

An observer describes the formation of . . .

Vanguard Presbytery

A significant event in the Presbyterian family occurred in Savannah, Georgia on September 7, 1972. A group of ministers and independent Presbyterian churches met and formed Vanguard Presbytery.

Early in August the Reverend Todd Allen, pastor of the Eastern Heights Presbyterian Church of Savannah, contacted the Administrator of the Steering Committee for a Continuing Presbyterian Church and requested advice and counsel with reference to his plan for calling a meeting of the representatives of independent Presbyterian churches and their pastors for the purpose of forming a presbytery that would be faithful to the Word of God and the Reformed Faith. The Steering Committee is ever ready to assist Presbyterian churches in uniting for this worthy purpose. The Administrator was glad to be of what service he could, but the credit for the accomplishment of the Vanguard Presbytery must go to the Reverend Todd Allen and others closely associated with him.

The meeting on September 7 was on a high spiritual plane, beginning with a devotional lesson from Philippians 1:1-6. The Communion service which followed was according to the Word of God and the presiding minister reminded the worshippers that the Sacrament commemorated the substitutionary atonement of our Lord for our sins.

In a most orderly fashion a temporary moderator and clerk were elected and four standing committees appointed. These committees were "The Constitution and Service for Constituting the Presbytery", "Naming and Chartering", "Presbytery Organization and Schedules" and "Committee of Thanks." The entire group united in intercession to God for His blessing upon these committees.

The feature of the afternoon meeting was an address by Attorney Owen H. Page. Mr. Page was the attorney for the Eastern Heights and Hull Memorial Churches when these churches went independent in 1966. The case went to the United States Supreme Court and was decided in favor of the local churches' ownership of their respective properties. The case was decided on neutral principles, that is, without reference to church doctrine or government. Mr. Page stated that the vast majority of church property decisions recently rendered in various states had used the Savannah churches as the precedent effecting their decisions. (Incidentally, state laws vary greatly on the matter of church property and any local congregation wishing to assure the ownership of their church property should consult local attorneys to work out the proper legal instruments).

The standing committees worked during the afternoon and completed their reports.

The people of the Eastern Heights Presbyterian Church graciously entertained the entire group at supper.

The concluding session of the presbytery was held at 7:00 P.M. All committee reports were unanimously adopted. Rev. Todd Allen was elected Moderator and Ruling Elder Chester Hall of the First Presbyterian Church, Louisville, Kentucky was elected temporary Clerk and Treasurer. The presbytery was named "VANGUARD PRESBYTERY, a provisional presbytery for Southern Presbyterian and Reformed churches uniting." The presbytery accepted an invitation for their November 14 meeting from the Tabb Street Independent Presbyterian Church, Norfolk, Virginia.

The meeting in Savannah was joyously Christian and was without criticism or derogatory remarks concerning any other religious groups. The presbytery voted to accept the invitation of the Steering Committee for a Continuing Presbyterian Church for its moderator to become a member of that Steering Committee.

—Dr. John E. Richards

The new Moderator shares . . .

The Story Behind Vanguard Presbytery

The Lord did it.

God prompted us to take the initiative in calling a meeting of separated brethren to see if there was sufficient interest to form a new presbytery.

Our feeling is that independency should not be a permanent status for a Presbyterian church. Were it not for the fact that we fully expected a continuing Presbyterian church loyal to the Word of God and the Westminster Confession of Faith to be established, we would have joined, when we left the denomination, either the Orthodox Presbyterian Church or the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod. But we preferred to wait for conservatives in the Presbyterian Church, U. S. to be reconstituted as a southern Presbyterian Church.

When the idea of forming a vanguard presbytery was given to us, we talked to elders and other ministers and they encouraged us to pursue the idea. We got in touch with Dr. John E. Richards who had just been named Administrator for a Steering Committee for a Continuing Presbyterian Church and explained the idea to him. He said he would attend the meeting as an observer.

We then set a date — September 7, 1972.

We wrote ministers and churches who were separated. We invited a few personal friends to come as observers. The response was fantastic. A total of 53 persons from nine states were present.

The first congregation to officially unite with the new presbytery is the Talucah Presbyterian Church, Valhermosa Springs, Alabama, who voted unanimously on September 10 to join the new court.

The organization and publicity for the meeting on September 7 was handled by us. Through our contacts with the media in Savannah the event gained widespread publication and the Associated Press picked up the story and spread it all over the country.

A total of ten churches are represented by signers of the resolution adopted by the group. The mailing list for the new Presbytery now numbers 39 persons and is growing.

We have already taken steps to get a charter in Georgia, and to be incorporated. We throw open the door to all ministers and churches who desire to separate from the Presbyterian Church, U. S. and who want a haven — a presbytery home. We are not seeking to persuade any ministers or church to come out of the PCUS. However, if they are already out, or plan to leave, we stand ready to welcome them into our fellowship.

We are prepared to help any church that faces legal action. Mr. Owen H. Page, the Savannah attorney that represented Eastern Heights and Hull Memorial Presbyterian churches through four years of litigation, is attorney for Vanguard Presbytery. We hope that his services will not be needed, but he is prepared to give assistance where necessary. We believe that we have something to offer churches in the legal expertise gained in our long court battle.

—Rev. Todd Allen
Moderator, Vanguard Presbytery

Churches In Hanover Presbytery Follow Different Courses To Same End

Two churches in Hanover Presbytery are seeking out. The Tabb Street congregation in Petersburg, Va., has voted 87-26 to withdraw and the Presbytery has entered the case on behalf of the minority of 26, saying in effect that if the majority persists in its course then it will go to court on behalf of the minority to claim the property for the "true and loyal" congregation of Tabb Street. So far the majority has resisted all efforts to get them to discuss the question with the presbytery and has refused all mail sent to them by the presbytery. The presbytery's resolution suggests that at least 30 days be given for some sort of reconciliation to be worked out (or even longer if there is any evidence of progress in that direction). However, if there is

no reconciliation or agreement between the two factions in the congregation, the matter will have to go to the civil court to determine which is the true Tabb Street congregation and to whom the property belongs. Legal experts in Virginia differ as to what the courts would do with it, but lawyers representing the majority feel that they have a very strong case, especially since Virginia law has more to say about church property and congregational majorities than most states.

The West End Church in Hopewell has also joined the act but is using a different script. The Session has called a congregational meeting for October 1, 1972, to take action on a recommended petition from the session to Hanover Presbytery that the congregation and its property be dismissed. Basing its case on two position papers adopted by the presbytery which stated in effect that if a church felt it could no longer remain in the presbytery it should be permitted, however regrettably, to withdraw with the best wishes of its brethren, and that the proper and constitutional course for withdrawal would be to ask the presbytery to dismiss it with its property. The Session of West End Church has differed with the presbytery for years and has been acting as though it were independent of the presbytery for a long time, and with the adoption of these papers the session felt that the presbytery was giving them an open door to be consistent. It is convinced that the presbytery will be reasonable and fair and is seeking to be the same toward the presbytery. Neither congregation has determined yet to which other church body, if any, it would ask to be dismissed, but Vanguard Presbytery is under consideration by both.

—Kennedy Smartt

Keeping Posted

● The emphasis in this issue of "Contact" is news. So much is happening of a critical nature, we felt that you should receive background and interpretive comments from the persons involved — just to keep the record straight.

● Our Contact Minister for Holston Presbytery, the Rev. Mickey Bolus, has resigned his pastorate to become an evangelist with the Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship. Though this means that Mickey can no longer serve as our Contact Minister, we rejoice with him in this new opportunity for usefulness in the Kingdom of Christ Jesus.

● New Contact Ministers for Holston Presbytery are the Rev. Joe Morecraft of Bristol, Tenn., and the Rev. Frank Smith of Johnson City. We are thankful for the assistance and continuing leadership of these dedicated men.

● The Atlanta School of Biblical Studies begins its second year this Fall, using the facilities of the Chapel Woods Presbyterian Church in east Atlanta. This school provides an excellent curriculum for lay and ministerial continuing education. For information write the School at 2901 Wesley Chapel Road, Decatur, Ga. 30034.

- We welcome a new Contact Minister for Mecklenburg Presbytery, the Rev. Tom Cheely. Tom provided excellent leadership in his former presbytery and we are delighted to retain his expertise in another area of the church.

- You will note that the Steering Committee for a Continuing Presbyterian Church has a page in this issue. We will continue this in the future, and with this issue we also include every PCUS minister on the mailing list.

- Another secretary has been added to our PCU office staff. We welcome Miss Linda Barlow, a graduate of Belhaven College, and a D. C. E., to the team. Now serving you in the office are Mrs. Paul Settle (Georgia), Mrs. Barbara Perry, and Miss Barlow.

- The Executive Secretary has held meetings of various kinds in Brewton, Ala., Birmingham, Ala., Slidell, La., New Orleans, La., Baton Rouge, La., Millbrook, Ala., and Jackson, Miss., in recent weeks. His itinerary takes him by November 3 to Abbeville, S. C., Rock Hill, S. C., Chester, S. C., Greenwood, S. C., Birmingham, Ala., Chattanooga, Tenn., Knoxville, Tenn., Bristol, Tenn., Charleston, W. Va., Lansing, Ill., Louisville, Ky. Whew!

- Dr. Robert Strong is preaching a series of sermons concerning the New Confession of Faith. Mimeographed copies may be secured from him at 1728 South Hull Street, Montgomery, Alabama 36104.

- Persons looking for Bible study helps for circles, home study groups, church classes, etc., may be interested in a fine study of Philippians, available from First Presbyterian Church, Box 4862, Jackson, Miss., 39216. Also available is a splendid, bound series of studies in the Sermon on the Mount from the Rev. Gordon Reed, Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, S. C. (105 River Street). Soon to be completed is a series of discussion questions with answers, on the Epistle to the Hebrews, available from the PCU office.

- We have learned that the West End congregation of Hopewell, Va., voted 331-0 to petition Hanover Presbytery to dismiss it with its property.

- Another unanimous vote was recorded by the Eastern Heights Presbyterian congregation when, on September 24, it acted to unite with Vanguard Presbytery.

Free and open debate during . . .

An Information Forum

In April, 1971, the Session of the South Highland Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama, in an effort to perform its duty of leadership in spiritual matters, adopted a "Declaration of Position" in which it set forth its opposition to union with the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and the Church of Christ Uniting (COCU), reaffirmed its commitment to the Westminster Confession of Faith, and stated its position that local congregations have the sole right of ownership and control over local church property.

One year later, on May 4, 1972, a small group in the church circularized the congregation with a letter criticizing the Session for adopting the Declaration without first informing the congregation on the matter.

Realizing that this dissenting group was probably correct in that a sizable percentage of the congregation is either not informed or is erroneously informed as to the various issues confronting the denomination, the Session voted unanimously on May 22 to sponsor an "Information Forum" during which both sides of the issues would be presented.

The Rev. Paul G. Settle, Executive Secretary of Presbyterian Churchmen United, and Mr. Jack Williamson, an attorney and Secretary of Concerned Presbyterians, were invited to present the so-called conservative viewpoint. Two persons were selected by the Moderator, the Rev. Sterling Edwards, to discuss the issues from the opposing side. These were Dr. David H. Eddington, Jr., Pastor of the Spring Hill Presbyterian Church, Mobile, and Dr. W. Frank Harrington, Pastor of the Peachtree Presbyterian Church, Atlanta.

The forum was moderated by Dr. Edwards. Each speaker was allotted an initial ten minutes, then a five minute rebuttal period, with a question and answer period following. The question given to the panel was "Who is causing the division in the Presbyterian Church, U. S.?"

The first speaker, Mr. Settle, discussed the issues from a doctrinal standpoint, using Bible references to document his statements. Mr. Settle stated that the division in the church is caused by radical leaders who have departed from the belief that the Bible is the Word of God, and who believe that the Bible is merely a "witness" to God's revelation. He said the leaders appear technically to be committed to Scripture, but in practice have departed far from Biblical principles in many instances. He cited numerous examples of non-biblical teachings contained in denominational literature and pronouncements.

Mr. Williamson approached the issue from the perspective of church polity. He stated the radical ecumenists who are in control of the Church are determined to liquidate the PCUS by merging with the UPUSA denomination and eventually with the Church of Christ Uniting.

No court, he said, has the right to govern as it sees fit. It is bound by the constitution. When a court departs from the constitution, divisions are brought about. He cited the General Assembly's approval of union presbyteries with only a majority vote, rather than with the three-fourths vote required by the Book of Church Order.

The positions of both Dr. Eddington and Dr. Harrington can very well be summarized as, "We do not always agree with the decisions of the church courts, but in the Presbyterian Church they are the ruling bodies and when they make a decision we should go along whether we agree or not."

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STEERING COMMITTEE FOR A CONTINUING PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

True to the Bible, the Reformed Faith and Obedient to the Great Commission

How The Steering Committee Came To Be

When the presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church in the United States voted down union with the more liberal Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in 1954, those who were determined to have union at any cost began working to effect union by varied, and sometimes unconstitutional, means.

These radical ecumenists greatly deflected the teachings of the four seminaries of the denomination away from commitment to the Bible as the verbally inspired Word of God and from the defense of the Westminster Standards of our church. Mostly by a faulty interpretation of the seventeenth chapter of John, young ministers were taught organic union of church organizations as a great Christian ideal and that the changing of the social and political order is the mission of the church. The radical ecumenists by 1960 had taken control of most of the church and were continuing a steady, well-planned drive towards a "watered down" theology and radical church union as expressed in the Constitution on Church Union (a kind of American "super church").

There were, however, those within the denomination who still believed that the Bible was the Word of God, and in constitutional church government and the great Reformed doctrines as set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith. The Board of Directors of the Presbyterian Journal has constantly stood for the faith "once delivered unto the saints."

About sixteen years ago ministers and lay people, recognizing that the denomination had forsaken its mission in evangelism, organized the Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship. Having more than one dozen evangelists, PEF has constantly furthered the spiritual mission of the church.

Christian laymen, concerned because the church had deviated from the faith, organized Concerned Presbyterians approximately seven years ago. This great lay organization is dedicated to the formation of a continuing church true to God's Word and loyal to historic Presbyterian doctrine and polity.

Approximately four years ago, more than six hundred ministers signed a Declaration of Commitment pledging themselves to do whatever was necessary to maintain their Reformed faith. They were joined by the sessions of many churches. These ministers and church sessions organized themselves as Presbyterian Churchmen United.

Thus, over a period of time God raised up a witness for His Word and the Reformed Faith in these four conservative groups.

Since they had the same beliefs and goals, it was quite natural for these four groups to join

hands in coalition. They organized, in 1971, a Steering Committee for a Continuing Presbyterian Church. The Steering Committee consists of three representatives from each of the member organizations.

Recognizing that the radical ecumenists have divided the church and are determined to liquidate the Presbyterian Church U.S., the Steering Committee is determined with God's help to continue in America a Presbyterian Church faithful to Scripture and the Reformed Faith and obedient to the Great Commission.

Any ministers or laymen who feel in their hearts a like dedication are invited to contact the Office of the Administrator, Post Office Drawer 1024, Perry, Georgia 31069.

/jer/

The Mission Of The Steering Committee

The Steering Committee for a Continuing Presbyterian Church believes that God has given it a specific mission. This mission is to be the instrument of God in calling together all individual believers and judicatories that God wishes to be a part of a continuing Presbyterian Church. We recognize the challenge to serve Christ in and beyond a denomination that has been grievously divided by the radical ecumenists.

The Committee has no ecclesiastical authority, but a deep sense of interest and pastoral concern for the individuals and groups who are steadfast in their allegiance to the Presbyterian faith and order, and who would continue a Presbyterian Church faithful to the Scriptures and the Reformed Faith and obedient to the Great Commission. The position of the Steering Committee with such individuals and groups is that of advisor and friend.

We recognize that those who have fellowship and communication with us vary in their motivation, situations, and concerns. It is quite natural, therefore, that the Holy Spirit will move these people to speak and act at different times. So it is to be expected that the emerging Continuing Church may come to fruition over a considerable period of time. Some have already been moved by their zeal for the purity of the church and against apostasy in the present denomination. Some are gradually coming to realize that they cannot bear faithful witness for Christ as a part of an increasingly apostate denomination. Some are not willing to have their churches and judicatories restructured and their votes gerrymandered. Some cannot tolerate being merged with non-Reformed bodies, and those steadfast to the Westminster Standards cannot accept the proposed New Confession.

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Steering Committee — (Continued from page 4)

God, the Holy Spirit, works when and where He will and Christian people are moved to vote and act according to their conscientious understanding of the Scriptures. So it is that from various motivations and at sundry times and places over the next many months those who are dedicated to a continuing Presbyterian Church will come forth and at God's appointed time will be united in a truly Reformed and Evangelical fellowship. To all of these believers, whenever they act in the schedule of events, the Steering Committee extends its fellowship, counsel and love.

Seeing things from this perspective, we have continually declined to set dates or mark particular times for the rebirth of the Continuing Church. Like the Kingdom of God, it has come, is coming now, and will come in the future.

/jer/

The Steering Committee And The Bible

We believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God written, the only infallible rule of faith and practice, and that the entire sixty-six books of the Bible were verbally inspired by God.

We believe that "the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is Scripture itself." The Scriptures, being self-attesting, are not subject to the preconceptions or criticisms of man, nor should they be interpreted to suit the situations or fancies of man. The Supreme Judge of the controversies, opinions, doctrines and private spirits "can be no other than the Holy Spirit speaking the Scripture."

We believe and accept the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures, and that these standards are the most acceptable expression of the Reformed Faith.

—From "Faith and Purpose of
The Steering Committee"

An Information Forum — (Continued from page 3)

Dr. Eddington stated that in his opinion, the organizations operating outside the official church are causing the divisions and they should be dissolved. He said all issues should be submitted to church courts and their decisions then should be considered "the supreme authority" and binding upon all.

The Session feels that the Forum was well worth-while in that it provided some 350 members of the South Highland church, and many visitors, the opportunity to hear both sides of the issues. Hopefully, those who were present will now be prepared to make wise decisions on the questions that surely will be before the churches in coming months.

—Kermit H. Potts
Ruling Elder, South Highland
Presbyterian Church

The Westminster Confession Of Faith

In the Confession of Faith the Westminster Assembly gave to the Christian world the finest piece of intellectual work since the New Testament. The Confession is first and foremost Bible study. Here is a series of propositions, precisely chiseled, of strictest logic, the meaning perfectly plain, not a word wasted, the prose sonorous though never purple, the system of doctrine which the Scriptures contain is set down in carefully organized fashion.

The Confession of Faith is our standard. This is what has rallied us. Ministers, elders, and deacons swear to uphold it; the people consent that this is the form of doctrine that is to be taught among us. Sometimes we head it urged that the thought-forms of the 17th century are now outgrown. The Confession is characterized as "static." To such palpable efforts to seduce us from the faith of our fathers we turn a deaf ear: truth is not in an invidious sense static. The term that really fits the Confession is "dynamic," for it is a mighty statement of the truth of God.

The Confession of Faith is our tool. It is the great instrument we have been given for building up the Church in the faith.

The Confession of Faith is our weapon. If this is to import the controversial, let it be so. True Christianity has been obliged to be controversial. Our Lord Himself was a controversialist. So was Paul. So was Peter. So was John. Luther, Calvin, Knox were controversialists. We are not better than our fathers. If the faith is attacked, we must defend it. The Confession of Faith is a keen Damascus blade placed in our hand for the purpose. In a day when many contrary points of view ask to be accepted as exponents of God's Word, the Confession of Faith cuts into and exposes their errors.

—Dr. Robert Strong

"Give Attendance To Reading"

—I Timothy 4:13

This month's recommended reading for pastors and serious laymen is given by Dr. O. Palmer Robertson, of Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia.

Dr. Robertson recommends the following for teaching or preaching from the minor prophets:

Keil and Delitzsch: THE MINOR PROPHETS

John Calvin: MINOR PROPHETS

E. B. Pusey: THE MINOR PROPHETS

George Hutcheson: EXPOSITION OF THE MINOR PROPHETS

Hugh Martin: JONAH

T. V. Moore: HAGGAI and MALACHI, and ZECHARIAH

H. C. Leupold, EXPOSITION OF ZECHARIAH

Closet Call

"And when thou prayest, enter into thy closet . . ."
—Matthew 6:6

Praise God for His guidance in recent meetings of the Steering Committee.

The leaders of the new Vanguard Presbytery surely need our prayerful support in the days ahead.

Remember to pray for Linwood Wilkes and the Tabb Street congregation. May their stand for the truth be firm but loving.

Pray for Ken Smartt and the West End congregation in Hopewell as they take their stand for Christ.

Ken Keyes, John Richards, and Paul Settle are traveling widely in an effort to reach all the presbyteries before January 1. Pray for traveling safety and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Pray for the Moderator of the General Assembly, Dr. L. Nelson Bell.

Intercede for the PEF evangelists, for the ministry of the *Presbyterian Journal*, and for the entire coalition.

"In thee, O Lord, do I hope: thou wilt hear, O Lord my God."
—Psalm 38:15

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHMEN UNITED "CONTACT" is an occasional publication of Presbyterian Churchmen United, Inc., an organization of ministers and sessions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. Issued from the office of the Executive Secretary, Paul G. Settle, 3436 Wellington Road, Montgomery, Alabama 36106.

CONTACT
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHMEN UNITED
3436 Wellington Rd., Montgomery, Ala. 36106
NUMBER 18 — OCTOBER 1972

It's That Time Again

Budget time, that is.

And we trust that you will consider the increasing needs of P. C. U. (and the three other conservative groups) as you prepare your church budget.

Our needs are greater now than ever before. We traveled more than 26,000 miles last year in our efforts to "get the word" to God's people concerning the issues, and our itinerary for **this Fall alone** will take us into at least 21 presbyteries, the Lord willing.

"Contact" is being received with increasing appreciation— our mailing list has expanded by about 2000 since May — and we begin with this issue to send it to **all** the ministers in the denomination — therefore costs of publication will be more than doubled.

And, since we're tallying a few financial needs, we should mention the rising costs in the office for supplies, equipment, postage, and for a second full time secretary.

PCU also helps to provide the funds for the vital work of the Steering Committee and its new Administrator.

You have supported this work generously, and we praise God for you. But we still need your prayerful assistance.

You will put us in your 1973 church budget, won't you?

Thank you!

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