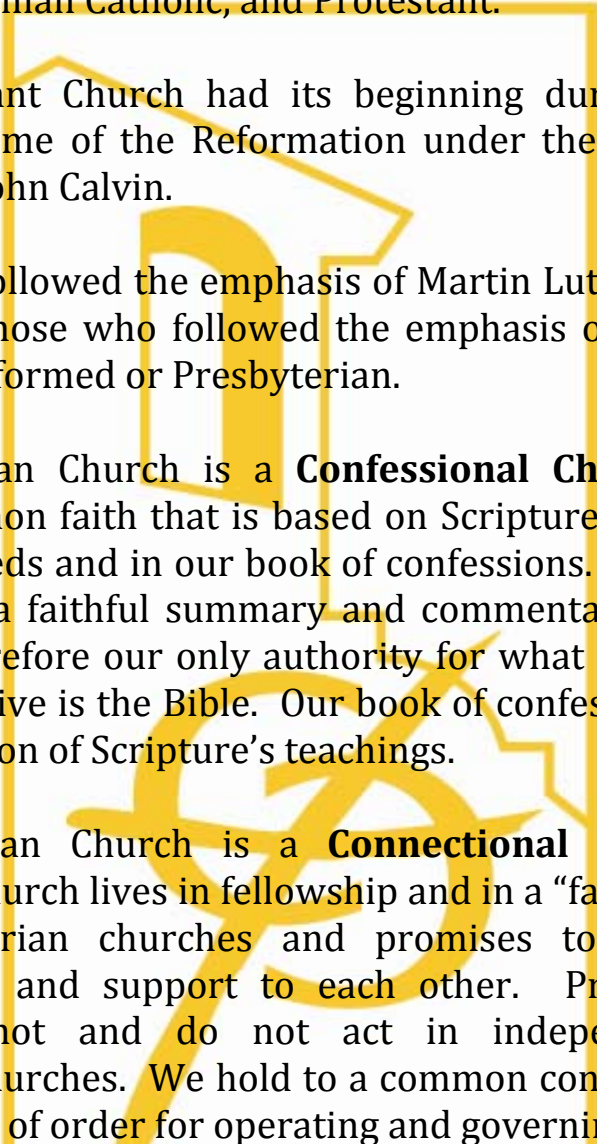


## WHAT IS A “PRESBYTERIAN” CHURCH?

1. The word “Presbyterian” comes from a Greek word (the language used in writing the New Testament) that means **elder**.
2. The position or office of “elder” is found throughout Scripture and begins as far back as Moses. The Apostle Paul’s practice was to appoint elders in every church he planted and he gave them the responsibility to provide spiritual oversight and guidance to the congregation.
3. The word “Presbyterian” therefore refers to our form of government – Each local church is led and guided by a team of elders that form a **session**. This team is responsible for giving spiritual oversight and guidance to the church and is the highest authority in the local church (the “buck stops” with the Session). This means that all other boards and committee’s serve at the direction and under the authority of the Session.
  - a. Elders are called by God through the “voice” of the church; are trained, ordained, and installed for their service to the church.
  - b. Elders are elected to one three-year term.
  - c. Ordination is perpetual (that is it is good for a life-time).
  - d. Our church presently has nine active elders serving on our Session.
4. The Presbyterian Church’s form of government is (like our country) **representative**.
  - a. The elders represent the congregation and make decisions and give direction on behalf of the congregation.
  - b. Our form of representation differs from the U.S. form in that in the church each elder is to seek to discern and then do, not the will of the people but rather, the will of God.

- c. Each local church elects and sends an elder to represent their church at the Presbytery (a specific geographical area: we are part of the Presbytery of Grand Canyon and consist of about 73 churches plus some mission stations among the Native Americans).
  - d. Each Presbytery elects and sends elders to represent their Presbytery at the Synod (a larger geographical area of several Presbyteries: our Synod is called the “Synod of the Southwest” and includes Arizona and New Mexico. There are four Presbyteries in our Synod; two in Arizona and two in New Mexico).
  - e. Each Presbytery elects and sends elders to represent their Presbytery at the General Assembly (which meets every two years at various locations throughout the U.S.).
  - f. At each level – the Session, Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly (the elder serving is to seek the will of God) vote accordingly.
5. The Presbyterian Church is a **Christian Church**.
- a. We are committed to Jesus Christ as the only Savior.
  - b. We submit to the authority of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments.
  - c. We subscribe to the great “ecumenical creeds” of Christendom: The Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed (which means that we subscribe to all the major doctrines and beliefs of all Christians of any and every denomination).
6. The Presbyterian Church is a **Protestant Church**. (The word “Protestant” comes from the word “protest” and expresses the protests that were made against the Biblical abuses and false theological teaching that had crept into the church during the Middle Ages).

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- a. There are three main streams or branches within Christianity: Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant.
  - b. The Protestant Church had its beginning during the 17<sup>th</sup> century during the time of the Reformation under the leadership of Martin Luther and John Calvin.
  - c. Those who followed the emphasis of Martin Luther became known as Lutherans; those who followed the emphasis of John Calvin became known as Reformed or Presbyterian.
7. The Presbyterian Church is a **Confessional Church**. Presbyterians confess a common faith that is based on Scripture and expressed in the ecumenical creeds and in our book of confessions. We view our book of confessions as a faithful summary and commentary on the teaching of Scripture. Therefore our only authority for what we are to believe and how we are to live is the Bible. Our book of confessions is a faithful, but fallible, exposition of Scripture's teachings.
8. The Presbyterian Church is a **Connectional Church**. Every local Presbyterian Church lives in fellowship and in a "family" connection with other Presbyterian churches and promises to pray for and give encouragement and support to each other. Presbyterian Churches, therefore, cannot and do not act in independence from other Presbyterian Churches. We hold to a common confession of faith and to a common book of order for operating and governing our churches.

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