persons or groups within its membership. No member shall be denied participation or representation for any reason other than those stated in this Constitution." (F-1.0403).

**BOOK OF ORDER REFERENCES RE: CAUCUSES AND COUNCILS SERVING COMMUNITIES OF COLOR SINCE REUNION**

1. **ARTICLES OF AGREEMENT** (*Book of Order 2013-2015*) – Article 8.2 – 8.3 Racial Ethnic Representation, Participation and Organizations – includes the following statement: "Racial ethnic members in the United States (Presbyterians of African, Hispanic, Asian descent and

Native Americans) shall be guaranteed full participation and access to representation in the decision-making of the church, and SHALL BE ABLE TO FORM CAUCUSES.” 8.2

“Consistent with the principles of diversity and inclusiveness as set forth in 8.2, The General Assembly Council (*now the Presbyterian Mission Agency*) shall consult with and receive input from the Caucuses and Councils Serving Communities of Color of the church, and shall make provision for the expenses necessary to such consultations. The purpose of such consultation shall include:

- determining the priorities for assisting racial ethnic churches and ministries,
- developing a denominational strategy for racial ethnic church development,
- finding ways to assure the funding and operational needs of schools and other institutions which historically have served Black Americans and other racial ethnic groups.” 8.3

## **CLARIFYING THE ROLE OF CAUCUSES AND COUNCILS SERVING COMMUNITIES OF COLOR**

### **A Definition:**

The word caucus comes from a Native American verb in the language of the Algonquin nations, which means, “to gather”. Caucuses are entities where people of similar characteristics or concerns come together to affirm their identity and to pursue collective goals.

Caucuses and Councils Serving Communities of Color in the PC(USA) are support communities seeking to overcome inequalities, injustices, paternalism, and racism while vying for full partnership in the mission of the church. They assume the risk of challenging the church when it fails to heed to the “voices of peoples once silenced” including the poor and oppressed. Caucuses and Councils Serving Communities of Color are self-determining fellowships, ordinarily created not by official ecclesiastical action but by their own constituencies to whom they are primarily accountable. (Adapted from the article, *The Purpose of Caucuses by Rev. Helen Locklear, 2003*).

### **Historic Role of National Caucuses:**

The following are historic roles undertaken by Caucuses and Councils Serving Communities of Color within the Presbyterian Church. Many of these roles continue today though altered based on denominational changes that have occurred since reunion.

1. **Monitoring** – Acting as a conscience of the church, working for people of color / and multi-cultural congregational transformation, and racial justice.
2. **Advocacy** – Acting as an advocate for program development and funding on behalf of related congregations and communities across the denomination which includes: mid councils and other decision making bodies at all levels of the church; matters related to new congregational development and congregational transformation; women of color, youth, young adults, and matters of justice for all ages; as well as concerns of emerging countries.
3. **Programmatic** – Working with congregations, mid councils and appropriate General Assembly agencies to address congregational concerns, historical research, assisting appropriate entities at all levels of the church regarding recruitment and enlistment of people of color interested in ministry vocations, and equipping persons for leadership roles in program areas, councils, and staff positions. (Adapted from article by Rev. Helen Locklear)
4. **Educational** – Serving as a primary resource for enabling all members of the PC(USA), and people of color in particular, to better understand and relate to the unique cultural nuances of

Presbyterians of color and their communities in order to be more effective partners in the mission of Jesus Christ.

The caucuses relate to the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board and the General Assembly through the Racial Equity Advocacy Committee (REAC) which has direct access to the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board. REAC's primary responsibility is to advocate for policies that impact people of color

REAC's mandate does not include programmatic ministries. However, REAC may advocate for policies related to congregations and communities of color, which are of major interest and focus for Caucuses and Councils Serving Communities of Color.

It is understood that the General Assembly's "Shape and Form" process, approved by the 205th General Assembly (1993), officially assigned to REAC the advocacy role of the caucuses, as well as the role of monitoring, at the General Assembly level. However, there continues to be an appropriate advocacy role for the caucuses at the mid council level relative to programmatic and community issues which are of concern to constituent congregations related to the caucuses. Some of these issues may not require the advocacy of REAC because of their local focus.

The five current Caucuses and Councils Serving Communities of Color (African American/Black American, Asian, Hispanic, Middle Eastern, and Native American) select one member from each caucus to be elected to REAC through the General Assembly Nominating process to serve a four-year term with eligibility for one additional term.

The Caucuses and Councils Serving Communities of Color are committed and prepared to assist the General Assembly in its constitutional responsibility to "Nurture the covenant community of disciples (G-3.0501c)" which includes the racially diverse congregations who relate to the caucuses.

### **PROPOSED RELATIONSHIP OF CAUCUSES AND COUNCILS SERVING COMMUNITIES OF COLOR WITHIN THE PC (USA)**

1. Caucuses and Councils Serving Communities of Color will relate to the General Assembly through the Office of the General Assembly (OGA), the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA), and the Racial Equity Advocacy Committee (REAC) in matters related to policies that impact people of color.
2. The Presbyterian Mission Agency and the Office of the General Assembly may<sup>1</sup> consult and receive input from the Caucuses and Councils Serving Communities of Color in matters such as:
  - determining the priorities for assisting churches of color and ministries for people of color,
  - developing a denominational strategy for church development / transformation in communities of color,
  - determining the future financial support and operational needs of schools and other institutions which historically have served Black Americans and other communities of color. (*Adapted from Articles of Agreement, Article 8.2-8.3*)

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<sup>1</sup> By action of the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board on September 19, 2014, "may" is to be interpreted as "will" by the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

The Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA), in consultation with Racial Equity and Women's Intercultural Ministries, is requested to develop a process that will enable recommendations from caucuses regarding programmatic ministries to be considered by the PMA Board, as appropriate.

3. Mid councils of the church will be encouraged to utilize the consultative resources of Caucuses and Councils Serving Communities of Color in developing and implementing strategies for mission with congregations and communities of color, and the recruitment of persons for ministry vocations, with a particular focus on clergywomen of color.
4. Caucuses and Councils Serving Communities of Color will continue to be related to the Racial Equity Advocacy Committee (REAC) in matters of advocacy.
5. Caucuses and Councils Serving Communities of Color will continue to be related to Racial Equity and Women's Intercultural Ministries through the respective Congregational Support Offices in matters consistent with the role of these offices.

In order to help facilitate the assigned task of the Congregational Support Office, it is recommended that all Congregational Support Offices have a functioning Advisory Committee. Each Advisory Committee should consist of at least two members appointed by the respective caucus.

6. In order to develop an ongoing relationship with the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly and the Executive Director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency, the leaders of the five caucuses (Chair/moderator/president) will convene for at least two (2) scheduled conference calls with the Stated Clerk and the Executive Director each year. The scheduling of these calls should be held at such times to provide input from the caucus leadership regarding appropriate items going to the General Assembly, or as needed by the caucus leadership or the Stated Clerk / Executive Director.
7. Caucus leadership may hold telephone conference calls at least twice each year to maintain good lines of communication between the caucuses. It is encouraged that these calls include the caucus representatives from REAC to broaden the sharing of information and input. The calls could also serve a preparatory purpose for planning and developing agendas for the conference calls with the Stated Clerk and Executive Director. Staff may be invited to participate on these calls, as appropriate, with the caucus representatives given the prerogative of meeting without staff.

### **SUGGESTED FUNDING FOR CONSULTATIONS**

1. Funding for consultations requested by an agency of the General Assembly will be provided by the agency.
2. Funding for conference calls with the Stated Clerk and Executive Director will be provided by these offices.
3. Funding for conference calls between the Caucuses and Councils Serving Communities of Color will be funded by the caucuses.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Apostle Paul, writing to the church in Ephesus said, in the words of *The Message*, "(God) handed out gifts...to train Christ's followers in skilled servant work, working within Christ's body, the church, until we're all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God's Son..." (*Ephesians 4:11-12*)

We believe this proposed Covenant of Understanding will enable Caucuses and Councils Serving Communities of Color in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):

- to be full contributing partners with the General Assembly and Mid Councils,
- to enrich the life, ministry, and mission of our congregations of color, multi-cultural congregations and communities, and
- to share our rich gifts, cultures, and commitment to Jesus Christ with the whole church, as together we seek to be “fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ”, while faithfully serving God in this time and place. (*Ephesians 4:13*)

Approved in the fall of 2014 separately by  
the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board,  
the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly,  
and the Caucuses and Councils Serving Communities of Color