

Overview of the Proposed Covenant for Joint Witness

September 17, 2024

1. Background

- a. Offered by National Capital Presbytery in the fall of 2023 as an alternative path to ECO
- b. Typical expressions of "joint witness" sees a PCUSA church joining with a church from a different denominational tradition (e.g. Methodist, Episcopal, UCC)
- c. In March we learned the initiative rests with Greenwich to draft a proposed plan (attached)
- d. Session agreed to explore this as a matter of due diligence in our discernment process with National Capital Presbytery and the Greenwich family.
- e. The East Central Presbytery (ECO) is supportive of exploring this possibility

2. Section I on Vision and Purpose

- a. Honors Greenwich as a community of historic Christian conviction expressed with kindness
- b. Reflects a desire for Christian unity with theological, pastoral and missional integrity
- c. Points out where both PCUSA and ECO polities allow for this kind of arrangement
- d. Highlights why we seek to join ECO and why we would maintain connection to PCUSA

3. Section II on Administration

- a. Addresses specific concerns raised by the Session and church members
- b. Clarifies Session authority over all uses of church property, selection of elders and deacons
- c. Allows expression of conscientious positions on membership status
- d. Specifies how per-capita funds to the two presbyteries would be handled
- e. Requires future pastoral leadership to affirm ECO essentials and Greenwich's vision
- f. Provides for review, amendment and dissolution if necessary

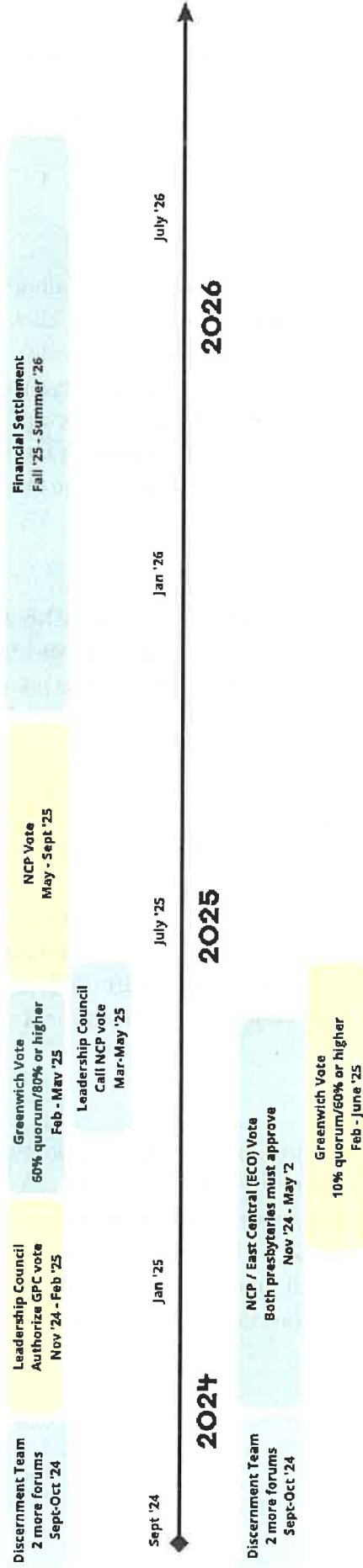
4. Additional considerations

- a. Approval process: Session, Congregation, National Capital and East Central presbyteries
- b. Lowers threshold for affiliating with ECO from 60% quorum/80% vote to 10%/67%
- c. Removes property negotiations with potential for significant savings of money
- d. Allows evangelical witness and mission to continue within National Capital and beyond
- e. Many find the concept and plan difficult to understand without a knowledge of polity
- f. Will not satisfy conscientious concerns of all and would require great trust to pursue

Projected Flow chart / time-line for completing the Discernment Process

Plan A (Eco only)

Dismissed to ECO upon finalized financial agreement, late 2025 or mid 2026?
 Amount of agreement unknown, Session has discussed \$500K - \$1.0M



Plan B (Joint Witness)

Become part of ECO upon confirmation of Greenwich vote, mid 2025?
 No property settlement required

DRAFT
Greenwich Presbyterian Church

A Covenant for Joint Christian Witness between
National Capital Presbytery, PC(USA)
and
East Central Presbytery, ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians

I. Vision and Statements of Purpose

A. Vision

"To all who are spiritually weary and seek rest; to all who mourn and long for comfort; to all who struggle and desire victory; to all who sin and need a savior; to all who are strangers and want fellowship; to all who hunger and thirst after righteousness; and to all who will come - this church opens wide her doors and offers welcome in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ."

This welcome statement reflects the warmth and Christ-centered spirit of Greenwich Presbyterian Church. Our vision for a joint Christian witness is presented in this same gracious spirit, and offers a deep desire to show a theological, pastoral and missional faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Theological – honoring historic Christian orthodoxy and scriptural fidelity
Pastoral – embracing the blessedness and brokenness of the human family
Missional – engaging the world through ministries of proclamation and justice

B. Witness to the Unity of the Body of Christ

"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." Ephesians 4:3-6

"May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." John 17:23

"How good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters live together in unity!" Psalm 133:1

Greenwich Presbyterian Church has a rich history of cooperative Christian witness within the local community. We also have a long history of active involvement in the Rappahannock, Winchester and Potomac Presbyteries of the PCUS, in the National Capital Union Presbytery, and in the National Capital Presbytery of the PC(USA).

In pursuing this venture in cooperation with the East Central Presbytery (ECO), we affirm that both denominations seek to embody the grace and truth of Jesus Christ. This covenant seeks to be generative and missional, grounded in the conviction that such a joint witness will help the world to know the Father's love through his Son, Jesus Christ.

C. Witness to Ecumenicity and Reconciliation

Joint witness efforts typically involve parties that do not share the same ecclesiastical history and polity. This venture is being pursued with the awareness that one denomination has grown out of the other, and thus we believe it can serve as a witness to the reconciling work of Jesus Christ and Christian unity. As noted below, both polities provide for such expressions of ecumenicity:

"We cherish our common history with all expressions of Reformed and Presbyterian churches. We wish to partner in mission and ministry, while confessing the common historical biblical and

orthodox faith as given to us in God's Word, our authority for faith and life." (ECO - 5.02 Reformed and Presbyterian)

"Congregations, historically members of the PC(USA) or other Reformed denominations, who wish to maintain that membership while joining with ECO and who recognize and teach the Essential Tenets may request to join a presbytery of ECO after a period and process of discernment, and a two-thirds vote of the congregation at a duly called meeting. This joint witness shall be formed in communication with the presbytery or comparable governing body of each denomination. Wherever the constitutions of the denominations differ, any mandatory provisions of one shall apply in all cases where the other is permissive." (ECO - 5.0201 Union Congregations)

"When its strategy for mission requires it, a presbytery may approve the creation of a joint witness between congregations of this denomination and congregations of other Christian churches that recognize Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, accept the authority of Scripture, and observe the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper." (PCUSA -G-5.05 Joint Congregational Witness)

D. Purposes for Joint Christian Witness at Greenwich

The unique nature of this ecumenical venture invites all parties to be clear and committed to the reasons for pursuing this effort. The following purposes express the hopes and intentions that stand behind our covenant for joint witness.

1. The covenant provides for a new ministry partnership with the East Central Presbytery that will allow Greenwich to:
 - a.) express a differentiated theological identity through commitment to the Essential Tenets of the Reformed faith as articulated in the ECO Constitution,
 - b.) pursue mission opportunities within a shared interpretive framework of Scripture, and its implications for the human condition, evangelism, justice, worship and the life of discipleship to Jesus Christ,
 - c.) access denominational resources and pastoral leadership to equip Greenwich for congregational life and mission to become a "flourishing church that makes disciples of Jesus Christ."
2. The covenant calls for continued partnership with the National Capital Presbytery which will allow Greenwich to:
 - a.) bear gracious witness to an historic Reformed and evangelical perspective within the "big tent" of the PC(USA) family,
 - b.) serve the mission strategy of the National Capital Presbytery as witnesses to the love and justice of Jesus Christ in this geographic region,
 - c.) express pastoral sensitivity to the breadth of belief and conviction within the Greenwich church family and surrounding community.

II. Administration of the Covenant and Congregational Life

A. One Congregation, One Name and One Mission

Greenwich Presbyterian Church will continue as one congregation united in worship, fellowship, mission and administration. There will be one Session to provide guidance and governance, one budget for the administration of the church's ministry, and one church staff to serve with the Session to accomplish the mission of the church. As both polities are presbyterian in nature, there is no need to alter or amend the name of the church.

B. Session and Constitutional Provisions

Greenwich Presbyterian Church will be governed by a single Session which shall abide by the constitutions of both denominations. The Session alone is authorized to train, examine, ordain and install

Elders and Deacons to serve as officers of the church, and shall review this covenant with all officers annually.

Where the denominational constitutions differ, any mandatory provisions of one shall apply where the other is permissive. Where there are contradictory provisions, the Session shall make determination in consultation with both presbyteries. Greenwich will continue to recognize the historical presbyterian principles of freedom of conscience and the practice of honoring "scruples" as may be declared by officers of the church.

C. Membership

Members of the church will ordinarily be regarded as members in full standing in *both* denominations. For reasons of pastoral sensitivity and personal conviction, however, individual members may indicate a preference to hold their membership in only one of the denominational communities.

Upon approval of this covenant, all current active members of Greenwich Presbyterian Church will be provided opportunity to indicate their membership preference: ECO, PC(USA) or BOTH. Members who do not indicate a preference will be considered members of both ECO and PC(USA) for record keeping and reporting purposes. Future members will be provided information contained in this covenant and will be asked to indicate their membership preference as noted above.

All members of Greenwich Presbyterian Church shall be eligible to serve as officers in the church.

D. Membership Reporting and Allocation of Offerings to Denominations

The annual PC(USA) per-capita offering to National Capital Presbytery will be based on the number of Greenwich members indicating their membership preference for the PC(USA) as determined in section II.C. For purposes of equity, the annual ECO denominational offering paid to East Central Presbytery shall be the same as that paid to National Capital Presbytery.

E. Pastoral Leadership and Selection Process

The Pastor(s) of Greenwich Presbyterian Church will ordinarily hold their ordination in either ECO or the PC(USA) and will be considered as serving within the bounds of both presbyteries. Pastors will be expected to affirm the Essential Tenets, be active in both presbyteries, participate in a pastoral Covenant Group for accountability and affirm their commitment to this covenant of joint witness.

Whenever a pastoral vacancy occurs, a Pastor Nominating Committee shall be formed and transitional leadership secured in consultation with both presbyteries and the Session. To ensure alignment with the theological, pastoral and missional vision of Greenwich Presbyterian Church, the pastoral search process shall include a review of this covenant with the PNC and all prospective candidates.

F. Session Authority and Church Property

The Session alone shall authorize all uses of church property, ensuring that such uses are consistent with the mission of Greenwich Presbyterian Church. This authority includes all requests for services of Christian marriage, which is understood to be a covenant ceremony between one man and one woman.

Greenwich Presbyterian Church was formerly in the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) and approved the "property exemption" offered to PCUS churches within the 8-year window following the formation of the PC(USA) reflecting the historic understanding that church property is held for the benefit of the local congregation. As such, under this covenant Greenwich Presbyterian Church will retain the exclusive right to receive, hold, buy, sell, encumber or lease its church property without requiring approval of either presbytery (ECO 4.0101; PCUSA G-4.0208).

G. Review and Amendment

This covenant shall be reviewed annually by the Session in consultation with both presbyteries for the first three years after adoption to ensure missional effectiveness and to address any pastoral, theological or administrative concerns. Recommended changes resulting from this review process shall be presented to the Greenwich Session and both presbyteries for approval.

Following the initial period of annual review, the covenant shall be reviewed on a three-year cycle, or as requested by any of the parties. Should the review process lead to changes that any party is unable to approve, that party shall communicate its intent to dissolve this covenant in writing prior to taking action.

H. Dissolution

A request by the Greenwich Session to dissolve this covenant must be approved by a two-thirds vote of the congregation at a duly called meeting.

If this covenant is dissolved, the Greenwich Session shall communicate its intent to remain affiliated with the PC(USA) or to seek disaffiliation and proceed according to National Capital Presbytery's disaffiliation policy. As this covenant was approved after an extensive period of discernment with National Capital Presbytery, a request by the Greenwich Session to disaffiliate from the PC(USA) shall resume according to the current disaffiliation policy.

If the PC(USA) amends its constitution to bind the conscience with respect to the ordination of officers, Greenwich will be released from financial provisions of the property trust clause if it seeks disaffiliation.