

TOWN HALL NOTES

To the Covenant Congregation,

In three separate meetings in late August and early September, more than 400 Covenant members and friends participated in roundtable discussions about two issues affecting PC(USA). This marks the first time in Covenant's 50-year history that we have come together in such numbers to discuss denominational issues. In part, that is because our response to these issues will have long-term consequences for Covenant. We also recognize that these issues have arisen at a time when Covenant is seeking to better understand who God is calling us to be on this corner, in the wider community, and in the world.

The specific issues that brought us together are the new Form of Government and Amendment 10-A, which changes the language governing ordination standards for deacons, elders and ministers. The new wording states that "Governing bodies shall be guided by scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates." Responses within PC(USA) have varied widely, with some congregations embracing the new standards and others seeking ways to maintain the old standards.

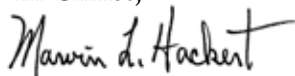
At Covenant, we responded by reading the Bible in 90 Days prior to gathering for congregational conversations about these changes. We also continue to monitor development as churches within Mission Presbytery and groups such as the Fellowship of Presbyterians explore a range of possible responses. Ultimately, Covenant's response will be determined by Session after extensive prayer, discernment, and consultation with the congregation.

This report provides an overview of the themes and priorities brought forth during the town hall meetings, as well as answers to some of the most frequently asked questions. An extensive list of comments made at the meetings is available in the church office, church library, the narthex and online at www.covenant.org/session. Comments and questions can be submitted to Session online or by letter. The website is updated regularly as new information becomes available.

The town hall meetings represent one step in establishing Covenant's identity, which will ultimately determine how we move forward as a congregation. At the recommendation of Interim Senior Pastor Paul Parsons, Session has approved another series of conversations to celebrate God's provision, acknowledge where we have not been faithful, and seek His guidance. The meetings will be Wednesday, Oct. 12, and Monday, Oct. 17 in FE 200, and we ask that you choose one meeting to attend. We believe this process will illuminate the path God intends for us.

On behalf of Session, I thank everyone who attended the town hall meetings and ask for your continued prayer and participation as we move forward.

In Christ,



Marv Hackert
Clerk of Session

Executive Summary

This report was gleaned from Town Hall Meetings held at Covenant Presbyterian Church, Austin, Texas, on Sept. 7 and Sept. 12, 2011.

Introduction

Even a brief glance at the comments made during the September Town Halls reveals that the people of Covenant care—about the issues of leadership, homosexuality, governance and community. They also care deeply about the church and the denomination, about each other and most of all about following Christ. At the same time, their comments show just how challenging it is to live out their care when the questions are complex and the response unclear. This report is intended to gather, organize and reflect back the substance of these Town Hall Meetings to the Session.

Variety

- Compiling comments from the meetings, it's clear the congregation holds a wide range of assumptions about what is most important in this discussion:
- “Covenant is gradually being eroded by the culture of the world,” several people insisted, indicating something is going wrong.
- Others hoped that “Covenant will remain the loving, welcoming place it has been, united in Christ,” naming what they feel is a healthy and special culture.
- Regarding homosexuality, one person noted, “What would Jesus do? Christ does not specifically mention this issue.”
- A different voice said, “It's clear to me that the Bible is consistent in its approach to homosexuality; it's a sin.”
- Someone expressed concern about homosexual abuse and hygienic issues of gay and lesbian individuals.
- Another person's best friend is a gay minister: “I went to a gay service; they sang better and dressed better, but otherwise I did not notice a difference.”
- About nFoG, we heard that, “flexibility in rules could be good!”
- We also heard, “global standards are important...nFoG may dilute and confuse those standards.”

Clearly, the congregation is not yet of one mind. Some strongly believe these are issues of social justice. Others maintain the big question is about righteousness. Still others feel the conversation is mostly about polity and organizational structure. Further viewpoints range from a simple desire to stay out of conflict to seeing these issues as an opportunity for something bigger. While all the views have merit, each of them leads to a different outcome for the church.

If the whole body of comments clarified anything, it was that productive discussion may depend entirely on having shared understanding and agreement about what specific values are MOST important to the people of Covenant and to God.

Themes

Despite the range of opinions across hundreds of comments, three distinct themes emerged from the concerns and questions expressed. Each theme has two or three sub-themes.

Theme	Concerns (Sub-themes)	Questions
Relational	<p>We need to know our identity and mission as a church and as a denomination.</p> <p>We're worried about staying in relationship and unity with one another through this.</p>	<p>Who are we as Covenant and as Presbyterians?</p> <p>What's most important to us?</p> <p>What role does the Bible play in our life together?</p> <p>What kind of leaders do we want to follow?</p> <p>Who has God designed us to be as a body, and how can we be more of that?</p> <p>How can we stay together through this?</p> <p>Is division inevitable?</p>
Spiritual	<p>We want biblical authority on these issues, but we don't agree on what the Bible means.</p> <p>We have questions about how we should respond to sin and specifically homosexuality.</p> <p>We have a wide range of opinions about leadership and ordination standards.</p>	<p>What does the Bible say about leadership, homosexuality, sin?</p> <p>How do we interpret and understand what the Bible says?</p> <p>How are we to understand sin and homosexuality?</p> <p>What does God want our response to be when we think we see sin in others?</p> <p>Are some sins "worse" when they're found in leaders?</p> <p>What are the rules? What should the standards for choosing leaders?</p> <p>How should those standards be worded?</p> <p>Who should make the selection of standards and of leaders?</p> <p>Is all of this really just about ordaining gay pastors?</p> <p>Or is this truly a larger discussion about standards for leadership?</p>
Procedural	<p>We want a Form of Government that is orderly, stable, understandable and uncomplicated.</p> <p>We want to have a clear sense of what the options are and what the decision process will be.</p>	<p>Can local control really work?</p> <p>Will nFoG just complicate our lives more?</p> <p>Is this really a viable way to relate to the denomination?</p> <p>How will we make the decision?</p> <p>What are the ultimate criteria for the decisions (Elder conscience, will of Mission Presbytery, majority of congregational opinion, etc.)?</p> <p>What about financial and property issues?</p> <p>What about The Fellowship?</p>

FAQ

How do we go about defining who we are as Covenant Presbyterian?

We will hold a second round of town hall meetings on Wednesday, Oct. 12 and Monday, Oct. 17. These meetings will open with a short teaching by Paul Parsons on “Markers” (Henry Blackaby’s term for times when God clearly showed up in a church’s life). Paul will also talk about the founding principle in the Presbyterian Church – “group conscience” in which that God reveals His will in groups of people, not simply to individuals.

In these meetings, the emphasis will be on building a foundation for 10-A and nFoG decisions. To do this, we will talk about where God has ‘shown up’ at Covenant to spread faith and bless our congregation in a pattern that points toward our future. We will also talk about our past – recognizing times when we have hurt each other – and seek reconciliation as we move forward.

The second round of town hall meetings will be discussed at our October Session meeting. We will make decisions related to the meetings, processing what we saw happen, and pray and listen to the Holy Spirit. We anticipate a third round of meetings in November, dates to be determined.

Through this process, the congregation will have provided the raw material to lead us to embrace an answer to the identity question. We believe this will provide the foundation to help us make decisions in response to the passage of 10-A and nFoG.

How do we engage in conversations about these tough issues and stay in loving relationship with one another?

Covenant is offering a “Faithful Disagreement” class in which participants reflect on the early church’s experiences of conflict. The class will study biblical texts showing discord in the church and draw lessons from each about how it informs current conflicts. The class is offered Sundays at 9:30 a.m., CO 208; Thursdays at 10 a.m., FE 109; and Mondays at 6:30 p.m., in FE 109.

As a denomination, PC(USA) has adopted “Seeking to be Faithful Together: Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement,” which Covenant is following during our process of discussion and discernment. (Interim Pastor Parsons was a member of the committee that wrote the guidelines.) The key principles and scriptural references are as follows:

In a spirit of trust and love, we promise we will...

- Give them a hearing... listen before we answer – John 7:51 and Proverbs 18:13
- Speak the truth in love – Ephesians 4:15
- Maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace – Ephesians 4:3

We are encouraged to include our disagreement in our prayers, not praying for the triumph of our viewpoints, but seeking God’s grace to listen attentively, to speak clearly and to remain open to the vision God holds for us all. Additional information about the guidelines is available at www.covenant.org/session.

What avenues of communication are available through this process?

Covenant.org/session is regularly updated with new information and links. Articles are published in Cornerstone and Covenant Matters to let the congregation know about pertinent developments. Members of Session can be reached at session@covenant.org if you have questions or wish to register comments.

What does the Bible say about ordination?

The words ordain and ordination come from the Latin *ordinare*, which means “to set in order” “to arrange” or “to appoint to office”.. In the King James Version, the verb “to ordain” renders 35 different words (11 Hebrew words in the Old Testament, 21 Greek words in Apocrypha and the New Testament, and three Latin words in Apocrypha). This is due to the fact that the English word has many shades of meaning (especially as used in the time the King James Version was made).

- To set in order, arrange, prepare: 1 Chronicles 17:9; Psalm 132:17; Isaiah 30:33; Habakkuk 1:12
- To establish, institute, bring into being: 1 Kings 12:33; Psalm 8:2-3; Isaiah 26:12
- To decree, give orders, prescribe: Esther 9:27; Romans 7:10; Ephesians 2:10
- To set apart for an office or duty, appoint, destine: Mark 3:14; John 15:16; Hebrews 8:3
- To appoint ceremonially to the ministerial or priestly office, to confer holy orders on: John 20:21-23; Hebrews 6:2 (Edwards, D. Miall. “Ordain; Ordination.” International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.)

According to author Leslie Scanlon, the Bible doesn't comment directly about ordination, although it does list qualifications church leaders must have and presents different kinds of ministry to which people are called. The idea of an “ordered ministry” – in the Presbyterian church that's ministers, elders and deacons – is drawn from this biblical presentation. Scanlon emphasizes scripture describes church leadership as being about grace and love, not power and authority.

What do we need to know about nFOG? What decisions about nFOG and 10-A does Covenant need to make, by when and who's going to make them?

The nFoG is an attempt to bring the book of order “back to a truly constitutional document that contains broad governing and theological principles and emphasizes function over structure.” nFoG will prompt Covenant to adopt a set of local by-laws and operating procedures for how we wish to operate.

The nFoG became effective on July 10, 2011. However, a recent vote at the June Mission Presbytery meeting gives us one year to write and pass our own local bylaws to address procedural issues not explicitly covered by the nFoG. For example, the current Book of Order defines a quorum for congregational meetings at 10 percent of membership, while the nFoG omits this section and leaves it up to local congregations to decide what constitutes a quorum. If no action is taken, this could default to what Roberts Rules of Order defines as a quorum, and thus a majority of members would have to be in attendance to conduct business on behalf of the body.

At its September meeting, Session approved a new committee to address our needs to write by-laws, an operations manual and other supporting materials in response to the recent passage of the nFoG. Initial members of this committee will be former, current and future clerks of Session (Judith Thornburn, Marv Hackert and Joy Durrant) and Fred Clement (Director of Administration). This committee may recruit additional help as deemed necessary.

We are currently operating on an enabling motion passed by Mission Presbytery last June to adopt the necessary provisions of the 2009-2011 Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as a policy and guidelines manual for Mission Presbytery, its organizational entities, agencies and congregations for one year. When there is conflict with the nFoG, the new Form of Government provisions will prevail. The new committee hopes to have an initial report ready for Session by early next year.

Who owns Covenant's property?

All of Covenant's property is owned by and titled in the name of Covenant Presbyterian Church, a Texas non-profit corporation.

Who is responsible for Covenant's financial liabilities, including the mortgage on the property?

Covenant is responsible for the payment of its financial liabilities, including its mortgage on the property.

Does the Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church (USA) address the question of property ownership and control?

The Book of Order of the PC(USA) contains several provisions related to a congregation's ownership and control of property, but holds that all property held by a congregation is held in trust for the use and benefit of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Thus while we own and control the use of our property as part of Presbyterian Church (USA), we are limited in our options. See Book of Order, Section G-4.02 for specific provisions.

Where can we get more information about the Fellowship of Presbyterians?

The Fellowship of Presbyterians seeks to establish a subset of like-minded churches within the PC(USA). The fellowship states a desire to form a fresh way for our congregations to relate, recapturing more of what it means to be the body of Christ. For more information, visit www.fellowship-pres.org

Collected Comments from Town Hall Meetings

The full comments received from both September Town Hall meetings are listed below. They are arranged together under the themes and sub-themes noted in the Executive Summary. Notes in [brackets] are editorial attempts to clarify when verbatim wording or meaning was uncertain.

Relational: Identity and Mission

1. How can we as a church body remain relevant and be the body of Christ, executing on what Jesus told us to do, to worship the lord and love our neighbors? Are we too bound up in rules, regulations and bureaucracy that we can't respond?
2. Our entire conversation centered on the impact and questions 10-A will have on Covenant more than on the denomination as a whole.
3. I don't want to let one issue define me or my congregation.
4. I don't this want to have this [homosexuality issue] be what we are about.
5. I fear having to examine if I belong here.
6. [What's most important to me is being Presbyterian] Why remain a Presbyterian if everyone is different?
7. [It's most important to me to] remain an open and welcoming community in Christ.
8. The big issue a lot of Presbyterians face is that this issue is representative of many concerns facing the PC(USA). We need prayer and discernment; we need conviction on this issue. [We should ask] why we remain Presbyterian and what is our real conviction.
9. If we as churches within the PCUSA have different rules and organization, will that not cause confusion and a lack of cohesion between the churches to be able to operate together as a larger body?
10. Will this (NFoG) cause problems for people who move to other towns and look for a PCUSA church?
11. Are we going to become Congregationalists?
12. With all these changes, what will it mean to say, "I am a Presbyterian?"
13. We have centuries of Presbyterian history, and now it is dissipating. Are our traditions being shredded?
14. The younger (20-40 year olds) members won't know the history of this church and the denomination.
15. Would we, as a congregation, consider having a practicing homosexual serve in leadership?
16. Concern about Godly standards vs. the world's standards—the adoption of the world's standards by our church.
17. Our witness and work in the world will be compromised because we are not standing on the Word of God.
18. Other denominations feel that the Bible is not the authority.
19. For me, this has been a longtime struggle. It's partially why I'm here. I was raised Catholic; so it was dictated to me what I believed - rather than allowing us to discuss our beliefs and have a role to play in deciding. I'm amazed that Presbyterians can deal with this as openly as you have.
20. The most important thing to me is that Covenant remain the loving, welcoming place it has been, united in Christ.
21. We hear there is division within the church over several issues but don't see it in the church groups that we are in. Is there division?

22. Concerned that the issue surrounding the ordination standards will dilute and overshadow our mission statement: "By God's own grace and power, Covenant Presbyterian Church will be a church of passionate worship, sacrificial service, respectful evangelism, and rich discipleship - A place where seekers are invited and equipped to become mature disciples of Christ in Austin and around the world."
23. Concerned that our church will lose our historical sense of openness and our ability to be open and not divisive, but be able to agree to disagree on some points while not compromising on the basic tenets of our faith.
24. It is disturbing how fractious the process has gotten [at GA] - How do you define what a church stands for when it is so diverse? Complexity drives irrelevance.
25. It's most important to me that we have a denomination that is biblically based.
26. It's most important to me that we be biblically based [as a church].
27. [We] must maintain core biblical beliefs in stating who Covenant is.
28. There has been a degeneration of adherence to Biblical standards in Covenant and in the PCUSA.
29. [It's most important to me that] we be courageous and loving in the nature of Christ. Christ reserved his harshest criticism for church leaders who held to the letter but not the spirit of our law. Samaritans (homosexuals) are our neighbor.
30. As a church, are we going to have the Bible be the guide or the authority of our church? Are we going to interpret the way we want rather than submit to authority?
31. Growing churches are more conservative on homosexuality, the Bible-based churches. [Do we want to be a growing church?]
32. If within the denomination practicing homosexuals are able to hold pastorates, how attractive would any Presbyterian church be for candidates who hold another view? What is the ultimate impact upon the Presbyterian church?
33. Are there any basic tenants left? Are we being conformed to the world? Are we becoming a political community?
34. [It's most important to me] to be in worship with like-minded persons.
35. [Our] church struggles with identity. We have disagreements among ourselves.
36. How'd we get here, and how do we move forward?
37. Our ability to continue a mission based church [is most important to me]. It's about Christ, not about us.
38. I cannot live with homosexuality in leadership.
39. How do we shine the light of Christ to the community and how will this (10a) help us do that?—I'm not sure 10-A will do this.
40. [It's most important to me that we are a] Christ centered mission church.
41. As Presbyterians we value our history.
42. What do role models mean to membership? What is the image of leadership?
43. The fact that [Presbyterians discuss such issues] at all is a completely foreign concept to me; I was raised Catholic. I was interested in what the discussion would be like and what questions people had.
44. I want to maintain the PCUSA identity – something that is known and understood and has a common bottom line.
45. St. Andrews is a wonderfully inclusive Christ-like church. Each time we visit, we are remembered and included in all the activities. When the new ordination standard passed, 2 gays and 2 lesbians spoke about what it meant to them. Covenant is my home church. If St. Andrews ordains a gay minister, that fine with me. St. Andrews is interesting; they are a community in Christ.

46. We had a huge range of denominational backgrounds --and lots of folks new to the Presbyterian church.
47. One person expressed concern that the desire for inclusiveness, "Big Tent," was indicative of political correctness and bowing to contemporary society.
48. One group wanted to talk about the effects of different scenarios, but was reluctant to say what they felt personally about ordaining gays, lesbians, etc.
49. What is the right direction for Covenant and the PCUSA? How do we minister to all the people in the world?
50. Covenant is being gradually eroded by the standards/culture of the world. We should look and be different than the world.
51. The church looking like the world.
52. This congregation is made up of many people who came from those traditions that have stricter rules. The average Covenant member has attended 2 to 3 previous denominations. I know one who attended 7 previous denominations. Many people come here because of our openness. We don't come down too hard on the rules.
53. At some point, Covenant needs to decide what it believes about the Bible and live it out. We don't seem to hold Scripture in very high regard.
54. "Our core beliefs need to be clear, and the first core belief is that the Bible is true."
55. We've adopted too much of the world in our church, and that's not limited to sex.
56. I would like a set of standards so that I know what Covenant stands for. When you go to other churches you know where they stand. When I came here, I talked to Rick and I had a good idea of where he was headed. Current and prospective members need to know that about us. If we agree with Covenant's position, we join and become active. If not, we quietly go somewhere else.
57. This is a tolerant congregation, and that's the way it ought to be. But there is a great, ongoing degradation in our culture that should not be institutionalized in the way we run our church.
58. Our leaders should be examples.
59. PC(USA) wants to be relevant to younger people. That's a driving force behind this change.
60. How does the 10-A issue relate to the larger issue of who we are as a church?
61. We want to be an inclusive church and benefit from the diversity of our membership, but we expect our leaders to love God and be held to a higher standard.
62. CPC has historically been a more independent kind of church as to the what extent it followed directives from Presbytery. Covenant is blessed with an amazing and resourceful group of folks.
63. People searching for a church will have to ask more details about what the church is about.
64. What is Jesus calling us to do? Minister to outcasts?
65. Can we step back and study, learn about it, try to understand as a congregation? Education would be good.
66. Other denominations have ordained gay and lesbian ministers and survived and thrived. [Being] a body of people who develop a relationship with God will only make us stronger with our faith
67. [The most important thing to me regarding these issues is] what is Jesus calling us to do?
68. Jesus Christ must be the center of our church.

Relational: Relationship and Unity

1. That Mission voted in favor of 10-A may be the most pertinent factor.
2. The dissent inside the church is a concern.

3. I can't see the denomination staying together due to these legal issues. There are
4. activists who will bring lawsuits regardless, especially in this situation.
5. [It's most important to me that we] keep our focus on Jesus. Personally, I've been through this too many times before, seen it tear apart families and churches.
6. [It's most important to me that we] be proactive against the disease in our national church that is not focused on Christ or love but on issues that divide and separate the body of Christ. GA two years ago was dominated by the two opposing sides, not loving disagreement.
7. Why is it that such a small percentage of people are forcing so much time and energy in dealing with the ordination standard issue?
8. We have 500 years of church history as Presbyterians. There are too many elders and leaders to let this divide us.
9. I have more fears about not accepting 10a. I am more fearful of it being divisive.
10. [It's most important to me that] people give each other the benefit of the doubt. I recognize the tug between unity at all costs requiring folks at either end of the spectrum a great deal of pain because they are having to compromise their beliefs.
11. [We] need to accept there are differences in the body of Christ.
12. Our table seems to be of one mind. Really heartening to see the unity.
13. I am impressed with the sincerity with which people come to the issue.
14. [My most important] concern : church unity (global) and how are we to fit into that?
15. [My most important thing is] the fear that as churches come up own standards, may create splinter groups. Unity but not a unified body.
16. [What's most important to me is] unity –but not at any cost/price. [Not if] the essence that causes this problem is the tail wagging the dog.
17. I don't know [what's most important to me]. I want to remain unified, but what is the real issue? Choice vs. what God made?
18. If we're not united are we even a church?
19. Which decision would cause fewer people to leave (there's an assumption that people will leave)?
20. Will there be people who stay who will be bitter? What effect would that have on Covenant?
21. Concern about division, and how that would affect Covenant.
22. Are we going to have inclusiveness, or splinter?
23. Could it be God's purpose that we should separate, while loving those we are separating from?
24. How do we keep the Covenant family together while going through this process?
25. How do we keep the Covenant family together while going through this process?
26. Having seen this happen in a different denomination, we are fearful of the implications for Covenant.
27. Will these divergent views split the Church?
28. Will we become so emotional that we lose sight of what brings us together – Christ?
29. Will this issue cause Covenant to be divided? We would hate to be split from the PC(USA)
30. Is how we stand on 10-A going to affect this congregation? What happens if we refuse to accept 10-A?
31. The unity of Covenant is most important to me—peace, understanding, and following God as we're led by the Spirit.
32. Concerned about a potential division in the church over ordination standards.

33. Possible division of the PCUSA—why?
34. [What's most important to me is] fellowship with other Christians.
35. Being a connectional church [with our demonization] has value.
36. Holding together as a church, being kind-spirited [is most important to me].
37. [I'm concerned that] this recurrent issue divides and erodes the church—
38. I hope that the church hangs together in all of this, that we hear each other, accept differences and opinions have peace with unity of spirit.
39. What's important to me is not to become some fractured, splintered, offshoot of a church.
40. I hope everyone can be open about the words they use – inclusive/exclusive. How we define things puts people in camps. I hope we can be more elevated or above the fray, on a higher plain with our language.
41. The group did want to avoid divisiveness within our church.
42. [I'm concerned] that this discussion will get ugly and people will be hurt.
43. [I would] leave Covenant...if we decided to ordain practicing homosexuals.
44. In the past there were similar issues involving Blacks, women, etc.[that divided the denomination] – might this create a similar division?
45. There is concern about the unity of Covenant and divisiveness that making the decision is going to cause. Some can make a case for either side. Others feel strongly on one side or the other. Can we figure out how to be a big tent church?
46. I don't want to have a leader that is a practicing homosexual. I would struggle big-time and have to search for a new church.
47. Belonging to a specific denomination doesn't matter to me. I am a church shopper, I have [a family] who I want to be led. Covenant worked! Education was marvelous! Great music! Small groups! The standard for leadership was one of defining questions I had in finding a church. I left the Episcopal church. I want to be in a church where the leaders are following the same book I am reading.
48. [It's been] 33 years since we united after the Civil War; is there a way to come together and reason?
49. Will some members leave and criticize if a gay and lesbian minister is ordained? The more immediate issue is whether people will leave if we do not take a stand.
50. My experience with a Methodist "welcoming congregation" is that the term seems only to be used to welcome gay and lesbian members.
51. Will the passage of nFoG cause us to lose the connectional nature of PCUSA?
52. There was concern that 10-A would cause a split within Covenant.
53. The relationships that have been built up over the years with other members are very important.

Spiritual: Authority/Interpretation of Scripture

1. To me, we should take 'gay' and plug in 'divorced' 'black' 'leper.' I don't think that's liberal; I think that's following God's word.
2. Jesus reached out to those who were ostracized. In my personal opinion, Jesus went to the people who were most broken. Being homosexual is a hard walk, how much harder would it be if you're ostracized by the church you grew up in. (Relates story of friend whose son has been ostracized by Catholic church after acknowledging his homosexuality.)
3. I would like to have a meeting with examples of the biblical basis for both sides of 10-A.
4. What are the Biblical references on each side of the 6B/10A issue? WWJD? (What would Jesus do?)

5. A concern was [voiced] about a movement suggesting other ways to be saved other than by accepting Jesus.
6. In Mark, Jesus [named] a standard [for leadership] that is high. That's established a highbar.
7. I think it's important to realize that people are coming from different sides, people are coming from a point of conscience. Authority of Scripture still includes a huge amount of interpretation. The more I try to interpret scripture, the more I am worshiping my own mind and the ability to get my arms around it. My mind becomes an idol.
8. What would Jesus do? Christ does not specifically mention this issue.
9. Is there disagreement on how the Scriptures are interpreted?
10. Can we establish guidelines that look to Christ and the scriptures for whatever we decide?
11. Doesn't homosexual practice go against Scripture?
12. One voice was concerned about the lack of Biblical teaching on sexual ethics as well as other aspects of our lives (unspecified).
13. "The most important thing is the clear Scriptural basis. God gave us Scripture to follow instead of every church doing its own thing."
14. Read 1 Tim. 3—"Those are the godly standards...and you can argue that we shouldn't ordain women."
15. "There are clear standards from Scripture. We need to know them and obey them."
16. It would be helpful to have instruction on the Biblical basis/rationale each side is using.
17. There is a lack of Biblical understanding about this, and many, issues.
18. We see a gradual degeneration of commitment to Biblical standards, causing us to look too much like the world.
19. The Bible is our plumb line. If we twist it, we will go astray, or be led astray by the changing morays of the world. In Romans 1:26 we have a very clear warning.
20. The Bible says homosexuality is sinful.
21. It's clear to me that the Bible is consistent in its approach to homosexuality; it's a sin.
22. However, sometimes things don't translate correctly, so there might be misinterpretations.
23. God is steadfast; he is consistent. Is it the 10 Commandments or the 10 suggestions?
24. We need to see how does this topic (homosexuality) fits in relation to God in the Scriptures. If you do, the pro homosexuality arguments kind of lose steam.
25. The Bible clearly states that the leaders of the church are held at a higher standard than the public at large.
26. I have family members that are gay that I dearly love. Our decision is not to be made on what we think or feel. We need to make our decision on what the Bible says. The Bible is our authority.
27. Things that erode the Bible scare me the most of all. If you start challenging the Bible, it scares me to death. It's happening more and more. Other countries are getting more conservative on homosexuality.
28. We believe in the authority of Scripture. Scripture is not a guide; it's the authority. Instead of making the Bible fit our culture, we go to the Bible as our authority.
29. We haven't taught [young adults] what Scripture says and means; we haven't taken God and His Word seriously as authoritative over our own lives in every aspect, so we don't have credibility.
30. You have to have something as your guide, that's why the Bible was put in our hands.
31. What are the Scripture references relating to ordination standard issues in 6B and 10-A?
32. [It's most important to me that we] should follow Biblical truth.

33. [What's most important to me is that the] church must follow Scripture as a basis for teaching youth.
34. Concern was expressed that the foundation of Biblical truths and historical church doctrine not be eroded by these changes.
35. Seems like we would be lowering biblical standards just to be politically correct, and we wonder why others won't join us.
36. What does scripture REALLY say about homosexuality?
37. [Most of the rhetoric about ordaining homosexuals] is a political rationalization; [the issue] is not about not loving people, but about faithfulness to Scripture.
38. There is no scriptural ambiguity re: homosexuality.
39. We must adhere to biblical standards.
40. Leadership [should be] held to Scripture.
41. Bible trumps all guidelines; what is the biblical background to support the new amendment?
42. We allow leaders to be divorced (and Jesus talked about divorce), so why not gay? The apostle Paul was against homosexuality as he states in the Bible, but he was also against marriage.
43. What impact will this decision about ordination standards have on our children? What are the implicit and the explicit messages we are sending them about the Bible and about sexual ethics?
44. What is the difference between the practice of homosexuality and the ordination of women and the opposition to slavery/racism? Is there clear Biblical teaching on these issues?
45. What is the Biblical teaching on marriage and sex, as well as on homosexuality?
46. [What's most important to me is] a bible-based education for my children that is in congruence with Christian faith and principles, not those of the world. "They get bombarded by society's and Austin's culture every day in school, on TV, among their friends. I want my church to look different from the culture, and I want to know my children are not being taught and are not witnessing the world's standards in our church."
47. It seems like we are picking and choosing what we like from the Bible. If we don't like parts of it, we just ignore those or explain them away.
48. "Don't water down Scripture. Some of it's very hard."
49. We need Bible-based teaching on a variety of subjects, not just this one. What does the Bible teach about money? About marriage? About raising children?
50. When Jesus came, he stressed two of the Ten Commandments – love God and love your neighbor. He didn't prioritize the rest. I'm not sure we should either (by stressing sexual purity over coveting, honoring parents, taking an oath, etc.)
51. [It's most important for session to keep in mind] scriptural integrity and biblical authority.
52. God created homosexuals for a purpose – what does the Bible say?
53. What are the scriptural supports for 10A?
54. I believe what the Bible says. I don't agree with the change [to 10-A].
55. [Where does the] history of changes fit: allowing divorced, slavery issue justified by Bible, women not allowed then allowed?
56. Jesus wasn't for the people in power, he was for the outcasts, and we need to hear from them.
57. [I think] the authority of Scripture is watered down by the passage of 10-A.
58. Without a Scriptural standard that remains constant, our church will be swayed by the moral attitudes prevailing in society today.

Spiritual: Understanding Sin and Homosexuality

1. Cultural standards have changed, in some good and bad ways. Divorce does not have the stigma it used to, which is good.
2. We all have imperfections. God loves us all; He loves us in our imperfections.
3. Do gay people not love God as much?
4. This goes beyond homosexuality. I don't see in Bible where one sin is worse than another.
5. This opens the door for many other forms of sexual misconduct -- incest, sex with animals.
6. The bottom line is: are people born gay, or do they choose to be gay? If they are born gay, which I believe, then it would be the same as saying you can't be an elder because you are black, or because you are a woman.
7. If we think homosexuality is ok, where is our fellowship outreach group to the homosexual [community]? If we think it's a sin, where's our outreach to help?
8. This is an important issue, but the perception [of how important it is seems] primarily generational.
9. Who are we to judge? God is the judge.
10. How would we teach sexual ethics to our children? Placing practicing homosexuals in leadership roles sends a very specific message to our children—that homosexual practice is acceptable. “From the point of view of having a child, how do I explain an openly gay relationship in leadership?”
11. Concern about the perception of elevating one sin above another.
12. “Every church has leaders and pastors that don't abide by Biblical standards. We all sin in all kinds of ways. Why pick one or make one higher than another?”
13. We had a discussion based around the principle-person aspect of this issue. Everyone agreed that a Biblical standard is most important. However, everyone knows a person who is gay. They want to know how to resolve the tension between “loving everyone” and not allowing a dear friend to serve in leadership.
14. The generational divide came up—that to younger generations, homosexuality is simply a given and is therefore acceptable.
15. How do we learn more about sexuality? Could it be explained at a deeper level?
16. Sexuality should not be a morality or Biblical issue. It is not a choice. It is part of who you are.
17. This is about knowingly practicing sin. When is a sin a sin seems to be the question? The Bible says men aren't to sleep together. We are westernizing our stance because of science, and that's a sin. That's the way I look at it; to disagree is to say God didn't know what he was saying when he wrote the Bible. I understand this isn't everyone's opinion.
18. One of the problems is the liberalness of our seminaries. Seminary students are being given the right to think that homosexuality is OK.
19. The basis for this acceptance of homosexuality is that it could be a genetic trait. It's still a sin. Science says cancer is genetic and we're not arguing that it is good, are we?
20. I'm torn. I have 2 nephews who are gay and I knew they were gay when they were 3-4 years old. I know in those 2 instances, they grew up in families where they were the only gays in their family. When I hear that we're going to single out these people and say no you can't be ordained, I struggle. I don't want to be the person who decides that. I worked in a congregation where one of the pastors is gay and it didn't matter to most of the congregation. I admired him and didn't think it was my business to determine if he was chaste or not. I have great difficulty when one type of individual is denied ordination. Yet, I understand that a congregation has to choose and you have to live with that decision. Once made, it will continually come back up for reevaluation. It reminds me of when women couldn't work or black people

weren't allowed certain jobs. To me, I'm not sure why God made this so difficult for us. He gave us minds to think through this. If Jesus were sitting here, he wouldn't say the sin you committed is much worse than the one another committed.

21. Jesus never said anything about homosexuality. He was confronted with adultery and told the woman to go and sin no more. What about the guy?!? Jesus didn't change the law; he didn't make it a local option or change the penalty.
22. I don't have an issue with homosexuality. My issue is ordaining homosexuals. The Scripture is emphatic that you must stop sinning and homosexuality is a sin. Why do you think homosexuality was specifically brought out in the Bible? Probably due to rampant homosexuality in Roman and OT times.
23. Is homosexuality that is chaste a sin? Provide biblical authority for the answer.
24. Is homosexual behavior acceptable to God? Provide biblical support for the answer.
25. Is one sin more sinful than any other sin?
26. [What's most important to me is] God's design for man and woman.
27. If homosexuality is a sin, and the Bible is the guide for the church, why are we having this conversation?
28. This [10-A] is about the struggle for power [by homosexual activists].
29. I grew up Baptist. This is the 1st and only Presbyterian church I've been a member of. We have a lot of gay and lesbian friends. In the neighborhood where we live, we have gay and lesbian neighbors on every block. We entertain regularly and they are invited. Some of these folks have been in relationships 20-25 years. There are places in the Bible where it says homosexuality is a sin. Scripture has to be contextualized and understood. In the last couple of months, I've been doing a lot of reading and research. I'm still not sure what I'll ultimately believe. There is specific language about divorce in the Bible and I've been divorced twice. Yet, I could be in leadership in the PCUSA. For the sake of consistency, since we allow divorced folks to be ordained, I don't have a problem with homosexual deacons and elders being ordained at Covenant – or homosexual ministers by presbytery.
30. Why did the movement to change ordination standards happen? Is this a justice issue or righteousness issue?
31. The question is the definition of the sin. I would never march in a parade for fly a flag for my sin.
32. What would our children be exposed to when they attend PCUSA youth camps and on mission trips? Would that leadership include practicing homosexuals?
33. I don't think it has to do so much with who your partner is than with sexual promiscuity.
34. Someone voiced concern regarding homosexual abuse and hygienic issues of gay and lesbian individuals.
35. One of my best friends is a gay minister. I went to a gay service; they sang better and dressed better, but otherwise I did not notice a difference in the service. I gained more compassion.

Spiritual: Ordination Standards

1. What is definition of marriage? Does civil union between a man and woman count? Would those individuals be qualified to be elders?
2. What message does it send when church says to any group of people, 'you can come here but you can't be a leader'?
3. God says love everybody. However, just as a kleptomaniac cannot help but submit to his desire to steal. Do you put him in charge of your treasury? He's not fit for that job. If a person willingly participates in a sinful behavior, they should not be in a leadership position.
4. Who defines what 'guided by scripture' means?
5. If you know the sin and do it anyway, then you can't be ordained.

6. Are we opening ourselves up to lawsuits if we stay in PCUSA but adopt the old standards? [Would we eventually be charged with] discrimination because we're not applying the standards of the PCUSA?
7. Okay with homosexuality and even ordination, but concerned that a homosexual pastor may not be prepared to counsel families.
8. Up until now weren't ministers of Word and Sacrament ordained at the Presbytery level? How would Covenant's administrative rules affect a call to an already ordained minister of Word and Sacrament? How would that play out?
9. Is the question really do we want to keep 6B or not?
10. What was the specific language before being replaced by the G-6.0106b?
11. All concurred we should expect ordained positions to adhere to a higher standards, but not all agreed on definition of "repent."
12. The nFoG allows us an opportunity. We don't have to satisfy 6b anymore.
13. As a local church, there are two separate things we can do. We can decide what our elder, deacon and pastoral student candidates look like. Some may wish to impose restrictions on us. Will it be true that we can't decide what pastors get ordained?
14. Are candidates that PNC's chat with channeled through presbytery?
15. One person expressed appreciation for the wording of 10-A. Feels open and loving. Looking for candidates to serve the Lord.
16. Why would you want to ask about someone's sexuality? Discrimination will result in legal fights.
17. I would much rather have the broader language than have a checklist where there are more no's so the decision is no. I want to evaluate each candidate individually.
18. What did 6B say before "chastity and fidelity?"
19. Are we going to insist that our pastors and other officers that we ordain adhere to the Scriptures of Jesus Christ?
20. Are we just dealing with homosexuals or with the entire population in complying with Scripture? Example : married elder choosing to have sexual relationship outside of their marriage
21. Should we look at people that we plan to ordain to see what kind of example they are and how they live their lives in their attitude towards marriage and single life?
22. How do we find out about people's sexual activities within the joyful spirit of the faith as they are considered for ordination?
23. When did they change the rules for fidelity and chastity clause?
24. Is there going to be a judicial process for people who opt to sin?
25. Is there a clerical judiciary where you can initiate a judicial process within the denomination or Covenant, or will we have to come up with one?
26. What are the self-acknowledged practices which the confessions call sin? (Language from former 6B)
27. Will Covenant continue to have a training process for ordained elders and deacons?
28. People serving on our nominating committee might not know the basic tenets of reformed faith. What can we do about this?
29. Equal application of Biblical sexual standards to both hetero- and homosexuals (meaning abstinence outside of marriage—the example was cited of a case in our church where someone was nominated to serve as elder but was living with someone with no intent to marry. This person at my table would not have been comfortable if that person had been ordained but a practicing homosexual would

30. not have been. In fact, the person nominated was not ordained due to non-adherence to Biblical standards, but this was handled privately by the pastor at the time.)
31. The “loosy-goosy” vagueness of 10A is too broad, creating room for more disagreement. It seems to make the possibility of differing standards for every congregation and for every session whenever a session “rolls over.” This “feels like we become the arbiters of ordination standards, and it’s all relative and arbitrary, depending on the session. There’s no higher, common standard—it all depends on us! This puts us in the position of being more judgmental of people, not less.”
32. “There is a distinction between membership and leadership. Membership is open to all because Jesus
33. Christ loves everyone and died for everyone, and we are all sinners. But the choice for leaders is more selective; there are higher standards for leadership and mentors.”
34. “I have a friend who’s gay and my kids look up to him. I like everything about him, and he couldn’t be a leader.”
35. “I wouldn’t leave the church over this; it doesn’t bother me personally. But standards should apply to everyone.”
36. “Love them all, but not for leadership. Officers in the church should conform to a Biblical sexual ethic, and Biblical ethics in all aspects of life, as well.”
37. “Living in a homosexual relationship is ‘living in unrepentant sin,’ and we can’t ordain anyone who is unrepentantly sinning in any fashion.”
38. The main concern seemed to be a uniform application of Biblical standards to everyone who holds office. Sort of “either judge one/judge all or judge none.”
39. How much of this discussion is about ordaining homosexuals? Neither Paul nor Marv actually said those specific words. Someone else replied ordaining homosexuals is what we’re talking about.
40. The key for the 1996 fidelity /chastity clause is that those who refuse to repent of what Scripture calls sin, shall not be ordained. Since then, the change has been a thorn in the others’ sides. Now it’s a thorn in our side.
41. The Bible is a standard and we don’t need to put a homosexual in a position of leadership because it erodes our standards. We’ve seen what it (homosexuality) has done in the Catholic church with themolestation of children.
42. At least one person in our group was clearly uncomfortable with the church not ordaining gays.
43. Does the presbytery have the authority to override the decision of a church to call a pastor? Could a church try to call a straight pastor only to have presbytery refuse to ordain him because he’s not gay?
44. Has anyone, up to this time, been not ordained because of a gay lifestyle?
45. There now seems to be no exact criteria for who can hold an leadership office in the church.
46. Amendment 10-A says leaders should be “guided by Scripture.” Is that enough?
47. What is the purpose of the change to 10-A? Is it to give rights to gays for ordination?
48. Several people voiced that it’s a problem for them to have gay officers or a gay minister.
49. Why is it any of my business what the sexual orientation is of the pastors or elders?
50. “I see both sides of the issue, and I don’t know if I’m right or wrong.”
51. Could Covenant use 6B instead of 10-A? How would that work?
52. [It’s most important to me that we] should not dilute standards for church leaders.
53. I’m curious. Prior to these conversations, have there been positions staked out at Covenant on ordination standards?
54. The 1998 wording singled out some but ignored other standards.

55. Within churches there is and should be a higher standard for leadership.
56. Hate the sin but love the sinner—but leadership is another matter.
57. What is left in 10A is vague. The Chastity clause was absolute/radical and eliminated a whole group of people.
58. 6B states: person that refuses to repent....shall not be ordained...? taken out in 10A but applies to all sorts of leaders, not just pastors. All are called to repent.
59. It is appropriate for us to hold leadership to higher standard.
60. I just joined the church last year, how long has this (ordination standards) been discussed?
61. Is the 2nd option (on the handout) of maintaining the old ordination standards possible?
62. Has a known gay applied as a Minister of Word and Sacrament in our presbytery?
63. This is the 1st time I've read the new ordination standard – and I think it's a wonderful statement in beautiful language. This is why I'm a Presbyterian.
64. So with the new ordination language, we are open to gays and lesbians.
65. Is the presbytery taking a stance on ordaining homosexuals?
66. What's not in there (the ordination standards) is important.
67. Does our church have a written standard for deacons and elders?
68. There have been suits filed within the church (and in US courts) against churches who ordained gays and lesbians.
69. What are [our congregation's] feelings about ordaining gays and lesbians as deacons and elders [as opposed to pastors]?
70. When I was in Catholic school, I asked why women can't be priests. I was told it was because all the Apostles were men. Why can't priests marry? I was told if they have a family, it distracts them from their job. If they don't have a family, how can they tell parents what to do? It comes back to who are the people that are going to do a good job. If their skin is green and they have 3 horns, who cares? If they are going to do a good job, that's all that matters. Catholics were too focused on maintaining order "the way it's always been" rather than doing what's best for the church. I know some fantastic homosexual people and some horrible priests.
71. Were there other issues addressed in the ordination standards? Or were they primarily about gays and lesbians?
72. Some said they were OK with the change in ordination standards.
73. Will we differentiate between practicing homosexuals and non-practicing homosexuals?
74. Ordaining practicing homosexuals seems to be more an adoption of a political view of the culture than a practice that belongs in the church.
75. The qualifications for membership are confused with the qualifications of leadership. Everyone can be a member, but the qualifications for leaders should be higher.
76. Apply the standards for leadership equally—i.e. if a heterosexual is living with someone and they aren't going to get married, that person shouldn't be ordained either.
77. The whole purpose is to make it possible to have gay ministers. Every minister we've ever had has been an awful sinner. I'm an awful sinner; we all are. What they're asking us to do (by ordaining those who are sexually active outside marriage, gay or not) is to dispute what scripture says and 2,000 years of church history. Not only are we not supposed to consider it a sin, it's something we should celebrate. It would be just like me saying, 'I happen to be a thief but there's no reason I shouldn't be your minister.'

78. The Lord made us all and loves us all. He may not love everything we do. We are called to love everyone. When it gets to people being leaders and teachers, Scripture holds them to a higher standard.
79. The new language allows choice; it doesn't force any church to ordain gays or accept a gay minister (or does it?).
80. Does the church have a standard for "Christian marriage" [when considering leaders]?
81. Are there questions of candidates for ordination that we cannot legally ask? Or, is the church exempt from most HR restrictions?
82. Some were comfortable with the old language of 6B, but understood why people would question why sexual orientation and behavior should be singled out when these are just one aspect of a long list of things we need to consider in discerning a candidate's qualifications to serve. Once you start putting things on a list, where do you stop?
83. The fidelity and chastity words are left out of the standards for ordination.
84. The nominating committee still chooses people. We can't change the constitutional questions asked of the elders/deacons, but we can create our own standards.
85. I disagree with the new wording.
86. Can we legally ask about a person's sexuality?
87. How can someone who is in a same sex marriage counsel others?
88. In section a., now refer to "teaching elders" as opposed to "ruling elders".
89. Criteria that we come up with are applicable to deacons and elders, as well as ministers.
90. "You'd be amazed with the consequences of your decisions" – article on a website, discussing the positive consequences of the ordination of a gay minister.
91. Eight of nine members at one table appeared to support 10-A.
92. As there are many sins listed in the Scriptures and the Confessions, why has there been such a focus on "sexual sin" as precluding ordination in recent years?
93. Some members at one table had no problem with the wording of 10-A. Others at the same table felt strongly that 10-A compromised scriptural standards.

Procedural: Form of Government

1. When I first came to Covenant, I didn't know what a Presbyterian church was. Over the years I have tried to discern what that is over other denominations, and it seems to stand for order and decency and its method of government is similar to the US. In our current political environment, our church is becoming less and less relevant due to the infighting and polarization (much like government).
2. Never could I accept the rigidity and absoluteness of the Roman Catholic church (of his wife), I'm pleased to be a part of a church that has the ability to somewhat govern itself and also remain a part of a larger body.
3. Who is entitled to be a commissioner at a Presbytery meeting?
4. I believe we can resolve this at the local level if we can really control it. How do we make that desire to be known?
5. One person feels it's positive in a lot of ways. Anytime an organization allows a church to write their own bylaws it's good. They aren't telling you how to run your own business.
6. An elder is not elected to represent the congregation. An elder is elected to govern. Not democratic.
7. I trust the nominating committee to discern who will lead us. [I don't feel I need to play a role in making these decisions.]

8. By accepting 10-A, [do] you allow the [local] congregation to make the decisions?
9. How often do these policies need to be updated?
10. Do you think Covenant could leave Mission Presbytery and stand alone as a church if we don't agree with Mission presbytery?
11. I read on the internet about a church in Honolulu which was affiliated with a Los Angeles or San Francisco presbytery; the Honolulu church had a more conservative stance than their presbytery. nFOg gave them the freedom to drop out of their current presbytery and join the more conservative San Diego presbytery. I don't know if that information is correct.
12. There were questions about the overlay presbytery and what it meant. An overlay presbytery has the same geography as the present presbytery but could have a different COM and COPM.
13. My concern is what happened to PCUSA in the last 30 years. Before that time, the stance against homosexuality was cut and dried -- then, groups started chipping away at the standards. The judicial committee turned a blind eye to gay ordination. The fidelity/chastity clause came about to enforce the rules that were always there.
14. Do the confessions identify homosexuality as a sin?
15. What happens if we leave the PC(USA)?
16. We feel that "global standards are important and have concerns that local governance as we perceive it to be in the nFOG may dilute and confuse those standards."
17. Would Covenant and other churches truly have a 'local option?' How would this be implemented? What authority would a higher governing body have over us as a local church?
18. Flexibility in rules could be good.
19. The value in 10-A is the ability of each church to decide.
20. Will we really have local control?
21. Will we be forced to accept [standards] that have been passed in another church?
22. How often does Presbytery block a church's call?
23. Are there legal risks for a congregation? Re-employment practices? Bias in hiring?
24. Can the denomination really exist with multiple forms of government?
25. To what degree does the local church has effective control? Really.
26. Perhaps each church can set its own standards—a congregational model.
27. Is CPC going to be able to take advantage of this flexibility without fear of retribution from other churches—Would we find ourselves ostracized?
28. What are the benefits and non-benefits of being in PCUSA?
29. I thought the focus of nFoG sounded more democratic, making decisions at the local level.
30. To end the divisiveness, it looks like it's in the Book of Order. Will each congregation decide the direction it wants to go? Or if we don't accept the change in ordination standards is there some place to go and stay in the PCUSA?
31. My understanding is that each church can develop their own standards.
32. Who ordains who was clarified: churches ordain elders and deacons; presbyteries ordain pastors.
33. Is this (gay ordination) a regional issue or were different pockets of groups in the country advocating for this?
34. Some presbyteries are more inclusive and others not, as are churches.

35. Must we as Covenant adopt the position that the presbytery has adopted? Are we required to? Can we not accept the change in ordination standards and stay in the PC USA?
36. Can we still maintain the old standard for deacons and elders? Someone said they thought we could. But for a minister, the presbytery ordains.
37. The decision has been pushed down from a General Assembly decision to local control. We can choose to ordain or not ordain homosexuals
38. When women were first ordained as pastors, deacons, and elders, it was controversial – but, once the practice started, it became the accepted practice.
39. Once a presbytery starts ordaining homosexuals, does that become the accepted practice?
40. A congregation commits to a seminary student to “sponsor” them through their seminary years. Would we need to have a standard if they were gay or not?
41. COPM is the governing body at presbytery for recommending ordination of seminary students.
42. If we don't agree with the standards do we have a recourse besides leaving the PC-USA?
43. Can the church decide one way and the presbytery or GA make us call a pastor who believes the other way? Or refuse to let us keep the old standards in 6b?
44. What is the real meaning of local control vs. control by the presbytery?
45. [It's most important for session to] maintain traditional standards.
46. Local option implies we have many more options to consider – more “faith based” going forward vs. the more prescriptive way before.
47. Thus, “local option” has already been somewhat in operation here. If we truly have local control, the nFoG may allow CPC to thrive with fewer constraints and explicit rules.
48. What role will Mission Presbytery take in all of this? A fear that Presbytery will try to micromanage the operations of our church. Will they allow “local option” only to the extent they feel our “options” conform with their ideas?
49. Can the nominating committee be directed to follow standards for ordination?
50. What happens if we don't get our local governing documents in order within a year?
51. How will work if every local church has a different set of rules?
52. Change in wording has triggered crisis, but nothing has to change. It does not mean that any congregation has to change; it's up to congregation. Some congregations have already ordained gay and lesbian ministers.
53. Under oFoG – couldn't call interim minister to be permanent minister; can this be changed [with nFoG]?
54. Doesn't the passage of nFoG make us more congregational and less Presbyterian?
55. Under the passage of nFoG and the new amendment 10-A, can all congregations independently decide on their own ordination standards?
56. Under the new Book of Order does presbytery have the right to reject Covenant's ordination standards?

Procedural: Decision Process

1. [Desire for the decision to be made on a] Biblical basis and matching congregational discernment.
2. We heard Paul Parsons say that there would be another cycle of town hall meetings probably in several months and that we had a year to write Covenant's by-laws. What is the scenario after this next cycle of meetings?
3. What are the other issues besides ordination?

4. [We] touched on, but did not have the time to expand on, questions and comments of “local option” still subject to Presbytery’s interpretation of matters.
5. We have to do what we have to do with nFoG. The real question is 10a. Depends on what we do as a congregation.
6. Where does mission presbytery fit in regulating our rules/bylaws? Is there a layer of rules that presbytery can impose on us?
7. Why does this have to be such a big issue, and why do we have to decide?
8. I would like to let the thing play out.
9. I find myself in a dilemma. The way it was before, I didn’t have to make a decision. Now my decision might change daily.
10. Maybe having broader language and letting it settle out at local levels will allow us/presbytery to get moving on other business.
11. What was the vote of our Presbytery?
12. Why was there not these kind of meeting before the vote? Elected leaders: are they doing a good or bad job? We should have had these discussions before the vote.
13. If a church chooses to define the standards of ordination similar to 6b, will this be allowed? How would Presbytery know the individual church standards?
14. Does this all boil down to whether we decide to have gay pastors?
15. Has any of this changed the fact that the session will vote its conscience and not the will of the congregation?
16. Does Mission Presbytery have veto rights over Covenant’s local decision regarding ordination?
17. I don’t know enough about all this to make a decent decision.
18. Is it possible for a church to decide on a candidate for pastor and have the presbytery overturn their decision – i.e. if our presbytery is more liberal than us, could they overturn our decision to call a non-gay person based solely on those grounds?
19. We feel helpless because elders will decide and the longer you drag this decision about homosexuality out the worse it’s going to be. If you drag it out for a year, it will be bad.
20. So if Covenant does decide on a stance regarding homosexuality, how long will it be in effect? If the church begins to tilt another way, will we have to change? Just because we settle this once doesn’t mean it will be stay settled.
21. I have my own individual views about someone who is gay but understand any organization has to have structure. Where those 2 things collide is the rub. The sane thing to do is to discuss the different opinions, then reflect back what the Bible says and its interpretations.
22. I’d like to know the names of the people who are for ordination of gays and lesbians because I’d like to talk to them to convince them they are wrong.
23. To what do you attribute the shift in the vote over the years regarding 10-A? We think it may be because the gay community has gained strength.
24. Who will do the voting on ordination standards, nFoG, our relationship with presbytery, PC(USA), etc.?
25. Will there be a poll of the congregation to assess the overall beliefs concerning the ordination of practicing homosexuals?
26. I want to make sure that session is aware that I’m thankful that we have this opportunity to have discussions. My wife and I advocated for these discussions and I’m grateful we are having them!
27. Just being able to talk about things is important and democratic.

28. This has been an ongoing discussion for 30 years and nothing has been resolved.
29. Do you really think anything will come of these discussions this time?
30. Belonging to two groups [the overlay idea] seems like the easy way out and not making a decision.
31. Where are the PCA and EPC on this matter?
32. Must we as Covenant make a decision on 10-A to stay in PC-USA? What are the repercussions?
33. If we choose not to take a position are there repercussions, benefits, or disadvantages?
34. We felt we were being asked to make a decision without understanding all the consequences or options available.
35. If the session rotates 1/3 per year, and if in two years, 2/3 of the session would be “new,” then could the session change the ordination standards every two years?
36. How do you discuss the issue if no one’s willing to name it? The language is so vague that it’s hard to tell what we are really talking about.
37. I’m not sure what I believe. I’m not sure the Holy Spirit has given me the right answer.
38. If we accept 10-A, are we saying we want to be part of a group (PCUSA) we don’t agree with?
39. We appreciated the initial background presentation to give some foundation for the discussion.
40. I would like the decision reflect more love.
41. What are the ramifications of doing nothing?
42. What are our options?
43. [Regarding the] procedural decisions – I’m happy to leave it up to Session.
44. Looking at options – they seem to be either to accept or to how to avoid.
45. With a sense of inevitable split over this issue is our focus on the future of the denomination or on Covenant’s congregational future?
46. Have some of the Austin Presbyterian Churches met recently with representatives of Mission Presbytery to discuss these issues, and what was the outcome of such a meeting?
47. Has Covenant and/or PCUSA lost members through the recent passage of nFoG and 10-A?
48. The response of our Session to nFoG and 10-A must be based on prayer.
49. What does voting to reverse 10-A and replacing it with earlier ordination standards gain Covenant that we don’t have if 10-A is the rule?

Finances and Property

1. How much are pastors’ retirement and other benefits affecting their willingness to speak
2. up/out on this issue?
3. How do property issues affect our decision-making ability?
4. Money—How does this encumber the church for benefits of partners?
5. [It’s most important to me] what happens with the property.
6. Under nFoG, will this change have any effect on Covenant’s contribution of money to the presbytery and denomination? Are we being “taxed” by nFoG that we didn’t have before? Was it mandatory before? Have we always paid?
7. How much is the current per capita amount? Under Fog will we get to choose how much we contribute to the presbytery? We will be able to opt out of paying?

8. Finances of church [are most important to me]—directions and uses of money in view of changing economies and personal status.
9. What are the financial and legal ramifications if we leave PC(USA)?
10. What's the head tax for Mission? How is it affected in the nFoG? If we become a union presbytery will we have to pay a head tax to the NRB?
11. Is sensitivity to loss of pension funds for pastors the main issue [or one of the issues] that is driving the fellowship to seek union in the solution process rather than splitting off?
12. By staying together in some of the Fellowship models are we not creating two bureaucracies that need to be funded rather than one?
13. What would be the financial impact of Covenant separating from PCUSA?

The Fellowship

1. What is the Fellowship of Presbyterians exactly?
2. Will [The Fellowship] split the Presbyterian church as we know it?
3. Is the fellowship talking about these two issues? Fellowship wants to go back to 6b. They are in the process of working with this. But there are other things besides 10a/6b.
4. If we join the Fellowship will we lose people from our congregation?
5. What is the Fellowship?
6. Why are people at Covenant so interested in the Fellowship? What's it all about, anyway?
7. My understanding of the Fellowship is that it is a non-geographic presbytery of like-minded folks. We would still be a member of Mission Presbytery but affiliated with non-geographic presbytery that has different ordination standards.
8. I don't understand how you could be a part of the new group and still part of PC-USA. This option probably has some things to do with property rights and pensions?
9. Has Peter Barnes backed off based upon lack of support?
10. What are all of the options that the Fellowship has put forth to bring resolution to the "crisis of conscience" that passage of amendment 10-A has brought about?

Miscellaneous: Communication

1. Will Marv Hackert's presentation be on the web? (Group at table thought it was very well done.)
2. Is there a way to find out what the white paper is and what it deals with?
3. Will we have a follow up meeting to this Town Hall Meeting to hear feedback from session about these questions?
4. August letter regarding Westlake meeting – what happened?
5. Why were we not given copies of the slides that Marvin used in the presentation? That would have been helpful.