

IPC Synod

Special Committee on Denominational Structure / BCO Editorial Board

3rd February 2016

Minute of Meeting

Sederunt:

Leo Proot (Moderator), Andrew Randall, Taero Yoon, Matthew Roberts, Joel Rinn, Simon Barker (Clerk)

Apologies:

Puk Kyong Kim

1. The Meeting was opened with a reading from Mark 8:21 and a prayer.
2. The minute of the meeting of 4th December was accepted to be a true and accurate record.
3. The 'IPC Discussion Document' had been edited in light of discussion at the last meeting by Leo and was considered.

The role for this document moving forward was discussed. Should it be 'official' or a useful introduction to IPC?

Sharing and communication of information and papers across our whole denomination needs to be cultivated. Responses and engagement from individual Sessions to consultations has not been well demonstrated historically.

The intention was resolved to be a general introduction to IPC that would be a 'front page' website document.

The need for timely comments on documents was accepted.

The 'History' section was refined and condensed and it was considered desirable to develop a separate and more detailed introduction to the history of IPC.

ACTION: Joe Martin to be approached to oversee this

The 'Vision', 'Mission' and 'Core commitment' sections were further discussed and edited.

ACTION AR: To edit for style

ACTION SB: Final version to be circulated to Group prior to Synod for any significant objections to be raised, then posted on the website.

4. Arrangements for BCO meetings and dealing with matters coming to Synod were discussed. Suggested that BCO amendment business should be routed through clerk and committee as agreed. Individuals should bring other business through their Presbyteries. The Moderator and Clerk of Synod set the agenda for Synod and therefore have capacity to bring business that is not otherwise on the agenda. Noted that Synod Committees can also bring business directly to Synod.

ACTION:

Recommendation to Synod for BCO standing committee procedure:

- Receive any proposed amendments for BCO from Elders, Presbyteries.
- the BCO committee may bring a recommendation to adopt OR to bring an opinion but requesting debate OR bringing a majority/minority report OR not bring to Synod.
- if BCO committee rejects a submission the individual could bring it to their Presbytery for consideration that they would bring the issue to Synod.
- The ongoing composition of the BCO committee should be considered by Synod in June. Proposal is for two members per Presbytery nominated to serve.

5. IPC denominational structure

The current situation was discussed. There has been an unfortunate delay in conveying the minutes of the last Synod to Korean brothers. Korean UK Presbytery recognizes the challenge of a dwindling language-basis in the UK. The language barrier is very significant for those who remain in '1st generation' Korean churches.

Recommendation to Synod is that we continue with one BCO in one denomination.

Acceptance of single BCO by all constituent Presbyteries is a given.

Desire to move towards a BCO without exceptions in the long term was clearly expressed.

This 'structure' committee to wind up at Synod 2016.

Single standing committee of Synod should meet with members appointed by Synod. This should be chaired by the Moderator of Synod.

ACTION: SB to construct a report to Synod. To circulate to Committee.

6. Synod meeting 2016

It was recognized that there would be insufficient time in the current agenda to adequately consider the business before Synod. The business of Synod is growing and therefore we will have to devote more time to it.

It was agreed that Synod should start its meeting with lunch on Friday 10th June (Lunch 1pm, Meeting from 2pm).

ACTION: SB to circulate revised agenda and highlight new start time.

7. BCO Amendments

See below for detailed recommendations on amendments tabled.

8. Consideration of additional publications:

a) Subordinate Standards

b) Book of Liturgy

ACTION: The BCO editorial committee is asked to consider the drafts of each of these texts **by end February** and revert to the clerk with comments on each in particular addressing the following questions:

Subordinate Standards draft text

- (i) Is this text developing in a way that is likely to be helpful to elders and members ? If not why not?
- (ii) Is this contents list satisfactory – if not please give alternate with reasons:

WESTMINSTER STANDARDS

- a. Westminster Confession of Faith — Historic text (with biblical references; in order of best version: John Bower, Free Church of Scotland [in the Word doc. attached])
- b. Westminster Confession of Faith — Modern text (kindly provided by OPC - without biblical references; OR Rowland Ward's translation)
- c. Westminster Larger Catechism - Historic text (with biblical references) - ideally John Bower version, if not then OPC version, but ideally a modern version if we can get it
- d. Westminster Shorter Catechism - Historic text (with biblical references) - ideally John Bower version if we can get it; if not OPC version, but ideally a modern version if we can get it.

THREE FORMS OF UNITY

- a. The Belgic Confession (modern version 1976 Psalter Hymnal of CRC) (with biblical references)
- b. The Heidelberg Catechism (modern version 1978 Modern English Version of RCUS) (with biblical references)
- c. Canons of Dort (modern version 1976 Psalter Hymnal of CRC)

- (iii) Are the specific versions of content suggested the best ones? If not please provide desired alternative (or weblink to it) with reasons.

Liturgy book text

Clearly some issues in this area are a matter of personal taste what to include and what to leave please do comment but not everyone's preferences can necessarily be satisfied in terms of presentation/length of documents like these and please bear in mind the need to encourage brothers who have contributed content so far. Please do focus on the usefulness as a whole and that the 'best' version of each text is being used.

- (i) Is the content list correct?
 - Too much – what can be left out?
 - Too little – what is missing?
- (ii) Are there particular versions you think we should use? – please consider the versions of the creeds suggested in particular.
- (iii) Are you content with the modern English use here ('thee' becoming 'you', 'beseech' becoming 'pray you would'). There are not that many of these occurrences and we have not changed anything more than occasional olde English terms that are no longer used.

Proposed Amendments to BCO v4

Note – the Synod Special Committee on Denominational Structure has been designated to also function as the BCO revision committee pro tem.

The following proposed amendments were considered at a meeting of the Synod Special Committee on Wednesday 3rd February 2016 and amended for subsequent consideration at Synod 2016.

A1 –

UK Presbytery requests a change from ‘Particularised’ to ‘Established’ in the wording of BCO v4 9.1, Stage 4 to read as follows:

A local church is recognised to be ‘established’ when it has developed to the point where it no longer needs the oversight of the Church Planting Committee. It is therefore directly accountable to Presbytery through the usual channels. In order for a mission church to be recognised as ‘established’, it must have:

[Items (i)-(iii) unchanged]

(iv) Presbytery will then assess the general health of the church and approve the move to established church status *[Paragraph beginning ‘If a church...’ unchanged]*

Presbytery shall keep a current list of established churches, mission churches and approved church plants.

BCOEC – Amendment to be submitted to Synod with additional recommendation for bracketed insertion after first use of ‘Established’ here of (this is used to mean the same thing as historically meant by ‘particularised’)

A2 –

The Synod Special Committee on Denominational Structure requests the following insertion of text to the Synod Section of BCO v4:

8.X The establishment* of a Presbytery

The establishment*, dissolution or merging of Presbyteries shall be a recorded decision of Synod and is designated as Special Business in line with Section 2.2 of the BCO.

Establishment* of full Presbytery status shall be by motion of a Proto-presbytery and shall also require

- a. The existence of five established* churches for minimum of 1 year within the Proto-presbytery
- b. Adoption by the proto-Presbytery of the BCO in its latest version approved by Synod as the valid law of the Church (and in the case of a non-English speaking Proto-presbytery, to have a full translation available).

*subject to amendment A1 being passed the term ‘established’ or ‘establishment’ would be used here rather than particularised

A3 – UK Presbytery submits for consideration to include in section 5.7 of the BCO the following:

The following categories of **Teaching** Elders who are not serving on Sessions shall apply:

Status	Requirements	Member of Presbytery	Public comms	Presbytery/ Synod access to papers	Attendance at Presbytery	Voting
Retired	Has stepped down from Session or OOB within last year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Strongly encouraged (Apologies for	No

					absence should be submitted)	
Out of Bounds	Engaged in specific ministry outside an IPC session, approved by Presbytery for a period of up to 3 years which may be renewed	Yes	Yes	Yes	Expected (Apologies for absence should be submitted)	Yes
Emeritus	Has given faithful service and wishes to continue to serve Presbytery to the best of ability. Approved by vote of Presbytery	Yes	Yes	Yes	Encouraged but not expected (No apologies are required)	No
Affiliate	No specific requirements, by request to the Clerk	No	Yes	No	Welcome but not expected (No apologies are required)	No

An elder who voluntarily relinquishes his responsibilities on a Session has one year from their retirement to apply for a 'change in status' to 'out of bounds', 'emeritus' or 'affiliate', giving reasons. Presbytery shall determine whether to approve that change in status, decline or suggest an alternative.

If the retired elder chooses not to apply within a year of retirement, then the Clerk will remove him from presbytery membership. This does not preclude him from applying for one of these statuses at a later date.

Where a Teaching Elder, without good and godly reason, fails to exercise his call or seek a new one, this is a failure to abide by his ordination vows and should be a matter for discipline.

BCOEC: The committee make the suggested amendment to insert the word 'Teaching' in the header. The final para is also suggested by the committee.

A4 –

UK Presbytery submits the following for consideration of insertion:

Presbytery Committee of Enquiry (PCE)

From time to time between Presbytery meetings there may be a need for Presbytery to act with urgency regarding matters of concern brought to its officers.

A presbytery committee of enquiry may be formed by the Moderator of Presbytery with the agreement of the Clerk of Presbytery when a matter concerning the church or its member(s) has been brought before the Presbytery Moderator and Clerk, consideration of which in their judgement:

- a. may be a matter which is the proper business of Presbytery and
- b. cannot wait until the next scheduled meeting of Presbytery and
- c. does not, at initial assessment, justify an extraordinary meeting of Presbytery.

A PCE shall have specified terms of reference drawn up by the Moderator and Clerk of Presbytery in respect of the issue at hand.

Composition of a PCE

A PCE shall be composed of the Moderator of Presbytery (or their deputized nominee), the Clerk of Presbytery (or their deputized nominee) and three other Elders called by the Moderator to participate (giving due regard to the need to avoid conflicts of interest). Any potential member of the PCE who has a conflict of interest or direct involvement on the issue at hand shall recuse themselves from participation.

Principles of a PCE

A PCE shall undertake its work with the following principles in mind:

- a. It is primarily for fact finding purposes
- b. It shall undertake all its activities with the primary purpose of fulfilling the overriding objective. It shall seek the peace and harmony of the church.
- c. It shall seek honest perspectives and accounts of all involved in the issue at hand before reaching any conclusions or recommendations.
- d. It shall undertake to communicate clearly the progress of the enquiry to all parties concerned, specifically when decisions are reached or reports made.
- e. It shall maintain a pastoral awareness of all parties involved in the matter at hand.
- f. Although it may make recommendations to Presbytery it is specifically not a decision making nor disciplinary body of the church.
- g. It shall abide by the principles of confidentiality set out below.

A PCE shall nominate a chair and note keeper from amongst its membership. The chair shall be responsible for making arrangements for meetings and timely conduct of the enquiry. The chair shall be responsible for collating the final report of the committee to Presbytery.

A PCE shall anticipate the full cooperation of all church members in discharging its duties.

Where matters of a personal nature are concerned those contributing to the PCE shall be expected to refrain from discussing the issue further than those already involved during the period of the enquiry.

Procedure for PCE

The procedure followed by the PCE shall necessarily be dependent upon the particular circumstances of the issue at hand but shall generally be expected to involve the following steps:

- 1) Fact finding
 - The members of the PCE may delegate aspects of this stage to a small subgroup of not less than 2 of their number (for instance determined by those living more conveniently to access those involved in the issue at hand).
 - The PCE shall make arrangements to gather written and preferably face to face accounts from those directly involved in the issue at hand. Each individual contributing to the enquiry shall have the terms of reference available to them before hand and shall be able to be accompanied by a trusted friend if they so choose to any meetings. There shall be no legal representative at any PCE meeting, this being a non-disciplinary process.
- 2) Review

The members of the PCE shall meet to discuss and review their findings and prayerfully consider the options. It may be appropriate to undertake one or several of the following at this stage:

 - Clarify aspects of discussions or written submissions with those who made them
 - Meet individuals for further discussion or for pastoral care
 - Meet with particular groups (for example the Session or Congregation of a church)

- Offer appropriate pastoral support to those involved in the issue at hand

3) Report

The PCE shall write a report and make recommendations.

- Any individual upon whom the report or a recommendation therein will have direct impact shall have a right to see the draft report and make request to correct factual inaccuracy *but not the opinion* of the PCE contained in the report. The PCE may accept or reject such a correction of fact, giving reasons.

- Any individual concerned (whether a member of the PCE or not) may dissent from or assent to the report of the PCE. Any dissent(s) shall be appended in written form to the report.

- The report shall usually be presented at the next Presbytery (in open or if necessary when there are matters of a personal nature, in closed session) however if the PCE determine that the matter cannot wait then they shall have the ability to call an extraordinary meeting of Presbytery (in accordance with the BCO) for the report on the issue at hand to be considered.

- Subsequent to the deliverance of a report to Presbytery, the work of a PCE shall be considered to be concluded unless Presbytery determines there are further matters requiring an extension to the PCE.

Outcomes of a PCE

The report of a PCE will usually contain some recommendations to Presbytery for its consideration. A PCE (or its individual members) does not have autonomous authority to act for Presbytery (which would require a Commission to be formed) and therefore is not expected to make recommendations to churches or individuals.

Recommendations may include one or more of the following:

1. Finding of 'no case to answer'
2. Recommendation to commend for action or lack of action
3. Recommendation to censure for an action or lack of action
4. Recommendation to accept a resignation or period of sabbatical
5. Recommendation to institute formal disciplinary action (see section on Discipline)
6. Recommendation for further investigations by PCE
7. Recommendation to institute a Commission of Presbytery
8. Recommendation to institute additional support to a given situation

Principles for handling information disclosed to members of the PCE

In the context of a PCE the disclosure of sensitive and personal information is possible. It is important that the person who is sharing or disclosing personal information has confidence that what is said will not be indiscriminately spread to others. PCE members must be trustworthy in dealing with personal matters to enable people to open up with real confidence.

Members of a PCE shall therefore abide by the following principles:

- a. Each PCE member has a responsibility to handle potentially personal information sensitively, at all times. It might be right to share knowledge but this must only be done

after a period of reflection to ensure that the disclosure is appropriate and done with the best intent to build up rather than tear down.

- b. There are important occasions when we must pass information on. Yet even then the information needs to be passed on in the right way, at the right time and to the right people:
 - Child protection issues: if there is a concern regarding child protection or protection of a vulnerable adult, this must be taken to the designated child protection team for a given church and/or the proper legal authorities. This is a legal obligation.
 - Concern for the health and/or safety of someone in the Church
- c. As Presbyterians we believe that situations in churches are best dealt with by the combined wisdom of a number of church elders. Therefore anyone disclosing information to an elder should always understand that it may be appropriate and or necessary to share this with other elders in the PCE, the Session or the Presbytery. At the same time it is a duty of elders to handle such information wisely and not discuss it with others where it is neither appropriate nor necessary. Decisions over what should be disclosed are therefore based upon trust rather than unqualified promises of confidentiality, which may unhelpfully bind consciences.
- d. Sharing our problems and concerns with each other is central to supporting one another both in prayer and in practical ways yet just as there is the potential for great help being given there is also potential for great hurt being received in matters of a sensitive nature. We all need to think very carefully before discussing someone else's problems. Proverbs 18:6 tells us: *The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down to the inner parts of the body.* Gossip is tempting and inherently interesting to us. We need to be on our guard to avoid it.
- e. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not afraid to bring matters into the open in an appropriate way. Openness can often be the very things that sets us free from the fear of being discovered or known. Appropriate openness is often the thing which assures us that, as believers, we are already fully, perfectly known and fully and perfectly loved and accepted through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In summary this is what a church member can expect from the PCE:

- To take very seriously the bible's teaching not to be a tale-bearer, not to engage in gossip, idle speculations or spread rumours.
- To take seriously the call to shepherd the flock of God. The overriding aim of the PCE is to honour God and build up his church whilst being redemptive and helpful to everyone.
- In the case of elders who are married it is recognised that they may wish to share some of what they are told with their wives to allow the sharing of burdens that is essential to a fruitful Christian marriage. Taking that into account, however, discretion will be shown by the elder in deciding what is appropriate to disclose to his wife with reference to the particular situation he is facing. His wife is also bound to follow these guidelines on confidentiality to the same full extent as her husband. The PCE, as elders of the IPC, must commit themselves, along with their wives, to serving the church family with integrity and to earn and guard the trust of the church family in doing so.

- To be able to share with fellow elders anything that is discussed. This openness between elders is for the protection of the church. The elders have been set apart by the church to lead the body and they must be united in order to fulfill this calling effectively. If information is shared with an elder that may pose a potential threat to the welfare of any part of the church it is vital that they consult with fellow elders about such matters.
- The outcome (usually a report) of a PCE will be discussed at Presbytery but this will be in closed session (only Presbytery members will be present) if there are sensitive personal matters involved. The same principles described here will be respected by all Presbytery members in this situation.
- If the PCE decides that the welfare of the individual or others is at stake then it may be their duty to share information with the appropriate authorities (civil, family or church). This is for the protection of the individual and the church. The PCE would endeavour first to secure an individual's agreement to make the necessary disclosure themselves if at all possible. This could, in some circumstances mean speaking with police, legal courts, parents or spouses about matters discussed.
- Presbytery may decide to involve others outside of Presbytery as sources of help.
- The PCE will be glad to discuss these principles with members further at any time.

In turn, Church members are asked to act with discretion in respect of matters considered by a PCE and where necessary to bring their concerns to the PCE.

BCOEC – Revised version above to be considered by Synod for inclusion in BCO

This version is the final draft reached at the meeting pending Andrew Randall's final edit – this will follow in due course.

Introduction to the International Presbyterian Church (version 4)

History

The IPC is a European-based Reformed and covenantal denomination started by Francis Schaeffer in 1954. By the late 1960s there were 3 congregations in 3 countries. It had from its beginning a stated intention of being a church which crossed international boundaries. Since 2000 it has grown considerably. It maintains its same vision of being a Reformed church focused on bringing and applying the gospel to a modern secular world. It now consists of a growing number of churches in various countries stretching from Great Britain across Europe, to Azerbaijan and Korea.

[Link to History of the Denomination page]

Vision

Our conviction is that authentic gospel ministry is always embedded in churches. Therefore we seek to bring the gospel to unchurched people by growing existing churches and starting new ones. We believe the Church should be international, multiethnic, interdependent, Reformed and covenantal.

Mission

The New Testament shows us that the Church consists of people from every nation under heaven united into one body by the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ. Therefore we understand mission to be done best by the Church united across barriers of race and language proclaiming Christ as Lord and Saviour to all races and languages and calling them to join together in his Church. Local churches should therefore both reflect and evangelise the communities in which they are located. We also believe that indigenous leadership and effectively communicating the Gospel into the culture and language of each people group are key elements in embedding that Gospel in local communities.

Core Commitments

International: The ethnic and social diversity of the Church united in Christ is one of her greatest adornments. We reflect the image of God most clearly when united across the barriers that divide sinful humanity. It is one of the greatest testimonies to the saving love of God, signaling to the world the reversal of the fall exemplified by the Tower of Babel and the curse of the nations (Genesis 11). Together, we are completed in Christ (Revelation 14:6). God's saving purpose has always been for all nations. The unity of the Church, which will be complete in the new heavens and the new earth, is already a reality which we must strive to live out in practice in our churches. We have a commitment not only to bring the gospel to individuals but to engage cultures as well. The gospel not only critiques us as individuals but it also critiques and transforms our cultures.

Presbyterian: The creation of Christ's Church is God's central purpose in salvation, as his chief means of bringing glory to himself through his Son. The Church is not a mere association of individual believers, but was designed as a family from its beginning through the promise of a seed in the Garden of Eden. Specifically, it is God's covenant family, bound together across the generations, and across the world, by God's covenant promises of mercy and eternal life in Christ (Genesis 17:7,8; Ephesians 2:19-21). As God's family, the Church, being one body filled with one Spirit serving one God and Father, has a unity in her common declaration of one Lord, one faith and one baptism (Ephesians 4:4-6). This is to be expressed in mutual love, service, cooperation and accountability to one another according to the pattern of government by pastors and elders, also called 'presbyters'. This pattern is that each congregation is ruled by a plurality of elders, with all elders being part of and accountable to a council of elders ('presbytery') consisting of the elders of churches in a specific area. A key function of the presbytery is the careful choosing and ordaining of elders (1 Timothy 4:14). Presbyteries are to be united in and accountable to a Synod of many presbyters (Acts 15). This unity of believers and churches across time and space is of great value to the church. Government by councils of elders guards the Church against cultural idols by helping to expose them. The whole church grows when its elders work together, rely on

each other, and govern Christ's church together (Acts 11:27-30; Acts 13:1-3). The sharing of money, knowledge, wisdom, abilities, prayer and discipline is difficult and messy in a church full of sinners, and will never be achieved perfectly in this age. It is nevertheless required of us to the best of our ability, and is a means used by the Lord Jesus to bring great blessing to his Church.

Church: We believe that the Church is the Body of Christ and the fundamental agent for carrying out the Great Commission, enlarging the Kingdom of God. We consider the historical and confessional understanding of the Church identified and affirmed in our doctrinal standards (*Westminster Confession of Faith with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms* and the *Three Forms of Unity, The Heidelberg Catechism, The Canons of Dort, and The Belgic Confession*) to conform most closely to Scripture.