



Spirit Inspired  
Worship



## The Good Book, part 2

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Fair warning: it's the second week in a row that I'm writing about Presbyterian polity. 'Tis the season, it seems. This week, I'm flying home, or at least, to one of my former homes. I'm headed to Denver, where I spent almost half of my life. I won't see much of it on this trip though.

The Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (USA) is holding a consultation with presbytery leaders from across the denomination. We're flying in and meeting for two days at the airport hotel. It's not glamorous travel, but I'm still looking forward to it. In part, I look forward to joining presbytery colleagues whom I've met over the years. I will also get to be with two of Milwaukee Presbytery's wonderful leaders: Lee Tan (for CTM) and Teresa Larson (for CPM).

We are invited to join the Board of Pensions in imaging its future. They are calling it a Season of Rebuilding, and they want input from mid-council leaders of the denomination, among other voices. Our Board of Pensions manages healthcare, disability, and pension for ministers and other employees of the church. They provide wellness programs and emergency grants. One of six agencies of the denomination, BOP has been financially solid. They also recognize that, with changes in church membership and pastoral leadership and with burgeoning healthcare costs, they are now operating in uncharted territory. So, they're asking for input.



Because we are Presbyterian (here's the polity piece), we discern together. In the Foundations section of our Book of Order, we describe the principles of Presbyterian government, which stem from the declaration that we are one church, gathered collectively and governed by presbyters who seek together to find and represent the will of Christ. (BOO F-3.02). This current expression of our polity restates historic principles of our church, **dating back to 1797**: "The radical principles of the Presbyterian church government and discipline are: 'That several different congregations of believers, taken collectively, constitute one Church of Christ...that in like manner, a representation of the whole should govern and determine in regard to every part, and to all the parts united: that is, that a majority shall govern; and consequently that appeals may be carried from lower to higher governing bodies, till they be finally decided **by the collected wisdom and united voice of the whole Church**. For these principles and this procedure, the example of the apostles and the practice of the primitive Church are considered as authority."

As reflected in the last sentence, the promotion of group discernment long predates the Presbyterian adoption of it. We are reminded, especially in the Acts of the Apostles of how disagreements about governance and theology were handled by the early church: how the disciples "called together the whole community" to address the neglect of widows; how Peter addressed the church leaders in Jerusalem about the conversion of Gentiles; and how Paul and Barnabas debated in the Council of Jerusalem about which requirements were to be imposed on new converts. Having received the Holy Spirit in dramatic fashion on Pentecost, the early church continued to rely on the presence and movement of the Spirit to guide their collective decisions.

The Board of Pensions is not alone in discerning the future. We've shared in this edition of Fresh Impressions of the work evangelist Dan Gonzalez is doing for Presbyterian World Mission through a Global Advisory Panel. The Office of General Assembly and Presbyterian Mission Agency are discerning how they will merge. We celebrate that this work is done together. It's who we are. We have confidence in this approach, not just because it's in the good Book of Order, but because its foundation is in the Good Book, our holy Scripture.