



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on January 28, 2012

Conservative Presbyterians Announce Break From Liberal PCUSA

The new denomination will be under the umbrella of another recent entity, the [Fellowship of Presbyterians](#), which was launched last year in response to concerns among clergy “about the health” of the PCUSA, particularly its steady loss of members over the past four decades as it has compromised on biblical theology in an effort to maintain cultural relevancy.



Although “homosexuality is not mentioned in the ECO’s founding documents,” the [Washington Post](#) noted in its report on the new denomination, “its stated commitment to conservative theology and the inerrancy of the Bible indicates that gay clergy will not be tolerated.”

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[Reuters News](#) reported that 2,000 Presbyterians from some 500 PCUSA churches nationwide attended the conference, many of them curious about the new fellowship, but not yet ready to cut ties with the mainline denomination.

As reported earlier in [The New American](#), the “PCUSA is one of several mainline denominations in the U.S. that have split with the historic Christian teaching of homosexuality as sinful. Others include the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the United Church of Christ, the Episcopal Church, and the United Methodist Church.”

While conceding that the issue of ordaining homosexuals provided momentum for the breakaway group, “ECO leaders speaking at the conference leveled other complaints against the [PCUSA], including excessive bureaucracy, complacency, declining membership, and the tendency to become a ‘big tent’ religion, accommodating all at the expense of their reading of scripture,” noted Reuters. According to the ECO’s president, John Crosby, that tent “has become so broad that it’s falling down without center poles.” He added that “the [necessary] tent pole is biblical authority understood in the orthodox community and that has implications for all sexuality.”

ECO’s leadership said that interested congregations will be able to join the new denomination outright, committing to its authority exclusively, or simply affiliate with the fellowship without dropping their ties to the PCUSA.

Predictably, PCUSA’s leadership responded to the breakaway with some concern, with a group of eight elders from the august denomination [pleading with disenfranchised members and congregations](#) not to allow “one-sided presentations to be all you consider as you seek to discern God’s call to you and your congregation.”



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In explaining the purpose of the new denomination during ECO's founding conference, the [Rev. John Ortberg](#) of Menlo Park (Calif.) Presbyterian Church told the assembled that "our problem is hell [and] our job is to put hell out of business. That's why Jesus went to the cross on a Friday and laid in a tomb and rose on Easter morning."

Referring to the acronym "ECO," which the [denomination's website](#) explained speaks in part to its "commitment to strengthen the 'ecosystems' of local churches," Ortberg said that the goal of the new fellowship would be "to build a spiritual ecosystem that in turn builds flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ."

In conclusion, Ortberg defined the mission of the new Presbyterian denomination by posing a question to the assembled clergy and laity: "Who is ready to be a servant and a partner and soldier in an army that is advancing against hell?... Will you devote the rest of your life to be part of such a church?" [One observer noted](#) afterward that in response, those present "rose to their feet in spontaneous standing ovation, giving the speaker his answer."

Graphic: logo of Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians (ECO)



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