

GUIDELINES FOR DIVIDING PRESBYTERIES

In answer to the request from the 25th GA that MNA work together with the Stated Clerk's office to define a process for dividing or creating new presbyteries which would include the presbyteries and the churches that will be affected by the change in boundaries (*M25GA*, 25-34, III., 11, p.162), proposed Guidelines for Dividing Presbyteries were presented to the MNA Committee at its October 1997 meeting. The Guidelines were adopted and presented to the Stated Clerk's office.

Guidelines for Dividing Presbyteries

As presbyteries grow in the number of congregations and membership they include, there may come a time at which division of the presbytery may be helpful. Presbyteries should take care that they do not divide prematurely, causing one or more of the resulting presbyteries to lack the resources necessary for their future growth. On the other hand, a presbytery may become so large that it cannot give adequate attention to the needs of the churches and ministers within its own membership, and may find even its efforts at church planting and other growth in ministry difficult.

The 16th General Assembly (1988) established guidelines for the division of presbyteries, presented below unchanged. These guidelines are sufficient in addressing most situations.

Special care should be taken to ensure that the division of a presbytery is not made in haste or without adequate consideration of the needs of all parties involved. Therefore, at the very earliest stages of discussion of a possible division, those initiating the discussion: (a) should take care to ensure that all churches and teaching elders (including missionaries and other out of bounds members) who will possibly be affected are fully informed of the discussion as early as possible; (b) should communicate with the stated clerk of the presbytery, who in turn should communicate with the entire presbytery; (c) should be encouraged to contact General Assembly Mission to North America and the General Assembly Stated Clerk very early in the process as well, for any assistance they may be able to offer in making a smooth transition and in giving advice that may be helpful to the planning process; and (d) should target the first meeting of a presbytery in the summer or fall of the year so that they may be able to fully participate in the nominating process of General Assembly without undue delay.

Following are Guidelines taken from the *M16GA* 1988, p.143, 16-63, III, 16-17.

- (1) A presbytery should have a radius of 2 1/2 hours maximum driving distance.
- (2) A presbytery should have a minimum of 10 churches.
- (3) A presbytery should have a total communicant membership of at least 1000.
- (4) Presbytery boundaries should not partition metropolitan areas.
- (5) A presbytery should have regional cohesiveness.
- (6) A presbytery should have at least 3 churches each having a membership of at least 125 communicant members.
- (7) Presbytery boundaries should be such that its member churches have a potential for shared ministries.
- (8) Presbytery boundaries should be such that its member churches have a common commitment to the region within the boundaries and sense their shared responsibility to cover the region with the Gospel.

- (9) When a presbytery reaches 30 churches, it should consider whether subdivision would lead to more effective ministry.

Reasons:

- (i) It is often to the advantage of very large presbyteries to subdivide for more efficient oversight and closer cooperation.
- (ii) Additional presbyteries are urgently needed in most of the United States, other than the South, and in Canada in order to make the Presbyterian system of government operate efficiently. A presbytery in an area where the PCA is not particularly strong could be viable with as few as ten churches, and even with less. (The first presbytery in this land had but seven.)
- (10) A presbytery should limit its boundaries to that geographic area for which it is able to take meaningful responsibility for evangelism and church development.

Reason: *M12GA*, 12-67, III,8

- (11) We acknowledge the existence of language presbyteries.
- (12) We recognize the ideal nature of guidelines such as these and understand that several existing presbyteries do not presently meet all of them.

Approved by the MNA Committee, Oct 97