

SYNOD POLICY ON COVENANT CRITERIA

Approved by Council September 9, 1989

For Submission to the
Synod of South Atlantic

1. PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER

This policy on Synod covenants has been developed in order to guide the Ministry Units of the Synod, and the Synod Council, as they work with the institutions which are currently related to the Synod, and with other institutions which may wish to enter a covenant relationship with the Synod.

2. DEFINITIONS

- A. Institution. For the purpose of this policy, an institution is an organization which serves some benevolent purpose, and which is sufficiently separate from the Synod that it has its own governing board, even if that board is elected or confirmed by the Synod.
- B. Covenant. A covenant is a voluntary agreement, entered into by the institution and by the Synod, which describes the way in which the Synod and the institution relate to each other. The covenant shall be prepared by a joint drafting committee, and must be ratified by the Synod and by the appropriate governing board of the institution to be in force.

3. SUBJECTS TO BE COVERED IN THE DIALOGUE LEADING TO A COVENANT RELATIONSHIP

- A. Is the institution engaged in a mission which "fits" with the defined areas of mission of Synod, as stated both in the Book of Order and in the Synod Manual?
- B. Is the service area of this mission more or less coterminous with the bounds of the Synod, or at least, significantly beyond the scope of a presbytery, yet not so wide that any covenant should be with the General Assembly?
- C. Who are the clients of the institution?
- D. Is the mission of the institution essentially, not just peripherally, Christian in its focus, so that its natural partner is the church, rather than some other social institution, such as government?
- E. Is the mission distinctly Presbyterian in character? Or, is it ecumenical, and if ecumenical, is the institution also engaged in covenant relations with the other appropriate churches?
- F. Is the mission of such a character that the shared identification will enable the Synod to claim that ministry as Synod's witness in that area? That is: is it not just "OK", but something which we really ought to be doing, and are glad to claim this ministry as our expression of this witness?
- G. Is the scope of the institution's mission congruent with both the need in this area, and with

the scale of Synod's resources and efforts in other areas of mission? (Not so tiny a response as to be an embarrassment, nor so large a project as to risk consuming all of Synod's energies?)

4. SUBJECTS FOR MINISTRY UNIT REVIEW

- A. Is the Synod able to produce some response, some form of partnership in this covenant relationship, that justified Synod's claim to be a participant? Is there something more than just lending our name (or a granting of a fishing license) involved in our entering this covenant?
- B. If we accept this specific institution in a covenant relationship, are there other institutions to whom we will also be expected to relate, and should we negotiate at the same time? Are we being asked, inadvertently, to choose sides in a controversy or competition of which we are unaware?
- C. If this area of ministry is one which we recognize as important, what kind of ministry would we design, if we were starting from scratch? Is the institution now offering a covenant anything like that design, or are we settling for someone else's definition, with which we will be uncomfortable over the long haul?

5. GUIDELINES FOR WRITING COVENANTS

- A. When consideration is given to writing an initial covenant, the first question will be the appropriateness of having a covenant. Synod expects that a review of the history and current operation of the institution, and of its governing documents, will precede any decision to begin drafting a specific covenant. In all cases a mutual agreement of the governing board of the institution and of Synod's Council, that a covenant is needed, shall be reached before work on the text of the covenant is begun.
- B. When a Covenant Writing Team is needed to create a new covenant, or when a Team is needed to review an existing covenant, the Governing Board of the institution shall select its members of the team. The appropriate ministry unit of the Synod shall select members for the Synod. It is not required that every member of the team be a member either of Synod's Council or ministry unit, or of the institution's governing board.
- C. The work of the Writing Team should include at least these steps:
 - (1) Orientation meeting and on-site visit.
 - (2) Review of the history and current operation of the institution and of existing documents, including any existing covenants and agreements.
 - (3) Evaluation of the degree of fidelity with which each partner has met the expectations of the relationship which are explicitly stated in a covenant or implied by history and practice.

- (4) Assessment of the present relationship and determination of the desired future relationship.
- (5) Writing an evaluation and report of items (3) and (4).
- (6) Writing the covenant, using an outline similar to this:
 - Nature of the covenant
 - Parties of the covenant
 - Responsibilities under the covenant
 - Review and renewal of the covenant
 - Formal approval of the covenant

D. Contents of the covenant should include at least:

- (1) What Synod expects of the institution; what the institution expects of Synod.
- (2) The nature of any financial commitments and expectations, both in direct support and in any anticipated permission to solicit funds from presbyteries, congregations, or individuals under the relationship of this covenant.
- (3) The nature of the current relationship between Synod and the institution.
- (4) A specific statement of the lines of communication between the two (2) parties.
- (5) The relation of the institution to Synod's structure, indicating the appropriate Ministry Unit.
- (6) The specific nature of Synod's role (if any) in the nomination or election of members of the institution's governing board.
- (7) Specific statements on how each party will appropriately foster and further the goals of the other.
- (8) A statement about how regular reports will be made and how each party has access to the other.
- (9) A statement about the mechanism for approval, which shall include approval by the institution's governing board and by the Synod before the covenant shall take effect.