



For as in one body, we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. – Romans 12:4-5, NRSV

Dear Friends,

In my last Clerk's Corner, I mentioned that I was looking forward to this month's stated meeting, where we will be receiving a petition from the members of *Emmanuel Indonesian Presbyterian Church*, who are asking to be recognized as a congregation of this presbytery. This moment has been a long time in coming and is the result of many years of faithful work on the part of the members of this community and NCP's Congregational Development Commission. This week I wanted to take some time to talk about how congregations become part of the presbytery community.

The *Book of Order* describes the congregation as "the basic form of the church, but ... not of itself a sufficient form of the church" (G-1.0101). As Presbyterians, we live within the creative tension described here. Congregations are where God's people meet for worship, fellowship, and education. It is where the people hear God's Word proclaimed and experience the Word sealed in the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The ministry of our congregations equips all of us for lives as Christ's faithful disciples bearing the good news of God's grace in Jesus to the world.

Nonetheless, the church is bigger than any one of its congregations. We celebrate the wide-ranging work of the Spirit in congregations spread out across the geographic bounds of this presbytery, within the borders of our nation, and throughout the world. We give thanks for the continuing miracle of Pentecost, as each community of believers proclaims the gospel and lifts its voice in prayer in its own language. And we thrill in wonder at the faithful witness that is possible when we join with neighbors nearby or in other nations. Congregations are necessary as the basic form of church, but the church truly comes alive in the Spirit when congregations cooperate and move together as members of the one Body of Christ.

When a group of people feel themselves called to become a congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), they submit a signed covenant to the presbytery, consisting of only two sentences:

We, the undersigned, in response to the grace of God, desire to be constituted and organized as a congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), to be known as _____. We promise and covenant to live together in unity and to work together in ministry as disciples of Jesus Christ in this place according to the principles of faith, mission, and order of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). (G-1.0201)

Then, "[a]t its sole discretion the presbytery may ... declare them an organized congregation of the presbytery" (G-1.0201). The presbytery then supports the new congregation in identifying and electing pastoral leadership and elders, creating bylaws, and so on.

A simple beginning—a stated desire and a promise to follow Jesus together—gives rise to so much more. What an exciting time for communities like Emmanuel Indonesian! What a joy to share in their hope and energy as they take the next step in faith!

Grace and Peace,
Rev. David Baer, Stated Clerk